

POVERTY REPORT CARD SNAPSHOT FOR ACTION



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CONTEXT

The Northwest Territories (NWT) has some of the strongest income supports in Canada on paper. However, a housing crisis requiring over 2,000 new units, the lowest minimum wage among the territories, and chronic underinvestment leave residents, particularly Indigenous peoples, without the basics. Most poverty indicators cannot be reliably graded because the most vulnerable communities are the least likely to be captured in any survey.

KEY FINDINGS

No protection against high rents: About 50% of those experiencing a housing crisis in the NWT are Indigenous. Recent government rent increases for market units have made affordability worse, not better, for the people who can least afford it.

Wages not keeping up with rising costs: The minimum wage is \$16.95/hour — the lowest among the territories — in a jurisdiction where Yellowknife's cost of living is 24% higher than Toronto's. This is not a gap. It is a policy failure.

Social assistance is not enough to live on: Inflation since 2021 has significantly eroded the real value of benefits, yet the government has responded with one-time top-ups rather than indexation. This leaves the most vulnerable residents permanently exposed to the next cost surge.

SELECT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Raise the minimum wage to at least \$22.50/hour and index it to inflation:** A wage floor lower than Ontario's in a territory that costs far more to live in is unconscionable.
- **Increase Income Assistance and all benefit payments by 15% over three years and index them permanently:** Stop managing poverty with one-time fixes: build automatic protections into the system.
- **Invest in Indigenous data sovereignty:** Poverty cannot be measured — let alone solved — without the trust and participation of Indigenous communities. Dedicated, long-term resources for Indigenous data governance are not optional; they are a prerequisite for any credible poverty-reduction effort in the NWT.



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