

# Communication is Key:

## A Youth-Led Review of the Government of Nunavut's Interagency Information Sharing Protocol for Suicide Prevention

By David Korgak



Iqaluit. Credit: Adam Chamberlain.



Jane Glassco  
Northern Fellowship

Fifth Cohort | Policy Recommendations



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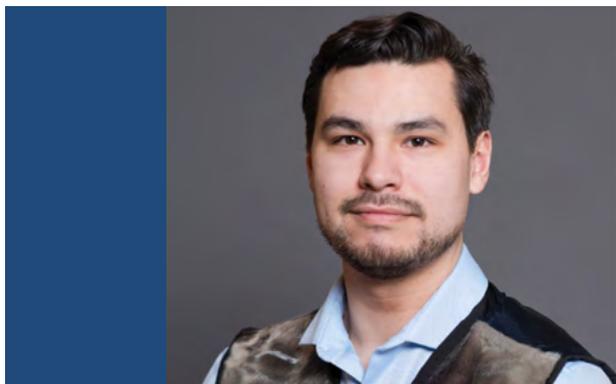
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## David Korgak

**David Korgak was born and** raised in Iqaluit, Nunavut. A graduate of Nunavut Arctic College's Nunavut Teacher Education Program, David served as valedictorian of his graduating year. He further went on to complete the Sivuliqtiksat Internship Program designed to support Inuit opportunities at Management and Specialist level positions.

David is an advocate for Inuit in Nunavut through his role at Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. His career affords him the opportunity to see policies and their direct or indirect impacts on Inuit. As a young person who has grown up in Nunavut, David has seen the impacts of these policies on many people in the territory.

Through the fellowship, David looks forward to learning more about policies and impacts each policy has in their implementation. He hopes to use the fellowship as a stepping-stone to gain personal and professional experience to further advance policy areas that affect Nunavut's most vulnerable populations.

As an Inuk, David feels strong ties to his culture living in the north. He often seeks the advice of elders utilizing Elder Advisors in his office as well as his grandparents. His grandfather, John Amagoalik, has shown great leadership to David. David hopes he can advance Inuit rights, culture, and life much like his grandfather did and continues to do to this day. He hopes this can be achieved as a Fellow and as an advocate in the north.

# Personal Statement

I am a Nunavut Inuk who was born and raised in Iqaluit, Nunavut. In this paper I will explore the issues facing the Government of Nunavut's Interagency Information Sharing Protocol for youth suicide prevention and present some policy options to make the system more responsive and better equipped to serve the unique needs of youth. Having grown up in Nunavut, I have seen firsthand the impacts of inadequate service provision, inadequate service coordination and the lack of support for young people. This has translated to suicide being a prominent issue within Nunavut. There are additional factors including intergenerational trauma, addictions, a lack of culturally relevant mental health supports, and, unfortunately, a government system that does not support Inuit the way it was intended under the land claim.<sup>1</sup> These are difficult challenges that we must overcome and I cannot comprehend how strong and how dedicated young Nunavummiut<sup>2</sup> have become

to address these issues, namely, the four youth I worked with to complete this project. They've inspired me to elevate my voice and theirs louder than I could have imagined possible. It is their commitment that has pushed me to continue to advocate for Nunavummiut in any capacity I can. I have faith that if we continue to elevate the voices of young people and allow them to lead, these issues that we experience can be addressed holistically and in a manner that reflects Inuit societal values.<sup>3</sup> I look forward to moving onward on my path and supporting all those who share the same vision for Nunavut.

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<sup>1</sup>In theory, the Nunavut legislature and government approaches are supposed to reflect Inuit culture, language and values. Unfortunately, the Nunavut Government has fallen short of its goals in this regard, with some Inuit even arguing that the overall system is designed to suppress Inuit.

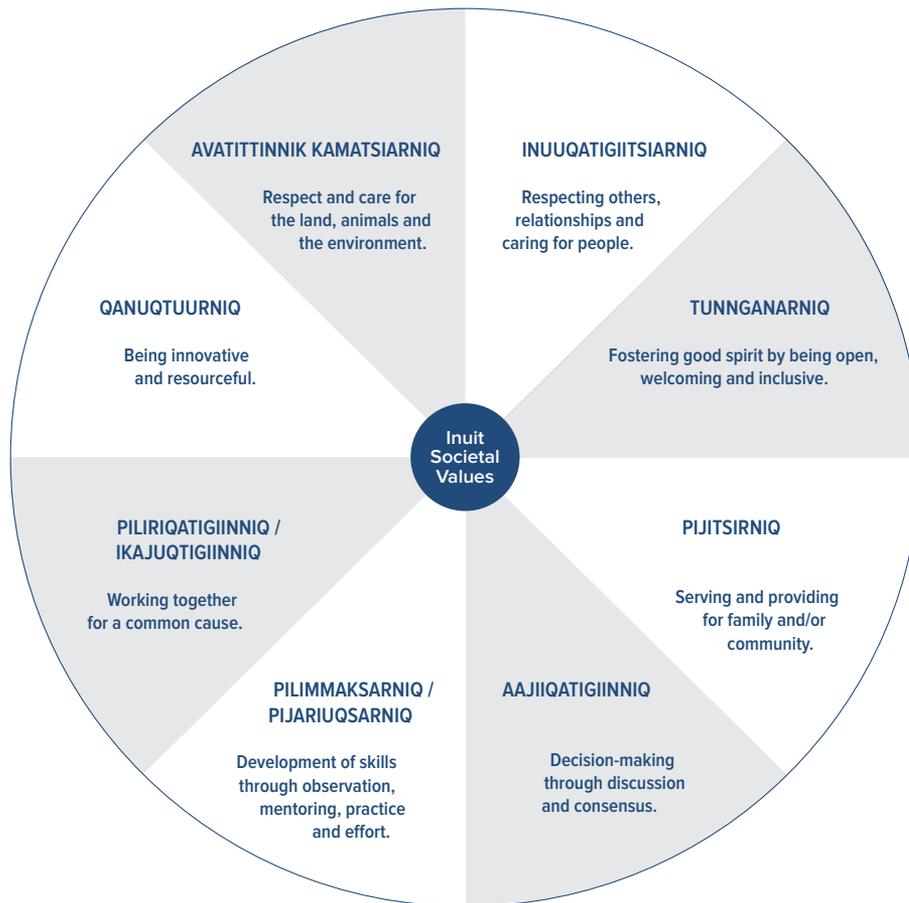
<sup>2</sup>The term "Nunavummiut" refers to residents of the territory of Nunavut.

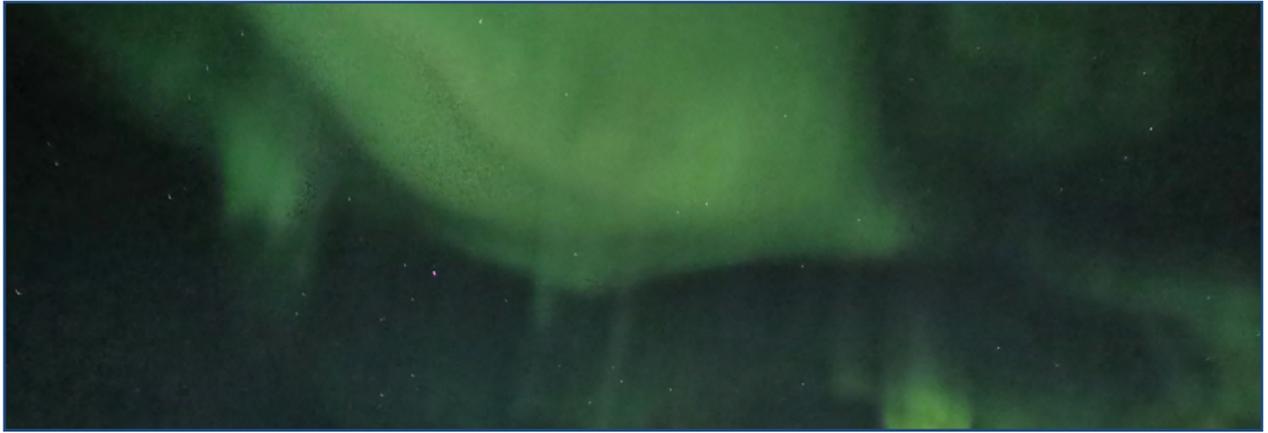
<sup>3</sup>Nunavut Government has been guided by Inuit societal values as outlined in the Government of Nunavut's original mandate: *Pinasuaqtavut*. These values, based on the idea that survival in Nunavut's harsh climate is only achieved by working together on life skills and principles for living, are: *inuuqatigiitsiarniq* – respecting others, relationships and caring for people; *tunnganarniq* – fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive; *pijitsirniq* – serving and providing for family and/or community; *ajjiqatigiinniq* – decision making through discussion and consensus, *pilimmaksarniq* / *pijariuqsarniq* – development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice and effort; *piliriqatigiinniq* / *ikajuqatigiinniq* – working together for a common cause; *qanuqtuurniq* – being innovative and resourceful; *avatittinnik kamatsiarniq* – respect and care for the land, animals and the environment. Nunavut. "Inuit Societal Values", *Government of Nunavut*, accessed December 6, 2021, <http://www.gov.nu.ca/information/inuit-societal-values>.



Iqaluit. Credit: Adam Chamberlain.

# Inuit Societal Values





Northern Lights above Iqaluit. Credit: David Korgak.

## Abstract

It was my observation through my role at the Nunavut Representative for Children and Youth's Office<sup>4</sup> that Nunavut's Interagency Information Sharing Protocol (IISP) has the potential to positively impact young people, but it is not being meaningfully implemented in Nunavut communities.<sup>5</sup> I also observed that there is also a lack of youth involvement in policy-making. To remedy this, I am making several recommendations based upon my own working experience with IISP, an interview with the Director of Inuusivut,<sup>6</sup> and the results of seven working sessions wherein youth drafted their own recommendations for change.

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<sup>4</sup>The Representative for Children and Youth is an independent officer who reports to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut and the public. It is the mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth's Office (RCYO) to ensure Government of Nunavut legislation, policies, procedures, programs and services provide ethical, equitable and consistent outcomes that meet the needs and support the rights of young Nunavummiut and the families who rely on them. Nunavut. Representative for Children and Youth. "What we do", *Representative for Children and Youth*, accessed on December 8, 2021, [www.rcynu.ca](http://www.rcynu.ca).

<sup>5</sup>Signatory representatives of the IISP include the Government of Nunavut departments of Health, Education, Justice, and Family Services; the Nunavut Housing Corporation; and the RCMP. The protocol, created in response to recommendations made in the *Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan*, was developed to support and encourage collaboration among community stakeholders. Designed to promote the well-being of all Nunavummiut, IISP contains information sharing concepts and guidance to address a variety of health issues and collaborative processes to ensure all stakeholders are working from a common understanding. Most importantly, IISP includes what information can be shared, when, and with whom, to protect the rights of Nunavummiut while providing clear guidance for professionals to safeguard against potential breaches in confidentiality. Nunavut, Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, "Interagency Information Sharing Protocol (IISP)," *Nunavut Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs*, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.gov.nu.ca/eiacourses/interagency-information-sharing-protocol-iisp-0>. The *Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan (Sept. 1, 2011 to March 31, 2014)* can be accessed through the Nunavut Legislative library at <https://assembly.nu.ca/library/GNedocs/2010/000330-e.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>Inuusivut is a division within the Government of Nunavut's Department of Health that used to be called "Quality of Life Secretariat." It is responsible for administering training on the IISP to government service providers in Nunavut to ensure there are clear, consistent and holistic preventative services for Nunavummiut.

## **Policy Recommendations:**

- Make IISP training mandatory for all service providers in Government of Nunavut departments that have signed to the protocol. This includes making the IISP training top priority for new employees in each signatory department.
- Expand the protocol to include youth centre or community wellness staff in hamlets and communities and include them in training.
- Identify more levels of risk and timelines for follow-up associated with each level.
- Ensure there is a guide to outline roles and responsibilities and allow for frequent interagency meetings.

## **Practice Recommendations:**

- Permanently designate Inuusivut staff as essential workers due to the ongoing suicide crisis in the territory.
- Continually offer IISP training throughout the year in any form appropriate, whether virtually or in-person.
- Staff IISP-related positions indeterminate, with housing benefits, and include a signing bonus for Inuit who are hired into those positions similar to the signing bonus of nurses.
- Require all relevant staff in the Inuusivut division to be trained to deliver IISP training and to track the number of participants in IISP training when it is delivered.
- Guarantee that staff who may be working from their communities will not find language to be a barrier in participating in interagency meetings.
- Ensure the IISP is published and made available to the public and that the information can be easily accessed by anyone.

Achieving all of the recommendations included in this paper will take a collective approach, something the Government of Nunavut has historically not been able to achieve. Communication within the Government of Nunavut and between territorial and federal



David Korgak, left, speaks about the youth-led policy recommendations alongside Jasmine Evic and Blake DeMaio.  
Credit: NNSL photo/nnsi.com.

**“Communication within the Government of Nunavut and between territorial and federal departments and agencies, including the RCMP, is vital to move forward with any of these recommendations.”**

departments and agencies, including the RCMP, is vital to move forward with any of these recommendations.

The research is not intended to lay blame or discuss all shortcomings of the services provided in Nunavut. There is a layer of accountability, as I believe all governments should be accountable to their commitment; however, the purpose of this paper is to identify gaps in existing services and put forth policy recommendations to the Government of Nunavut, the RCMP and the Nunavut Housing Corporation to improve service coordination for the benefit of all Nunavummiut.

# Research Background

## Youth in Policy

Saving the lives of Nunavummiut is the motivation for this paper and the key to doing so is to listen to young people and amplify their voice to ensure decision makers are hearing them.

The lack of youth involvement in policy that most affects their lives and the lack of commitment to follow-through on initiatives from the Government of Nunavut (GN) must be addressed. Further, if the GN were to address these issues, youth must be involved from the very beginning. The GN must go to places where the youth are, such as schools and youth centres, or host consultations in a public place at a time that is convenient for youth schedules. Many youth participate in extracurricular activities, are employed, or have commitments at their homes with family.

It has been my professional experience that there is a lack of coordination between GN departments on the Interagency Information Sharing Protocol (IISP). As the Minister of Health states, addressing suicide is everyone's responsibility.<sup>7</sup> Statements like this being made with no follow-through are egregious examples of how the government only appears to provide service to the public. The government should

not be allowed to continue to make statements without ensuring it is meeting its objectives. This could save the lives of many Nunavummiut. To ensure the voices of youth would be heard on policies surrounding the IISP, I worked directly with youth through seven engagement sessions. The youth interviewed staff at Inuusivut, reviewed the IISP Training Manual and signed protocol, and examined the Prince Edward Island BRIDGE model.<sup>8</sup> The youth also wrote and filmed a digital story outlining why they believe these recommendations could save the lives of their peers.

The youth based their recommendations on how to deliver holistic support for young people by ensuring the very practice of government reflects youth priorities and perspectives. For example, one youth recommendation includes offering a signing bonus to Inuit in positions such as social workers, mental health workers or paraprofessionals, or school administrators that would require participation in interagency meetings. It is the opinion of the youth that a signing bonus for Inuit in IISP-related positions similar to those given to nurses would entice more Inuit to pursue the relevant positions.

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<sup>7</sup>Nunavut. Department of Health, *The Nunavut Interagency Information Sharing Protocol Training Manual* (Iqaluit, Nunavut: Department of Health, Government of Nunavut, 2016) 2.

<sup>8</sup>BRIDGE stands for "Building Collaborative Solutions to Help Islanders At Risk." Prince Edward Island, "Prince Edward Island Bridge Model," *Prince Edward Island*, accessed December 14, 2021 <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/prince-edward-island-bridge-model>. This model, based upon the Hub Model or Situation Table, consists of a multi-agency team focused on addressing specific situations where "the probability of experiencing harm is imminent". It is not a service delivery mechanism but a way to mobilize existing systems and resources in a timely manner, e.g. 24 to 48 hours. Canada. Public Safety Canada, "The Hub Model / Situation Table," *Public Safety Canada*, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/nvntn/dtls-en.aspx?i=10015>.

 **The lack of youth involvement in policy that most affects their lives and the lack of commitment to follow-through on initiatives from the Government of Nunavut (GN) must be addressed.”**

I would like to take this time to recognize the dedication of the youth involved, Blake DeMaio, Jasmine Evic, Rocco Canil and Jennifer Williams, for working through COVID restrictions to complete the recommendations and their story.

This paper, along with the accompanying recommendations from these youth, is addressed to the decision-makers within the Government of Nunavut and the RCMP. Here, I document these youths’ journey to summer 2021, but there is more to do. To ensure their concerns are heard and impactful, the youth opted to wait until after Nunavut’s territorial election in October 2021 to formally issue their recommendations and premiere their video. They chose to wait for the completion of the Nunavut Leadership Forum so they could identify the ministers who will be invited to attend their public presentation in February 2022. No ministers attended the screening and only representatives from two agencies were in attendance, two from the RCMP and one from the Department of Family Services.

Overall, the youth explored two key issues in regards to the Government of Nunavut’s Interagency Information Sharing Protocol (IISP) with regard to youth suicide prevention:<sup>9</sup>

- Lack of holistic, preventative support for youth in crisis; and
- Lack of youth involvement and consultation when it comes to informing child and youth services policy.

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<sup>9</sup>This protocol focusses on suicide in general but, given that youth in Nunavut have the highest rate of suicide, I have taken the approach to focus on the impact of IISP on youth suicide.

Lack of holistic support for youth and Inuit is a prominent issue in Nunavut due to the lack of communication between and within government departments. Communication is key to ensuring those who are responsible for providing support to the territory's most vulnerable population are able to do so.

Youth voices are largely absent from policy development. This is clear in the GN's approach to community consultations, highlighted most recently when the government did consultations for Bill 37, the Education Act. The government held consultations in every Nunavut community but those consultations took place at times and places inconvenient for youth, such as evenings in hamlet halls.

### **Suicide in Nunavut**

In Nunavut, sadly, it no longer comes as a shock when a suicide takes place. If it were, it would make headlines at least once a week, given the frequency of suicides. Between 1999 and 2018, there were 574 suicides in Nunavut, according to information gathered by the Office of the Chief Coroner of Nunavut.<sup>10</sup> If you examine the situation nationally, Canada's average annual suicide rate is 11 per 100,000 people but Nunavut's rate is 117 per 100,000. For Inuit males between 15 and 29, the rate is almost 40 times the national figure.<sup>11</sup> Despite this shockingly high rate, suicides are rarely discussed or reported on in Nunavut, outside of those expressing grief on social media. Moreover,

when the topic is discussed, it is because one caught the attention of media and this attention only lasts a short time. It more often feels like it is brushed aside and not given appropriate attention. No one wants to discuss the reality of the lives of young Nunavummiut.

I cannot say for certain when suicide became such a prominent issue for Inuit in Nunavut. I have heard stories that it was practice at one time for elders to sacrifice themselves by going onto an ice floe and being taken away if they became a detriment to the community. It was the elder's decision to do this. Often times this was during a period of hunger, to ensure the younger hunters and people in the community could survive. However, the issue of suicide among Inuit today is much different and arises from a host of factors including food insecurity, lack of housing, lack of mental health support, child sex abuse and trauma, among many others. The National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy (NISPS) states:

**“There is clear evidence from around the world that social disadvantage, such as living in poverty and not getting enough to eat, is linked to higher rates of suicide. Achieving social equity is necessary to prevent suicide; it is also a broad and overarching goal that will improve many other areas of life.”<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>10</sup>Nunavut Suicide Statistics provided by the Coroner's Office. Nunavut. Office of the Chief Coroner, “Suicide Stats 1999-today,” (unpublished document, last modified 2018), Microsoft Excel file.

<sup>11</sup>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Statistical Profile 2018* (Ottawa: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018), 18.

<sup>12</sup>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy* (Ottawa: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016), 8.

To this end, the National Inuit Committee on Health, coordinated by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK),<sup>13</sup> has identified eleven social determinants of Inuit health, including availability of health services and mental wellness services, that must be addressed to achieve social equity and collective wellbeing.<sup>14</sup>

All of these factors can be attributed to colonization and the many actions that have been taken against Inuit in these last 70 years, from forced relocations and dog slaughters to systemic racism and underfunding of programs and services. The focus of my paper is not on these issues, but is linked in some way to the issues young people face today.

### **Interagency Information Sharing Protocol (IISP)**

The GN inherited a host of problems when it was established in 1999, including the very real issue of suicide. To address the suicide epidemic in Nunavut, the GN developed the Interagency Information Sharing Protocol (IISP). The IISP was based on the recommendations of the 2015 Discretionary Inquest into suicide by

the Nunavut Chief Coroner<sup>15</sup> and was revised in 2017 with the *Inuusivut Anninaqtuq 2017-2022 Action Plan*<sup>16</sup> which focused on suicide prevention. The IISP was and is intended to “support and encourage collaborative community practice”<sup>17</sup> and to serve as “an arrangement to promote the well-being of all Nunavummiut”.<sup>18,19</sup> While the intention is commendable, the execution of IISP has been lacklustre at best.

It was my observation through my role at the Representative for Children and Youth’s Office that the protocol was not being implemented meaningfully in Nunavut communities. As a result, IISP is not serving its intended purpose of providing holistic, preventative support for Nunavummiut. The identified lead of the IISP is Inuusivut which is a division within the Nunavut’s Department of Health responsible for administering training to Nunavut government service providers to ensure there are clear, consistent and holistic preventative services for Nunavummiut. I was unable to identify any lead for the implementation of interagency meetings and ensuring these take place in communities.

<sup>13</sup>ITK is the national, non-profit organization representing 60,000 Inuit in Canada, the majority of whom live in four regions of Canada’s Arctic: Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador). Collectively, these four regions make up Inuit Nunangat. It includes 53 communities and encompasses 35 percent of Canada’s land mass and 50 percent of its coastline.

<sup>14</sup>The eleven social determinants of Inuit health that must be addressed to achieve social equity are: quality of early childhood development; culture and language; livelihoods; income distribution; housing; safety and security; education; food security; availability of health services; mental wellness; and, the environment. United for Life, *Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan 2017-2022*, (June 2017) accessed December 8, 2021, [https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity\\_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/03/Inuusivut\\_Anninaqtuq\\_English\\_oa.pdf](https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/03/Inuusivut_Anninaqtuq_English_oa.pdf).

<sup>15</sup>Nunavut. Department of Justice. “Verdict of Coroner’s Jury” (Iqaluit, Nunavut: Iqaluit Justice Centre, 2015).

<sup>16</sup>United for Life, *Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan 2017-2022*.

<sup>17</sup>Nunavut. Department of Health, 3.

<sup>18</sup>Nunavut. Department of Health, 5.

<sup>19</sup>Nunavut. Department of Justice. “Verdict of Coroner’s Jury”.

**It was my observation through my role at the Representative for Children and Youth’s Office that the protocol was not being implemented meaningfully in Nunavut communities.”**

IISP training has been difficult for many to access and information on the protocol itself is nearly impossible to find on the GN’s website. When I approached a service provider to identify youth who might be interested in reviewing the protocol, I was informed that this person had been trying to access training for years. When I approached the youth on this subject, none were aware that this training even existed. Given that these youth are so focused on supporting the mental health of young Nunavummiut, it was surprising to see how little both the service provider and youth actually knew about this protocol despite it having been in place since 2015.

Below is an overview of the protocol taken directly from the IISP training manual:

**[IISP] was created in response to recommendations made in the Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan to enhance collaboration among community stakeholders. The protocol serves to promote the well-being of all Nunavummiut, so information sharing concepts covered and guidance offered in the protocol can also be applied to address a variety of health issues and collaborative processes.**

**Collaboration among community stakeholders is common practice, and the protocol provides clear guidelines to ensure that all stakeholders are working from a common understanding. This includes what information can be shared, when, and with whom.**

**The arrangement serves to protect the rights of Nunavummiut and also provides clear guidance for professionals to safeguard against potential breaches in confidentiality.<sup>20</sup>**

<sup>20</sup>Nunavut. Department of Health, 3.

“**While I understand Nunavut has many challenges related to capacity, staffing, infrastructure and isolation, I believe those arguments are invalid with regard to suicide prevention.**”

Several issues plague IISP. One critical problem is lack of training. The training for this protocol has not been delivered in every community; it is not advertised as a training option for community service providers and, quite simply, is not meeting the needs of service providers or those who could benefit from such wrap-around services. Another critical issue with IISP is insufficient pathways for communication and collaboration. While Inuusivut made improvements to address these concerns, the revisions are still not enough. Lack of collaboration and inadequate service coordination for young people continues to take place despite having a signed protocol in place to support collaboration.

Government service providers have expressed their concern and frustration with IISP, reporting that it has been difficult to access training in the protocol, with some having made repeated requests over the years for training without success.<sup>21</sup> Another reported they could not access the training so instead used the training manual as a guide to ensure they could work with other agencies to try to provide preventative support to young people in their community.

While I understand Nunavut has many challenges related to capacity, staffing, infrastructure and isolation, I believe those arguments are invalid with regard to suicide prevention. The GN took swift action once the Covid-19 virus was declared a pandemic in March of 2020 and within 48 hours had set up isolation hubs for travellers coming into the territory. If suicide was treated as seriously as the Covid-19 pandemic, how many lives of young Nunavummiut could be saved?

### **IISP Training and Suicide Numbers**

Despite there being an entire division within the Department of Health, Inuusivut, dedicated to support IISP training and other issues, it appears communities have had limited opportunities related to training. In fact, IISP training in communities has largely remained inaccessible. It is unclear what impact Inuusivut has had and why it has not produced results in the area of suicide prevention.

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<sup>21</sup>While I did not conduct formal interviews with government service providers on their experience with IISP, when they heard about this research project, they were eager to give feedback.

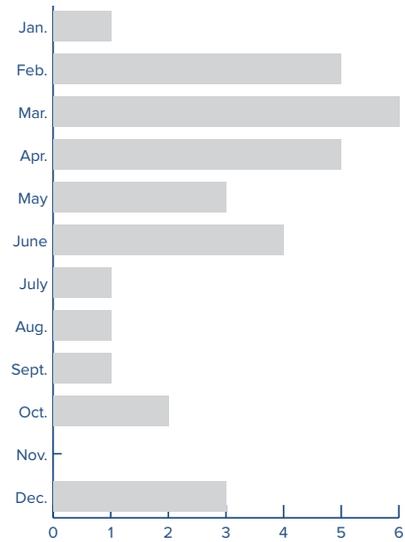
## Suicides in Nunavut, 2015 – 2018<sup>22</sup>

**2015**



Total in 2015: 32

**2016**



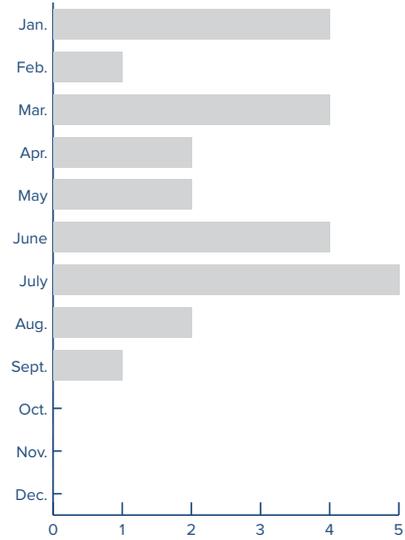
Total: 32

**2017**



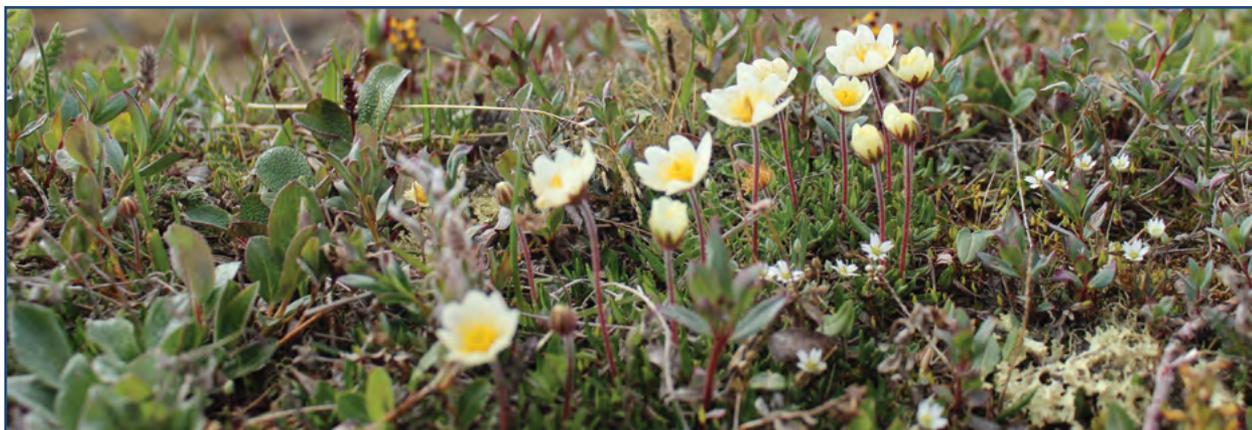
Total: 25

**2018**



Total: 25

<sup>22</sup>Nunavut. Office of the Chief Coroner.



Iqaluit. Credit: Adam Chamberlain.

The chart above depicts the statistics on suicide in Nunavut from 2015-2018. While the overall yearly total does decrease slightly from 2015 to 2018, the numbers are consistent from 2017 to 2018 showing that although it is lower, many preventable suicides are still taking place.

Further, according to the 2018 Inuit Statistical Profile<sup>23</sup> which reviewed information as far back as 1991, while there was a slightly lower number of suicides from 2004 to 2008, overall the number of suicides in Nunavut has remained consistent. As reported by ITK, “The four Inuit regions in Canada have rates of suicide that range from five to 25 times the rate of suicide for Canada as a whole... Suicide among Inuit is a preventable public health crisis that can and must be addressed.”<sup>24</sup>

Through observation and an interview with the Director of Inuusivut, it appears there has been no work to implement training, at least since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the introduction to the IISP training manual, the President of the Embrace Life Council<sup>25</sup> wrote, in part:

**Traditionally, when Inuit were faced with a situation or dilemma they would get together, collaborate, and come up with a plan. The IISP is very similar where it brings all the different departments together and gives everyone a chance to have a say in and provide input on an outcome.**<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. *Inuit Statistical Profile 2018*.

<sup>24</sup>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Statistical Profile 2018*, 18.

<sup>25</sup>Isaksimagit Inuusirmi Katujjiqatigiit (IIK) or Embrace Life Council is a not-for-profit suicide prevention organization located in Iqaluit, Nunavut. It was founded in 2004 after a meeting hosted by GN and RCMP and was attended by representatives of municipalities, churches, Inuit associations and various Nunavut government departments. IIK’s focus is suicide prevention and promotion of healthy living. Jim Bell, “Embrace Life Council urges self-reliance,” *Nunatsiaq News*, June 24, 2005, accessed December 15, 2021, [http://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/embrace\\_life\\_council\\_urges\\_self-reliance/](http://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/embrace_life_council_urges_self-reliance/).

<sup>26</sup>Nunavut. Department of Health, 2.



Credit: David Korgak.

It is clear this was not happening even before the pandemic. Many key stakeholders such as social workers, mental health workers and school administrators, who could meaningfully contribute to the wellbeing of young people and communities, are non-Inuit. While well-intentioned, most non-Inuit people are not adequately knowledgeable in culturally appropriate service provision and they could definitely benefit from the IISP training.

Further, many staff who hold mental health or social work positions are employed through four-month contracts without prior training or a transition period with the staff they are replacing. This means anytime a social worker or a mental health worker arrives in a community they have never been to, they have to learn everything about their clients. This has been reported to my work as a professional. For example, a Community Social Services Worker (CSSW) reported they had completed the apprehension

of a young person without receiving delegation to do so. To explain briefly, children are apprehended when there has been harm or potential for harm. However, only the Director of Child and Family Services has the authority to apprehend children and youth, but the Director can delegate that authority to a CSSW, peace officer or any other authorized person. The CSSW has no authority to apprehend a child or youth without delegation – to do so would be unlawful. This example illustrates that inadequate training and lack of preparation negatively affects the level of service a CSSW (and other workers) can provide while also preventing them from being able to effectively work together.

Of course, IISP is not the only model in use; other jurisdictions have developed various service models. The youth had a brief overview of the Prince Edward Island “Building Collaborative Solutions to Help Islanders At Risk” or BRIDGE

model.<sup>27</sup> The BRIDGE model brings together the service providers from a number of government and non-government agencies to offer programs and support to Islanders who are at very high risk of harm occurring soon. The service providers meet around a “Situation Table” to find ways to help individuals or families who are at risk of harm. They deal with issues of homelessness, mental health issues, violence and abuse. The Situation Table group uses what is known as a “Filter Four Process” to decide if there is a very high risk of harm. In a situation where there is an acute risk, the group will coordinate a response within 24 to 48 hours.<sup>28</sup>

There is much to learn from this and other models. For example, the IISP as it exists now in Nunavut does not outline roles and responsibilities such as a meeting Chair, note taker, or even outline how frequently meetings should take place. The BRIDGE Model is a more thorough process that better outlines who is responsible for what and how each respective agency or organization can work together.

## Research Objectives

In February 2016 [then] Minister of Health Honorable Paul Okalik addressed the citizens of Nunavut with this message:

**Suicide is everybody’s responsibility. We are tackling one of the most difficult challenges anyone can face in terms of suicide prevention. Your role is very important in meeting that challenge. All of us have a role to play, whether it’s for a family member or those that are in the professions in various fields. We entrust you, in your job, to do your part in making sure that we tackle this challenge together. Thank you.**<sup>29</sup>

How can we ensure it is everyone’s responsibility to prevent suicide if the government has not followed through on its commitment and responsibility to provide IISP training and create safe pathways to provide adequate support and intervention for people in crisis?

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<sup>27</sup>Prince Edward Island.

<sup>28</sup>Prince Edward Island.

<sup>29</sup>Nunavut. Department of Health, 2.

## Method

My research consisted of engaging youth in seven working sessions, during which they reviewed the existing IISP, examined the Prince Edward Island BRIDGE Model, interviewed the Director of Inuusivut and drafted recommendations. The recommendations came directly from youth and highlight their concerns.

Each of the seven sessions were an hour and a half in length; running from 3:15 pm to 5:00 pm on days that worked for all youth. Dates and times of each session were chosen to ensure they didn't interfere with the youths' school, work or extracurricular activities. Snacks and drinks were also provided during each session.

Sessions 1-3 were all about providing the youth with the opportunity to learn the basics of the policy including a brief history and review of the IISP. As we engaged deeper into the protocol, some of the comments made by the youth included, "why haven't we ever heard of this?" or "why is this not advertised anywhere?" It became apparent that the youth needed more information than I could provide.

At session 4, the youth wanted to speak with staff at Inuusivut to ask some questions. In response, I reached out to the Director of Inuusivut and facilitated an interview by telephone, as the COVID-19 restrictions didn't allow for an in-person meeting. The Director, who was willing to talk to the youth, declined to have the interview recorded. In total, the youth asked

“As we engaged deeper into the protocol, some of the comments made by the youth included, “why haven't we ever heard of this?” or “why is this not advertised anywhere?”

17 questions of the Director, ranging from ice breakers to get to know who was on the other end of the phone line to ease nerves on both sides, to questions around data tracking and frequency of interagency meetings. While the interview went well, the youth had concerns related to some questions not being answered adequately. Further, the youth were informed that Inuusivut staff hadn't actually done any work related to the IISP since the onset of the pandemic as they had been re-deployed to support isolation hubs.<sup>30</sup> It was unclear what specific work Inuusivut staff did at those isolation hubs.

<sup>30</sup>At the time, in order to enter Nunavut, all residents and visitors had to isolate for two weeks in either Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton or Yellowknife.



Arrival of audio/visual equipment for youth to film their story. Credit: David Korgak.

The remaining three sessions included a brief review of the Prince Edward Island BRIDGE model and drafting of the youths' recommendations.

In addition to the youth engagement sessions, I was approached by Catherine Guzik to participate in a Digital Storytelling Workshop, which focused on using digital stories as a therapeutic tool. I presented this as an option for the youth to accompany their recommendations. The youth agreed with the idea that having a form of media accompany their recommendations would reinforce their message and make it more powerful. Ms. Guzik, who co-facilitated the workshop with Trish van Katwyk from the University of Waterloo, secured funding that allowed the youth to purchase equipment to create their digital story including providing each youth with a gimbal to stabilize their cameras while filming on the move. Although the delivery of the storytelling workshop was affected by a COVID-19 outbreak in Iqaluit and all sessions were switched from in-person to online, the youths' dedication to their story never wavered and was completed in May 2021.

The youth themselves will present their recommendations along with their story to the Ministers of Education, Health, Justice, Family Services, and Nunavut Housing Corporation, as well as the Commanding Officer for the RCMP in Nunavut. This meeting has been set for February 1, 2021, and I will facilitate and organize on behalf of the youth. The video will be uploaded onto YouTube that same day for further viewing. Media has been invited and, to date, APTN, Nunatsiaq News and Nunavut News have confirmed their attendance at the meeting. The goal is for territorial ministers to accept the recommendations and show that youth voices can be heard. Unfortunately, no ministers attended the screening and only representatives from two agencies were in attendance, two from the RCMP and one from the Department of Family Services.

Release of the youths' recommendations is important to highlight as youth in Nunavut have had very little voice in policymaking. My goal throughout the work of the engagement sessions and this paper is to elevate the voices of young people to have a direct impact on policy makers.

# Project Recommendations

## Youth Recommendations

The recommendations made by the youth are as follows:

### Policy Recommendations:

- Make IISP training mandatory for all service providers in departments signed to the protocol. This includes making the IISP training top priority to new employees in each signed department.
- Expand protocol to include youth centre or community wellness staff in communities and include them in training.
- Identify more levels of risk and timelines for follow-up associated with each level.
- Ensure there is a guide to outline roles and responsibilities and allow for frequent interagency meetings.
- Staff IISP related positions indeterminate, with housing benefits, and include a signing bonus for Inuit who are hired into those positions similar to the signing bonus of nurses.
- Require all relevant staff in Inuusivut to be trained to deliver IISP training and to track the number of participants in IISP training when it is delivered.
- Guarantee that staff who may be working from their communities will not find language a barrier to participating in interagency meetings.
- Ensure the IISP is published publicly and ensure information can be accessed easily by anyone.

### Practice Recommendations:

- Designate Inuusivut staff as essential workers permanently, due to the ongoing suicide crisis in the territory.
- Continually offer IISP training throughout the year in any form appropriate, whether virtual or in-person.

The Representative for Children and Youth's Office support these above recommendations<sup>31</sup> as they have observed inadequate service coordination and a clear lack of accountability for those who are responsible for service provision for the territory's most vulnerable population. I cannot say if anyone is opposed but to do so, I believe, would mean they are opposed to life promotion and addressing systemic gaps within the GN and the RCMP.

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<sup>31</sup>Their support was shown in-kind; the Office allowed me to use office and boardroom space, equipment, connected me with youth to interview, etc. while undertaking this research.

**As I have come to learn, crisis does not wait until the next business day.”**

### **Key Recommendations Breakdown**

I would like to highlight several recommendations made by the youth that I feel should receive priority. These recommendations are as follows:

- Expand the protocol to include youth centre or community wellness staff in communities and include them in training.
- Identify more levels of risk and timelines for follow-up associated with each level.
- Ensure there is a guide to outline roles and responsibilities and allow for frequent interagency meetings.
- Permanently designate Inuusivut staff as essential workers due to the ongoing suicide crisis in the territory.

I have chosen these recommendations for three key reasons: each has direct impact on the provision of holistic support; provides clearer direction as to who is considered “at risk”; and ensures those who are responsible for supporting front-line service providers with training and support are meeting these expectations in the workplace.

Training should be at the forefront of combatting these issues and timing of its delivery should not cater only to the schedule of the office workers providing the training but also should consider the schedule of those who require the training. As I have come to learn, crisis does not wait until the next business day.

### **Additional Recommendation**

In addition to the youths’ recommendations, there is the issue of engaging youth in policy that affects them. I believe that needs to be addressed as well. I am therefore making one additional recommendation:

- The Government of Nunavut’s Department of Justice should expand ongoing community engagement efforts to include youth voices in policy and legislation. This includes ensuring youth are provided all necessary tools and information to be informed on existing legislation and how it can be improved for the benefit of all youth.



Still image from the youth's digital story *Communication is Key: A Youth-led Policy Change Project*. Credit: Rocco Canil, Blake DeMaio, Jasmine Evic, Jennifer Williams.

I make this additional recommendation because consultation on legislation and policy should be targeted. There must be focused efforts to identify key stakeholders, rather than rigid consultations for the public. Public consultations in community halls, such as those that took place for Bill 37 in Nunavut, can be tremendously intimidating for youth. As well, such large public forums do not provide adequate background information to youth to help them formulate informed feedback. Two hours in a community hall is not sufficient for informed feedback and previous papers have provided this same indication, for example as put forward in Jackie Price's Kitchen Consultation Model.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Jackie Price, "Tukisivallialiqtakka: the things I have now begun to understand: Inuit governance, Nunavut and the kitchen consultation model" (master's thesis, University of Victoria, 2007), accessed December 8, 2021. <http://hdl.handle.net/1828/987>. Her thesis is also available through the Nunavut Legislative Library at <https://assembly.nu.ca/library/Edocs/2007/001497-e.pdf> accessed December 16, 2021.

# Conclusion

## What can government do?

Human resource spending, for staff and benefits, will be the most significant cost of implementing the above recommendations. However, given that the Government of Nunavut operates at around a 30% staff vacancy rate, according to their 2019-2020 Public Service Annual Report,<sup>33</sup> I believe that there are streams of funding that could be repurposed if there is any concern about funding.

Further, it is up to individual divisions within GN departments whether or not to designate staff as essential workers, so there should not be any issue with this shift within the division for staff to change designations. This is evident by the fact that CSSWs are not essential workers and have the same closure days as any other GN service.

Given the emphasis there has been recently within the GN and the world as a whole on working remotely, training for service providers within the signatory departments of the IISP and the RCMP can be delivered online/remotely and without travel. This would mean there would be no additional cost for the GN to deliver this training.

One of the recommendations made by the youth was to staff IISP-related positions indeterminate, with housing benefits, and include a

 **The youth and I were concerned at the thought of trying to hire Inuit on short-term contracts with no benefits such as housing.”**

signing bonus for Inuit who are hired into those positions similar to the signing bonus of nurses. This recommendation is based on ensuring the GN addresses ongoing staff turnover in key positions such as CSSWs and Mental Health workers, who can have tremendous impact on the communities they work in.

This recommendation would require an extensive amount of work in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources. During the youths' interview with the Director of Inuusivut, she stated that there were openings reserved for Inuit and that they were not posted on the GN Jobs website, so candidates would be hired on a Casual Staffing Action (CSA). The youth and I were concerned at the thought of trying to hire Inuit on short-term contracts with no benefits such as housing.

<sup>33</sup>As of March 31, 2020, there were 5,142 positions within the GN, 71% of which were filled. Nunavut. Department of Human Resources, *Public Service Annual Report 2019-2020* (Iqaluit, Nunavut: Government of Nunavut, 2020) accessed December 8, 2021, [https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/psar\\_2019-2020\\_-\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/psar_2019-2020_-_final_en.pdf), 16.

**If 2019-2020 taught us anything, it is that there is always going to be something that applies extraneous pressure to the government system. From ransomware to COVID-19, we cannot let these be the excuses that limit us from meeting the needs and supporting the rights and best interests of young Nunavummiut. They must become the additional challenges we overcome while continuing to meet the needs and support the rights and best interests of Nunavummiut. This is the level of accountability we should all be striving for and what I will, and all Nunavummiut, should be holding departments to moving forward.<sup>34</sup>**

The GN Department of Justice is responsible for reviewing all legislation drafted in the territory and as such, it should be their responsibility to ensure the voices of young people are included. Implementation of a youth engagement specialist would mean dedicating funds such as salary, honoraria for youth, and any necessary administrative costs associated with staff, including computer, phone, and office space. As previously mentioned, it should not be difficult to redirect funds given the vacancy rates within the territory.

### **How will this be achieved?**

Other GN departments will need to work together with the Department of Human Resources with regard to staffing key positions and ensuring the benefits recommended to be associated with hiring Inuit staff are incorporated.

There are large systemic barriers associated with non-Inuit filling large proportions of senior management positions in government. I anticipate those senior managers who hide behind government processes and administration will create the barriers to implementing these recommendations.

There will be an administrative burden that comes with going through the entire indeterminate staffing process from start to finish rather than hiring casual staff. However, in the long term, doing so is much less work than continually hiring short-term contractors.

There are also concerns with the existing pay structure for short-term contractors. Through my role within the Representative for Children and Youth's Office, I have had the benefit of travelling across the territory to meet with many government service providers. At one such meeting, I was informed by a mental health worker that once they completed the first year of their indeterminate contract, they would leave the territory. When asked why, the service provider informed me that it is financially

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<sup>34</sup>Nunavut. Representative for Children and Youth, 2019-2020 Annual Report (Iqaluit, Nunavut: Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, 2020), accessed on December 8, 2021, <https://www.rcynu.ca/whats-new/publications/annual-reports> 54.

more beneficial for them to accept four-month contracts versus indeterminate contracts. This was because travel costs in and out of the territory are covered under four-month contracts but not the indeterminate ones. That is, indeterminate employees are responsible for travel costs associated with travelling out of the territory if they take annual leave. They also informed me that taking the four-month contract meant they could go into the community and return to their homes out of territory with the opportunity to choose when they can return. As well, they listed other benefits that were more personal in nature.

**Throughout the year, I have heard many people say that the GN is broken. However, I believe the problem is that it is not evolving to meet the needs of today's young Nunavummiut. Fundamental, Inuit-led changes, mindful of the past but in the best interests of young Nunavummiut and the future of Nunavut, must be implemented at a foundational level. These changes must be prioritized and enforced by all levels of government, community members, families, and young people.<sup>35</sup>**

<sup>35</sup>Nunavut. Representative for Children and Youth, 3.

 **The service provider informed me that it is financially more beneficial for them to accept four-month contracts versus indeterminate contracts.”**

Achieving all of the recommendations within this paper will take a collective approach, something the GN has historically not been able to achieve. This is not tolerable. Government administrators and processes create too many artificial barriers, allowing staff to abdicate some of their responsibilities. Inuit must take a stand to work for the collective good while assuming this responsibility. This will be how these recommendations and the lives of those we lose to suicide will be addressed. This is how we must move forward.

Communication within and between GN departments as well as the RCMP is vital to move forward with any of these recommendations. If the GN fails to do so, we will continue to lose lives of Nunavummiut to suicide and this is not acceptable.

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