**EDITORIAL** NUNAVUT ᓄᓇᕗᑦ

# Declare a suicide crisis now, figure out what it means later

## Nunavut should heed Kimmirut inquest jury's recommendation to reflect dire situation



Corey Larocque

The Government of Nunavut should declare a suicide crisis in the territory now, even if it means figuring out what it means later.

As one juror in a coroner's inquest last week said, "we really need to do something."

Declaring a suicide crisis was one of 32 recommendations the inquest jury in Kimmirut made last week. The inquest was looking into the 2019 death of George Arlooktoo, who stabbed himself as police entered his home. Officers were there to arrest him, believing he was in a mental health crisis after stabbing his partner the night before.

It was simply heartbreaking to read that juror's comment on the inquest's fourth day.

"Ever since George took his own life — committed suicide — we've had four other people who have done the same thing," she said in Inuktitut through an interpreter. "This really is a crisis."

Five suicides over six years must be devastating to a hamlet of fewer than 500 people.

It wasn't perfectly clear what the jurors hoped would be accomplished by declaring a suicide crisis.

In the past decade or so, governments across Canada have started to declare particular social problems to be crises, emergencies or epidemics.



**Suicide is a crisis in Nunavut, says a jury in Kimmirut, where a coroner's inquest into the 2019 death of George Arlooktoo was held last week. (File photo)**

The British Columbia government in 2016 declared a public health emergency because of the increasing number of opioid-related overdose deaths.

In Ontario, there has been pressure on the provincial government to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. That recommendation came out of an inquest into the 2015 triple murder of three women in a rural area outside of Ottawa.

The federal government recognized femicide as an epidemic in 2023. But Ontario's provincial government hasn't acted yet, saying it needs to study the issue.

That appears to be the same approach the GN is taking to the Arlooktoo inquest's call for it to declare a suicide crisis.

Premier P.J. Akeeagok declined to comment on the jury's recommendation when a Nunatsiaq News reporter asked him about it. He deferred to Health Minister John Main, who is also responsible for suicide prevention. Main also declined comment, leaving a spokesperson to say the Health Department needed more time to consider the inquest's recommendation.

It's hard to deny that suicide is a crisis in Nunavut, so a declaration by the government would reflect what Nunavummiut — like that juror in Kimmirut — are saying and thinking.

Whenever governments declare any social issue to be a crisis, emergency or epidemic — whatever word applies — there's a risk it will be merely symbolic.

But there's also a chance the declaration will allow them to marshal resources to deal with a tragic situation. It signals the situation is one the government is prepared to train its attention on. And it focuses the public's attention on the situation.

One of the very first issues MLAs faced after the October 2021 election was a student-led demonstration demanding change to mental health support and making more suicide prevention resources available in Nunavut.

Last year, the GN signed the Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan, Nunavut's five-year plan for suicide prevention.

There are about six months left before the next territorial election.

There's still enough time for MLAs to end this term focusing more attention on the same issue that faced them when they arrived — suicide prevention and mental health supports.

**NEWS** CANADA ᑲᓇᑕ

# News quiz | Culture, cabins and funding for kids

## Test your knowledge of current events with our weekly news quiz

Nunatsiaq News

Ready to take a break from tariffs, politics and the usual daily hubbub? Take a few minutes and try our weekly news quiz.

1. *Kaniq Allerton proudly introduced himself in Inuktitut when speaking at the House of Commons as part of the 2025 Forum for Young Canadians. In January, the Iqaluit-born teen was profiled in Nunatsiaq News for another achievement — what was it?*

   A. He won a scholarship to play hockey at Boston College in the United States.
   B. He's a competitive figure skater training in Winnipeg.
   C. He's a top speedskater who has represented Nunavut at the Arctic Winter Games.

2. **North of North,** *the sitcom filmed in Nunavut featuring many Inuit actors, was previously available on CBC and APTN TV. It hit a much wider market this week, though. Which major streaming service is it now available on?*

   A. Netflix
   B. Crave
   C. Disney+

3. *The City of Iqaluit is again trying to regulate where people can build cabins. Despite a moratorium the city imposed, people keep building them. What year was the moratorium put in place?*

   A. 2023
   B. 1999
   C. 2020

4. *Federal government ministers have said funding for the Inuit Child First Initiative will be extended for another year. And yet, many Nunavut non-profits say they are still worried. Which of these is* **not** *correct?*

   A. No one has said how much money will be available.
   B. No one has said when that money will actually start flowing.
   C. Parliament hasn't actually voted to approve the funding extension.

5. *The annual Toonik Tyme festival kicked off Thursday in Iqaluit. It's the 60th year for the event — what did Iqaluit city council do to start the celebrations with a bang?*

   A. Organize a fireworks show
   B. Declare a civic holiday for April 11
   C. Wrote and performed its own interpretive dance celebrating Iqaluit's history



**People in Iqaluit enjoy a lively game of bingo during Toonik Tyme last year. This year's annual celebration started Thursday and runs until April 20. (File photo by Jeff Pelletier)**



**Kaniq Allerton, 16, introduces himself in Inuktitut in the House of Commons in Ottawa on March 28. (Photo courtesy of Laura Thompson)**

### Answers

1. B — Kaniq Allerton is an accomplished figure skater who has been skating since he was nine years old. He competed in March at the Skate Manitoba Provincial Championships.
2. A — *North of North* started streaming on Netflix on Thursday. There is no word yet whether the show will return for a second season.
3. C — While the City of Iqaluit has temporarily suspended cabin-building on municipal land since 2020, cabins keep popping up. That has led to what one city councillor called an "absolute mess."
4. A — Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu has said $121.7 million will be allocated for the one-year extension. But that needs approval by Parliament before the money can start flowing.
5. B — Council declared a civic holiday for April 11.