

The MLA for the Nanukput district says the COVID-19 threat has helped strengthen the relationship he has with the four mayors in his area.

Written By: John McFadden

Jackie Jacobson says he has not been able to find too many positives coming out of the coronavirus pandemic but adds that it has worked to bring his important working relationships with officials in Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Ulukhaktok and Sachs Harbour to the forefront.

Jacobson says he believes many community members of his district are following the direction of Dr. Kami Kandola, the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) of the Northwest Territories.

She has been telling NWT residents for weeks now to stay home, avoid groups of people and practice social distancing by staying at least two metres apart from other people.

Jacobson does say however that he is frustrated by what he calls a lack of action by the territorial government.

He pointed to the removal of the minister of municipal and community affairs (MACA) from her portfolio as an example of what he is talking about.

"Since March 18th when I got home, I have been on the phone from morning until night doing the government's job for them," Jacobson said. "We've taken matters into our own hands in trying to deter visitors from coming to Tuk but we have had difficulty trying to stop them."

Jacobson says they tried to reach out to the former MACA minister to have her make changes to the NWT'S Hamlet Act so that they could set up check stops.

But Jacobson says Paulie Chinna did not respond to their requests.

He thinks that may be at least part of the reason Premier Caroline Cochrane has taken over the portfolio.

"For my own tiny communities people are really scared. It has come to the point that people are watching other people to see what they are doing and where they are going," Jacobson said. "Travel should have been pulled a long time ago in terms of letting people into communities."

Jacobson points out that many members of his communities have been following the advice of Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya who says that heading out onto the land is probably the best way to avoid the COVID -19 threat.

He adds that it is not like the Inuvait people have not been through this before noting that epidemics in the late 1800s and early in the 20th century wiped out huge swaths of certain communities.

Jacobson says if the government is serious about avoiding similar scenarios they need to follow their own advice.

"They have to remember that we are all in this together and we will only get through it by helping each other, not ignoring certain regions because they are isolated with relatively low population numbers.