

POLICY PROPOSAL

A Vulnerable Persons Alert for the Northwest Territories

A proposal to amend the Missing Persons Act, SNWT 2024, c 6, to create a Vulnerable Persons Alert for missing residents of any age who cannot keep themselves safe, connected to NWT Alert and the national alerting system.

Prepared for consideration by the Government of the Northwest Territories

Submitted by Parent Partnership Project Inc.

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Executive Summary

When a resident of the Northwest Territories who cannot keep themselves safe goes missing, the territory has no dedicated, standing Vulnerable Persons Alert framework with common eligibility criteria, activation rules and safeguards. The Missing Persons Act, in force since January 2026, gives the RCMP investigative tools and a limited power to disclose information to the public, and the territory already operates NWT Alert. What is missing is a consistent framework designed for missing vulnerable persons who do not meet AMBER Alert criteria. An autistic child who bolts toward water, an adult with a brain injury who becomes lost, a parent with dementia who walks out at night: none fits the AMBER Alert, which is built for abductions.

This proposal recommends that the Northwest Territories amend the Missing Persons Act to create a single Vulnerable Persons Alert. Eligibility would turn on what a person can and cannot do, not on age or diagnosis. The alert would use the alerting system the territory already operates, and would not require a new system, a new brand of alert for each condition, or new infrastructure.

Two drafts are attached for the government's consideration: an amending Bill and an amendment to the Missing Persons Regulations. Both are discussion drafts for legislative counsel, and both identify the points that need legal verification.

1. Background

1.1 What the Missing Persons Act provides today

The Missing Persons Act, SNWT 2024, c 6, received assent on June 13, 2024 and came into force in January 2026, together with the Missing Persons Regulations, R-017-2026. The Government of the Northwest Territories developed it in response to Call for Justice 5.8 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and it advances Action 75 of the territory's Changing the Relationship Action Plan. It lets the RCMP obtain records and search orders from the courts and make emergency demands for records, where no criminal investigation is underway. Section 13 lets the RCMP disclose to the public a missing person's name, age, description and photograph, a health condition that poses a threat, vehicle information, the circumstances of the absence, and places the person may be, where that would help locate them.

A person is a missing person under the Act only once reasonable efforts to locate them have failed. The Act has no "vulnerable person" category; its powers are available for any missing person. The Act and regulations also establish reporting requirements. Section 14 addresses annual reporting on emergency demands for records, while section 3 of the regulations provides for broader annual RCMP reporting to the Minister by May 15, with the report laid before the Legislative Assembly. Nothing in the Act creates an alert, and section 13 carries no criteria, no targeting rule and no reporting for alerts.

1.2 Public alerting in the Northwest Territories today

NWT Alert is the territory's public alerting system. It shares notices through a website and app and, for critical events, sends alerts that interrupt television, radio and wireless devices. It can be used by all

Government of the Northwest Territories departments for emergency public alerting. PPP has not found a standing alert category for missing vulnerable persons in the territory.

1.3 The elopement case in Calgary from summer 2026

On July 16, 2026, an 11-year-old nonspeaking autistic boy went missing from a day home in Calgary. Because the case did not meet the usual threshold for an AMBER Alert, an emergency alert was not issued until July 18, two days later, and only after the Government of Alberta granted a case-specific exemption. The search ended on July 29, 2026, when he was found deceased. Under the current framework, a child in this situation reaches the public only through an exemption granted case by case, not through a standing category built for the purpose.

The Northwest Territories has the same gap. A child in this situation in the territory would have no standing alert category built for the purpose.

1.4 Other jurisdictions are acting

On August 10, 2026, Alberta announced it would engage law enforcement, disability advocates, and community partners on emergency alert processes for missing vulnerable persons, including a review of its AMBER Alert criteria. PPP took part in Alberta's listening sessions in fall 2026 and has prepared companion proposals for each province and territory on the same model as this one. A common functional test across provinces and territories would mean that a person who crosses a jurisdictional boundary is assessed against the same eligibility criteria on both sides.

1.5 The federal context

Bill C-263, the Silver Alert National Framework Act, passed second reading in the House of Commons on June 5, 2026 and is before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It followed the disappearance of Earl Moberg, an 81-year-old Winnipeg man living with dementia who went missing in December 2023 and was never found. The bill is framed around older adults.

PPP has separately asked the Government of Canada to support a national standard for a Vulnerable Persons Alert that covers children and adults under one functional test. Canada's alerting standard already contains an event code for a missing vulnerable person, called missingVPer. That code is not currently on the list of events that receive Broadcast Immediate distribution, the treatment that interrupts phones, television and radio. A Northwest Territories amendment would fit the national work and would not depend on it.

2. Problem Statement

People go missing in the Northwest Territories every year whose lives are at immediate risk because they cannot recognize danger, say where they are, or get back to safety. The Alzheimer's Association estimates that about 6 in 10 people living with dementia will wander at least once. A 2012 study in Pediatrics found, in a parent-reported U.S. survey, that 598 of 1,218 autistic children (49 percent) had attempted to elope from a safe environment at least once after age four. A 2022 Government of Canada

news release states that if a person with Alzheimer's disease is not found within 12 hours, there is a 50 percent chance they will be found injured or dead.

Comparable serious risks can arise from different forms of functional vulnerability, regardless of age or diagnosis. The territory's rivers, lakes, tundra and boreal forest, the distances between communities and its winter cold add to them. The Northwest Territories has the investigative half of a missing-persons framework, but no dedicated public-alert framework for these cases.

3. Policy Objective

To ensure that when anyone in the Northwest Territories goes missing who cannot keep themselves safe, and the public could help find them, police have a clear, consistent statutory framework for alerting the public quickly, in the right area, with only the information needed, regardless of the person's age or diagnosis.

4. Proposed Solution

PPP recommends a targeted amendment to the Missing Persons Act that adds a Vulnerable Persons Alert, with an amendment to the Missing Persons Regulations for the operational details. It creates one alert for everyone who cannot keep themselves safe, rather than a separate alert for each condition or age group.

4.1 Who qualifies, and when the public is alerted

The test has two parts, which PPP's national proposal calls gates.

Gate	What it triggers	What must be true
Gate 1	The sustained, enhanced police and search response	The person is missing, functionally vulnerable, and at a materially elevated, time-sensitive risk of death or serious bodily harm
Gate 2	The public alert	The public can usefully help, and a defensible alert area exists

Gate 1 describes the enhanced operational response proposed in PPP's national standard. The Northwest Territories legislation provides the complementary territorial alert authority and safeguards.

- Functional vulnerability means a limitation that materially impairs a person's ability to recognize danger, communicate, seek help, or return to safety. Dementia, a medical condition, a developmental disability, autism spectrum disorder, acquired brain injury and young age are illustrative, non-exhaustive examples.
- The search never waits for the alert decision. Urgent search measures begin on reasonable suspicion, before either gate is formally decided.

- No minimum time missing is required. A child heading toward water should not have to be missing for a set number of minutes.
- Age and diagnosis are never the test. They can inform how the search is run, but they neither qualify nor disqualify anyone.
- Not every vulnerable missing person generates a public alert.

The Act has no narrower “vulnerable person” category, so the functional test does not need to be reconciled with an existing term. For the alert only, the draft Bill provides that the RCMP need not first have exhausted the reasonable efforts that the Act’s definition of a missing person otherwise requires, so that the alert can be part of the first response.

4.2 Who decides

Under the draft Bill, the RCMP would determine whether to activate a Vulnerable Persons Alert. The alert would then be issued by the RCMP, where authorized to access the applicable public-alerting system, or at the RCMP’s request by another authorized issuing authority. The responsible issuing arrangements would be confirmed with the territory’s public-alerting officials before implementation. Before activating, the RCMP must consider whether an alert would itself endanger the person or someone else, or interfere with an investigation.

4.3 Safeguards

- **Geographic targeting.** Alerts are geographically targeted to the smallest defensible area likely to support an effective public response. Broader distribution, including territory-wide alerting, requires an operational justification and should be reassessed as new information becomes available.
- **Minimum necessary content.** An alert says only what the public needs to help. A diagnosis is normally excluded, and is disclosed only where necessary and lawful.
- **Adult autonomy and consent.** Where the missing person is an adult, police consider available evidence that the person left voluntarily and can keep themselves safe. A located adult’s whereabouts must not be publicly disclosed without consent unless disclosure is otherwise authorized by law.
- **Review and cancellation.** Alerts are reviewed at prescribed intervals and updated when circumstances materially change. The alert is cancelled or updated as soon as the person is located, whatever the outcome, and is cancelled if the conditions for continued alerting are no longer met.
- **Recorded decisions.** Authorization decisions, including decisions not to issue an alert, are documented with the reasons and information available at the time.
- **Public reporting.** Use is reported every year, and audits check both alerts that should not have issued and cases where an alert should have issued and did not. Reporting includes cases where an alert was considered and not activated. The RCMP reports to the Minister of Justice with its annual report by May 15, and the Minister lays aggregated reporting before the Legislative Assembly, on the timetable the territory already uses in a manner that protects personal information and operationally sensitive details.
- **Mandatory review.** The arrangements are reviewed within three years of coming into force.

4.4 How the alert reaches the public

The draft Bill provides for dissemination through the system by which the Northwest Territories participates in the National Public Alerting System, in accordance with the requirements that apply to that system. Whether a Vulnerable Persons Alert interrupts phones, television and radio depends on national decisions about the Broadcast Immediate list, which are outside the Legislative Assembly's authority. Distribution to phones and broadcasters runs through federally regulated distributors under CRTC requirements. Territorial legal authority does not by itself establish that reach, which is why the national pieces matter. The Northwest Territories amendment supplies the territorial legal authority and decision rules, so that the territory is ready to use that treatment when it is available and can use its other channels in the meantime.

4.5 Coming into force

The draft Bill comes into force on a day or days fixed by order of the Commissioner, so that provisions can be brought in as the regulations, training and alerting arrangements are ready, and sets a fixed latest date so that the amendment cannot sit indefinitely without coming into force.

5. Evidence and Precedent

5.1 Manitoba

Manitoba legislated a Silver Alert in 2017. Eligibility is limited to adults: vulnerable persons as defined in Manitoba law, and other adults with a cognitive impairment. The disappearance of Earl Moberg showed a second limit. His family later said publicly that the alert went out through news media and did not reach people who were not already following the news that evening.

5.2 Alberta

Alberta has legislated a Silver Alert twice, in 2017 and again in 2023, with a threshold of 55 years or older. The Silver Alert provisions do not appear in the consolidated Missing Persons Act current to June 11, 2025, and PPP has not found evidence that they have been brought into force.

Legal authority is not the same as reach. A province can legislate an alert without that alert ever reaching a phone. An age-limited alert would also leave out missing children and younger adults who face comparable risks.

5.3 United States

The U.S. Ashanti Alert Act of 2018 created an adult-focused framework based on disability, endangerment or involuntary disappearance. In 2024 the Federal Communications Commission added a Missing and Endangered Persons event code to that country's emergency alert systems. It is the nearest technical parallel to what PPP proposes for missingVPer. The code has been technically enabled since September 2025; whether and how often alert originators use it is not confirmed.

5.4 What no reviewed jurisdiction combines

Pieces of this model exist in other jurisdictions. PPP's review did not find a single jurisdiction that combines age-neutral eligibility, a functional test, and Broadcast Immediate delivery.

No study yet shows that an interrupting phone alert improves recovery for these cases. That is why the draft Bill and regulations require documented activation decisions, annual public reporting and a review within three years.

PPP's companion document, *The Research Behind the Campaign: An Evidence Base for the Vulnerable Persons Alert Proposal*, describes the supporting evidence and its limitations.

6. Stakeholder Consultation (Recommended)

Before introduction, PPP recommends consulting, at minimum:

- The RCMP in the Northwest Territories ("G" Division)
- The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, which publishes NWT Alert, and 9-1-1 and dispatch services
- Search and rescue organizations in the territory
- The NWT Disabilities Council and other disability organizations in the territory
- Seniors', dementia and brain injury organizations serving the territory
- Autistic self-advocates, people with lived experience, and family and caregiver representatives
- Indigenous governments and organizations, including those engaged on the Act and on the territory's response to the Calls for Justice, and small and remote communities
- The Information and Privacy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories
- Broadcasters and telecommunications carriers in the territory that distribute alerts

7. Implementation Considerations

- Legislation: one amending Bill adding vulnerable persons alert sections to the Missing Persons Act.
- Regulations: an amendment to the Missing Persons Regulations covering decision factors, authorization, escalation where a family's request is declined, targeting, dissemination, content, review, co-ordination, records, reporting, audit, post-incident review, training and review within three years.
- RCMP: designated decision-makers available at all times; training for them and for those who take missing-person reports.
- Alerting: arrangements with the territorial officials who operate NWT Alert for issuing, updating and cancelling alerts.
- Translation: French versions of the Bill and regulation, since the territory's legislation is enacted in English and French.

- National: alignment with federal, provincial and territorial work on the Broadcast Immediate list and a national operational standard.

PPP has drafted a Model First Responder Training & Local Implementation Manual and a Proposed National Vulnerable Persons Alert (VPA) Operational Standard: Discussion Draft, which the Northwest Territories may use as starting points.

8. Fiscal Considerations

The Northwest Territories already operates an established public alerting system, NWT Alert. This proposal would build on that infrastructure rather than establish a separate alerting network. Additional implementation and operating costs, including consultation, drafting, translation, training, dispatch and alert-authoring changes, and annual reporting, have not yet been determined. PPP has asked the Government of Canada for time-limited federal funding to help provinces and territories align training, dispatch systems and implementation with a national standard.

9. Recommendation

PPP recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories:

- support an amendment to the Missing Persons Act creating a Vulnerable Persons Alert, with eligibility based on functional vulnerability and risk and not on age or diagnosis;
- introduce the amendment as a government bill, building on the Act the Minister of Justice already administers;
- refer the attached draft Bill and draft regulations to legislative counsel as discussion drafts, including the verification points listed in their drafter's notes;
- consult the organizations listed in section 6 before introduction; and
- take part in federal, provincial and territorial work on a national Vulnerable Persons Alert standard, so that the territory's alert can receive Broadcast Immediate distribution when that treatment is available.

PPP requests a written response identifying the territorial officials or bodies responsible for considering these recommendations, the next procedural steps, and an anticipated timeline for an initial decision or further engagement.

Who We Are

Parent Partnership Project Inc. (PPP) is a parent-led not-for-profit organization based in Calgary, Alberta, incorporated under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act. It produces free resources and pursues both direct family support and systemic policy advocacy for families of children and adults with disabilities. PPP has advocated on systemic issues facing vulnerable persons since 2018.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft An Act to Amend the Missing Persons Act (Vulnerable Persons Alert)

Appendix B: Draft amendment to the Missing Persons Regulations

Both appendices are provided as separate attached documents. This proposal is one of fourteen prepared by PPP: one federal, and one for each of the ten provinces and three territories.

Sources

- Missing Persons Act, SNWT 2024, c 6: <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/missing-persons/missing-persons.a.pdf>
- Missing Persons Regulations, R-017-2026: <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/missing-persons/missing-persons.r1.pdf>
- Government of the Northwest Territories, “Missing Persons Act comes into force”, January 28, 2026: <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/missing-persons-act-comes-force>
- Municipal and Community Affairs, NWT Alert: <https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/en/services/nwt-alert>
- Alberta Emergency Alert, Critical: AMBER Alert issued by the Calgary Police Service, July 18, 2026, 13:35: https://www.alberta.ca/aea/cap/2026/07/18/2026-07-18T13_35_18-06_00=CalgaryPoliceService=592F10C9-5B22-4056-8F4F-E5214FA29F33.htm
- Government of Alberta announcement of August 10, 2026, as reported by the Red Deer Advocate.
- Alberta, Missing Persons Act, SA 2011, c M-18.5, King’s Printer office consolidation current to June 11, 2025; Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Bill 210); Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022, SA 2023, c. 4 (Bill 204).
- Manitoba, The Missing Persons Amendment Act (Silver Alert), S.M. 2017, c. 29: <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/2017/c02917e.php>
- Bill C-263, Silver Alert National Framework Act, LEGISinfo, Parliament of Canada: <https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/en/bill/45-1/C-263>
- U.S. Ashanti Alert Act of 2018; Federal Communications Commission, Report and Order FCC 24-83, adopted August 7, 2024.
- Government of Canada, news release on search and rescue for people living with dementia, June 29, 2022.
- Alzheimer’s Association, public estimate of lifetime wandering.
- Anderson et al., “Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders,” *Pediatrics* 130(5), 2012.
- SOREM Broadcast Immediate Events List, Version 2.1, amended May 26, 2022.