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Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're going to move forward with our study on poverty reduction strategies.

We are very pleased to have members of the Kuujuaq contingent join us here in Ottawa today. As many of you know, we did our best to get to Kuujuaq as part of the travel component of our study. It wasn't the weather in Kuujuaq that held us up, but the weather here. We were about to leave and the charter was frozen solid. We were very disappointed not to be able to get up there. I know we're going to do our best to do that in the future. Maybe there are other studies we can pursue that will afford us the opportunity to visit that part of the country.

However, I am very pleased, as a consolation, to have you here today to meet with us.

I want to recognize that we have, representing the NDP, Madame Boutin-Sweet, who is stepping in once again.

Thank you and welcome.

We have a first-timer to the committee, MP Nicola Di Iorio.

I would like to welcome the communications officer, Marie-Christine Vanier, and the administrative technician, Linda Roy Makiuk, from the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau. From the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, we have Françoise Bouchard, director of public health.

We have only the two groups here today, so I will allow a 10-minute opening. We're going to start with the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau.

The next 10 minutes is yours.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier (Communications Officer, Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau): Thank you.

Thank you for the invitation.

[Translation]

Ullaakkut. Good morning.

My name is Marie-Christine Vanier, and I am the communications officer for the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau, KMHB.

I want to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to give you an overview of an important organization in northern Quebec, the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau, a key organization that provides housing for almost all Nunavik citizens, Inuit.

We were expecting you and we were very happy to welcome you to Kuujuaq. We even prepared bannock, which we ate to your health.

When we talk about housing in Nunavik, you will understand that we are talking about social housing.

The KMHB is a non-profit organization whose main objective is to acquire and administer housing for low to moderate income individuals or families. It manages and administers a social housing stock of 3,144 units in 14 Nunavik communities. In each of those communities, we have a local housing office, a housing manager, and a maintenance and repair team.

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk (Administrative Technician, Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau): Hi. My name is Linda Roy Makiuk. I work as an administrative technician for the client services of the KMHB office. I'm also the ambassador for the Pivalliani program.

The Inuit of Nunavik were nomadic for thousands of years, living in tents and igloos. The people survived one of the harshest climates on the planet by being ingenious with their hunting, fishing, and trapping skills and through strong leadership. They did what they had to do to survive and to take care of their families.

In 1998 the Kativik Regional Government and the Quebec government signed a framework agreement concerning the Kativik region, which included the establishment of a housing management structure that was to reflect the reality of the region. This was to be named the "Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau". The KMHB's 2015 housing needs survey determined that there were 3,912 individuals or families who lived in 2,884 social housing units. According to Statistics Canada, Nunavik suffers from the worst overcrowding situations in Canada.

The KMHB was the first out of the more than 500 housing bureaus in Quebec to operate at the regional level. The KMHB's board of directors is composed of up to seven members chosen from the region to represent the concerns of the municipalities, the tenants, and the socio-economic groups. The SHQ wanted the KMHB to function like any other housing bureau in Quebec, but it soon became apparent that in almost all aspects the KMHB had to be different, because social housing in Nunavik was different.

The KMHB has about 150 employees, of which more than 75% are Inuit.

Since 2000, the KMHB has added over 1,400 units to its stock due to various housing agreements with Canada and Quebec, for a total of 3,144 housing units in Nunavik.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: As Ms. Roy Makiuk said, Nunavik is a special region with unique realities that are very different from those in the rest of Quebec. We have to constantly take them into account in our operations.

I will give you a series of figures.

Nunavik's total population is about 12,000 people, 90% of whom are Inuit. The region's demographics are very different from those in the rest of Quebec. The population is increasing faster than elsewhere. From 2006 to 2011, the number of households increased by 11.8%, while that increase was 4.7% elsewhere in Quebec. As a result, even if homes are added every year, we cannot even catch up with the population growth.

The number of children in Nunavik is 3.2 per woman, while elsewhere in Quebec, it is 1.6. Moreover, 70% of the population is under 35 years of age.

In closing, the cost of life in Nunavik is 148% higher than in the rest of Quebec.

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: Among the conclusions of the report on the cost of living, which Gérard Duhaime of Université Laval studied, here are some interesting statistics.

For the households with the lowest incomes, more than 70% of their incomes go to food and housing expenses. Also, the grocery basket is 48% more expensive in Nunavik. As well, current expenses are 43% higher in Nunavik, including 37% more for beverages and tobacco. Also, for recreation, it's 32% more.

Only housing has a lower cost index in Nunavik. These differences are observed despite the cost-of-living measures already in place in the region. Although housing rents are lower in Nunavik than in Quebec City, housing drains between 22.1% and 27% of household spending. According to the survey, social housing is an important cost-of-living measure for Nunavik households.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: The housing issue in Nunavik concerns everyone. Everyone is affected. The KMHB is facing significant challenges. I will mention a few of them.

We are currently 1,030 homes short of meeting housing needs. So we are facing an issue of overcrowded housing, along with the social problems that can cause.

The housing access system is no longer adapted to the needs of tenants or to their reality. Of course, the system supports the less fortunate, while young people who work and live orderly lives are at a disadvantage. That is a problem and a criticism we hear every day from people we see on the street.

There are no roads between the south and the north or between communities. The only way to travel between communities is by plane at the whim of Mother Nature.

We hope to conclude longer-term agreements with governments over the next few years. Some of the benefits would be our ability to ensure better planning for construction projects and reduce costs thanks to a higher purchase volume. We could start building homes earlier in the season, prepare surfaces—pads, as we call the plots on which homes are built—a year in advance. That would give the pads time to stabilize after a winter.

Ground warming and permafrost thaw are becoming more significant every year and are increasingly influencing the stability of the ground and, in turn, existing and future builds. So longer-term planning would help us reduce expenses related to home renovations, since the pads would be more stable and would cause less damage. Longer-term planning would also help us further develop, with our partners, community urbanization, and conceive and design homes that are better adapted to the Inuit way of life.

Let's talk about the coming years. With the arrival of our new executive director, Marie-France Brisson, the KMHB is reinvigorated and is turning the corner. The KMHB's main objectives for the next few years are focused on the same theme—communication.

We want to improve the lines of communication with our tenants, and develop a stronger and more reliable connection in order to create a relationship of mutual trust, but also give them a say in the matter.

Client service will be our priority. We also want to create lasting connections and rebuild a trusting relationship with the tenants. We will work on improving information flow between various departments of the KMHB in order to provide an improved service.

We are developing a housing allocation grid project to better meet the needs of the people and accommodate them.

The more human aspect of housing will be among our concerns, so that we can build while taking into account Inuit cultural identity.

We also intend to develop a strategic plan to define our action plan for the coming years.

Those are the major objectives that will guide the KMHB over the next few years.

Thank you.

•(1115)

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: The Pivallianiq program has been ongoing for five years now. It is a unique initiative for a better-living pact with the communities of Nunavik. The Pivallianiq program means a change towards better living. Families are invited to participate in a major offensive to make our homes and communities better and more orderly places to live, thrive, and grow healthy.

You will find a summary of the program activities in your package. There are three parts to the program. The first part is the makeover team, which helps the tenants in their homes. The second part is the Nanuk tour that is given to the students from grades four to six in English and in French. Part three is the campaign, Say No to Vandalism. Street workers go into the communities to talk about vandalism and to find ways for the youth to express themselves other than through vandalism.

Thank you.

The Chair: You're very welcome. Thank you very much.

Now, from Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, we have Françoise Bouchard, director of public health.

The next 10 minutes are yours.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard (Director, Public Health, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for having us here to talk to you today about an important issue for us from the health perspective. This issue has been a preoccupation of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services for many years. My objective today is to relate to you a decision in regard to health issues that we are facing in Nunavik.

The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services was created following the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Our board of directors is made up of 14 representatives from the 14 communities of Nunavik region.

I am the director of public health. As the medical officer of health, I am responsible for all the programs related to promotion, protection, and prevention. As well, the board is responsible for all the planning of health and social services for the region. We also have two hospitals in Nunavik, one on the Hudson Bay coast and one on the Ungava Bay coast. Each village has a community health clinic providing 24-hour services.

Today my statement will include the remarks of Mr. Watt, who is not able to be present today. For us, the housing crisis in Nunavik has been an issue. It's reflected in the overcrowding of many houses and the poor shape of the existing housing and the need for major repairs.

This housing crisis has consequences for all age groups: children, youth, adults, and elders in Nunavik. Considering it from the children's perspective, the Nunavik population, as was mentioned to you, is a very young population. Roughly 40% of our population is under 19 years of age.

Acknowledging that, more than half of them are growing up in overcrowded houses; yet children are among the most vulnerable to inappropriate housing conditions. They are particularly vulnerable to infectious disease. We have some of the highest rates of infectious disease hospitalization rates in Quebec for children under two years old, and we can't escape talking about the psychosocial problems that some adults may demonstrate at home and that have repercussions for our children.

As for our youth, many young Inuit today have moved south to study or work, but they have a hard time when trying to come back. There is no housing available for them. This is a huge loss for Nunavik workplaces, because we can't benefit from their education and experience. Our objective is always to be able to develop Inuit competencies in health care, so that one day my job will not have to be filled by a white *halunak* from the south. This situation prevents other youth from also pursuing their education down south, because they're not encouraged that way.

In contrast, many adults try to escape the situation. Many move to Montreal, growing the itinerant population of Montreal homeless. Some, sadly, in fact end up on the streets, as they're poorly prepared for urban life.

The elders in Nunavik are the official tenants of their house, and the housing shortage often leads them to share their house, willingly or not, with some of their adult children or grandchildren who have nowhere else to go. Sadly, sometimes this leads to elder abuse situations.

There is a very well-documented body of evidence that housing circumstances affect the health and well-being of both family and individuals. I think you all have the brief that we have prepared and summarized. I will talk briefly about it today.

Increased humidity leads to increased mould growth and exposure, which could lead, we know, to asthma and other respiratory conditions. Household quality and density have well-documented implications for the spread of infectious disease.

Overcrowding, however, can also have an impact on mental health, with the possible health outcomes including depression, sleep deprivation, and family problems. In a situation in which individuals are already vulnerable, the situation only fuels psychosocial problems.

•(1120)

There's also a negative association between crowded living conditions and educational outcomes. How can a child do homework and concentrate in an overcrowded household?

Women, children, and elders who need alternative housing arrangements are often victims of family violence.

I want to talk specifically about an issue that has kept me and my team really busy in the last years and that is the recurrence of tuberculosis in the north. There is a strong resurgence right now of tuberculosis in Nunavik and the correlation between the housing situation and this resurgence is getting clearer.

First, there is a growing evidence base to substantiate the strong pathways between the incidence of TB and various social and economic determinants, including malnutrition, crowded housing, inadequate ventilation, low levels of sanitation, low socio-economic status, poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, high levels of stress, and poor access to health care.

Transmission of tuberculosis occurs most frequently as a result of prolonged contact and sharing a close environment with an infectious person. Persons who are at the greatest risk of exposure to tuberculosis are those who live and sleep in the same household as an infected person.

Since the beginning of 2000, the incidence of tuberculosis has been rising steadily in Nunavik after decades of decline. We see a strong relationship between the housing crisis we face and the tuberculosis resurgence in Nunavik. It has quickly overwhelmed our health care system.

The health board efforts to contain the recent TB outbreaks will not suffice if the social conditions that contribute to the transmission of the disease are not changed. We are in an endemic situation where each community right now is vulnerable to tuberculosis outbreaks.

In conclusion, for over a century public health in our country has targeted poor sanitation, overcrowding, and inadequate ventilation to reduce infectious disease transmission. While today most Canadians benefit from adequate housing and living conditions, and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis has almost disappeared in our southern parts, the housing situation remains critical in Nunavik, along with the situation with tuberculosis right now.

Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you both for making the trip here today to share this with us.

We are going to get started with questions.

MP Warawa, you have six minutes. Welcome back, by the way. We're glad to have you back, sir.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you. It's good to be back.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today on this important subject of poverty reduction.

My focus and responsibility is to represent Canadian seniors both in the general population and the north. Because you represent the north and the issues there, I'll be focusing my questions on the challenges that seniors face in the north.

I found it interesting that in 2008, the life expectancy of a male in the north was 68 and that it has now been reduced to 64. Life expectancy of the total population of Canada is 79, but in the north it's 15 years less. In the general population right now, one in six people is a senior. In six years it will be one in five, and in 13 years it will be one in four. Yet in the north both men and women are living much shorter lifespans—they are expected to, and are—and there is a real concern that as a country we are not prepared for the aging population.

What are the challenges that seniors face in the north? We have heard about elder abuse, and I would like some more comments on that. How does access to housing and the housing shortage affect Canadian seniors?

Canadian seniors need to have their accommodation a little warmer than most of us do because they are not as mobile and physical, so the cost associated with keeping their housing warm is huge. We heard about tuberculosis and the other challenges of access and the need for social interaction. If that interaction includes elder abuse or is heading in that direction, it is very concerning.

Could you share with the committee how poverty reduction and housing affect seniors in the north? What are the challenges facing Canadian seniors in the north? How can the federal government help?

I will open it up to all the witnesses.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Maybe Madame Bouchard could best answer that.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I can try. I wish my colleague were here.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It's not an easy question.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: You're right when you say that life expectancy in the north is still lower than it is in the south. We have to look at life expectancy being dependent on a lot of the issues facing our young children, because we still have a high mortality rate among children. We still have a lot of gains to make there.

With the change in lifestyle that has occurred in the last, I would say, 50 years in Nunavik, we're seeing more and more chronic diseases appearing in our regions that were not there before. The lifestyle changes that have occurred from *la sédentarisation* have resulted in issues for the Inuit accessing country food, all those elements that were very much present in the lifestyles of Inuit years ago and today are challenging for them to access.

For example, if elders don't have a family that hunts and brings them country food, they are losing all of the elements that they grew up with. The change in lifestyle is impacting the quality of life of the elders, and they are often very dependent on being in a family where their sons can keep hunting.

It's hard to talk about all of this without having all the context of living in the north. Take hunting, for example. Access to traditional food right now is very much challenged. Programs to support hunters are very expensive, and not all communities are able to access this capacity. So when we look at quality of life of our elders, we should consider all of these programs that can enhance their quality of life, the things that are dear to them.

The loss of the traditional ways brings a lot of challenges—for example, alcohol. We've talked about the problems we have. Living in a household where the young today have difficulty finding jobs or the capacity to bring their own value into the household has an impact on the members of the household, and elders are often pressured to use the little revenue they have to support the large family that's in the house.

These are the different issues that I can bring to you. I don't know if my colleague would want to add to that.

• (1130)

The Chair: Be very quick, if you have anything to add, because we're up to the six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: No. She summed up the situation very well.

[English]

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I don't know if I answered your questions.

Certainly, right now one of our departments in the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, the flying services, has looked at the development of services specifically addressing elders. If you're interested, I can ask them to forward to you the review of that strategy that's been done. I didn't bring it with me today.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

The Chair: If you could forward it to the clerk, that would be fantastic.

Thank you.

Mr. Long, for six minutes, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our presenters this morning.

I'd like to start with Marie-Christine and Linda on housing and how important affordable housing is to breaking the cycle of poverty.

In budget 2016 our government did come forth with extra monies—hundreds of millions of dollars was made available for affordable housing. There was an announcement in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay of an additional \$60 million investment in affordable housing for the province of New Brunswick. I think it was a very positive step.

There's no doubt that a national housing strategy is needed to help communities right across the country with poverty reduction. How would you see a national housing strategy roll out? What would it look like, coming from our government?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I would begin by consulting the population. I would ask the people what they want in terms of homes and lifestyles. So far, we have been developing plots, clearing them, preparing pads and building homes on them. I am telling you this because I have an idea in mind.

We are collaborating with the Université Laval, which is carrying out a major five-year study on architecture that should be more in harmony with Inuit culture and way of life.

I think that strategy should include research groups and consultations with Inuit to find out what they want in terms of housing and development. Urbanization is not developed, is not thought out, in the north. Homes are designed to reduce costs. They are built close together. You may not know this, but perhaps you do. Waste water is collected and clean water is put back into the tanks attached to homes. To reduce municipalities' costs, houses are closer together and neighbourhoods are very dense.

I have heard Inuit say that they would like to have a better connection with nature, have views of the land, see the sun when they get up in the morning. Those are the aspects that are brought up when we talk about housing development. They miss the land.

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long: Françoise.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: In the context of the consultation for the national housing strategy of the Government of Canada, the Institut national de santé publique du Québec has discussed our situation not only in Nunavik but also in regard to first nations. It's part of the written statement that I brought with me today. There are suggestions in there that address housing specifically. I can leave you my copy, Mr. Chair.

I think there are two main aspects they felt should be dealt with. First, the federal government urgently needs to invest massively to deal with the current backlog we have. We'll never get ahead if we don't deal with that damned backlog; I'm sorry to express my words like that, but we've been saying it and repeating it every year. We have a backlog that needs to be dealt with.

Mr. Wayne Long: Can both of you comment also on how important you feel it is to have governments aligned? Obviously, one thing happens federally and we come forth to a province or a territory with monies, but then maybe we lose control. Can you talk about how important alignment of governments is, from federal to provincial to—

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: The second aspect, I would say, is exactly that. There needs to be a series of measures that develop the community's capacity to facilitate a transition towards a model of full jurisdiction by Inuit over all housing issues.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay. You say “a series of measures”.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Long: Can you elaborate on that?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: In support of this, I am not the expert, but I would refer to this brief. Because I was not—

Mr. Wayne Long: You can submit that.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: We will deposit this brief, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wayne Long: Marie-Christine, could you also comment on the importance of the alignment of governments?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Housing in Nunavik is funded by both governments. We receive short-term funding. What may be beneficial and could help us reduce costs would be to have a long-term agreement with both levels of government. We receive money to build homes. We also receive some funding to manage the housing, and that is quite expensive.

We need the two governments to work together to be able to plan over the long term. A long-term agreement would enable us to reduce costs related to renovations, construction and purchase of materials. The idea is to plan all that several years in advance.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Boutin-Sweet, for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies. Thank you for being here.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Nunavik with my colleague Romeo Saganash. We visited five Inuit villages and a Cree village, so I saw the situation with my own eyes. It really affected me.

I remember two homes we visited in Whapmagoostui where the bathroom was black with mould. The home must have been shared by 14 people. As you said earlier, it is difficult for children to study in such an environment; there is no space. I understand how this may lead to mental health issues and violence. Housing is at the root of many things.

In Salluit, we talked to a woman who was the only wage earner in her household. Nine people lived in her home, and her weekly grocery bill was \$1,000. You don't become wealthy like that.

You really emphasized the lack of housing. You said that population growth is forcing you to catch up in that area. Homes are being built, but you are unable to catch up because the population is growing. You also said that young people have more difficulty obtaining housing.

How long does an individual whose name is on a waiting list have to wait before they get a home?

That is my first question.

• (1140)

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Certain criteria have to be met. The criteria grid is based on the one used in the south. The points are added up. If you have children, you get points. If your family situation is difficult, you get points. If you have a doctor's note saying that you may be depressed, you get points. The system is obviously designed to help the less fortunate families. The major criticism....

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: What is the average wait time for housing?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It varies from three to eight years.

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: It could take five to seven years to get a house for a person who has no social problems, no kids, and is a college graduate or student. It will be hard.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Let's take for example a father and a mother with two children aged two and three. How old will those children be when that family gets a home of its own?

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: It all depends on the points. We all follow the applications of the points, because we're overcrowded with applications, too. Every year, they have to renew their applications, and each application will probably get more or fewer points biyearly, so it always depends on the scale of the points.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: So it can take at least three years.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes. There are some luckier cases where people obtain housing after a year, but those are not the majority.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: That is unfortunately what I saw. The waiting lists are long.

You also talked about long-term planning, and I will come back to that, but I want to pursue this topic right now.

How can the federal government help with those waiting lists? You said that you cannot catch up. What do you expect from the federal government to resolve the housing crisis in Nunavik?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Additional homes would definitely go a long way to helping improve things, as housing is lacking in all communities. Some communities are more overcrowded than others. Adding new homes would certainly help reduce overcrowding in other homes.

As for renovations, they are the responsibility of the province. Renovations are also important, as some of the homes are in deplorable condition.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I was actually told that there is a preference toward building housing rather than renovating existing homes. Keeping the money for building more homes is preferred, and there is not enough money to renovate other homes.

I was also told that smaller villages are having trouble because fewer homes are built there. People have to wait even longer for housing. Is that something you have noted?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I am not sure, but I could get back to you on that.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: When it comes to adaptation, I was also told that it is windy in the north. The door hinges are not designed to withstand those climate conditions. So doors are often torn off by the wind. That is a cultural adaptation issue. You talked about aspects we did not discuss, such as the sun's orientation. However, the homes I saw over there are like the bungalows we have here.

If I lived in Kuujuaq or Ivvujvik, and I killed a caribou to bring home, I don't know where I would put it—perhaps in the basement or the bathroom. I assume that situation contributes to the mould. The homes are not adapted to the people's needs. Under a housing strategy, I would suggest that the very particular conditions in the north be considered. However, for the conditions to be accommodated, northern residents must be engaged in the process. We mustn't only hold consultations, but work together with the northerners.

• (1145)

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes. Exactly.

What I feel is really worthwhile about the Université Laval study is that it is being carried out in partnership with communities. Those in charge are getting people involved, not only through consultations, but they are asking them for ideas and inviting them to participate in the project. The idea is really to develop, in terms of structure, a housing concept that is consistent with the lifestyle.

There are no basements in Nunavik because of the permafrost. People have nowhere to cut up caribou. When a population hunts or fishes, they need somewhere to store the weapons. That is starting to be developed. Model homes have been built. There is one in Quaqtaq where the lobby was designed for that purpose with space to butcher the animal. There are areas to put closed and secured boxes for guns. There are boards....

What are they called, Ms. Makiuk?

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: It's a cutting board.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: That's for butchering animals.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes. It's for cutting up the meat.

So, homes are starting to be adapted, but those are really prototypes. So, while homes are being built.... In addition, people need several types of vehicles. We are talking about snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, trucks and cars. They currently have huts that can accommodate a single snowmobile, but a family often has more than one snowmobile used for hunting.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: They have large families.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: To adapt to the way of life, costs don't necessarily have to increase. It's really a matter of adapting to people's lifestyle.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now over to MP Sangha, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming here and making statements.

My question will be regarding food insecurity, which we feel is a great problem in Nunavik. Food insecurity refers to the situation when, for example, the food that is purchased does not last for long, or there is not enough money in the household to buy the food and the household cannot afford to eat balanced meals. The household members are skipping meals because there is not enough money for the food. These are the big problems that people are facing in the north.

Can you suggest to the committee the impacts you have witnessed from high food prices and how these can be improved?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: It's a good question.

Regarding food security, in the last two years, the Nunavik regional board has set up a working group on this issue with all the regional organizations. This working group is looking at the types of strategies we need to put in place as a region, but also recommendations that we want to make to the government regarding strategies. We have not completed our work. However, we recently sent our recommendations to the nutrition north program. As you know, this program right now is under revision and the regions are being consulted about it. We just forwarded our own recommendations to the nutrition north program. All the regional organizations have signed on to these recommendations.

Mr. Chair, I can forward the copy of those recommendations to your committee members.

• (1150)

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Thank you very much.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Did you want me to elaborate more?

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Yes, please go ahead.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: As for food security, in accordance with our mandate as a working group, we have identified issues. Clearly one of them right now is the lack of access to country food. It's an issue because we know this is healthy food for our communities. So we're looking at all the strategies to improve access. We know there are differences between our communities in their access to country food. There are different ways of sharing country food that have been put in place, like community freezers in the north. We need to fill up those freezers. We know that the impact of the different changes that have occurred has made it difficult to access some foods. For example, caribou right now in our region has gone down. These are all issues we're looking at.

Another issue is access to healthy food and our over-reliance on processed food. So we're looking at how to improve access to nutrition, healthy food, and decrease our dependence on processed food. That's another issue we're looking at. The third and fourth issues are looking specifically at some populations like elders and youth, who we feel would benefit from more targeted interventions to improve their access to food.

We have programs right now like breakfast in schools, and we want to expand that program to all children in all our schools and communities so they can have breakfast provided at school. We have right now strategies to increase healthy snacks in the schools because we know a full belly learns better than an empty belly. That's one of the strategies. We have community collective kitchens and other programs like this so that people can develop their collective kitchens to improve access to prepared food, using country food and delivery to people who are in need. These are the types of strategies we're looking at. These are the gaps we want to look at in the next two years. We hope to have a report in the next two years containing our strategies and the recommendations we want to make.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: You talked about young children changing their lifestyle to overcome chronic diseases, drugs, and other problems like suicide. We see that the Quebec government has done quite a bit to improve these things. What are your suggestions on the initiatives in place at this time to tackle this huge problem?

The Chair: He didn't give you a lot of time to answer that and I'm sure it's a complex response. I'll give you a little bit of extra time, but please make it brief.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Maybe as a follow-up, Mr. Chair, I could provide the committee with reports we have made. For example, we have a suicide prevention strategy that's recently been adopted by our regional board, and it is funded in part by the provincial government. We'll be happy to provide you with this and with any other documents that can address some of those questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ruimy.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, everybody, for coming today and making the trip here. I hope the weather is nicer here than back home.

Madame Vanier, what are the funding sources for the housing authority? Are they provincial, federal?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: They are both, actually.

[Translation]

New home construction is funded by the federal government, unless I am mistaken, and the provincial government is responsible for managing the housing.

•(1155)

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: What's the best combination of housing allowances, construction subsidies, and maintenance funds to produce and sustain the existing housing stock? What do you think is the best combination?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: That is a very good question.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: That's why I asked it.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I could consult my executive director about that and send you an answer.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Thank you.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much.

[English]

Typically, how long are the funding cycles?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It was one year.

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: Yearly. They're all yearly.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Oh, just yearly?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes. That's part of the problem because we cannot buy all the material to build a house years before, and we have to wait for the ice levels to go down for the sealift.

[Translation]

Materials are delivered by boat, but the ice has to melt for that to happen. Only then can construction begin.

If we were able to plan longer-term agreements, savings could be made. We could actually buy the materials in advance and start building earlier, without having to wait for the materials to arrive in late June or in July. That would also make it possible to start building.

Permafrost thaw is a problem. Ground warming is very obvious in the great north. When the budget is confirmed only one year in advance, we don't have enough time to build the pads, solidify them during the winter and then begin construction. As a result, after being built on pads, homes shift around. The inside structure of the home gets a bit broken down, and that requires renovations and necessarily implies costs.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

Is there a lot of home ownership over there?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I think there are about a hundred home owners. In my opinion, that program will grow. People are interested in home ownership. We are waiting to see whether the program will be ongoing. What's more, people know that it is one of the most generous programs in North America. Requests are made, but people don't always qualify. We just resolved an issue related to

[English]

the leasing of space with northern villages.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: You mentioned that homes were overfilled with too many people living in them. Do you see home ownership as a way of contributing to solving the poverty cycle in the north?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes, that is a related approach that will help reduce overcrowding.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I'll move to economic development. I'm not sure if you can answer this question. What opportunities are there? It's wonderful if we can figure out the housing piece, but are there opportunities for sustainability through economic development? Can the federal government present ways of improving economic development there?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: That's a good question.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I like to ask good questions.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: The Province of Quebec is working on the Plan Nord actually, and, of course, there are opportunities. But what are they? I don't really know. I'm more concerned about housing.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I'll come to economic development. It is an important question for me because of the issue of sustainability. Everybody deserves to be able to have that good life, but it has to be sustainable.

What types of programs are currently out there? You mentioned the Quebec government. Could you expand a bit more on what is doing to increase economic development and how can we play a role in that?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: That is a very good question I cannot answer right now. However, I could send you the answer.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Last question. You have seniors housing. Are the houses that are being built now for multi-generational families? Or how much input do you actually have into what is being built to suit the needs of your population?

• (1200)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: In fact this is done through a survey of the population, a survey on housing. We are going to do one this year, and we have hired a company. This survey will allow us to see where the overcrowding situations are, and how we can meet the needs of the population with the greatest needs. This survey, which is really important, is done every two years. It is, in a way, a snapshot of the population and its needs.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: However, homes for the elderly are built and funded by the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: For six minutes we'll hear from MP Zimmer, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thanks. Again, we regret not making it up there. I remember looking forward to seeing what northern Quebec looked like in the winter. I'm from northern B.C., so I have an image of what it looks like, but it would be nice to see Quebec. Nevertheless, here we are.

I have a question that goes back to the original way of life of the Inuit people. Sometimes we think we have the right solution for people, but one that's not necessarily our own. I am of Germanic descent, and my mom is Scottish and Irish. We have our backgrounds, and you have your background. I often wonder whether the solution for you is the current model of housing, given the increasing rates of tuberculosis and other health issues that are occurring from this somewhat unnatural way of life for Inuit.

What do you see? Do you see changes that need to be made to the housing model? We always hear about the need for more money and more houses, but do you see, a little bit outside of that question, which you've already asked us, a need for a change in the way the houses are built or the way things are done? Do you see possibly a hybrid form of a return to the way Inuit used to live? Hunting and gathering used to be the way people survived, and they did it quite healthily, I would assume. They were quite healthy people back in the days previous to the 1700s.

Do you have some thoughts about that, Linda, if you wouldn't mind answering?

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: In the history of my ancestors, I cannot go that far back. I'm half French and half Inuk. I've lived both sides as well, as a French person and as an Inuk person, but I live the lifestyle of the Inuk. I eat country food; I do all the main things.

To see the difference between then and what it is now.... I would not know that.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'll ask that of Françoise.

The reason I brought this issue up is that one thing I think we've seen consistently, with our poverty reduction strategy, is that the key to having somebody succeed in life, to getting off the streets, or—you name it—getting out of their situation of poverty, is giving them a purpose in their life, whether it's a job.... It could be as simple as a job. It could be a career. It could be a multitude of simple things, actually.

I'm just concerned about the people of Kuujjuaq, because their original purpose in life up there, the reason they were up in the northern regions of Quebec, was to survive as hunters and gatherers. That's where they lived. So what can the new purpose be for the people of northern Quebec? I have some questions at hand here—what's the main industry in Kuujjuaq; what's the unemployment rate—but what do you see? What can we give them as a sense of purpose?

There are phrases we've used before: give somebody a fish, feed them for a day; teach them how to fish and feed them for a lifetime. How do we feed the people of Kuujjuaq for a lifetime?

Françoise.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I wish my colleague were here. All I can talk to you about is my perspective as a *halunak*.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Absolutely.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I don't think people want to go back to the way it was 100 or 150 years ago. That's not the reality of today. What they're looking for is an ability or capacity to marry the traditional life with the modern life of today.

How do we achieve that? We have to give them the time. We have to give them the capacity to do it.

How do we better marry the two? In the case of housing, we came up with the solution of these great bungalows with three bedrooms. It was a case of, "That's it. We're building those for you." In fact, we need to sit down together and let them choose how they want to build a community, what type of housing, from the start.

Unfortunately, we have gone in saying that we knew what was best for people. That's not the way to go. We need to let people decide what is best for them. So I'm not going to answer your question.

• (1205)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I want to interject here before you finish that.

You talk about their indicating what kind of housing they would like, but I would also suggest it's a question of how they can sustain it and pay for it themselves. I think an important part of home ownership is having made a contribution to it rather than having somebody else buy it for them, let's say.

How do you solve that, too, so they become participants not only in the selection of the house but also in paying for it?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: We know that one key is education. We know that the capacity to acquire the skills and competencies of the jobs already in the north.... There are a lot of jobs in the north; we cannot say there are no jobs. But we have to support the capacity and the factors favouring people getting access to those jobs. Often we don't give them the right conditions.

Housing is a good condition to give people so they have a safe environment to learn in. That's the first step: a safe, secure environment to learn in so they stay in school, so they have the capacity that if they go to school in the south, they know they can come back and have a place to live and enjoy both the traditional ways of life and....

There are people who succeed in doing that today. There are people who do, but it's not everybody. Everybody does not have the ability to do that.

The challenge is that we have to start somewhere. It's all areas. In health care services, we know that the majority of employment here is held by people from down south who come to work up north. Our objective is that one day those jobs will be filled by people in the north. To do that, we have to facilitate access to education and be creative in how we give that education. Right now, for someone

living at home in the north, growing up in a small community and having to go to Montreal to finish their schooling, it is a big, big change. It's an incredible change. You have to imagine it for yourselves. Let's say you grow up here and are sent to a small community in Africa. You are told, "This is where you have to live for the next three to four years to acquire your skills." I don't think many of us would stay.

Let's do more to facilitate education and programs in the north that are adapted to the north. In our certification process in the south, we have become very rigid, with the claim of the need to ensure safety and benefit and everything else. I understand that. However, we need to understand that we also could be more flexible in the communities to facilitate education programs up north. There is the idea of having a college up north, having facilities where people can learn in their communities in the north. We have to be flexible there.

I can give you an example of that, I think. We have to work with the vision of people being up there and wanting to stay in their communities. They want to grow there. They want to live there. They want to earn a living there. They also want to practice what has built their identity, which is the land, going onto the land and accessing country food. That's part of the cultural identity that is a safety net for suicide prevention and mental health. It's all part of that.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Dhillon, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Good afternoon, and welcome.

My question is addressed to anyone who would like to answer.

In your opinion, what steps can we take to improve the housing situation in that community? What can the federal government do?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: At the risk of repeating myself, clearly increasing the number of houses would help to lessen the overcrowding in other homes.

Ms. Bouchard raised another matter, that of education. Recently I became aware of the fact that it is really not easy to leave your family and your usual lifestyle, to no longer hunt, fish and do things like that.

We leave all that to go to study in Montreal, but once we get there we don't do anything, we are no longer connected to our family, we have no contact and we are away from our environment. It really tears you up, and it is one of the reasons why people don't finish their schooling or don't leave to go and study in the first place. It's really hard.

• (1210)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: It might also be said that there is a lack of social infrastructure. Ms. Bouchard mentioned an alcohol problem. Is there also a detox centre?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: There are programs, and there is a project regarding that. In fact, I think the intent is to ask the federal government for a detox centre project in Kuujjuaq.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: You feel it is important to have this type of infrastructure in the communities.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Yes, it's important for the communities.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Do you have something to add, Ms. Vanier?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: No.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I would like to add something. First, we have to eliminate the famous backlog, and come to an agreement with Quebec, that is, governments have to agree; but there must also be agreement with current Inuit leaders so that they take their place and become eventual leaders in this area. We must agree with regional organizations regarding the future growth of a program so that it does not just last for one year, but several, and we have to find a way of settling all of that for the future with the local organizations.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Earlier you mentioned that there was elder abuse. Is that a recent situation? If not, has it existed for a long time? What can we do to improve the situation and prevent these cases of abuse?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: We don't talk about that sort of situation very much. We know it exists and we acknowledge it, but as for any case of abuse, very often the first step is to recognize that it is happening. We live in a society that recognizes that we have problems and that we need to deal with them; the communities are starting to take themselves in hand. We have to make plans, that is clear. We don't always have structured plans yet.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Ms. Vanier, you mentioned earlier that in Nunavik the cost of living was 148 times higher than in the rest of Quebec. Could you explain that figure, briefly?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes, it is 148 times higher.

In fact, that figure is taken from a study done by Gérard Duhaime of Laval University entitled "Cost of Living in Nunavik". I could provide you with copies if you like.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Yes.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: So the figure comes from that study. That group of researchers studied people's consumption and their various expenses over a long period. They collected invoices and produced a report on the consumption of the Inuit in Nunavik.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Is 148 times higher, or 148%?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It is 148%.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay. You said "times" and I was a bit confused.

[English]

Do I have some time?

• (1215)

The Chair: About a minute and a half.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

[Translation]

Ms. Bouchard, you talked about tuberculosis. This is very disturbing. I think that all of the members of the committee consider that a worrying situation. Has there been an improvement or is it getting worse?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: According to my current observations as a public health physician, the epidemic has not yet peaked. We are currently seeing gradual outbreaks in all of our communities. We are dealing with a generation, those aged 15 to 34, who had very little contact with tuberculosis. They are unfortunately very vulnerable because of conditions and lifestyles. I think this will last for some years yet.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Unless there is improvement in housing.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I don't see that happening in the immediate future, and that is why we have to take long-term measures. In the short term, we are always dealing with crises, and we continually have to react.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Fine.

Thank you very much to all of you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now it's over to MP Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Thank you very much.

How do residents in your communities heat their homes?

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: With a furnace.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: And how do they power those furnaces?

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: With gas.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Natural gas? Diesel?

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: I'm not sure. It could be diesel, yes.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Power?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: The electricity is from diesel, yes, but the furnace, I think, is...I'm not sure. I can get back to you.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: They obviously pay for the heat they consume.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: The Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau provides electricity to heat the homes and to meet general needs.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Excellent.

What means of transportation is used to get the food to you?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: The food is sent by airplane and by boat when that is possible. That is how food arrives in the north.

However, after it gets there it has to be distributed to the 14 communities. I have been to the various communities of Nunavik and it is sometimes difficult to find a celery stalk that is in good shape.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Is the food distributed to the small villages by truck?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: By plane.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: So the plane stops in each village. They don't use trucks because there are no roads.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: There are no roads, that's right.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: What type of fuel do the planes that deliver the food use?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Airplane fuel, I expect.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Consequently, the increase in the cost of energy will have an effect on communities like yours, correct?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Certainly, because it will increase the KMHB expenses. Whenever there is an increase in energy costs, this affects budgets. There is less money in the coffers to do other things.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: There is going to be a carbon tax of about \$50 on each ton of carbon. This is going to increase the cost of energy to heat homes and transport food, which is already too expensive in northern communities. Will these increases have an adverse effect on the citizens who live there?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It is certain that tenants are going to feel the effects of an increase. Rental costs are already increasing by 8% each year. Those costs affect renters directly, and other expenses will be added to that. There will be other increases that will affect tenants.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Is it possible to simply replace all of these other sources of energy with solar panels, or something else?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I know that at this time people there are looking at potential new energy sources, solar and wind energy. That is being studied currently.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: What are the obstacles?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I am not in direct contact with those who are piloting the project. I will have to send you that information.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Until you have replaced the current energy sources with new ones, the citizens of your communities will be affected by the increases in the cost of gas and fuel, correct?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: That is correct.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Fine, thank you.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now have Madam Boutin-Sweet.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We talked about economic development and education. I'd like to talk about all of that in connection with the building of new housing. I would like your opinion on this.

In my opinion, if more on-site training were offered in the construction trades, culturally adapted training, we could reduce construction costs. We could plan for the longer term, as you said, and we could better adapt things to the climate and the culture, since the workers live there. Do you think we could adopt that type of long-term solution?

Regarding energy sources, I know that Nunavik does not draw its power from the Hydro-Quebec power grid, and that is a problem. Could the federal government provide assistance in this regard, in

order to lower construction costs and improve existing and future infrastructure?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: That is a very good question.

Could you repeat the first question?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: My first question was about training people in the construction trades.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: In the long term, I think that could be one solution to be considered. Some companies hire Inuit people from the communities. In the long term, that practice could be broadened, and a larger number of contracts could be awarded. We have a construction company, but it is difficult to get contracts. It depends on the number of houses that are being built.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: What could the federal government provide?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: They could offer training programs and programs to transmit knowledge to the Inuit.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Not very long ago, the federal government had a program whereby it paid for part of the training, but that program was cancelled a few years ago.

In your opinion, should the federal government to continue to cooperate with the other levels of government, or provide its own training in the construction trades?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I think that that could be really beneficial. Indeed, people could be trained and get construction expertise.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: In that case, it would no longer be necessary to bring up workers from the south. It would of course be less costly. And since the workers would be on site, they would not have to pay for housing.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It is the same philosophy as Ms. Bouchard's.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We are moving on to the second round here, starting with MP Warawa, please.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I again want to express my appreciation for your sharing with us. We get to understand, a little bit, some of the challenges of those living in the north.

I've asked a staff member behind me to do some research, and I'm going to ask you if you've heard anything of a cost-benefit analysis of growing food in the north as opposed to having it trucked or flown in.

In the Maple Ridge area, there is a company that had a display of what it called a 40-foot farm. It is a greenhouse built in containers retrofitted to create a portable greenhouse that would be flown in. The lighting inside the greenhouse would be provided by electricity from the village, and each community would grow its own green vegetables. It's on a rotisserie within the greenhouse, so that you have all these different layers that rotate and are constantly exposed to the light so that they grow; but you can have multiple crops within this greenhouse growing at the same time. They call them 40-foot farms because it's being grown within a 40-foot container that's been retrofitted to exist in the north. The community provides electricity.

Have you heard anything about that cost-benefit analysis?

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: There was a project where they grew vegetables in a water tank. There were fish underneath that fed the vegetables. It was a complete nutritional element transfer. That said, I have never heard about a container as such.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa: We can maybe do some more research on that, Madame Bouchard.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes, it would be interesting.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I would invite you to get in touch with Kativik Regional Government, which has these greenhouse projects in place in Nunavik, as well as chicken coops to have fresh eggs available and accessible in Kuujuaq. Currently, Kativik Regional Government is developing the kinds of projects right now to look at exactly, I think, the perspective of growing or accessing your own fresh food.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Just to build on the comments by Mr. Zimmer, we're trying to provide the quality of life of the south, but in the north. I think the big question is whether that is possible to do.

The north is their home. They would like to be able to live a good quality of life there. Is that possible? I think that maybe the portable greenhouse, actually built in the community, may provide the benefit of affordable food. What makes it still quite expensive is the cost of the diesel to run the generators to power the lights and electricity in the communities.

Moving back to the issue of seniors, do we know what percentage of the population seniors are projected to be in the north? In the south, it is supposed to be the case that within the next 13 years, one in four people will be a senior or an elder, defined as age 65 and older. There are now more seniors than youth.

It sounds like it's quite a different mix. The projected life expectancy in the north is only 64. In 2008 it was 68. There's something happening in the north that is quite different from in the south. Do you have any projections of what's going to happen over the next 10 to 15 years in the north as far as the age of seniors is concerned?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I do not have the numbers in my head, but I can give you the information.

Mr. Chair, we can send you socio-demographic information regarding the Nunavik population.

We have what we call an inverted pyramid in Nunavik, because of the high natality rate that we have. I don't think this will change. I think the population is young, with a high natality rate right now, so we're probably going to have 50% of our population under 19 years of age for a long time.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Do I have another minute or so?

The Chair: You have about half a minute.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Could you address the challenges of mobility for seniors in the north?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: That's a good question.

When you asked about housing's capacity to address the mobility issues that elders may have in terms of adaptation, I was going to say that this is an issue, clearly.

Our communities right now are small, but they're expanding, and they're expanding with a low density. Transportation is an issue for people, especially if they don't have their own vehicles.

Some communities now have community buses. There is transportation so that elders can get to the health services they need or to the grocery store when they need to. However, they are often dependant on their own family members and on the availability of their family members.

I don't know if that responds to your question on mobility issues, but I think it's an issue of urbanization that has not been fully addressed. With the growing chronic issues such as hip problems, walking is clearly not as easy, especially in the winter. They depend a lot on transportation by others, but also on public transportation when available in the community.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, for six minutes, we'll have MP Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thanks again, Chair.

Thank you again to our witnesses.

Ms. Vanier and Ms. Makiuk, in your presentations you mentioned the lessening of permafrost. I don't know if that's the right terminology. Can you elaborate on that and what impact it has on your northern community?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I am not an expert on soil, but I am familiar with that situation because we have to deal with it. The permafrost layer is supposed to be frozen permanently, but the ground moves. It seems that this melting is being caused by climate change. Because of that, the houses, which are built on pilings, are much more unstable.

We build a pad that is made up of several layers of various substances such as sand and rock, and the homes are built on those pads. Before now homes did not move very much, but we now see that some new houses have already moved. The structure of homes that are only two years old has already moved. You can see that on the inside.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long: Would you agree that climate change is having an impact on your community?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Absolutely.

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Bouchard, can you also elaborate on that? What impact are you seeing?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I agree. In terms of impact from a health perspective, I cannot claim things, but one of the concerns we have, for example, is with rabies. There are animals that carry rabies in the south; with climate change, we see animals now moving more north. We are concerned about further risk of exposure. That's clearly an example from changes in the environment.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It affects country food, too.

[Translation]

People also notice changes in the behaviour of animals.

Kuujuaq is still considered the south. There are still trees in part of Kuujuaq. The trees are bigger and have more leaves. The situation is quite obvious in the north. It seems that the changes are more spectacular there.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long: I'm repeating, but you are seeing adverse effects due to climate change, obviously.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Long: If proceeds from a price on carbon were used to, say, deepen food subsidies, would you agree that this could be a way of lowering costs to help people living in poverty?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Are you asking should the proceeds of carbon taxation be used to reduce...?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes. If carbon tax revenue were given back to people living in poverty as subsidies, could you see that as a way to help alleviate poverty?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I'm not an expert who could say what is the best way of using a carbon reduction tax. Clearly, if it's about programs to increase the social safety net of our citizens, the source of the funds is an issue for government policy to decide. However, I think we need to increase the capacity of the social safety net for our citizens.

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Vanier, would you agree?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes, I totally agree.

Mr. Wayne Long: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have about two and a half minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'd like to talk about innovation in your community. We're a government that talks about innovation and new ways and new ideas.

Ms. Vanier and Ms. Makiuk, what innovation do you feel is happening in your community with respect to poverty and poverty reduction or needs to be introduced to effectively reduce poverty?

What innovation are you seeing, or you think you'd like to see?

●(1235)

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: I've been working as a Pivallianiq agent for the past two and half years. What I would do is meet one-on-one with the tenants in their dwellings to see what the conditions are in their homes.

The foundations, the pads, as Marie-Christine was saying, would have to be built two years before the contractors can build on the foundation. I've heard that, under the Quebec government, foundations have to be built two years in advance of the building being constructed. No matter whether it's a business building, or a dwelling, a home, a residence, the foundation has to be built two years before the building is constructed.

That's why we see that the newly constructed buildings, built within the last five years, are all cracked. The windows are cracking, the doors and windows cannot close well, it's cold, and when we get to winter and it's -50°, we have to live in these conditions because of how the contractors built our houses. What I see housing as lacking is the foundations.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Ms. Bouchard, can you talk to me briefly about what innovation you feel is needed, or what innovation you're seeing that is effective?

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I'm not sure what you mean by "innovation". If it's technology, I—

Mr. Wayne Long: It's new ways and trying things, new ways of thinking, new approaches.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: One thing I've observed in the last year is that the major regional organization, our leaders' organization in Nunavik, conducted what we call the Parnasimautik. They went around to each community to hear from the people directly about their preoccupations in all areas of life. What has come out of that is that we have communities now who have decided to hold their own Parnasimautiks, as we call them.

Unfortunately, even in small communities, sometimes we work in silos. It happens. Encouraging integration and sharing between the different groups in the community can bring change. We are seeing the leaders in those communities now undertaking these kind of initiatives in which they identify not only their own issues but also their own solutions. To encourage and support that will be the best way to move forward.

One of these communities, Kangiqsualujuaq, just won a prize for their family house. They decided to have a family house in their community so that people could share together issues and everything. They just won a prize at Arctic innovation...I think it was a conference in Winnipeg.

These are the type of things that we need to support and encourage in those communities, so that people themselves can find the best solutions. We support that.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now move over to Madam Boutin-Sweet, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

Inukjuak is a good example. Tommy Palliser spoke to me about the development of materials that are adapted to northern conditions, and about his work with the universities. He also spoke to me about greenhouses, as Mr. Warawa mentioned. For the committee's information, the clerk asked Mr. Palliser to send us a document, and we will be able to have some information on this which could be quite interesting.

You spoke about consultations earlier, consultations with local groups. We can talk about the housing strategy or we can talk about other consultations. You also referred to full jurisdiction, full local jurisdiction.

Someone said that earlier. Someone referred to full local jurisdiction. What did you mean by that?

[English]

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: I would refer to the example of our regional organization making recommendations to nutrition north Canada. The way of the future is that those funds should probably be transferred to the region to administer and decide where best to invest them, rather than criteria or conditions being imposed by the federal government.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I agree, but how can we get there?

What is the starting point for that?

There have to be some negotiations from the outset. And there has to be more than negotiations. It has to be discussions between equals, nation to nation.

• (1240)

[English]

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: There are regional organizations who represent the Inuit leadership. I think you can sit down with them. The governments have to recognize their capacity to manage.... The Kativik Regional Government is our regional government. They must recognize their legitimacy. Those programs, like nutrition north Canada, have existed for years now. We have learning and we know what they think.

If those programs were transferred to the regional bodies, they could best see where the needs are in their own communities. For example, we sometimes see the disparity in those programs between communities because of distance and other things. The regional bodies can best see how to assess and address those inequities. Often these programs, because they're not based in the community, cannot see how best to address those needs.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: So we are talking about local authority over decision-making and the execution of those decisions by the administration.

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: Correct.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Fine.

[English]

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: That's where we're moving with health care right now. The Nunavik regional board is the one that decides where to invest in what priorities.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I have a question for one of you about the melting of the permafrost.

I don't know if it was in Salluit or Ivujivik, but someone said that not only does that cause a risk for the construction of new homes, but also that the existing village might have to be moved.

Have you heard anything about that?

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: Yes.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: What have you heard?

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: The community of Salluit was based on swampy land. All the houses were sinking and breaking down. Salluit moved all the houses up to the mountains. This is why there are houses on the mountains of Salluit.

With the growing population, they had no more space on the mountain, and this is why they went back to the sinking, swampy area to build houses there.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: How is that move financed? To move a village, do you use funds that could have been used for the construction of new houses? How does it work?

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: I think they were all used already.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Have existing homes been moved?

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: Yes, they're all there right now.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: How was the move funded?

[English]

Ms. Linda Roy Makiuk: I don't know.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Could you send that information to the committee later?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes, with pleasure.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

The permafrost issue could get much worse because of climate change. That may be something that we will have to take into account in building new housing or moving existing communities.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Exactly.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: In my opinion, any housing strategy needs to be adapted to local conditions. Should a northern housing strategy contain that type of adaptation measure?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Certainly. Each community is different. The situation and the overcrowding vary from one village to another. Each community has its own particular conditions, and they should be taken into account.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: It's the same thing for the infrastructure. In certain locations, water is delivered, whereas in others I saw that there were service lines and an aqueduct system. In Nunavik, the infrastructure is not the same everywhere.

[English]

The Chair: Be very brief.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It may have been south of the 55th parallel.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: It was a little further north.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It may have been in Kuujjuarapik.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm looking at the clock. We have to save about five minutes at the end for some committee business. I want to get a few more questions in.

Bob, do you guys have somebody else who wants to take at least one more?

• (1245)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I think we're good.

The Chair: You're good, okay.

Next up is Dan Ruimy, please.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much.

I want to pick up a little on my colleague's comments about climate change. You said you're seeing the effects of climate change, and probably more so than what we would normally see. When we talk about pricing carbon, I come from British Columbia, where they have implemented a \$10 tax on carbon per tonne, and now they're up to \$30. We've been living with this for quite some time now. They released their last budget, and it shows they collected almost \$1.2 billion in revenue from pricing carbon.

It's up to the provinces to decide what to do with that money. They gave back almost \$580 million in personal tax savings. It could be a northern tax credit, it could be an income tax break, but it's all broken out. They put another almost \$1.1 billion in business incentives. It's all priced and it did come out to be revenue neutral.

Do you see that as having potential? The Province of Quebec would be collecting this money and deciding what to do with it, so do you see a portion of those funds being able to help up north?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: That's a good question.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we bring the witnesses here to ask them questions, not to answer them for them. Mr. Ruimy asked a question and then he nodded his head and

said, "Yes?" I would ask members not to answer the questions for the witnesses, out of respect for those who are here.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I will let the witnesses answer the questions.

The Chair: That's fair enough, but if we're going to start throwing stones about leading the witness, I think we better worry about whether we live in glass houses, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: If the Province of Quebec has the ability and the extra funds, and we know that north faces more challenges from by climate change, do you see that as an opportunity to get more funding to help with the challenges? Do you think it would be fair to redirect some of that funding to your region?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: As Ms. Bouchard was saying earlier, all of the funds, wherever they come from, will facilitate the development of Nunavik and help the Inuit. That is certain.

As to whether that is a good idea, it is up to the Government of Quebec to see, and to develop its strategy.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: My next question is whether the federal funding that you receive comes via the Province of Quebec or directly to you.

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: It comes to the Kativik Regional Government.

No, it comes to

[Translation]

the Kativik government.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Is it being issued to the province, which then issues it to you?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I would like to refer to my office before answering that. I'm not quite sure where it goes beforehand.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: That's okay.

Do you see other funding? I'm just trying to figure out where your sources of funding come from. Is it CMHC, or INAC? Where do you see housing funds coming from?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I'm not sure.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay.

Moving on to another subject now, we have housing funds, but what about wrap-around services? What kind of wrap-around services are you getting?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: I don't understand.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: What about wrap-around services? It's great to have a house but what about services like mental health services, learning how to write a resumé, and overall services that help one move forward?

If you have mental health challenges, are there services to address those needs?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Yes, there are some initiatives with the health board, I guess.

• (1250)

Dr. Françoise Bouchard: The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services is responsible for providing health services in the area of mental health.

In terms of programs like curriculum vitae writing, and things like that, there are programs that address adult education through the Kativik School Board. At the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, we are responsible for the planning and delivery of health services regarding mental health issues.

Clearly, this is a big challenge, because in a trans-cultural setting, mental health has to be addressed with the competencies required. Access to specialized services is always an issue. To be able to recruit and retain resources in the north is *toujours* a challenge at this time. We do not have enough psychologists. We do not necessarily have all the time and resources required to provide those services. Clearly, it is an area that is being addressed right now.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to cut Dan a little bit short here.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Argh!

The Chair: The reason is that I had previously asked if anybody else wanted to ask questions and I think we've had some reconsiderations. In the interest in playing nice in the sandbox, we have Nicola next, followed by Pierre. Madam Boutin-Sweet has asked for a brief question as well.

We do not have time for two, let alone three, because I do need five minutes at the end. I'm going to limit the next three questions to three minutes, please, starting with Nicola.

[Translation]

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to greet the witnesses and thank them for being here and for their precious co-operation.

We are talking about a population of 12,000 people with a high birth rate. It is reasonable to assume that families are quite large and have four, five or six people per family. From 2,000 to 3,000 homes were built over a 30-year period. Given the conditions that have been described to us, after 30 years they are outdated or are in very bad shape.

Have you investigated best practices? I will tell you why I am asking you that. It will give you time to think about it.

In the work I used to do, I had the opportunity to travel in the north but I never went, as opposed to you. However, when I saw photographs I thought that those homes were completely inappropri-

ate given the reality of the north—they are even inappropriate to the south. You can imagine the difficulty there is in adapting something to northern realities when we can't even adapt it to southern conditions. However, there are architects and engineers with good brains, artists, people who do manual labour and are very creative.

Have you tried to survey the best practices to design buildings that would be better adapted to the location and conditions as regards their architecture and the materials used?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Construction in the north certainly requires specialized materials, given the strong winds and intense cold.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: That was not my question.

Have you examined the best practices?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: What prevents you from surveying the best practices in your daily work? You read on this topic and you are in contact daily with people. Why does no one study the best practices? Would it not be a good idea to start doing that today?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: The KMHB construction team does that, in close co-operation with the Quebec housing authority, the Société d'habitation du Québec, SHQ. The SHQ functionaries have been piloting that file for a long time, in fact since the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Another interesting initiative is Habiter le nord québécois—living in the Quebec north—a project put together by researcher Geneviève Vachon.

It is a five-year study slated to go from 2015 to 2020. The objective is to have the buildings correspond better to the Inuit way of life and their cultural identity, as well as to the location of Nunavik. Some specialized architectural firms are partners in this study. Partnerships are also created directly with the communities. The researcher goes from community to community with her team. That is what is being done currently.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: How many houses were built over the past year?

[English]

The Chair: I have to cut you off there. I'm sorry.

Pierre Poilievre, please, for three minutes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: To revisit something Mr. Ruimy said, he basically proved my point. He said that British Columbia's carbon tax collects over a billion dollars from taxpayers and gives back only \$500 million in tax relief. The rest is all in business incentives, which means handouts to interest groups that are able to effectively lobby for that money. That doesn't make it "revenue neutral", Mr. Chair, just to correct the terminology. "Revenue neutral" doesn't mean that a government spends everything it gets. It's the equivalent of *Field of Dreams*: "if you send it, we will spend it".

What we're talking about here is a revenue-generating carbon tax that expands government at the expense of taxpayers, and disproportionately at the expense of low-income rural and remote taxpayers, who are more dependent on fossil fuels for their energy. What we've seen today is more evidence that the increases in those costs disproportionately fall on communities in the north, because they must heat homes in a colder climate and must transport the essentials of life over longer distances.

I put that on the record to correct earlier statements. Thank you.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, Madam Boutin-Sweet, please, for the last word.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very brief question. One of you said that rents increased by 8% per year. What is the reason for that?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: Those are the rental increases we see every year.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Why do rents have to be increased? Is it because expenses are higher?

Ms. Marie-Christine Vanier: In fact, all of the houses are managed by the SHQ, and so it is the government that requires these rent increases every year.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: That was quick. Thank you. I appreciate it.

I want to thank the witnesses here today.

Thank you very much for coming down and meeting with us. As we said at the beginning, it was heartbreaking not to be able to visit you up north, but who knows what the future will bring? We will jump at the opportunity—though maybe not in February—to get up there at some point.

For the record, I just want to remind folks that we are travelling to Toronto for Friday and will be having the last witnesses and site tours there for this study. Also, I will just remind you that we will not be meeting on Thursday of this week. That meeting is not going to occur.

Thank you all very much. Thank you to everyone who made today possible. I think we are ending with two minutes to spare. That's fantastic. Thank you, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

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