



ONTARIO NON-PROFIT
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

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

January 25, 2021

“For Indigenous, By Indigenous” Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy for Canada

Founded over 30 years ago, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) is a member funded and directed association that represents over 730 non-profit housing providers and local housing corporations throughout the province. The community housing sector provides safe, affordable, and stable housing for half a million low- and moderate-income Ontarians, including culturally-supportive housing for Indigenous households, with built assets close to \$30 billionⁱ.



“For Indigenous, By Indigenous” Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy for Canada

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

Several converging factors underscore the need for a distinct urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy for Canada, including but not limited to:

- The rapid growth rate of Indigenous populations (42% in 10 yearsⁱⁱ);
- The increasing urbanization of Indigenous peoples (80%ⁱⁱⁱ);
- The disproportionately high rates of Indigenous poverty (24%^{iv}), core housing need (18%^v), and homelessness (15-90% in urban centres^{vi}); and
- The considerable overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the health, justice, and social services systems.

In light of the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous communities across the country – living both on and off-reserve – we expect these needs to continue growing significantly. While housing on-reserve is in severe need of repair and new construction, there is an equally pressing need for investment in the often overlooked and vastly growing need for Indigenous housing in urban, rural, and northern areas. Moreover, while the National Housing Strategy has rightly identified the need for distinctions-based strategies for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, there remains a considerable gap in meeting the needs of the nearly 80% of Indigenous households living off-reserve in the absence of a fourth strategy for urban, rural, and northern Indigenous communities.

At this pivotal moment in history, the Government of Canada has a once in a lifetime opportunity to support a “For Indigenous, By Indigenous” urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy for Canada. Indigenous communities and organizations across the country have been working in strong partnership, laying the groundwork to map needs, scope solutions, and develop strategies. Indigenous-led efforts are crucial to understanding and addressing diverse community needs and supporting Indigenous self-determination.

Investment in this approach is critical to help meet one of the government’s key commitments of supporting progress along the path to reconciliation, including addressing many of the recommendations outlined in the Final Reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Moreover, investing in an urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy will have broad-reaching impacts, helping to stimulate economic growth during this unprecedented downturn and ensuring communities across the country are supported sustainably for the long-term.

As the voice of the community housing sector in Ontario, ONPHA strongly supports the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) Indigenous Caucus, who have been



leading the critical work to develop and champion a [“For Indigenous, By Indigenous” urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy for Canada](#), and we wish to express support for their recent [submission](#) to this committee. In addition, we wish to take this opportunity to highlight ONPHA’s ongoing work in partnership with our Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Advisory Committee and Indigenous community housing providers and partners across Ontario to implement an [Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Plan for Ontario](#).

To meet the growing and diverse housing needs of Indigenous communities living in urban, rural, and northern areas, we strongly recommend that the government work in true partnership with Indigenous communities, organizations, and leaders based on principles of self-determination, sovereignty, and reconciliation to:

- 1. Build at least 73,000 subsidized Indigenous-owned and operated units to meet core housing need**
- 2. Support programs and partnerships that ensure cultural continuum and encourage Indigenous people to move along the housing continuum**
- 3. Increase Indigenous control, management, vision, and direction in the community housing sector to effectively meet diverse community needs**
- 4. Develop a comprehensive database of the Indigenous community housing sector to measure and develop better data, information, research, and evaluation on urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing**
- 5. Increase funding to reduce and ultimately prevent and eliminate Indigenous homelessness**

ONPHA’s Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Plan for Ontario^{vii}

In Fall 2018, ONPHA’s membership unanimously adopted a resolution put forth by its Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Advisory Committee (URIHAC) resolving that ONPHA work with partners to call on federal and provincial governments to implement urban and rural Indigenous housing strategies. To support this resolution, ONPHA engaged a team of Indigenous-led consultants and a Steering Committee composed of URIHAC members to create an [Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Plan for Ontario](#).

Released in May 2020, the Plan outlines socioeconomic, legal, and historical arguments to support six calls to action with clearly identified costs, savings, and benefits. ONPHA continues working closely with Indigenous, federal, provincial, and sector partners in the resourcing and implementation of this crucial plan. Details of our recommendations below build upon the data and analysis in the Plan, as well as the figures in the [CHRA Indigenous Caucus submission](#), which extrapolates the Plan’s data to the Canadian context.



1. Build at least 73,000 subsidized Indigenous-owned and operated units to meet core housing need

Ontario alone needs to build at least 22,000 subsidized Indigenous-owned and operated units over the next 10 years to meet the growing housing needs of off-reserve Indigenous populations. This includes units to meet current and future needs, as well as replacement units for current stock requiring renewal.

The initial \$7.3 billion investment can save \$14.3 billion in system efficiencies, through cost savings in social services, healthcare, shelter services, justice, and foster care, while significantly boosting Indigenous personal incomes through improved employment and education outcomes. Moreover, the construction program will create 95,000 year-jobs in the construction sector and other industries, while adding \$3.8 billion to the economy through construction multipliers.

On a national scale, the required 73,000 units would create nearly 300,000 jobs, add \$12.5 billion to provincial economies, and save over \$47 billion across public systems. Following the development of these robust, community-led strategies, now is the time to move out of the planning stages and act by investing adequate, sustainable resources in Indigenous-led organizations to implement these critical plans.

2. Support programs and partnerships that ensure cultural continuum and encourage Indigenous people to move along the housing continuum

Beyond providing adequate, affordable housing for Indigenous people, Indigenous-owned and operated housing also provides culturally-supportive, wrap-around services and supports that recognize and reflect the diversity of community needs. Ensuring cultural continuum in housing is critical to help address the lasting impacts of racism, colonialism, and intergenerational trauma, while also helping move Indigenous people along the housing continuum, improving health, education, and employment outcomes, and reducing overrepresentation in the health, justice, and social services systems.

Considering the depth of need facing Indigenous communities, nearly all (if not the entirety) of Indigenous housing providers' portfolios are rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units. While this composition is important to support community needs, it also puts these providers in deeply precarious positions, with extremely limited reserve funds and flexibility for long-term planning. Moreover, many of the operating agreements that support urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing providers are beginning to expire, further threatening the sustainability of their operations in the absence of long-term solutions and investments. As such, it is critical that in addition to capital funding, the government also invests in sustainable operational funding to ensure these services and supports can continue meeting community needs for generations to come.



3. Increase Indigenous control, management, vision, and direction in the community housing sector to effectively meet diverse community needs

The Indigenous community housing sector currently lacks substantial control over its limited resources, operating under a patchwork of programs that severely underestimate the vast, growing needs in urban, rural, and northern communities. Despite these significant challenges, Indigenous housing providers have continued to provide safe, affordable, culturally-supportive housing as essential service providers for the past 30 to 50 years. As such, it is critical to leverage the knowledge and experience of Indigenous organizations and leaders, who have proven track records of effectively meeting diverse needs through a depth of community-based experience.

In light of newly proposed legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada, it is incumbent on the federal government to adequately and sustainably support Indigenous control over the development and determination of Indigenous housing programs (as outlined in UNDRIP Articles 21, 23, and 39^{viii}), including in urban, rural, and northern settings (as identified by the Federal Court of Appeal in the *Misquadis* decision^{ix}). Investing sustainably in urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing is critical to recognizing Indigenous housing providers as expressions of Indigenous self-determination, and advancing along the path of truth and reconciliation.

4. Develop a comprehensive database of the Indigenous community housing sector to measure and develop better data, information, research, and evaluation on urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing

For a variety of reasons, Indigenous people may not be accurately represented through current government data systems (e.g., Census data). As a result, some Indigenous communities feel that such information severely underrepresents the accurate size and composition of Indigenous populations throughout Canada, in turn producing conservative estimates related to both community need, as well as system savings and benefits. The lack of standardized data is a major obstacle in the development and sustainability of Indigenous community housing.

As such, there is a critical need for a comprehensive, community-supported Indigenous housing database to accurately measure and represent the current and future needs, gaps, and capacity in the sector. Such data is crucial to ensuring that investments and programs are meeting diverse community needs, while also building trust and good faith with Indigenous communities.

5. Increase funding to reduce and ultimately prevent and eliminate Indigenous homelessness

We know that the cost of homelessness is far greater than the solutions, especially in light of the significant cost increases related to COVID-19 responses^x. With rates of Indigenous



homelessness over eight times greater than that of non-Indigenous people in urban centres^{xi}, greater investments must be made to reduce and ultimately prevent and eliminate Indigenous homelessness across Canada.

Recognizing the strengths of the Reaching Home program, which promotes community-led decision-making, increased resources must be allocated to address Indigenous populations experiencing and at-risk of homelessness, as needs continue to outpace investments. As identified above, Indigenous-led organizations are the best suited and equipped to develop and deliver supports and services to Indigenous communities.

Thank you for taking the time to review our submission. ONPHA looks forward to continuing to engage with all levels of government to develop innovative, sustainable solutions for the community housing system and ensure communities are supported equitably for the long-term.

Sincerely,

Marlene Coffey, MA, MAES, MCIP, RPP

CEO

ⁱ The total value of social housing units in Ontario is estimated at \$30 billion, however this does not include all assets in the community housing sector, including land, which would likely result in a significantly higher real value for the sector. See: Office of the Auditor General. (2017). 2017 Annual Report, Chapter 3 (3.14). Available at: http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en17/v1_314en17.pdf

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada. (2017). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada. (2017). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

^{iv} Statistics Canada. (2017). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

^v Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2019). The housing conditions of off-reserve Aboriginal households. Available at: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/data-and-research/publications-and-reports/socio-economic-housing-conditions-off-reserve-aboriginal-households>

^{vi} Thistle, J. (2017). Indigenous definition of homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Available at: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHIndigenousHomelessnessDefinition.pdf>

^{vii} Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association. (2020). Urban and rural Indigenous housing plan for Ontario. Available at:

https://onpha.on.ca/Content/Advocacy_and_research/Advocacy/Indigenous_Housing_Plan/Indigenous_Housing_Plan.aspx



^{viii} General Assembly resolution 61/295. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A/RES/61/295. (13 Sept. 2007).

^{ix} *Ardoch Algonquin First Nation v. Canada (Attorney General)*. (2003). FCA 473. Cited as *Misquadis*.

^x City of Toronto. (2020). City of Toronto calls for Federal-Provincial-City partnership to create 3,000 permanent, affordable homes over the next 24 months. Available at: <https://www.toronto.ca/news/city-of-toronto-calls-for-federal-provincial-city-partnership-to-create-3000-permanent-affordable-homes-over-the-next-24-months/>

^{xi} Homeless Hub. (2013). Homelessness, urban Aboriginal people, and the need for a national enumeration. Available at: <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/aps/index.php/aps/article/view/19006>