



Aboriginal Housing Management Association

Report on Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing

Presented to Parliament of Canada, HUMA Standing Committee

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Introduction and Background

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (hereafter referred to as AHMA) is an umbrella organization consisting of forty-one (41) Indigenous housing providers. AHMA's members oversee 5,400 units that collectively house an estimated 8,700 Indigenous individuals and families living in urban, rural, and northern regions throughout British Columbia (BC). **Notation:** *For the purposes of this report the term 'Urban, rural and northern housing' shall refer to off-reserve housing for Indigenous peoples.*

As Canada's first Indigenous housing authority, AHMA was created **for Indigenous people, by Indigenous people**. In addition to providing families with affordable housing, AHMA's members offer many support services through thirty-five (35) different programs including homelessness prevention, transition homes, parenting skills, mental health programs, substance use support, and more. As an Indigenous organization, AHMA brings a cultural component to its relationship with members. AHMA recognizes the dispossession of Indigenous peoples caused by the Canadian Government through residential schools, the sixties scoop, and consequences of colonization. AHMA is working with its communities to reclaim self-determination through culturally appropriate housing that honors Indigenous traditions in meaningful ways.

In 2016, more than half of all Indigenous people in Canada lived in urban areas. Indigenous households in urban areas are more likely to rent than non-Indigenous households; about half of Indigenous households rented their dwelling compared to 29% of the non-Indigenous households. Moreover, 11% of Indigenous people living in an urban area resided in housing that was subsidized in 2016. Between 2011 and 2016 in Canada, the proportion of Indigenous households living in housing that is below housing standards across urban, rural, and northern communities has decreased. Despite this, the number of Indigenous households in core housing grew by 36,690 households in 2016, for a total of 648,765 households. This indicated that housing challenges for Indigenous people in urban, rural and northern communities are increasing. Lone parent and youth-led Indigenous households were especially vulnerable. In the same year, 18% of Indigenous households were in core housing need compared to only 12% of non-Indigenous households.

While affordability remains the biggest driver for core housing need, other issues include overcrowding and homes needing major repairs remain crucial challenges in Indigenous housing. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AHMA is seeing a higher fluctuation of Indigenous individuals and families who are moving between off reserve housing and on reserve housing in search of more stability. Local economies across BC are impacted by social distancing measures and travel restrictions, and Indigenous individuals and families are especially vulnerable to these circumstances. The long-term impacts of the pandemic on



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Indigenous peoples need to be monitored as it is important to identify how Indigenous housing needs will change over time, including the scale of housing needed across Canada, types of housing, and location.

Policy Context

At the Federal Level

The National Housing Strategy (NHS) is a 10-year, \$55 billion plan intended to create new housing supply, modernize existing housing, provide resources to community housing providers, and support innovation and research. Indigenous housing is identified as one of the six priority areas for action in the NHS. The NHS respects government-to-government relationships with Indigenous peoples, commits funds, and supports significant work currently underway to co-develop distinction-based housing strategies for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation partners that are founded in principles of self-determination, reconciliation, respect, and co-operation. Establishing national strategies, with provincial implementation guidelines and benchmarks, will ensure a coordinated response at all levels of government and will allow Indigenous people to meet Indigenous housing needs in both reserve communities, and in urban, rural, and northern communities across Canada.

To truly be aligned with UNDRIP, the Truth and Reconciliation Act, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Canada must ensure that Indigenous peoples have accessibility and the power to exercise their rights to adequate housing. This can only be done through an inclusive and culturally appropriate National Indigenous Urban Housing Strategy created for Indigenous Peoples by Indigenous peoples.

The Federal Government's distinction-based approach fails the 78% of Indigenous people who are not living on-reserve in Canada. The Federal commitment to the distinction based Indigenous groups is immensely important and crucial work. AHMA, and our members, in no way would ask for that commitment be taken away from or reduced in any way. As such, the National Housing Strategy lacks the specific means and measures needed to address the housing rights violations experienced by Indigenous people residing in rural, urban, and northern communities across Canada.

Many Indigenous peoples inevitably do not have a relationship with their Nations or hereditary communities. The crux of the matter is that Urban Indigenous Peoples are a diverse community; In BC, only 60% of Urban Indigenous people are First Nations; The remaining are Metis, Inuit, self-identified and non-status who do not have an Indigenous governing body to represent them. To that end, these individuals have no voice, nor do they have meaningful representation from elected officials at either the provincial or federal levels. Of course, this lack of government representation is primarily due to the horrific actions of colonization and associated assimilation policies by the Canadian government that conveniently displaced hundreds of thousands Indigenous peoples from their heritage, traditions, families, and lands. Residential schools, the sixties scoop and the current foster care system are prime examples. This isolating experience is the urban Indigenous truth. The self-identified, the disenfranchised, the forgotten, the displaced, the majority and yet the 'without government' voice.



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At the Provincial Level

Compared to other provinces and territories, BC was and continues to be the leader in terms of advancing Indigenous self-governance and recognizing that Indigenous challenges requires Indigenous solutions. Following the devolution of the Urban Native Housing portfolio from CMHC to BC Housing (hereafter referred to as BCH), AHMA started negotiating with BCH the terms of a potential further devolution.

In 2012, The B.C. government reached a milestone with transferring the administration of all federal and provincial Indigenous social housing programs to AHMA – nearly 3,800 units in total. The transfer included Aboriginal housing units, emergency shelters and the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program. This Indigenous self-management model for social housing is the first of its kind in Canada and better serves the needs of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia. The BC Government committed to transfer over \$35 million annually to AHMA to administer subsidy payments that keep the housing affordable for Indigenous individuals and families.

In 2018, through the Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund (IHF), AHMA, in partnership with Government of British Columbia, became the first province in Canada to invest provincial housing funds into both on and off reserve housing. Through the IHF, \$550 million was invested to support the building and operation of 1,750 new units of Indigenous housing projects over a 10-year period. It was a monumental housing initiative that encouraged the inclusion of all Indigenous Peoples, no matter where they reside. The IHF aims to support Indigenous families, seniors, individuals, and persons with disabilities. AHMA and the province partnered with non-profit housing providers, Indigenous housing societies, and First Nations to deliver new projects from this funding program.

In December 2019, BC became the first province in Canada to pass legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). BC's Bill-41, affirms and recognizes the inherent rights and freedoms of Indigenous Peoples and the minimum standards that are expected to ensure those rights are protected. The province has committed to:

- Consult with Indigenous groups when making decisions that may affect their Aboriginal rights.
- Pursue and achieve reconciliation.
- Adopt, implement, and ensure consistency of British Columbia's law with UNDRIP, specifically with respect to the Indigenous right to self-determination.
- Address and close the gap on the significant disadvantages of, and inequalities facing, Indigenous people respecting Indigenous.

At the Municipal Level

With rapidly growing urban Indigenous populations, provincial and federal commitments to reconciliation under the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and the recently mandated Housing Needs Reports, municipalities are increasingly positioned to respond to urban Indigenous housing needs. However, while there is extensive literature regarding Indigenous housing on-reserve and an increasing body of research examining urban Indigenous housing experiences, an analysis of municipalities' response to urban Indigenous housing needs in BC through policies and plans remained elusive.



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In December 2020, in partnership with UBC, AHMA completed a study that included 30 municipalities within BC. The data was collected from a content analysis of OCP and Housing Strategies, which are two primary instruments that municipalities use to acknowledge housing needs and articulate their priorities and actions towards addressing housing needs. This analysis was supplemented by data from surveys and interviews with municipal planning staff who have experience and in-depth knowledge of the processes undertaken to create their municipality's OCP or Housing Strategy.

The study found that although there is a desire to engage in reconciliation efforts, 90% of municipalities do not acknowledge or address urban Indigenous housing needs with their OCP or Housing Strategy. The study also identified challenges for municipalities in addressing urban Indigenous housing needs, including lack of financial and human resources, ambiguity over whether Indigenous housing needs are distinct, and uncertainty around the role and jurisdiction of municipal governments. Municipal planners indicated a number of resources that enable them to acknowledge or address urban Indigenous housing needs in OCPs or Housing Strategies, including access to Indigenous-specific housing data, strong relationships with local First Nation leadership and urban Indigenous representatives, and support from city council and municipal staff.

Although this study does not attempt to make suggestions for how municipal processes, plans, or policies should acknowledge or address urban Indigenous housing needs, understanding the municipal perspective and current response to urban Indigenous housing needs within OCPs and Housing Strategies lays the groundwork to identify Indigenous-led and Indigenous-informed approaches to municipal housing policy, incentives, and actions.

BC Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy

Following the 2019 Federal Election, the Indigenous Housing Sector in BC and across Canada heaved a sigh of relief to see that Minister Hussen was mandated to create a National Urban Indigenous Housing strategy. However, a year later, we are dishearten to see that there is no progress on this file.

Considering the significant time and effort that has to be invested in this initiative, and the wide consultation process that has to take place, we see the delay in initiating this project a major threat to its conception. Particularly, in a minority government environment. For this reason, AHMA's Board of Directors have decided to invest our own fund to create a BC Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Strategy with the hope that, once completed, it will be considered for funding by our Federal Government.

An Advisory committee composed of many internal and external stakeholders will oversee the progress of the development of the strategy and ensure that a wide and a meaningful consultation is a key component of it.

The BC Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy will:

- Define and understand who the Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing and Service Providers are, and measure their social and economic impact in supporting Indigenous peoples.
- Define current challenges in the delivery of urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing and propose solutions to bridge the gaps if any.



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- Assess BC's Indigenous urban, rural, and Northern housing needs and develop a 10-year plan to respond to the needs of fixing existing stock, build new units and create new housing programs.
- Develop an implementation and delivery plan that identifies the role of AHMA, member organizations, funders, and partners.
- Assess and build capacities for AHMA membership in housing related domains.
- Identify key partners to support the implementation of the Strategy (e.g., municipalities, MLAs, MPs, other Indigenous organizations, etc.).
- Develop a system to monitor and evaluate the success of the strategy.
- Measure the return on investment in Indigenous Housing in terms of different types of taxes and quantify any social returns.

Conclusion

AHMA is calling upon the Federal Government, under the leadership of Minister Hussen, to set the framework – inclusive of timelines and resources – for the immediate creation and implementation of the *National Urban Indigenous Housing Strategy*.

Additionally, AHMA respectfully requests the opportunity to serve as advisors and/or board members on whatever governing body is established to create and oversee this initiative. Given AHMA's years of experience and knowledge – indeed, we are arguably Canada's foremost subject matter experts on urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing – we are well positioned to partner with government on this new initiative.

Only through meaningful engagement with AHMA and Indigenous housing and service partners across Canada, can the social, economic, and Indigenous rights of urban, rural, and northern Indigenous peoples in Canada be claimed and protected.

AHMA's vision for the future was built on our members history of grassroots evolution and self-determination. It also aligns with the United Nations Article 23, that states 'Indigenous Peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic social programmes affecting them.' A provincial Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy is an integral step toward obtaining that vision and empowering all of our Indigenous communities no matter where they reside.