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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



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

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• (1835)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House of Commons order of September 23, 2020. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

First, members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you're on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. I remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair, and when you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. From the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, we have Romy Bowers, senior vice-president, client solutions; and Lindsay Neeley, director, housing solutions, indigenous and the north. From the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, we have Chantal Marin-Comeau, director general, reconciliation secretariat. From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we have Janet Goulding, associate assistant deputy minister, income security and social development branch; and Kris Johnson, director general, homelessness policy directorate. Also, from the Department of Indigenous Services, we have Chad Westmacott, director general, community infrastructure branch.

I understand CMHC is going to go first.

Will it be you, Ms. Bowers?

Ms. Romy Bowers (Senior Vice-President, Client Solutions, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Yes.

The Chair: You have the floor for five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Romy Bowers: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm joining you today from Toronto, the traditional territory of the Wendat, the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee, Métis, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

It's a great pleasure to appear before this committee on behalf of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. We are Canada's national housing agency. We are guided by a very bold aspiration: By 2030 everyone in Canada has a home that they can afford and that meets their needs.

To achieve this goal, we know that we must do more to address the diverse and pressing housing needs of indigenous peoples. For indigenous households living in urban, rural and northern areas, the rate of core housing need is 18%, as compared to the national average of 12.7%. The housing needs are most dire across the territories, where approximately one-third of the indigenous population lives in unacceptable housing. There is much still to do, but we believe there are many reasons to be optimistic.

Even in the midst of a global pandemic, CMHC is actively working with new and existing partners to help address the exceptional housing challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis. At CMHC, we have quickly rolled out a number of new initiatives that will support indigenous and northern housing needs. For example, we are delivering a new shelter initiative that will fund the construction of 12 new shelters for indigenous women and children across the country over the next five years. We are also supporting close to 400 indigenous youth to secure employment in the housing sector, at a time when jobs can be difficult to find. Last month, we launched a new rapid housing initiative, a \$1-billion program to help address urgent housing needs by expediting the creation of permanent affordable housing.

In addition to these recent initiatives, we continue to offer funding and financing options to support indigenous and northern housing needs through the national housing strategy. Launched in 2017, the national housing strategy was developed in consultation with Canadians and various partners, including provinces and territories, indigenous organizations and community housing providers. There is more than \$55 billion being delivered through various programs and initiatives, and we have prioritized indigenous and northern housing needs across them all.

For example, through the national housing co-investment fund, we have invested over \$121 million over the past two years to support 577 units serving indigenous and northern housing needs. There is also \$125 million set aside within this fund to target specific needs, including repairs to the existing urban indigenous housing stock and for projects in the north.

We are also supporting indigenous-led innovation, research and demonstrations projects to help communities explore culturally appropriate and industry-leading housing models or technologies.

I'd like to point out that provinces and territories play a key role in supporting indigenous and northern housing. Through new bilateral agreements with CMHC, provinces and territories are delivering various programs, including the new Canada housing benefit, which will help low-income households access affordable housing.

In addition, there is \$200 million in targeted funding being provided through the Canada community housing initiative to protect and preserve affordability among existing units serving indigenous households. Although not indigenous-specific, targeted funding for the territories will benefit indigenous peoples living in the north. There is \$447 million being provided through bilateral agreements with three territories, including \$300 million to address the higher housing costs and needs of the north.

Reducing chronic homelessness is also a key priority of the national housing strategy, and my colleagues at ESDC will be speaking later about funding and programs being delivered to address homelessness.

There are various other programs under the national housing strategy umbrella, and we are actively working to ensure that indigenous housing providers and organizations can access these funds and make the most of these programs to address their needs. We have recently created an indigenous and northern housing solutions team at CMHC to provide dedicated support for our clients.

However, we recognize that to advance reconciliation we need housing strategies that are for indigenous people and led by indigenous people.

• (1840)

We are very proud to be an active partner in working with first nations, Inuit and Métis organizations alongside Indigenous Services Canada and CIRNAC on distinctions-based housing strategies. My colleagues from these departments can provide more details on these initiatives.

We'll also be working with indigenous partners, housing providers and others to identify critical housing needs and gaps in urban, rural and northern areas. This work will complement a larger plan to address critical infrastructure needs in indigenous communities.

For many years, we have offered funding through various legacy housing programs to build new housing or repair or renovate existing housing in first nations communities. We provide the tools and training to first nations to assist with housing management, maintenance and construction. In 2019-20 alone, these programs helped to build or renovate some 1,200 homes and preserve rent subsidies to 22,600 households.

These programs are complemented by initiatives delivered by Indigenous Services Canada. Together, we invest some \$326 million annually on first nations housing on reserve.

Finally, I'd like to note that our real change starts within CMHC. At CMHC, we want to do our part. I'd like to highlight a few actions we are taking in support of our reconciliation initiatives.

We have nominated an executive-level special adviser on indigenous housing and reconciliation and are in the process of establishing an indigenous advisory council. This work will touch on all facets of our country and company, including our business practices and relationships with indigenous peoples and organizations.

Our reconciliation work is also being supported by our indigenous employee resource group. We're offering training to all employees on reconciliation. We will also support the transition of our dedicated housing programs for indigenous housing toward indigenous self-determination, care and control.

We are very pleased that this committee will be exploring the gaps and barriers in urban, rural and northern indigenous housing as part of its study. We are committed to doing our part to help build a better future for indigenous peoples across the country.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be very pleased to answer any questions the committee may have regarding my opening remarks.

Thank you so much.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bowers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marin-Comeau, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau (Director General, Reconciliation Secretariat, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Thank you.

[*English*]

Kwe kakina. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for having me here today.

I would first like to recognize the traditional territory of the Algonquin nation where I'm currently situated. I would also like to recognize the traditional territories from which you are participating.

I'm pleased to represent Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, which is responsible for overseeing some of the Government of Canada's initiatives related to Inuit and Métis Nation housing.

Safe, healthy and affordable housing provides the foundation for individuals and families to achieve better health and socio-economic outcomes. For indigenous peoples, it's also a way to live their culture, stay connected to their communities and be able to participate in society and the economy.

These are the reasons that, in 2017, through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee and through the Canada-Métis Nation Accord, federal and indigenous leadership committed to working together to take important steps to address the significant housing needs.

Today, I am happy to speak in particular about our work with Inuit and the Métis Nation.

I would like to start my remarks by giving you a few of the current statistics. According to the 2017 report from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, over 50% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat, the traditional homeland of Inuit, live in crowded homes. We have heard stories of 15 people sharing a three-bedroom home, of entranceways and boiler rooms being turned into sleeping areas, and of children taking turns sleeping because there is just not enough room.

Over 30% of Inuit live in homes needing major repairs. Overcrowding contributes to the rate of tuberculosis in Inuit communities, and that rate is about 300 times higher than the rate among non-indigenous Canadians. Métis people experience core housing need at a rate 25% higher than non-indigenous Canadians.

Therefore, in budget 2016 and budget 2018, Canada invested a combined \$980 million in distinctions-based funding to address Inuit and Métis housing needs. This includes \$80 million in 2016 over two years and \$400 million in 2018 over 10 years to support the Inuit-led housing strategy with direct investments in Nunavik, Nunatsiavut and the Inuvialuit regions. It also includes \$500 million in 2018 over 10 years to support the Métis Nation housing strategy.

This was the first time that investments in indigenous housing by design took a distinctions-based, indigenous-led approach and delivery.

The co-developed Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, which was released in April 2019, and the Métis Nation Housing Sub-Accord signed in 2018 were designed by indigenous partners and will be delivered by indigenous partners.

The strategies recognize the importance of long-term planning, direct investments provided to indigenous partners, and the need for innovation and experimentation and for taking into consideration the housing development challenges.

Here are a few of the results to date.

Since 2016, Inuit housing authorities have overseen the construction of approximately 480 housing units, with an estimated 550 more to be completed by the end of budget 2018. Since 2018, Métis Nation housing authorities have overseen the construction or purchase of nearly 200 units while renovating nearly 1,000 and subsidizing rents for nearly 1,200 Métis citizens.

These approaches directly lead to employment and business opportunities because of indigenous leadership's strong commitments to ensure that maximum benefits remain in their communities. These strategies are being delivered in flexible and innovative ways, reflecting indigenous lifestyles, traditions and culture.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, indigenous partners have directed some of their housing investments to deliver short-term emergency rental subsidies and temporary shelters for people living in unsuitable conditions.

As you can see, some progress has been made in addressing Métis and Inuit housing needs, but there remain significant challenges. Some of these challenges relate solely to geography. Of particular significance for Inuit is that housing construction in remote locations is characterized by a short construction season and by high costs of construction materials and labour.

Enhanced coordination among programs and services offered from federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments is also required. There is a complex patchwork of programs, services and funding opportunities available from different levels of government.

- (1850)

Inuit and Métis Nation partners have also identified the need to build capacity in their regions to take on greater roles and responsibilities in housing development and management, and to promote innovation and experimentation in housing.

We also know that funding is not consistent or sufficient to address the degree of housing gap, and long-term planning is required.

What are the next steps?

The 2020 Speech from the Throne recognized the need for continued attention to housing in indigenous communities, and committed to making ongoing progress to increase safe and affordable housing for indigenous people.

We have taken important steps with Inuit and Métis Nation partners, and these are guided by Canada's commitment to reconciliation with indigenous people, but also to self-determination. Results of the current strategies so far indicate that we're on the right path, that distinctions-based, self-determined approaches lead to more effective results, but a lot more needs to be done.

Together, we can ensure that the most immediate housing needs are addressed, while establishing a strong and equal foundation for Inuit and Métis Nation housing.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Marin-Comeau.

Next, we have Ms. Goulding, from the Department of Employment and Social Development.

Ms. Goulding, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Janet Goulding (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people from which I am joining you this evening. I have the privilege to work and live here.

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for the invitation to speak with you today about the federal government's approach to preventing and addressing urban, rural and northern indigenous homelessness.

This evening I will provide a description of the Reaching Home program, a brief history of federal indigenous homelessness programming, and an overview of the current federal efforts to address indigenous homelessness, including in urban, rural and northern communities.

Reaching Home, Canada's homelessness strategy, is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada. Reaching Home replaced the homelessness partnering strategy in April 2019 and represents a \$2.2-billion investment over 10 years to tackle homelessness.

Under Reaching Home, direct financial support is provided to community entities. These are organizations responsible for managing funding in their community or region according to homelessness needs and priorities.

Reaching Home supports the goals of the national housing strategy, in particular its objectives to assist the most vulnerable Canadians in maintaining safe, stable and affordable housing, and to reduce chronic homelessness in half by 2028. This is a goal that will be evolving along the lines expressed in the last Speech from the Throne.

To understand Reaching Home, it's useful to look to past federal homelessness programming. The overrepresentation of indigenous people in the homeless population has been known for some time, and significant investments have been made under federal homelessness programming to address this issue.

In 1999, the government launched the national homelessness initiative, and under this initiative it introduced an aboriginal homelessness stream. Dedicated funding was provided for the first time to indigenous organizations to provide programs and services that met the distinct needs of indigenous people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

While the initial aboriginal homelessness stream only provided \$8.1 million annually to eight cities across Canada, the funding was later increased to expand to other communities, and the annual total investment eventually reached \$14.3 million. Budget 2016 then doubled the funding available under this stream to bring it to \$28.7 million annually.

Since the launch of Reaching Home, financial support to reduce indigenous homelessness has expanded to 30 urban communities

and seven regional areas, including a recent expansion to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Reaching Home recognizes that indigenous people are overrepresented in homelessness. That is why \$413 million has been dedicated to address indigenous homelessness over nine years. Of this amount, the program is investing \$261 million over nine years—approximately \$29 million a year—through the existing indigenous homelessness stream to maintain the community-based approach and to help organizations provide culturally appropriate supports and services for all indigenous people in those communities.

In addition, as part of the Reaching Home program, a new funding envelope of \$152 million over nine years was created for the development and implementation of distinction-based approaches to homelessness.

ESDC has been engaging with national indigenous organizations in alignment with the permanent bilateral mechanisms to ensure that funding meaningfully responds to the needs of first nations, Métis and Inuit. Our engagement efforts are focused on identifying homelessness-related priorities and concluding funding agreements to pursue distinctions-based approaches.

For the first time, funding for modern treaty holders that have provisions in their treaties related to health and social services is also being explored. ESDC has identified 20 modern treaty holders with these provisions, and engagement to establish homelessness funding agreements is at various stages.

I will also note that Reaching Home established a new territorial homelessness stream, with funding of \$23 million over five years. While the territorial homelessness stream is not indigenous-specific, it does have a significant focus on indigenous homelessness, given the high proportion of indigenous peoples in these territories.

Further, Reaching Home has two other funding streams—the designated communities stream and the rural and remote homelessness stream—and these can also help provide supports and services to indigenous peoples.

While it is important to recognize that the investments have been increased over time and program improvements have been made, our work is clearly not done. In 2018, 30% of the homeless population in Canada identified as indigenous, while indigenous peoples account for roughly 5% of the total population.

The prevalence of indigenous homelessness and the overrepresentation of indigenous people within the homeless population are ongoing concerns. They are linked to the experience with colonialism, to intergenerational trauma, as well as to a number of other structural, systemic, individual or relational factors.

• (1855)

That is why we welcome this committee's interest in the issue of indigenous homelessness, particularly in the context of the recent Speech from the Throne commitment to ending chronic homelessness, because it will be imperative to prevent and address indigenous homelessness if we are to attain this ambitious goal.

I look forward to recommendations on how urban, rural and northern indigenous housing and homelessness can be addressed, and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goulding.

Next we're going to hear from the Department of Indigenous Services.

Mr. Westmacott, go ahead, please.

Mr. Chad Westmacott (Director General, Community Infrastructure Branch, Department of Indigenous Services): Good evening.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the work that Indigenous Services Canada is undertaking in collaboration with Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and first nations partners to address the housing gap for indigenous people on and off reserve.

Before I proceed, I would like to recognize that I am presenting from the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin nation.

By way of introduction, I'm Chad Westmacott, director general of the community infrastructure branch within Indigenous Services Canada. My branch leads policy development, interpretation and implementation for infrastructure that helps to ensure that first nations communities have access to high-quality education facilities, clean drinking water and better housing.

Housing is a fundamental need for all Canadians, including indigenous people. All should have access to safe, adequate and affordable housing.

We know that first nations, Inuit and Métis are more likely to experience poor housing conditions, overcrowding and homelessness than the general population. We also know that overcrowding can be a key indicator of hidden homelessness, where people have access to accommodation but have no immediate prospect of permanent or stable housing.

Not having access to adequate housing has impacts on community and family well-being. For example, not having an adequate place to sleep or study can impact education, health and the ability to secure and maintain work. Housing is a core element of the social determinants of health, and its impacts are great, both on individuals and families.

COVID-19 has further illustrated the housing gap and the impacts housing has on human health. It has also emphasized the importance of working with indigenous communities to address their housing requirements.

In relation to housing on reserve, ISC supports first nations in the development of sustainable and community-driven housing solutions. This includes providing approximately \$140 million in ongoing annual funding and has, for the past five years, included an additional \$200 million annually in time-limited funding through budgets 2016 and 2018, for a total of \$1 billion from those budgets. These funds are used to address urgent housing needs and support new construction and repairs to first nations housing units on reserve.

As of June 2020, ISC and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation have jointly supported the construction, renovation or retrofit of 20,096 homes and servicing of 1,127 lots, benefiting 595 first nations communities. ISC has also been supporting 992 housing-related capacity development and innovation projects in first nations communities. These projects include supporting the creation and implementation of housing authorities and housing management training.

In April 2019, the department also launched the \$36-million indigenous homes innovation initiative. The initiative directly supports innovative indigenous-led and community-driven ideas that could lead to better housing and social conditions in rural, urban and remote first nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

Our support for first nations through these investments is improving living conditions. For example, the Anishnabe Nation of Lac Simon built eight semi-detached mini houses suitable for both seniors and single-parent families, to better respond to the needs of vulnerable people living alone.

Pelican Lake First Nation introduced new housing policies around home ownership, a housing maintenance program for tenants, and training on newly upgraded software used in on-reserve housing management for the community's housing staff. This has enhanced its ability to ensure that community members have comfortable, quality housing for generations to come.

These investments are only the first step in moving beyond responding to critical needs. To this end, ISC is working with the Assembly of First Nations and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to co-develop a 10-year first nations housing and related infrastructure strategy. The overall goal of the strategy is to improve housing conditions for first nations and ensure that all first nations have access to safe, adequate and healthy housing, thus creating sustainable and healthy communities.

This work supports first nations to identify their priorities, to prepare for the transfer of housing programs and services, and to identify how they want to be involved in addressing urban, rural and northern housing issues.

Next steps for the strategy include the co-development of an implementation plan to describe short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Simultaneously, first nations-owned data and information is being gathered by first nations to inform further development and implementation of the strategy.

Finally, in support of closing the critical infrastructure gap by 2030, which includes housing, ISC is working with indigenous partners to co-develop plans that will support community-led investments in infrastructure that will help address disparities. This is balanced by a longer-term vision to stabilize infrastructure funding to ensure that resources are available to enable the successful transfer of housing services to first nations.

• (1900)

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the ongoing work that my department is doing to close the housing gap in collaboration with federal partners and indigenous people and organizations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Westmacott.

Now we're going to proceed with rounds of questions, beginning with the Conservatives.

Mr. Schmale, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you for the testimony from our witnesses. There is some great information there.

I'd like to start with my question regarding the rapid housing initiative. Looking at the need and what we heard in the testimony just a few moments ago, clearly there is a need in the north. There are a whole bunch of things. There's stock; there are the terrible conditions; there's overcrowding and that type of thing. Was there funding dedicated to the north in the rapid housing initiative?

Ms. Romy Bowers: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Chair. I'll take that question on behalf of the CMHC.

There is no dedicated funding or carve-out for the north. However, having said that, we do have a prioritization process. The whole rationale for rapid housing is to bring money to the people who need it most.

One of the witnesses we have here is Lindsay Neeley. She has a group of people who are actively looking at applications that are coming from the north and ensuring that support is given to organizations from the north that are trying to access that funding. They are making sure the needed priority is given to those applications.

• (1905)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I might as well stick with my friend from the CMHC.

In the recent "Northern Housing Report", it looks like the CMHC is no longer able to provide forecasts outside of three major urban centres in the north. According to your website, it's due to a lack of available data. Can you tell us why there is less information available?

Ms. Romy Bowers: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Schmale.

We do have a dedicated housing economist team that collects data across the country. There are challenges associated with collecting data in the north. I can get back to you on the question regarding the very specific challenges that exist in the north. We can also include steps that we're taking to address this data gap in the long term.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: It's my understanding that this data gap is fairly new. If that is true and my understanding is correct, where did the information come from before that you aren't able to get now?

Ms. Romy Bowers: Thank you very much again for that question. I will provide a written response to that as well.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay, perfect.

I want to continue on with your testimony. You mentioned that by 2030 "everyone in Canada has a home that they can afford and that meets their needs". Do you have a costing on that, by any chance?

Ms. Romy Bowers: As I mentioned in my remarks, there's been a historic investment in support of affordable housing by the federal government. The amount being invested is \$55 billion over 10 years. CMHC views that as the foundation on which all our activities are built.

We work with our partners in provinces and territories, and also with non-profits and the private sector. Our aim is to use the \$55 billion—which is a significant investment—and also to attract other sources of capital to make sure that we address the housing needs of all Canadians.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I look on your website when you talk about your aspirations. Making sure everyone has a home by 2030 is quite aspirational indeed. It's good to shoot for the stars, but also realize the realities. There is an asterisk on your website here. It reads, "All people physically living in Canada, regardless of citizenship". Can you expand on that and tell me what that means?

Ms. Romy Bowers: We tried to be inclusive in our aspiration. You're absolutely correct; it is an aspiration and it is a moon shot we're striving towards. We tried to be inclusive in that. We tried to address all people who are living in Canada, regardless of their citizenship. This would include people such as new immigrants or refugees who might not yet have gained citizenship.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Anybody physically, if they cross the border illegally, would then be given a home that meets their needs, that they can afford. Is that correct? If they cross illegally, they technically can't work, so they would get a home for free that meets their needs.

Ms. Romy Bowers: Mr. Schmale, in all honesty, that was not our intention in setting our targets.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: You're saying "All people...living in Canada". That means everyone.

Ms. Romy Bowers: That's correct.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Is there a cost for this?

Ms. Romy Bowers: I think I've addressed the answer to that question in my previous remarks.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I'll take it that you'll send it to us, but to me this is saying you're giving everybody who crosses the border legally or illegally a house that meets their needs and that they can afford. If they're illegal, they can't work; therefore, they don't have income, which means they would get a house whether they have two kids, 10 kids or coming alone. Can you please clarify that, and if this is wrong, why is this on your website?

The Chair: Ms. Bowers, please give just a short answer. We're out of time.

Ms. Romy Bowers: Our 2030 goal is an aspiration. We will address your specific questions regarding illegal immigrants in our written response, so thank you very much.

● (1910)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Chair, on a point of order, with all due respect to my colleague, the purpose of these meetings is to study urban, indigenous and rural housing, certainly not to make inflammatory assumptions about illegal people entering the country.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: There was nothing inflammatory. I was asking about what's on their website.

Ms. Leah Gazan: If he considers people illegal, I just think—

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, you have the floor.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I went on their website.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale, please mute your microphone until Ms. Gazan has finished. You can use the “raise hand” function if you wish to speak on the point of order. If you wish to engage in debate, you're out of order.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: If we want to call for meetings on refugees and housing, or immigration and housing, that would be appropriate. I think it's pretty uncalled for in this meeting, and certainly in terms of the comments, I would hope my respected colleague would do some research on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I appreciate the concern from my friend from the NDP. I have worked with her on the Crown-indigenous relations portfolio and I do appreciate her comments.

It's my understanding that in committee you can ask whatever you want when the microphone is yours. I only asked the line of questioning that was brought up in actual testimony in her witness statements. I then went on the CMHC website, which she was talking about and referencing, and I found that. I was asking a simple question that I just wanted an answer to. I had a series of questions and I did not feel that I was given the proper answer.

I know my friend from the NDP might not like that, but I was curious and I did not feel that I was given an answer. Therefore, until I'm censored on what I can say, I thought and I feel now that I was asking a valid question.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Gazan; and thank you, Mr. Schmale.

The questions certainly tested the boundaries of relevance in terms of the study, but as Mr. Schmale has pointed out, there is generally a wide latitude given.

Ms. Gazan, you've made your point.

We're going to move on now to Ms. Young, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our guests tonight for being here for this very important study on urban, rural and indigenous housing.

It is a very important issue in my riding of London West, where the majority of people facing homelessness in my community are indigenous people. I'm speaking from the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Attawandaron and the Chippewas of the Thames.

I want to ask about Reaching Home.

Ms. Goulding, I understand that the Reaching Home program is being used to help indigenous people living in urban areas. They're overrepresented in our emergency shelters, but do you get a sense that you really have a handle on the problem? A lot of people who are indigenous wouldn't actually go to shelters to seek support.

Ms. Janet Goulding: What we can say is that the data available to us.... We use several sources of data, and one is the shelter data that you refer to, but we also use PiT Count data. PiT Count represents point-in-time counts that happen across our designated communities, usually every other year. It provides us with a valuable source of information. It counts more than just those individuals experiencing homelessness in shelters, but also those sleeping rough in the street, or in other institutional settings where they're perhaps released from those settings and not having a place to go.

It's safe to say that the data we have provides a strong indication of homelessness across the country and indigenous homelessness, but it's hard to get a full picture, and it's likely somewhat unrepresented. We can be certain, though, that our indigenous population is still overrepresented in the population we count, and that supports are definitely needed to support this part of our community.

Ms. Kate Young: Would you say that, with the homelessness issue across this country, the program will be able to clearly find ways to help these people who are living homeless?

● (1915)

Ms. Janet Goulding: We've recognized a couple of things with Reaching Home.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, the federal government has significantly increased its support to the homeless-serving sector across the country, but solving the homelessness problem is a problem that we share with the provinces, territories and municipalities.

In many communities, the federal government is not the biggest funder of these services. Much of this falls squarely into provincial and territorial jurisdiction, but we do think that the funds we provide are important supports that are allowing communities to develop important elements like coordinated access and community plans.

We very much encourage, through the program, coordination between our community entities. Even though the designated community stream is the largest, where we do have indigenous community entities, we encourage strong collaboration, so that all homeless individuals are served in those communities regardless of their ethnicity or their cultural background.

Ms. Kate Young: Is there engagement with indigenous groups for the shelter home program?

Ms. Janet Goulding: I'm not sure what you mean when you say "the shelter home program", but what I can say is that we have funding in 30 communities across the country and seven regions that specifically have indigenous community entities targeting culturally appropriate services for indigenous individuals. In the other communities where we provide funding, there is strong collaboration between all the partners there to ensure that all homeless individuals are served.

Ms. Kate Young: You mentioned that some of the programs are provincial and some are federal. Is there a problem with jurisdictional disputes that are hindering progress in this area?

Ms. Janet Goulding: I don't think there's a problem with jurisdictional disputes. The split in responsibilities is quite clear, so the provinces and territories are responsible for social services and health services, for example.

The federal funding supplements the kinds of services required to provide coordination in case management for housing. Particularly, in the COVID context, there has been additional support provided to ensure that shelters and the homeless-serving sector can meet the new public health measures around self-isolation and quarantine, and those kinds of things. I wouldn't say that there is a jurisdictional problem there.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Young.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you may go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the witnesses and thank them for their contributions.

Before I get to my questions, I have a short comment. In the next few weeks, the parliamentarians on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities will hear from witnesses sharing their stories. Our job is to study the barriers and challenges related to

indigenous housing in rural, urban and northern communities. It is no easy feat for parliamentarians to sort everything out, to understand how the programs are coordinated and to be familiar with each one, so I wish to thank the analysts for the information they have provided to help educate us. What can the government do to better coordinate efforts and make sure the various housing and homelessness programs you talked about meet the needs of indigenous people? How can the government keep track of improvements, setbacks and challenges over time? That answer would be invaluable to us, but you don't have to answer. After all, it does warrant extensive consideration.

My question is for Ms. Bowers. Under the national housing strategy, \$400 million was allocated over 10 years to build and repair housing units in Inuit Nunangat, including in Nunavik. According to Statistics Canada, 23% of housing units are in need of repair and new units need to be built.

Can you give us an update on the initiative in Nunavik? Do you have any estimates you can share?

Since it does span 10 years, how do you make sure the project addresses the need and improves the housing situation?

• (1920)

[*English*]

Ms. Romy Bowers: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank Madame Chabot for that question, and I'd like to defer this question to my colleagues at CIRNA, which is the department in charge of this particular funding. I think they're in the best position to provide a response.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Good evening, Ms. Chabot. Thank you for your question.

I should start by pointing out that the 10-year investment is now in its third year. Since the beginning, we have been working with our indigenous partners to develop plans, priorities and funding for the regions, especially in Nunavik.

In addition, we have a trilateral table where the province, Nunavik and the federal government come together to do annual planning, make projections, engage in meaningful discussions and identify actions. I should make clear that everything done in Inuit regions is Inuit-led, in co-operation with local and municipal authorities.

We have already seen progress, but as I mentioned in my opening statement, there is much more to be done. Our Inuit partners are encouraged by the direct funding to the region. Clearly, this is a partnership built on self-determination. A lot of positive feedback has come in. Inuit identify the deficiencies, and determine the plans and investments. There is still a lot of work to do, but I hope that answers your question.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Yes, it does.

Can we get a report specifically on that initiative?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: At the end of every year, we prepare a report with our Inuit partners. I would be happy to share that with you.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you very much.

Under the rapid housing initiative, the government will invest \$1 billion by March. Has the government designated funding specifically for indigenous organizations or communities, or is the support broader in scope?

The question is for Ms. Bowers.

[*English*]

Ms. Romy Bowers: The \$1-billion rapid housing initiative consists of two streams. Half of the funds are being dedicated to select municipalities, and the other half, \$500 million, has a project stream. All non-profits and other organizations throughout Canada are invited to apply. We do have a prioritization process, which makes it very important that we serve the most vulnerable in a community and where the needs are the greatest. Clearly, projects that are in the north would fit those prioritization criteria.

We have a team at CMHC that works with proponents in the north to make sure that we provide support in the application process and to make sure that the prioritization process occurs as it should.

• (1925)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bowers.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

Ms. Marin-Comeau, I received an email from Mr. Kent advising of a small problem. When you speak French, click the button for French, please. The interpreters could not hear you very well.

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: All right. Thank you.

My apologies.

The Chair: It's okay. These things happen in our new world.

[*English*]

Next we have Ms. Gazan, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like brief responses, just because of my short period of time, from Madame Marin-Comeau and also Madame Goulding.

I want to thank everybody for being here. I know it's a very difficult time, and I appreciate your time here today.

With the government recently announcing funding for rapid housing, and with Reaching Home being primarily targeted, as you indicated, towards indigenous housing projects and women.... We know—particular to my riding—that 70% of the unsheltered community in Winnipeg is indigenous. Although I appreciated working with my colleague Adam Vaughan to get resources into our community, the \$12.5-million allocation is grossly inadequate in terms of meeting our current needs, and it's resulting now in people losing their lives from COVID outbreaks within our shelter system.

We're running out of space in our isolation units for the unsheltered community in places that have been opened up during COVID. This wouldn't have happened in the first place if there hadn't been a history of underfunding and underinvestment, particularly in the area of indigenous affordable and accessible social housing. This is particularly pronounced on reserve as a result of former finance minister and former prime minister Paul Martin's 2% funding cap, which has been devastating in terms of the housing situation on reserve.

With the rise of COVID cases across the country—certainly in first nations and Inuit communities, both urban and rural on reserve—we know the investments are inadequate. Very simply, are there any plans to increase investments to actually meet the real needs and urgency of housing on reserve and also in urban centres? If you could quickly respond to that, then I'll move to my next question. Thank you.

Either one can start. Maybe we'll start with you, Madame Marin-Comeau.

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Thank you very much.

I don't think I need to toggle anything. I hope everyone will understand my answer.

I'll respond to the specific area that I'm responsible for, which is Inuit and Métis housing.

The question you ask is a complex one, but maybe I'll just start with some of our plans for future years.

Under the current strategies, approximately 550 units are planned for Inuit regions, and there are going to be a whole bunch of units that will obviously see the light of day. There are going to be some reparations, as I mentioned, and there will also be some new constructions and things like that.

On the Métis housing strategy, we've established that by year 10, there will be 3,000 new homes; renovations and repairs to 2,500 homes; and provision of 27,000 rent subsidies. There is quite a bit that will be done under these current investments, but you quite rightly just pointed out that we are working with Métis Nation and with Inuit. We are in the third year of this 10-year investment, so there is still data coming in, and this year will actually be a pivotal year to establish exactly what these investments will cover.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you. That's good.

My time is so brief. I want to be able to hear from Madame Goulding quickly, before I move on.

Madame Goulding, are there plans for more investments?

• (1930)

Ms. Janet Goulding: I think what I would point to in this instance is the distinctions-based funding that I mentioned in my opening remarks.

We do have \$150 million allocated to distinctions-based funding. This is a process of allocation that we are co-developing with our national indigenous organizations, so the impact of that funding is not yet being felt in communities. I would indicate that that's probably the most important new funding that will become available.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Super. Thank you so much.

Again, thank you to the two witnesses.

You mentioned the distinctions-based housing. I did some number crunching. With the indigenous housing strategy, what you've offered is \$600 million over three years for first nations on reserve as part of a 10-year first nations housing strategy, \$400 million over 10 years to support a housing plan led by Inuit, and \$500 million over 10 years to support a Métis Nation housing strategy, a strategy that has yet to be released.

Indigenous people in my riding and elsewhere in Canada have not only been dispossessed of their lands, but continue to be denied the basic human right to housing. This is urgent. We've seen that during this pandemic. The strategy that is to be released is, as I indicated, inadequate.

For example, if you divide the number that was allocated to the 634 reserves, the \$600 million divided by three years amounts to approximately \$315,000 per community, which is.... A house sometimes costs even more because of remoteness issues.

For Inuit, you offered \$400 million for 53 communities. That's just over \$750,000. Lastly, for the Métis, this strategy amounts to \$100 per Métis person.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, you're out of time.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Sorry. Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to proceed with five-minute rounds, beginning with Mr. Vis for the Conservatives.

Mr. Vis, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you to all the participants today, and a big shout-out to Matsqui First Nation in my riding. They recently acquired the old hospital lands in Abbotsford, where I was born. They're going to be doing some great work there, building commercial and rental housing, and I'm super excited about what that's going to do for the Matsqui Nation.

I just have a couple of housekeeping questions as we commence this very important study. The first is for CMHC. I'm going to give you a suite of questions and if you don't have the answers today, I'd like it if you could please provide them to all committee members at a later date.

For clarification, because we had a lot of information thrown at us, how many programs does the CMHC operate for the purpose of providing indigenous housing? How many people at CMHC work on indigenous housing? What is the total budget allocation for indigenous housing, in both administrative and direct program expenditures? How much does it cost your organization to produce one unit of indigenous housing, with respect to both program and administrative costs?

Now I'll go to the Department of Employment and Social Development. Madame Goulding, would you have that information available today, or should I assume that you'll report back to the committee with some of those basic points?

Ms. Janet Goulding: Sorry, Mr. Chair, but I will defer that to my colleague from CMHC.

Mr. Brad Vis: Just for clarification, do you not have anyone at Employment and Social Development who works on indigenous issues?

Ms. Janet Goulding: Do you mean on indigenous homelessness or indigenous housing?

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes, I mean both.

Ms. Janet Goulding: At ESDC, we have a number of programs focused on indigenous issues, skills and training. With regard to homelessness, I can provide you with the numbers on homelessness, but in terms of our departmental resources, I'd have to report back on that.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay, thank you.

I guess I'll pass those questions on to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and Indigenous Services.

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: First, from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, we can get back to you with that information, but as you know, the full department is dedicated to indigenous services. Would you like to be more specific in terms of housing for Inuit and Métis, or maybe add a bit more specificity?

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes, just for first nations, Inuit and Métis, how many people work on all of those programs under your department? What is the budget allocation, both for administration and for program implementation or program costs? What is the average cost per unit for producing a unit of housing through the federal government?

I'm trying to get a broad understanding of what the federal government is doing right now to help all committee members provide positive recommendations moving forward as we work on this study.

• (1935)

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Absolutely.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you. I didn't expect everyone to have that information, but I wanted to get it on the record.

Mr. Westmacott, I don't believe you'd have that information today, would you?

Mr. Chad Westmacott: I do not, in terms of the actual specifics such as the number of people, or the average cost per unit. I would say, though, that the cost per unit will vary extensively depending on where it is in the country and the different conditions there, but we can get back to you with better information.

Mr. Brad Vis: Even if you were able to provide a regional breakdown, say for average cost per unit in British Columbia versus in Ontario or the territories, that would be very helpful for all of us. It kind of goes along the lines of my NDP colleague's questions as well. If you could provide that information back to all committee members, that would be very helpful.

Thank you, sir.

On the rapid housing initiative, could we have some clarification from CMHC, please? You mentioned that there were two streams, the \$500 million allocated to mostly urban communities and another \$500 million that is going to be prioritized by CMHC officials. Why was there an initial \$500 million prioritized for mostly urban communities in Canada when it's very clear that in northern Canada and in the territories, the priority is just as great as it is in those urban areas?

I raise this question because I heard back from the Government of the Northwest Territories recently, which outlined the acute challenges being faced in Yellowknife especially.

Ms. Romy Bowers: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Vis.

With respect to the first stream, the 15 large municipalities were chosen based on where severe housing need existed in Canada. We looked at homelessness based on the statistics provided by Statistics Canada and some of the PiT assessments that were provided by various providers, so that is the answer on the first part.

However, recognizing that homelessness exists in other areas of Canada, we established a separate project stream. I may not have been clear about this previously, so my apologies for that, but the second stream of \$500 million is based on an application program. Anyone in Canada is invited to apply and we will assess the projects based on need.

Mr. Brad Vis: Under the—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Thank you, Ms. Bowers.

Next we have Mr. Turnbull.

Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the panellists for being here today. I'm really glad we're embarking on this study. It's important work, and I appreciate your being key resources as we do this work.

I want to give most of my time to my colleague Mr. McLeod, but I have just a couple of questions.

Similar to Mr. Vis, I'm seeking some documentation and I want to get those questions out.

Ms. Marin-Comeau, would you be able to table a list of programs and the amounts of funding associated with those programs for anything to do with urban, rural and northern indigenous housing needs? Could you table a document with a list of those funding pockets and programs?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: I think this is a question for my other federal colleagues. At Crown-Indigenous Relations, we're really doing Inuit and Métis Nation. Maybe other colleagues would like to pipe in as well.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Would you be able to table any documents in relation to Inuit and Métis Nation?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Absolutely.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay. Great. Thank you.

To move over to Mr. Westmacott, I have a similar question. If I may, I'll ask you if you wouldn't mind tabling a list of funding and specific programs.

Based on my current limited understanding, I think there is urban programming for indigenous people, and there's the indigenous community support fund. I'm also interested in learning a bit more about the indigenous homes innovation initiative, which you spoke to in your opening remarks.

Would you be able to table more information on the funding and the specific programs associated with each of those streams?

• (1940)

Mr. Chad Westmacott: Absolutely. For those programs related to housing, we'd be more than happy to provide those lists.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's much appreciated.

I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. McLeod.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. McLeod. Welcome to the committee. You have the floor.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Turnbull, for sharing some time with me. I really wanted to take a few minutes to make a couple of comments and ask a few questions.

This issue is very near and dear to my heart. I'm one of the few MPs, if not the only MP, to live in an indigenous community. I live in a community called Fort Providence, in the Northwest Territories, and I'm so glad that this committee is doing this study. It's something that's long overdue. We really need to have a committee take the time to understand what's going on in indigenous communities across the country, and specifically in the north.

In the north, we have the highest rate of suicide. We have the highest rate of murder. We have the highest rates of sexual abuse, of TB—we have it all here.

We heard tonight that the national core need is, on average, around 18%. In the Northwest Territories, it's at 42%. That's up 20% from the 2016 federal census. For us, things are not going in the right direction.

We have put a lot of money into the north, but not a lot of it is going towards housing. We have many challenges. The government has made a lot of investments, historic amounts of investment for indigenous people across the country, but it has been focused on national indigenous organizations. I think you really need to take a look at that. This committee has to take a good look at where it's going.

For us in the north, we don't belong to the national indigenous organizations, so the \$1.5 billion for national organizations for housing doesn't come to us, and that's very concerning. The Reaching Home program is only for Yellowknife, so it's causing other problems because communities.... Are you asking me to pause?

The Chair: No. I'm just letting you know that you have one minute.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Okay.

Many things are not working for us, and I wanted to ask the presenters who are here for their presentations about this. We heard a lot about investment in the north and investing in indigenous people. I don't agree that it's really happening with the way it is. For example, on the shelter initiative that's sitting there, there are two units for three territories. That's not going to work. There are no applications—no applications for the carve-out for investment.

The question is, how do you propose we tackle the housing crisis in the north when we're actually losing ground with what we've been doing? Is there something new that you can point to that is changing the tide we're in?

The Chair: Whom do you want to address that question to, Mr. McLeod?

Mr. Michael McLeod: I want to address it to CMHC and to Indigenous Services.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Bowers, go ahead, and with a short answer, if you could, please.

Ms. Romy Bowers: Yes. I'd like to defer this answer to my colleague Lindsay Neeley, who actually leads a team of housing specialists who serve indigenous communities in the north.

The Chair: We'll have a brief answer, please, Ms. Neeley.

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley (Director, Indigenous and the North Housing Solutions, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Thank you very much for the question.

What we can say about funding for the north is that there are new bilateral agreements in place with each territory where, as Romy indicated, there's \$447 million over 10 years going to each territory to support the local needs. We're also working to prioritize northern housing needs through our programs of general application, like the national housing co-investment fund, and have provided \$95 million to date to support projects across the territories.

There's certainly more to do, but we're encouraged to see the progress that has been made so far.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I don't know if I agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLeod.

I understand you're going to get another chance in about 10 minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I hope so.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It is now your turn, Ms. Chabot, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Goulding, both of my questions pertain to homelessness and the reaching home program.

You said in your opening statement that funding had been allocated to address indigenous homelessness, which is on the rise even without taking into account the unique challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis. I'll have to reread your statement, but I thought it referred to funding increases. How many projects or organizations receive funding under the program to address indigenous homelessness?

You talked about a results-based approach. Do you set targets? How do you decide on the criteria? Do you receive project proposals? Do you decide—not you, personally, of course—which organizations or projects receive funding? Do you allocate funding on the basis of a grassroots approach or only after proposals have been submitted?

The results are pretty hard to see. Given that the programs span such long periods, the needs and problems often grow over time. How can you be sure you are meeting the right targets using your criteria?

• (1945)

[*English*]

Ms. Janet Goulding: Thank you very much for the question.

I'm going to defer this question to my colleague, Mr. Kris Johnson, who is the director general responsible for the homelessness policy directorate at ESDC.

Mr. Kris Johnson (Director General, Homelessness Policy Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you for the question. It is an important question.

As Janet mentioned in her opening remarks, our program is community-based. What that means in practice is that while we provide the funding to communities, there are local governance committees put in place across the country—we call them community advisory boards—that decide which projects get funded. While we fund dozens of communities, there are thousands of individual projects that are funded by the program. Those decisions aren't made by the federal government; they're made by people in the communities all across Canada.

You're absolutely right. The problems continue to be present. As with many other programs, the communities themselves make the best prioritization decisions about where to invest the resources.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Next we have Ms. Gazan.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you very much.

My question is for Madame Marin-Comeau, with regard to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

A report that came from the Native Women's Association of Canada indicated that first nations women living off reserve experienced “gendered and racialized discrimination by potential property owners”, which affects their ability to find not just adequate housing but safe housing.

Call for justice 4.7 of the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls says, “We call upon all governments to support the establishment and long-term sustainable funding of Indigenous-led low-barrier shelters, safe spaces, transition homes, second-stage housing, and services for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people”.

My question is, how many low-barrier, 24-7 safe spaces have been created since the national inquiry report was released a year ago?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Thank you very much for the question.

I don't have the answer to that question. Perhaps some of my other colleagues from the federal departments would have some of those answers. If not, I'll get those answers and provide them to the committee.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I ask that because, since the beginning of COVID, I've heard the government say that the reason they haven't been able to follow up on the action is due to COVID. However, we know there's been a 400% increase in violence against women in some areas, mainly targeting indigenous women.

I'm wondering if that is a focus going forward. I know you don't have a number, but is that a specific focus? As we know, in many cases it is a life-and-death matter.

● (1950)

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Perhaps I'll answer for the responsibility of Inuit and the Métis Nation. The partners we're working with to develop the strategies certainly have that as a focus. Obviously this is something that is very prevalent, as you've just mentioned, and it's very important for indigenous communities. When we developed housing strategies with Inuit and with the Métis Nation, there was certainly a very large focus on gender-based violence and how housing can help to alleviate some of the gender-based violence, as well as the shelters and homelessness. There is a very strong focus in those strategies on what you've just mentioned.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: Next we're going to Mr. Kent, please, for five minutes.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thanks to all our witnesses tonight.

What's the current status of CMHC's on-reserve rental housing program? Are rents reduced or scaled back when they involve buildings that require major repair or renovation?

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: Mr. Chair, I will answer that question on behalf of CMHC.

Our section 95 is the on-reserve rental program, which we continue to offer and have offered for a number of decades to support on-reserve housing needs. There are no clawbacks or restrictions to the funding for repairs. We also offer a suite of on-reserve repair programs that support a range of repair needs, from emergency repairs to adaptations for persons with disabilities or seniors. It's a suite of programs that we continue to offer to address the on-reserve housing needs.

Hon. Peter Kent: So rental accommodations are repaired by CMHC at no cost to the tenants. With how much delay, in some cases?

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: The form of funding provided for on-reserve repairs through existing programs is through a forgivable loan, repayable by the proponent. In most cases, that is the band or council that we've entered into an agreement with.

Hon. Peter Kent: Still with on-reserve households, what are the challenges facing those households to meet eligibility requirements for repair and renovation costs in whatever the successor programs are to the old residential rehabilitation assistance program? Again, it's an old program, but I'm sure it must have a successor of some sort.

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: At CMHC, we continue to offer the residential rehabilitation program on reserve. As I mentioned, it's a suite of programs that support a variety of repair needs on reserve. There's an ongoing annual budget of over \$8 million.

Hon. Peter Kent: Do band councils determine priorities?

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: That's correct.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay.

I wonder whether any of the programs that we've discussed here tonight have targeted shrinkage costs for administration. Is there a common target of what administration costs should be in the delivery of programs, funding and facilities to the homeless or those in need?

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure if that's a question directed to ESDC, who are responsible for the homelessness programming.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to defer to Kris Johnson.

Mr. Kris Johnson: Sure. Generally, we allow our community partners to reserve up to 15% of the funding for administration. The actual amounts vary by community.

Hon. Peter Kent: That's great, thanks.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Hon. Peter Kent: That's good. Thanks.

Coming back again to the rapid housing initiative and the major cities stream, I see that the City of Toronto has been allocated just over \$203 million. I understand it would be for the city to determine whether or how indigenous homelessness would be addressed or folded into any of the programs that they may have with regard to shelters or newly acquired housing. Is that correct?

Ms. Romy Bowers: That's correct. However, we do ask for an investment plan to be provided with each application, and we are looking for at least 15% of the projects to be targeted towards indigenous populations within the cities.

• (1955)

Hon. Peter Kent: Very briefly, do you have any numbers available for the meeting tonight in terms of your estimate of indigenous homelessness in the city of Toronto?

Ms. Romy Bowers: I don't have that with me right now, but I'm very happy to provide that after the meeting.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay.

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Next, we're going to go back to Mr. McLeod for five minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I did have a few more comments and questions.

First of all, in the north we don't have reserves, but we have indigenous communities. The community I live in is 95% indigenous, but it's not a reserve. We have a lot of band councils. I think almost every community has a band council, and we have 33 communities. If there are first nations in the communities, there's a band council.

A number of programs have come forward that we're struggling to access, as indigenous governments are trying to put in applications.

First of all, in any of the programs that involve cost-sharing, there are limits to what they can do if they don't have the resources. Under the co-investment fund, we've seen no applications approved under the carve-out for the Northwest Territories. The shelter initiative also needs ongoing operating funds that, in other parts of the country, would come from Indigenous Services Canada.

There is a program that I think is called the ministerial loan guarantee. I want to ask the representative from Indigenous Services about this. This program was set up in 1966 and it was designed to help indigenous communities off reserve to access programs, to do initiatives in the area of housing, but we haven't been successful.

We have not been able to get one project approved. Could you maybe tell me why that might be? Is there something in it that doesn't allow the Northwest Territories indigenous governments to be able to access that fund?

Mr. Chad Westmacott: I thank you very much for the question.

The ministerial loan guarantees were created predominantly because first nations needed the ability to access financing and markets. Due to the fact that they were on reserve, there were elements within the Indian Act that prohibited the use of the lands for collateral, so that is why most of the ministerial loan guarantees have been directed towards first nations on reserve.

In terms of the specific questions about the access to ministerial loan guarantees off reserve, where they are on Crown lands, that's a question I'll have to get back to you on.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Okay. In this case it's probably disputed lands, then, because most of the lands here are disputed and under land claim negotiations.

I have another question regarding the funding that's been going to national indigenous organizations. There has been \$1.5 billion, which has been very well received by those organizations, but there are self-governing indigenous governments, SGIGs, to which two nations here in the Northwest Territories belong.

They've done a lot of work to develop pride and a strong, independent nation, but it seems they've been left out of the funding announcements. Is there a reason we wouldn't recognize self-governing nations that have signed agreements with Canada and agreed to co-manage, co-exist? Why wouldn't we recognize them as being able and willing partners to deliver programs, while we recognize other ones?

That's my question.

Mr. Chad Westmacott: Thank you very much for the question.

Self-governing and modern treaty nations have the ability to access funding through the ISC housing programming. It is done through an application-based process, like all other first nations, recognizing the unique characteristics of self-governing modern treaties. They can access the housing funds that are provided by Indigenous Services Canada.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Would you be able to provide me—maybe not right now, but later on—with a list of those that have, in the Northwest Territories? I'm not aware of any.

There also seems to be a problem with the two reserves we have in the Northwest Territories, which are the responsibility of the Government of Northwest Territories. The Government of Northwest Territories says they are a federal reserve and they're a responsibility of our government.

How do you guys see that?

● (2000)

Mr. Chad Westmacott: Just recently, funding was provided to Salt River, to support the development in their community that would allow for future development for housing, etc. It's allowing for the necessary infrastructure that would support housing going on in the community. That money was provided this summer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLeod and Mr. Westmacott.

Next we're going to go to Mr. Vis, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

If my questions are repeated, it's because I had a technical issue and had to log off.

Going back to my questions with CMHC, I'd like to follow up on what we were discussing on the rapid housing initiative. For the \$500-million envelope that's remaining, are there guarantees that the money is going to be used appropriately? Are reporting mechanisms embedded into the agreements that have been established for this fund?

Ms. Romy Bowers: The short answer is yes. There is a reporting mechanism being established, and we expect reporting to continue for the 20 years we expect affordability to be maintained in these housing units that are created.

Mr. Brad Vis: Would those tools for transparency and accountability be different from funds in the national co-investment fund?

Ms. Romy Bowers: We take seriously our responsibility to provide governance and due diligence, and the different types of due diligence and governance depend on the nature of the program. However, it's always our intent to make sure the funds are being used for their intended purpose.

Mr. Brad Vis: I learned from a number of housing providers in meetings that under the national co-investment fund it's taking an exorbitant amount of time to receive those funds. Evan Siddall did tell this committee that they have improved the disbursement of government monies, or CMHC funds, to housing applicants. However, we haven't received that data yet.

I'm wondering why the applications for the co-investment fund take over a year, yet CMHC was able to develop a program that I am assuming from what you just told me has similar reporting mechanisms that can be delivered in under a month. Why the discrepancy?

Ms. Romy Bowers: We will follow up on the information you're still waiting for with respect to changes in our processes regarding the disbursement of funds under the national housing co-investment fund.

We have worked very hard over the last year to reduce the processing time by 50%. The data will provide some indication of that.

The RHI is a different program. It's 100% contribution versus being a loan. Given the nature of the different types of funding, our processes are very different, and our governance is different as well.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

I have a question for ESDC.

Many indigenous advocates and housing providers continue to question, without receiving an answer, why the federal government insists on implementing policies that balkanize on-reserve and off-reserve indigenous peoples.

The Reaching Home program illustrates this starkly. The indigenous homelessness stream provides support for off-reserve indigenous people, while the new distinctions-based and modern treaty holder funding stream denies this support.

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association, which I believe we'll be able to hear from in a future meeting, provided the following feedback on the national housing strategy in 2016, and I quote:

While this is common of all citizens, First Nations, Aboriginals and Indigenous people live between two solitudes of on-reserve and off-reserve, often moving back and forth between. Yet federal and provincial governments and housing services are delivered completely distinctly and usually roll-out of new programs that are pre-defined. This piecemeal approach neglects to deliver support to the whole person.... To replace jurisdictional and bureaucratic barriers to Indigenous Peoples with an AHMA-based model that puts responsibility in the hands of regional providers and supports individuals through delivery of meaningful solutions that address housing issues.

That's from someone in B.C.

Why didn't the government listen to and implement the solutions put forward by indigenous experts working in the housing sector when that program was developed, and why hasn't it been improved?

● (2005)

Ms. Janet Goulding: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

In terms of the indigenous homelessness funding under Reaching Home, I think what the program strives to do is to strike a balance between maintaining the very important services that we have right now in urban communities, as provided by the indigenous homelessness stream, and to work with our national indigenous organizations to ensure that new funding meets the needs of the Métis, Inuit and first nations peoples in Canada.

I would say that as we move through that co-development process with our national indigenous organizations, this funding is largely still unallocated, and it will, hopefully, support the needs of all indigenous peoples across Canada as that allocation becomes clear.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Ms. Goulding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis, and thank you, Ms. Goulding.

Next we are going to Mr. Vaughan for five minutes, please.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): Thank you very much. I have a few very quick questions, just to clear up some loose ends.

In terms of provincial transfers, the housing accords have now been signed with all provinces and territories. Indigenous housing dollars are contained inside those transfers. Do we track how much is spent and whether or not it's spent as intended?

I guess that question will go to Madame Goulding.

Ms. Janet Goulding: In terms of Reaching Home, we don't do transfers to—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: No, these are the housing accords with the provinces and territories. When we do block transfers to the provinces, there are legacy programs that are indigenous-led, -designed and -delivered. Do we track whether or not the provinces actually delivered the intended dollars to those providers, or is it just a general transfer?

Ms. Janet Goulding: In terms of housing programs, I'm going to have to refer to my colleagues at CMHC.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: My apologies.

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: Mr. Chair, I can respond to that question.

We do have, through the new bilateral agreements with each province and territory, some funding directed directly towards indigenous housing, and reporting is done publicly through action plans submitted by each jurisdiction.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Okay.

In particular, in terms of the housing subsidies for the operating agreements, there have been some lapsed agreements. Where have they gone and why are they lapsing if we've transferred dollars to the provinces, particularly in Ontario?

Mrs. Lindsay Neeley: I'm afraid we'd have to follow up with a written response on that one.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Okay.

Madame Marin-Comeau, would multi-year block funding to an indigenous-led urban, rural and northern housing program deal with some of the geography and seasonal construction issues? If they had multiple years to assemble resources and multiple years to use them, would that be better than an annual turnover and an annual project-by-project approach?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: Thank you very much for the question.

I'd like to clarify that it is not done project by project. It is a block of funding that is offered directly to Inuit or the Métis Nation. Those funding arrangements are very flexible. They actually can roll over the funding from one year to the other.

I think what you're pointing to is that we've provided the flexibility for those indigenous partners to roll over funds to accommodate some of the challenges, as you've just mentioned, such as the geography and some of those construction challenges, particularly in the north. We've built that into the funding arrangements with indigenous partners. It mitigates some of those challenges that you've just mentioned.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: To go back to CMHC, in terms of all the programs in the national housing strategy, there is no program that prevents an urban, rural or northern application. Is that true?

Ms. Romy Bowers: That's correct.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: The programs—even the rapid housing initiative—are designed to overlap with those programs, so if there are gaps, they can work in concert if needed.

Ms. Romy Bowers: That is correct.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: In terms of Reaching Home, in some of the larger centres—Vancouver and Winnipeg being two—we are now starting to see where indigenous leadership is actually taking over the designated community streams. Even though it's not part of the indigenous stream, indigenous leadership is in fact designing programs for the whole community, not just for themselves.

That may be for Madame Goulding.

● (2010)

Ms. Janet Goulding: Thank you for that question. Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: We're encouraging and supporting that process. If an urban program were to emerge, would blending those programs also be a possibility if the government decided so?

Ms. Janet Goulding: In terms of Reaching Home, we always encourage our designated community entities and our indigenous community entities to work together.

We certainly recognize the importance of ensuring that both of those dedicated funding streams serve the needs of the homeless individuals and their communities, because we know that there is an overrepresentation of indigenous persons. So, absolutely, we encourage that kind of collaboration.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: In Quebec, with Reaching Home, the money is transferred through the provincial government. It's the only place in the country where that happens. Our ability to fine-tune that into indigenous-led programs must be agreed to by the Government of Quebec before the federal government can spend directly into those communities with direct housing programs, including Reaching Home, as well as the general national housing strategy. That's one of the challenges we face in Quebec.

Ms. Janet Goulding: I can only speak to Reaching Home, and I'll defer to my colleagues on housing at CMHC. In Quebec, the indigenous homelessness stream is managed directly by Service Canada, so we do that on a project-by-project basis. The designated community stream and the rural and remote funding streams are co-managed with the Government of Quebec, and we set priorities jointly with them for that funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan, and thank you, Ms. Goulding.

We have about three minutes left, so we'll go with a couple of questions from the Bloc Québécois and from the NDP to finish up.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, you have two minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I am the Bloc Québécois member.

The Chair: Yes, over to you.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Pardon me. That is good news.

I have a question specifically about the reality [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in urban areas.

The Chair: I think Ms. Chabot's screen is frozen.

If so, no one can hear her.

[*English*]

Madame Chabot, I'm not sure if you can hear me, but we are going to go to Ms. Gazan. If you can get your technical problems resolved, we'll come back to you for a question before we wrap up.

Ms. Gazan, you have two minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I want to go back to the distinctions-based indigenous housing strategy and the numbers. This is really inadequate funding. It sounds like big numbers, but it's grossly inadequate. There are 634 reserves, so \$600 million over three years is a little over \$300,000 per community, not even the cost of a house in some communities.

The funding that's targeted for the Inuit communities is \$400 million. With 53 communities, that's \$500,000 per community over a period of 10 years. Again, we know there are 15 people living in a house. Lives are on the line. Going back to the Métis, over 10 years, it amounts to approximately \$100 per registered Métis person.

Why are decisions being made that knowingly underfund housing, when we know the situation is dire now, certainly with COVID, and that it's going to cost lives, particularly in remote and rural communities?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: I would answer by saying that more needs to be done. As I indicated in my opening remarks, it's the start of an investment made in 2016-18 for Inuit, and 2018 for Métis Nation.

I would like to also clarify some of the statistics in writing that you're using in terms of the communities and the dollar figures. I can provide those to the committee in writing.

• (2015)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Certainly, for Inuit Nunangat, 39% live in overcrowded homes; 33% are in need of major repairs; 33% are in core housing needs. We know this contributes to poor health, including mental health, and puts people at risk during the pandemic. Would you agree, yes or no?

Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau: The housing crisis has a lot of impacts. You've mentioned health, and previous speakers have mentioned education. Obviously, that's why the government is looking at strategies to address the housing crisis for all communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan. We're out of time.

[*Translation*]

Is Ms. Chabot still there?

No. All right.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we have some committee business to attend to, and we have about 14 minutes left in our allocated time.

I'm going to take this opportunity to offer a sincere thank you to the witnesses. This is obviously a vast study that impacts many departments. We appreciate the patient and professional way in which you've answered the questions today.

In the COVID era we—you knew it all along, but I think Canadians generally and parliamentarians especially—have developed a renewed appreciation for what you do. Thank you for being with us today, and thank you for your service to your country.

I wouldn't be surprised if we were to come back to you once we get some of the answers that you've committed to provide us in writing.

Thank you to all the witnesses. You're free to go, but you're welcome to stay. We're going to move now to committee business.

Colleagues, we're moving now to committee business, although we are not in camera; we're still in public, so that you know. There are a couple of matters that we want to deal with.

First of all, in terms of the schedule going forward, you will have received a notice of meeting for our next meeting, with a short witness list. That's because there are still witnesses to be confirmed, but they are coming from the lists that have been submitted by the parties in furtherance of the study we have started today.

Next week we will have Minister Tassi and Minister Schulte on supplementary estimates.

That's the plan for the next three meetings.

The one thing in particular that we need the committee's guidance on today is that we received a letter from the Parliamentary Budget Officer on November 2 outlining a proposed scope for the PBO's assistance with the study. What I require is some feedback from the committee and ideally a formal motion as to what our response to the Parliamentary Budget Officer should be.

Are we happy with the scope that has been provided, or do you wish to make a response or delegate me to do so? That's the question and the main reason for setting aside some time for committee business.

Would you please use the “raise hand” function to give any comments with respect to the scope of the involvement of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and ideally to put forward a motion for direction?

Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thanks, Chair.

I'm just trying to recall the PBO's point with regard to scope. Was he saying he is limited in his ability? I don't think he delineated that exactly.

● (2020)

The Chair: Mr. Kent, I can summarize. I have the letter before me.

He indicates that his office would be happy to provide the committee with an analysis of indigenous housing needs and of homelessness in urban, rural and northern areas. This would include the number of households that are in housing need or are homeless and the demographic, economic and geographic characteristics of those households.

His second item is on current federal spending to address indigenous housing needs and homelessness. This would include spending dedicated under indigenous housing programs and spending to support indigenous housing under programs not specifically targeted to indigenous people.

The third element of the analysis he's offering is a unit cost of addressing indigenous housing needs and homelessness through various policy options, including the cost of providing rent subsidies or social housing and a discussion of the key factors.

Those are the areas he specifically referenced. He basically left the door open to analysis or other opportunities.

Hon. Peter Kent: Conservatives would accept the gracious offer, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Mr. Vaughan, please.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Thank you.

In a follow-up to my question to some of the officials, there are block transfers made to the provinces that include accommodation for things like housing operation subsidies and some of the legacy programs that were downloaded in the early 1990s.

Could we also have the PBO report back to us on what transfers are made by the federal government to provinces, which provinces have reported, what that reporting looks like, and, if there are provincial supports that are above and beyond the federal ones, what do they look like? Then we can understand exactly what the full scope of federal and provincial spending is on this file, so we don't duplicate. I think that would be very helpful.

The last time the PBO looked at the national housing strategy, they excluded any program that was cost-shared, even though federal money was largely funding it. I'd like him to look at the national housing strategy—because the programs have been opened up to all urban, rural and northern housing programs—to get a full understanding from the full national housing strategy, not just the 100% federal dollars. What allotment of the programs has gone to urban, rural and northern? That will let us get an understanding of how they're currently accessing the program, even if it's not necessarily identified up front as indigenous.

There are two points, to be clear. First would be to ask for a full assessment, or as close to a full assessment as we can, of provincial transfers and provincial expenditures on indigenous urban, rural and northern housing. Second is a full assessment of the national housing strategy, whether it's 100% or cost-shared programs, to un-

derstand the draw that's being made on those programs by indigenous urban, rural and northern housing programs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: Actually, to Mr. Vaughan's point, I don't think it's unreasonable to understand the scope of provincial transfers and how that impacts areas of joint responsibility. That's a reasonable amendment or addition to the scope of work.

I would point out that in my first round of questioning today I was seeking to understand administrative costs by departments in administering housing programs. I would like that to be included in the scope of work as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Are there any further submissions?

I think I'm hearing that I should write back to the PBO to say we wish to add to the scope of his work the points raised by Mr. Vaughan and Mr. Vis regarding expenditures made by the provinces and administrative costs associated with the various programs. Is that the will of the committee?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'd add the full NHS programs, whether they're 100% or cost-shared, to understand what is currently inside the national housing strategy attributed to the urban, rural and northern streams.

The Chair: Yes, understood.

I think we have consensus.

Mr. Clerk, are we clear enough to be able to draft a letter that captures this discussion, or do we require a formal motion?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Wilson): It would be better if we had a formal motion, but we can work without one. Sorry, the procedure list....

● (2025)

The Chair: Any wordsmithing volunteers? I can't propose the motion, but I can tell you my understanding and somebody can adopt it.

I'm looking for a motion to direct the chair to respond to the Parliamentary Budget Officer to expand the scope of his analysis as contained in his November 2 letter by adding an analysis of the transfers from the province and provincial supports for urban, rural and indigenous housing to better understand the full scope of the federal-provincial contributions; that an analysis of sums for the national housing strategy allotment to urban, rural and indigenous housing be included; and, further, that any and all administrative costs associated with the various housing programs form part of the analysis.

If I could have a motion to that effect, I think that does it, unless you tell me that it doesn't.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Mr. Chair, could I ask a quick question?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Michael McLeod: You referred to urban, rural and indigenous. Is the study northern, urban and rural?

The Chair: I misspoke, if that's what I said, Mr. McLeod. The study is urban, rural and northern indigenous housing. That's what I should have said.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vaughan, did you have a comment?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'll move it.

The Chair: The motion is moved by Mr. Vaughan. Please don't ask me to repeat it.

Is there any discussion?

Seeing none, do we have consensus to adopt the motion or do we require a standing vote?

I believe I see consensus in the room.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Is there any further business to come before the meeting?

Seeing none, I thank you very much, colleagues. We'll go ahead with that letter to the PBO and we'll see you in a couple of days.

We're adjourned.

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