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

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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey





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• (1640)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number nine 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 order of September 23. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee. To ensure an orderly meeting, I'd like to outline a few rules.

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

Because of the delay due to the votes in the House, we've asked the witnesses to be prepared to appear as one large panel. I want to thank them for their accommodation in that regard.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses: Grand Chief Serge Simon of the Mohawk Council of Kanesatake; Chief Ralph Leon Jr. of the Sts'ailes First Nation; from Homeward Trust Edmonton, Susan McGee, CEO, and Matthew Ward, manager, planning and engagement; and from Lu'ma Native Housing Society, Marcel Lawson-Swain, chief executive officer.

Grand Chief Simon, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Welcome to the committee. You have the floor.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Wilson):** I'm sorry, Mr. Casey, but Grand Chief Simon isn't here.

**The Chair:** Okay. We're going to move to Ms. McGee.

You have five minutes. Go ahead.

**Ms. Susan McGee (Chief Executive Officer, Homeward Trust Edmonton):** Thank you very much, and good afternoon. It's great to be invited back as a witness for this committee and its important role. My name is Susan McGee. I am the chief executive officer of Homeward Trust Edmonton. We are a community-based organiza-

tion using a system-planning approach to end homelessness in Edmonton. We are a local entity reporting on and supporting the implementation of Reaching Home, and we have actively supported the evolution of our national housing strategy and homelessness strategies through a variety of ways.

I am also the regional representative for Alberta on the board of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, and have been a member of CHRA's indigenous caucus since its inception. I'm joined by Matthew Ward, the manager of planning and engagement at Homeward Trust. Matt's role includes supporting the indigenous advisory council in our current consultation to inform the next phase of our pandemic response to indigenous community members in Edmonton.

Homeward Trust brings together funding from all orders of government to support service providers, indigenous communities, and government partners in Edmonton to collectively plan, action and monitor solutions to end homelessness. We have served as the local entity since 1999. In 2008 we restructured, merging two other organizations under one comprehensive structure, with a minimum of four of our nine board members identifying as indigenous and with a separate indigenous advisory council serving as the indigenous community advisory board.

We're grateful for the opportunity to speak today about the Government of Canada's examination of urban, rural and northern indigenous housing solutions to end homelessness for indigenous people. As is the case across Canada, indigenous people are greatly overrepresented amongst those experiencing homelessness in Edmonton, with indigenous people currently representing 58% of our by-names list, while indigenous people make up roughly 5% of our city's total population, and this is growing.

Homeward Trust works in partnership with and directly funds 14 local indigenous organizations, using Reaching Home indigenous funding but also our Reaching Home designated communities funding and our provincial and municipal resources as well. This is done to maximize the use of this funding while reducing the administrative work for front-line agencies to support the outcomes for multiple funders, and to support the coordinated sector response.

This committee has heard from indigenous leaders and organizations on the critical importance of increased investment directly targeting the housing and support needs of indigenous community members. There are multiple sources that document the reality that indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern communities face specific challenges in having their needs met, wherever they are, through indigenous-led efforts that are best positioned to understand and address local community needs.

Homeward Trust supports the “for indigenous, by indigenous” approach before the committee and recognizes that a specific national strategy that is indigenous-led is required. Such a strategy should leverage the experience and knowledge of local organizations and leaders, and support local priorities that reflect the specific needs of their communities as well as the diversity of indigenous culture across our country.

The need for affordable housing has so outpaced existing resources for so long and the projects that meet real affordability requirements and provide sufficient supports to enable individuals and families the opportunity to improve their circumstances are so challenging to develop and deliver with current application requirements that we are in a deep hole. The overrepresentation of indigenous people among those requiring housing is well known. Without a specific national indigenous housing strategy to drive outcomes, we will perpetuate these circumstances for generations to come.

Many studies have come to the same conclusion. They may vary in their amounts or in where costs are incurred, but we know that homelessness costs more than its solutions. We know what those solutions are. We understand the importance of clear plans, and relying on evidence and targets drives much of our work at Homeward Trust. However, we also understand that perfection is the enemy of the good. We strongly encourage members of the committee and all members of Parliament to prioritize action and move forward with the well-earned confidence in indigenous organizations and leaders as partners in this effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Matt and I will be available for questions.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. McGee.

Next is Chief Leon.

Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr. (Sts'ailes First Nation):** Thank you.

First of all, thank you for the invite to be here today. I didn't know what kind of meeting I was coming to. Brad pretty much just “voluntold” me where I was going to be, what I was going to be doing and what kinds of choices I was going to help make. I'm always honoured to put in my two cents or my hundred dollars, whatever it may be. Sometimes you have to put your hand up and tell me to be quiet, because I turn into a politician and start talking and talking.

We're talking about housing today. We're in a rural setting. Our community is up to an hour's drive either way to a city setting. To go out and shop for groceries, you really have to plan. When you

go grocery shopping, you fill up your gas tank, feed your family on the way out, go shopping and then come back.

Only about half our membership lives in our community. We have a long waiting list for housing, but we've been pretty creative with our micro homes, the one-bedroom homes and the two-bedroom homes. We've been building quite a few of those. Our young people can utilize those homes, proving themselves or building their families. Before that, if anybody got a house, it would have been the big families. They had the big families and they'd get the house regardless, so that was a problem.

A lot of our homes were built in the eighties by CMHC and Indian Affairs. The contractors would come in to build a house and take as many shortcuts as they could in order to make a quick buck in our communities. That is a problem today. We're applying for funds for renovations. Why? Because we have mould in our attics. We have mould in our homes because of poor ventilation, or we're having to restore the outside of our homes because the slope of our homes and our yards isn't very well done. We have to be pretty creative here in Sts'ailes.

We're an independent band. We're an independent tribe. We're not in treaty. We're not in a treaty process, and we don't believe in a treaty process. We believe in a reconciliation agreement that we will be working on some day soon, hopefully, as soon as the pandemic allows us to.

We're going to put the invitation out to our MP Brad Vis, who has already come here a couple of times and has viewed our community, which is a good thing. You can't work with a community unless you know who you're working with. We're going to build that relationship our way. We'll set the table and invite him here. Then we'll talk about business in a good way.

We need to make it [*Inaudible—Editor*]. In our language, [*Inaudible—Editor*] means the interconnectedness that we all have together. We all have interconnectedness one way or another, because we're from only one Mother Earth, each and every one of us. We're from one mother. That's what our elders tell us, and that's always our teaching.

I'm glad and I look forward to Brad coming here and working with us. The housing is really important to us. We need a place to call home.

[*Inaudible—Editor*].

Thank you.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief Leon.

Next we will go to Mr. Lawson-Swain, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain (Chief Executive Officer, Lu'ma Native Housing Society):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm joining you today from Delta, British Columbia, on the traditional territory of the Tsawwassen First Nation. I am the CEO of Lu'ma Native Housing Society, First Funds Society, Lu'ma Medical Centre society, the Aboriginal Land Trust, and Lu'ma Development Management Ltd. I am also co-chair of the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, a committee member of the national indigenous homes innovation initiative, and a committee member of the national indigenous urban, rural and remote homelessness caucus. I'm also a lawyer by profession.

It is a pleasure to appear before this committee on behalf of the Lu'ma group of companies. I want to thank the committee for listening to indigenous Canadians and hearing the concerns and fiscal challenges of the indigenous housing and homelessness service providers from across the country.

Lu'ma began 40 years ago with the simple dream of providing affordable housing to indigenous peoples. Since then our society has morphed into a broad-based community organization that provides a wide range of services. These include social housing, affordable housing, modular housing, homelessness services, youth programming, the Aboriginal Patients' Lodge, medical services, community voice mail, and project development services for social-purpose real estate.

We are also the community entity on behalf of the indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the GVRD and throughout other parts of the province of British Columbia pursuant to the federal government's Reaching Home program. Our aspiration is to see a day when urban and rural and remote indigenous peoples experience the same level of access to housing and services that are afforded to all other Canadians and the distinction-based nations—namely, first nations, Métis and Inuit. To achieve this goal, it will take political will and bold and courageous actions on the part of the government and Canadians alike.

It should be noted that urban, rural and remote indigenous peoples are the have-nots in this country, and for the most part are landless and distinctionless as a peoples. We are experiencing gross and systemic violations of the right to housing. In Canada approximately 80% of indigenous peoples live in urban, rural and remote communities. Although we comprise approximately 4% of the total population, we are overrepresented in the homeless population across this country. The range of homelessness across Canada for indigenous peoples is between 30% and 80%. The data made available through the national homelessness point-in-time counts indicate that indigenous peoples comprise 30% of the homeless population across 61 Reaching Home communities. These figures are more than just numbers. They represent the members of our communities, our nations and in many instances our families.

In urban, rural and remote communities, we come from diverse backgrounds, indigenous nations and life experiences. Service providers such as Lu'ma and the many others that form part of the national indigenous urban, rural and remote homelessness caucus share a long-standing commitment to serving our communities in accordance with our cultural knowledge, practice and teachings.

I want to point out to this committee that the homelessness situation for urban, rural and remote indigenous peoples became more acute post-1983, when the federal government ended the social

housing program under the National Housing Act. While we suffered significantly prior to this period, our homelessness conditions worsened to the point where we are now today. Since then, and for the past 27 years, Canada has continued to fund the distinction-based nations while urban, rural and remote communities have suffered with a patchwork of programs that have left our communities in desperation.

Last year we were one of many indigenous agencies that authored a letter to the Prime Minister where we demanded that Canada recognize the right to adequately resource a national urban, rural and remote indigenous housing and homelessness strategy developed and implemented by the urban, rural and remote housing and service providers; that Canada recognize urban, rural and remote housing and service providers as expressions of indigenous self-determination, as recognized by the Federal Court of Appeal in the Misquadis case and as per articles 4, 21 and 23 of UNDRIP; and that Canada create legislation mirroring the rights of the accountability framework articulated in the National Housing Strategy Act, which recognizes culturally relevant housing as a human right for indigenous people in urban, rural and remote areas.

• (1655)

I have made the above presentation in the sincere hope that our housing and homelessness conditions will be prioritized in the federal government's implementation of the national housing strategy as a matter of human rights and consistent with UNDRIP so that one day, urban, rural and remote indigenous peoples will experience the same access to housing and services afforded to all other Canadians and distinction-based nations.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lawson-Swain.

We're going to begin now with rounds of questions, starting with the Conservatives.

Mr. Kent, go ahead, please. You have six minutes.

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Thank you, Chair. I will begin by asking our clerk whether Grand Chief Simon has been able to connect yet.

He has not? Thank you.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for appearing, and for your patience in waiting out our votes in the House this afternoon.

I'll start with Ms. McGee. I'm wondering, given the needs for indigenous affordable housing in the city of Edmonton, whether or not you have been in contact with the City of Edmonton for a share of the \$17 million under the major cities stream in the rapid housing project.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** We certainly have. We work very closely with the City of Edmonton and have submitted a number of projects already under RHI—certainly exceeding the original and block allotment for the city of Edmonton. Within that context we have targets in all of our projects, and we anticipate that specific projects will be indigenous-specific. As well, all of our agencies have also supported and are supporting indigenous community members with targets exceeding 60%.

At the core of all of that work is the desire to meet the housing needs of indigenous community members.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Could you tell us what your current inventory is and how you see that or how you would hope to see that expanded through the rapid housing initiative?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Interestingly in Alberta, we have independent operators outside of our social housing portfolios and we have a few hundred units within the community, the social housing historical allotment that was originally funded back in the 1970s through the then CMHC program. We have other organizations that have independently developed approximately 100 additional units.

We are very focused in our work at Homeward Trust on supportive housing and specifically on ending homelessness. Within our work we are targeting 900 units of supportive housing within the next five years, of which, again, a minimum of 60% will serve indigenous community members. There's certainly a much higher need for additional social housing and deep subsidy housing beyond that which we fund and operate.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Am I correct in assuming that unlike the case in some of the on-reserve housing situations or more remote situations, these would not be single-family homes as much as multi-unit dwellings?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** That's correct. We do have some duplex and fourplex housing, but primarily we're focused on multi-unit housing.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Thank you.

I will turn now to Mr. Lawson-Swain.

Mr. Lawson-Swain, the Lu'ma Native Housing Society has a long and clearly successful history in terms of the 500 existing units of housing that you now have. When you talk about continuing needs, how many additional units are you talking about?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Apparently we have about 600 units under development right now, but we have a huge need here in the GVRD. We have 6,000 applicants on our wait-list. We often say that it would take you 85 years to get housed at Lu'ma, which is an extremely long time. In order to accommodate the needs of our community over a period of 10 years, we'd have to build 600 units every year for the next 10 years just to meet our current wait-list.

We need to keep in mind that every year, those numbers are added to purely by the fact that indigenous youth are aging out of foster care. There are 700 indigenous youth that age out of foster care every year here, and of those kids, 50% will end up homeless and on the streets.

Generally to meet the needs, we would say that we would need almost 1,000 units a year for the next 10 years to meet our needs.

• (1700)

**Hon. Peter Kent:** You said there are 600 units currently under construction?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** We have 600, yes. We have 350 that are currently committed to with financing and program funding from BC Housing and another 300 or so for which we have bought sites and are in the process of making application to government to have funded.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** How have COVID restrictions and precautions impacted that work?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Amazingly, not very much. Our teams work extensively and we've done quite well, even during the COVID situation.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** And just as a final question, you wouldn't fall, I don't believe, under the major cities stream of rapid housing, but would you see any applications in the project stream given that it does provide for indigenous governing bodies?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Yes, we have made an application and are currently waiting for CMHC to make its decision on that application.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Next we're going to Mr. Turnbull, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the panellists for being here today. I really admire the work your organizations are doing. I spent a little time last night researching both, and Ms. McGee, I'll start with a few questions for you on Homeward Trust Edmonton.

I was really impressed by your updated plan on your website and the dashboard, and how you're measuring toward ending homelessness. I understand that you're distributing funds through Reaching Home and you're funding, I think you said, 14 indigenous-led organizations. Is that correct?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Currently, yes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay, great. Do you think that Reaching Home is meeting the needs of urban, rural and northern indigenous people?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** There's real strength to the way the program is delivered. It is really important to underscore that. It focuses on community-led decision-making and engages the community advisory board structure. Often we find it's difficult to have a really consistent systems and coordinated approach when there's a lack of coordination, and the Reaching Home program really drives that. We have seen increases in the available funding through Reaching Home that have been really critical, and more to our point in Edmonton, we are seeing increases for the first time in homelessness since we began our work in the housing first program in 2009. We had had an overall reduction in homelessness, but are seeing it go up, which is going to make it difficult for to maintain our pace of housing and continue to see that decrease in that circumstance. That's going to require more resources, but there are really effective aspects of the program that I think need to be acknowledged.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** That's great. Are there any improvements that you want to mention that need to be made?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** I think we are all absolutely exhausted by this pandemic, and it's very concerning and, quite frankly, scary. We have numerous outbreaks in our projects right now. However, we've learned a few things and I think that some of those things can be a bit of a silver lining, in that we are rolling out resources much more quickly and effectively and are able to make decisions in a much more compressed time frame.

I'm really hoping this is a learning and that we'll not go back to a pre-pandemic approach, once we can put this behind us. I think this is an area of improvement. There's a higher level of efficiency in the decisions that get made locally.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** In terms of truly undertaking this study and wanting to get the best possible outcome for urban, rural and northern indigenous people and their housing needs, what advice do you have for us on where this study should land?

Mr. Lawson-Swain, I'm going to ask you the same question afterwards because I'm sure you're going to have something significant to contribute to this as well.

Ms. McGee, I'll start with you.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** I tried to allude to it in my opening remarks, but I really do believe that we have some exceptional leadership in organizations that have been in a "hurry up and stand still" situation—certainly prior to the national housing strategy and currently with the expectation that there is going to be another specific indigenous urban, rural and northern component to that, but it's not happening fast enough. I think there's a bit of a preoccupation, quite frankly, with respect to having a lot of precision on really big numbers, in terms of need, when our resources are so shy of what we actually need.

So I think we need to move out of a planning space and into an action-oriented space and get those resources out the door and trust the organizations that exist to do that.

• (1705)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

Mr. Lawson-Swain, do you want to add to that or build on it, or just make some other suggestion?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** I would go a step further. I think what we need to do at this point in time is to create legislation for a national indigenous housing coalition from across the country. We should start with legislation, select people from across the country to sit on that national indigenous housing council and come to a quick agreement on the amount of funds that are needed to put that into action.

I agree with Ms. McGee. There is a lot of emphasis placed on what number we should select as far as the needs go and what budget to come up with. In my mind, we could easily look at \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion a year over the next 10 years.

In addition to this amount of money for the capital side of things, we need to recognize that there was a program in place at one time under section 56.1 of the National Housing Act. It really was the gold star of social housing across the country for urban indigenous housing providers because it not only provided resources for the capital funds, but also provided operating subsidies, which is the piece that's mandatory for urban native housing societies to function as non-profits.

There is no revenue in this. We're trying to meet the deepest needs of people across the country and the hardest to house, so we can't be looking at market housing and expecting organizations to pay market rents so that we can pay for mortgages.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

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

My sincere thanks to the witnesses for joining us. We have messed up your schedules.

First, on behalf of all my colleagues here, I want to apologize for the absence of Grand Chief Simon, who was one of the witnesses from my region. We have tried to contact him too; he probably has a good reason for not being with us. I am sorry about that; I am sure that he is sorry as well.

My first question goes to Chief Leon.

Thank you for joining us. Maybe someone did push you to be here, but they certainly had good reasons to do so. Your testimony showed us that, and I was particularly struck by it. I have questions about what you said.

You need to increase the supply of affordable housing. You talked about problems with the lack of housing, but especially about problems with mould and renovations. That is your reality. You are on a reserve.

Here is my question: how do the federal housing strategy programs apply? How are you able to succeed in solving those issues with federal programs?

[English]

**The Chair:** Chief Leon, that one was for you, I believe.

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** Thank you for the question, but I don't understand French so I don't know what the question was.

**The Chair:** Chief, on the bottom of your screen you'll see a globe that says "Interpretation". If you press on that, it will give you three options: "English", "French" and "Floor". If you press "English" you will get simultaneous interpretation of everything Madame Chabot says.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, I can start your time again.

You can ask your question again; the witness now has access to the interpretation.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Okay. I will ask my question more quickly.

Chief Leon, thank you for your testimony about the reality of the community on your reserve.

In light of the problems you shared with us, namely the lack of affordable housing and the state of that housing, do you have access to funding specifically for indigenous communities?

That is one of the components of the national housing strategy; it is designed to provide housing for communities. There is also a component for Indigenous peoples.

Is that a program that you take advantage of and that is able to meet your needs?

[English]

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** First of all, thank you for the question.

Like I said, in our home, our community, the membership is at about 1,200 people who are registered here on reserve, and we have 198 homes here to house. That creates a problem. More than half of them need to live off reserve to gain a home to live in.

Like Lawson-Swain and McGee said, a lot of our people from our communities end up in a situation where they have to go to them to get housed.

What we're trying to do here in Sts'ailes is to create the micro homes, which have only one or two bedrooms. It's more affordable to get them started. We utilize CMHC still to this day, and we also utilize ISC, Indian Affairs. We use the subsidy from ISC, which still creates almost a problem of affordability. The money from Indian Affairs is very minimal. It pays for maybe only a foundation and a septic field, and that's it.

Also, to get the people homes, they need a job. They need to prove themselves through their finance to gain a home themselves as individual purchases. We have many problems that overlap each other. It creates a big problem. In the leadership at home, we do want them at home, but like Mr. Lawson-Swain said, we need to build probably at least 100 homes a day for a year for them all to be at home.

Thank you for your question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

My next question goes to Ms. McGee.

We are familiar with a 2017 report by your organization that indicates that, despite progress over the last 10 years, a large gap still exists between the needs and the results in housing.

You indicated that you need funding to the tune of \$230 million from now until 2022.

Which sources of federal funding can help you and support your efforts?

[English]

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Currently, we do administer the Reaching Home funding. Throughout the pandemic, there have been some allocations to be really heightening our response specifically during the pandemic.

One asterisk or caveat I would put on that report is that at the time we were celebrating a 45% reduction in our homeless numbers in our community. We've had a very confident and robust housing first program. Since the pandemic has started, we have been housing at a pace of about 120 to 140 people a month, but we've also had more inflow into homelessness than we've had housing. Our numbers are now going up. We are back up from 1,500 at the time to now almost 2,000 people on our buy names list.

To speculate on the total number on funding, based on that \$230 million, would take some additional work, but from a federal perspective, the Reaching Home dollars play a very critical role. Also, I think, in various parts of this committee's work, as well as things we've learned in the pandemic, there is the importance of other areas. This is a public health crisis. We are working really hard with different areas of government to bring to bear additionally on the Reaching Home dollars other program dollars. Really, it's been through that Reaching Home priority-setting and the national housing strategy that all of those bars need to be set.

I don't have an easy answer to say what other areas of government could complement or make this all work, but I do think that it all needs to come together through a coordinated effort.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McGee.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Ms. Gazan, you are next, for six minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Mrs. McGee.



This summer I introduced a motion to convert the CERB into a permanent guaranteed livable basic income, as a step toward ensuring that every person living in Canada is able to live in dignity and with human rights.

Based on data, the basic income I was proposing was meant to centre those in society who needed it most. It's now clear that indigenous people are some of the most unhoused people living in Canada.

In addition, the national inquiry also called for a guaranteed livable basic income in its call for justice 4.5 to ensure a guaranteed livable basic income for all Canadians, including indigenous people, to meet their social and economic needs.

How do you believe a permanent guaranteed livable basic income could help ensure that indigenous people are able to access housing, and have their right to housing met?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Homeward Trust focuses a lot on data and numbers. I will confess that a lot of our focus is on those in our community who wouldn't even qualify for the CERB at this point, because it did require pre-employment, etc.

Having said that, one of our experiences during the pandemic heightens the fact that we don't know what we don't know. The inflow into homelessness, with so many people are experiencing poverty for the first time, is a result of the circumstances that are directly related to poverty and a lack of income.

It is that need for an income, and to pre-empt an experience where ultimately homelessness erodes so many other aspects of health and mental health for individuals. Those are some of the areas we are acutely aware of. Those pressures are far higher than we estimated in terms of the vulnerability of people who, because of a lack of income, are so on the verge of an experience of homelessness.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I agree 100%. We're seeing first-time homelessness at a higher rate now as a result of the pandemic. It's totally concerning.

My next question is for Mr. Lawson-Swain. I appreciated your comments. We have heard from previous witnesses that, in comparison with what is currently being offered by the federal government for housing, massive sustainable investments are required to ensure housing for indigenous people.

I appreciated your comments noting systemic racism. If you look at the history of wilful underfunding of first nations, it is really an example of systemic racism in real time.

Could you expand a bit more on that?

• (1720)

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** *Tansi, boozhoo.*

That is a really tough question. It's not easy to answer that.

Locally, in Vancouver, we have been calling for the government to begin the work of reconciliation by doing audits of systemic barriers to see what policies and laws exist that pose discrimination or systemic discrimination for indigenous people.

On the one hand, when government is doing reconciliation pieces, we're finding, locally here, that often government departments are working toward places where they're taking urban indigenous people and lumping them into an equity policy. We find that somewhat disrespectful, with respect to the unique and distinct history of indigenous people in this country, to find ourselves being assimilated into another process of equality, and assimilating us through equity provisions.

I don't know if that answers your question, but we need to do more nationally in this country to assess all of the rules, policies and laws that create systemic barriers for our people. That, I don't believe, has been done.

Hopefully, with Bill C-15 and the new issues with respect to UNDRIP, we will find ways to weed through those policies and become more effective with the work that we're doing nationally.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes, thanks very much. If you look at all the COVID funding that's been disbursed to date, we comprise 5% of the Canadian population, yet we've received less than 1% of the funding. That systemic racism piece is certainly reality.

With regard to this underfunding of indigenous communities, do you feel that you currently have sufficient resources to be able to guarantee the right to housing for each person accessing your services?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** No, not at all. We're extremely underfunded in the work we're doing. I want to comment on the point that you made with respect to allocation methodologies that have been utilized by government, in particular the federal and provincial government over the years. If we're 40% of the homeless population, and we never get 40% of the funding. Just like the example you gave of the COVID funding, if we're only getting 1% though we're 5% of the population, it seems a little unfair.

I think we need to start looking at what we can do to ameliorate the conditions in Canada. We need to go above and beyond what other Canadians are getting and we need to get indigenous communities up to par and on the same level of suffering as all other populations. If 5% of the majority of the population is homeless, we want to be brought down from 35% to 5%. To make that happen is going to take additional funding. We know and understand that additional funding can be made available like in emergency situations—like we are all in around the world, dealing with COVID. The amount of support and funding that has been provided by the federal government hasn't been enough since World War II. We need to recognize that we're in urgent situations in our urban, indigenous and remote communities across the country, and we need to do more to address that, with funding to address it adequately.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lawson-Swain, and Ms. Gazan.

Next, we have Mr. Vis, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Thank you so much.

My questions are for Mr. Leon, who does live in Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. The reason I invited you to committee today, Mr. Leon, is what you said earlier in your testimony, that there are 1,200 people on reserve right now but only 198 homes. That's an average of six people per home.

What I do know about Sts'ailes First Nation and what I appreciate is that you're so proactive in reaching out to the broader community. You did that with the former MP and you have done that with me. Relationships matter to you, and that's why I brought you here today, because your words mean a lot and they need to be shared.

One of the questions I have for you today is this. Do you believe that Sts'ailes First Nation has sufficient human and financial resources to develop project proposals? And generally how long does it take for ISC or CMHC to get back to you when you apply for a project?

• (1725)

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I think ISC is a little behind. They have to look after every community in the province of B.C., and we are one of the largest communities and they just can't keep up with our needs. It's almost like they don't need to be in existence. Why? Because a lot of our funds that come from Ottawa go to Victoria, go to them, and then by the time it gets to us, the percentage goes down. Here in Sts'ailes, if we lose a loved one and need to have a funeral, we have to shut down our school. Why? Because we have nowhere else to go. We need the gymnasiums. We've been communicating with ISC and the former MP for years. Words need to turn into action and that's why I reached out to you, Brad, because I hear your voice is loud for governance, as it needs to be.

It's pretty disheartening. We wrote the Prime Minister letters and the only letter we received was that he can't make time for us and he can't come to Sts'ailes. So we need—

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I'm sorry. I just want to get another question in, but I hear you.

You guys have a small but pretty dedicated administrative staff at Sts'ailes. How many hours in general, or how many days or weeks, does it take to apply just to get a single house built?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** Our housing worker, our housing director, probably puts in many hours over and above the time they get paid. Why? Because we can't put it in the budget. We can't pay them overtime because it's not in the budget. The Indian agent came here and said, "You only have this much money. You can only build this much, in this time, and that's it."

**Mr. Brad Vis:** What would you say—this is a little radical for some—if we cut out all of the administrative people at ISC in Ottawa and just gave you a direct transfer that included all of the salaries of those peoples that were dedicated to allotting you money? What if we just gave you all that money and let you take care of it yourself from both an operational and administrative capacity? Do you think your people would get better outcomes if there were more direct transfers or long-term funding models?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I believe so. We're in a 10-year grant funding program with the federal government through the AFN. I think we're ready to do that. We're educated enough to do that. We

know how to count to 10. We know how to read English. We're getting pretty good. I think we're ready for that. That's an awesome—

**Mr. Brad Vis:** You guys received some specific financial designations as well. Do you want to speak to that quickly and to why they should just give you more money, and less through Ottawa?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** With the 10-year grant funding program, we have to prove to the government that we can develop a financial law, that we can come up with the policy and procedures and be accountable to our people as well as the AFN and the federal government. We've proven ourselves already that we can be financially stable.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** So you have demonstrated capacity but are still required, time and time again, to submit those long applications.

**Chief Ralph Leon, Jr.:** Yes.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Ms. Young, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses today. We're getting some really good information.

Ms. McGee, I want to pick up on what you said a little earlier, that "we don't know what we don't know" in terms of data collection. There's been quite a movement toward indigenous organizations conducting their own research to get the data and information that is ethically collected and managed and made available for use by indigenous people. In your view, what role should indigenous people and organizations play in collecting that data on indigenous housing needs?

• (1730)

**Ms. Susan McGee:** I think it's a really important principle that supports the need for indigenous-led organizations doing the work. Data sovereignty is important. I think a lot of reports and research cite information about other people that they didn't participate in providing. There are organizations in Canada that have really been evolving and leading in that space, largely with the national emphasis on data and how important it is.

Really, from a principles perspective, one thing that comes to mind in terms of why it is so important that this work is indigenous-led and that data sovereignty is important is that good decision-making is informed by data. When indigenous organizations lead in that work, we check those boxes. We make sure that the ability to inform that work, when it's indigenous-led, does not conflict with some of the issues we run into when that's not the case.

**Ms. Kate Young:** What steps should we take to make sure that indigenous people are meaningfully involved in data collection?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Again, the most important thing is that it's indigenous led and shaped from the beginning. I think there are steps that organizations, in partnering with indigenous organizations, should be complying with so that the entire structure, when we're collecting data, is indigenous led and informed. I know that this work is big work when we're talking very specifically about those indigenous-led initiatives, but there isn't anything that can happen, when we're doing planning for addressing homelessness needs, that doesn't somehow touch on indigenous communities. I think it's an important lens to apply to everything. Certainly, there are lots of partners that can help inform that work nationally.

**Ms. Kate Young:** I'm not sure who would be best to answer this.

Ms. McGee, you might want to take it on. I'm talking about hidden homelessness, and certainly youth, LGBTQ and two-spirit youth, and the problems around that, and whether you see that as a growing problem and something that we need to tackle as well.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** It's certainly a growing problem and one that is important to really, fully understand. Mr. Swain mentioned the aging out of care concerns that contribute to long-term experiences of homelessness. We've participated in and supported Native Counselling Services of Alberta's production of a video really specifically about hidden homelessness and indigenous youth. What is important about that project is that it was a conversation. There was an approach to discussing the issue in circle, and really, the experiences and the very tricky experiences of people, in terms of obstacles as well as opportunities. That kind of lens, I think, can be shared with the committee, and probably more broadly shared. We generate a lot of information and maybe we don't hit all the right audiences. That all came about because it is such a significant concern in our community.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Mr. Lawson-Swain, could I ask you the same question about the hidden homelessness issue, and specifically for young people, and even more specifically for LGBTQ and two-spirit youth?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Sure. Thank you for the question.

This is often something that we try to address nationally. The hidden homeless are rarely counted in the point-in-time counts. Hidden homelessness generally affects the broader community, but in particular, for women and children, and youth aging out of foster care, this is a big issue.

The other thing is that you have to understand our family makeup. Our families won't turn people out of their homes if people come to them for a place to stay because they're homeless. Also, the families themselves don't highlight the fact that they have additional people living in their housing units, because they're often living in social housing or affordable housing, which means that

they're going to be evicted by their landlord for having too many people, based on occupancy standards. They won't bring to light the fact that they have additional people living with them in their homes.

I can't speak for the LGBTQ community. I'm not an expert in dealing with the community you're speaking of, but I do know that there are people, not a large number, who are in precarious positions here in Vancouver and throughout the country. Those are situations of violence and of people fleeing family violence and that kind of thing. Often, if people aren't telling others that they're from an LGBTQ community, they're not exposing themselves in that way. When they're in shelters or in any other places, they're at risk for violence. Often they're just not going to those spaces to be counted in the first place. It's a very difficult place to be for youth, women and LGBTQ communities. They're often not counted in the point-in-time counts.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lawson-Swain.

Thank you, Ms. Young.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Now we go to Madame Chabot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have two and a half minutes, please.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Did you call on me, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you. I am sorry, there still a slight delay.

Ms. McGee, I am going to continue with the question on data collection. It's the question that you were just asked.

What you told us is extremely important. You were saying that the data should be collected by and for the indigenous nations for whom they are important.

What kind of support do you need, both financial and human, in order to complete that data collection?

Surveys are important for better action and for finding solutions. According to your description, we can see a major gap between the needs in terms of homelessness and the range of support available for people in that situation.

What resources do you need in order to collect the data effectively and to be able to respond to the reality on the ground?

[*English*]

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Thank you for the question.

It isn't really just a resource question in the response to the context of this meeting. I think we are learning so much, and with complete vulnerability and humility, we have a lot more to learn. I would say that one of the things we really need to do nationally is that when we make something important nationally and when programs and national plans and studies get institutionalized in terms of expectations, we will respond.

There are experts in the field who we've learned from and are learning from, but I think that need needs to be driven.... I don't mean to sound deflective at all. It is a matter, though, however, that there is scarcity in all of this work. Limited resources are just the reality of the work that happens in the homeless-serving sector. It needs to be something that's an expectation of our work that then we also can ensure, and we rely on leaders across Canada that are more progressive, perhaps, than other communities and other spaces.

The facilitation of that I think is very important, and some of that has been facilitated by the establishment of cross-jurisdictional and national dialogue around this. I think that needs to be supported further. It is absolutely an environment of continuous learning. We will get there with.... I would be really at fault if I tried to put a number on a cost associated with something that is more about shifting how we do, who we are and how we be, as opposed to just a task.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McGee.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Ms. Gazan, please, for two and a half minutes.

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

My question is for Ms. McGee.

Today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, so I think it's important to raise article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognizes "the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others", as well as articles 21.2 and 22.1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which state that "Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including...housing", and that "Particular attention [shall] be paid to...persons with disabilities".

Last month was Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, which partially seeks to highlight the fact that indigenous people living in Canada experience rates of disability much higher than those of the Canadian population.

Can you speak about the importance of ensuring that the rights of indigenous peoples living with disabilities are upheld in housing and otherwise?

● (1740)

**Ms. Susan McGee:** I think you have said it so well. I think these are really fundamental rights, and if they're not incorporated in all

of our work, we are leaving behind those who are the most vulnerable amongst the most vulnerable.

I also know that in the communities we serve and those experiencing homelessness for a long period of time, disabilities aren't always the visible disabilities. Quite frankly, even for those with diagnosed disabilities, we know that within homeless community, many individuals did not have access in their lives to appropriate and timely assessments at times. Had they, now they would be qualifying for a level of support that others have available to them. It's just because of their circumstances, in that they were not really in a family environment network that enabled them to be appropriately diagnosed.

It needs to go back further and into the way that we actually determine, assess and identify that disabilities exist, because we have really failed to do that for people who are now adults and experiencing homelessness for long periods of time.

**The Chair:** You can have a very brief question, if you wish, Ms. Gazan.

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

How do you think this should inform future government strategies and funds related to this matter going forward? Should it impact funding frameworks?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** I can only express that currently there is an expectation around things like universal design and that there is a part of our application process currently that does identify that. I think we have to find a better way of not having that be potentially an obstacle.

I think there might be some opportunities to work at a community level to find really creative ways of meeting that need. It can become something that becomes another part of an application that perhaps gets in the way of the strength of an application, because we don't have a deep enough understanding of how we can achieve that creatively. I think organizations on the ground that really have the capacity to do that need to be supported.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

We will go back to the Conservatives.

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

First off, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being patient with us and for lending their time here to speak to our committee so that we can glean some of your wisdom and experience. Thank you for that.

My first question is for Ms. McGee. I know you mentioned that there has been an increase in homelessness in Edmonton. I'm just wondering if there's a reason for that, when you noticed it started, and if there's any data for that.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Yes, certainly, and it is directly related to the pandemic.

We maintain a by-name list. It's available on our website. We have public-facing tableau worksheets that illustrate over time how many individuals experience homelessness, and you can cross tabulate that with various other indicators.

Certainly, within the context of the pandemic, we have seen a couple of things. One is that housing stability has been compromised by individuals who may be co-housing or in precarious housing circumstances are not able to continue that because of the need for their cohorts to isolate, or just that it's been more tenuous. Again, to the earlier point about poverty, poverty is being exacerbated for many who don't qualify for various income sources and are being hit hard during the pandemic.

It's definitely connected to the pandemic, and I would say again that it exposes for us, with regard to our system, just how we need to really reorient around prevention so that it does not become an ongoing experience.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you.

I'm from Lloydminster, so I'm pretty close to where you're located. I'm just wondering how many people your organization would serve who would maybe come into the urban centre from rural, remote communities.

I'm just interested to know if that's a trend. Are there a lot of people who are coming from outside and finding themselves in the city?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Yes, there certainly are, and I apologize that I don't have a number off the top of my head for that.

When we opened our major centre at the early stages of the pandemic and had numerous people coming to Edmonton just for services. They were coming directly to the EXPO facility for support.

We also have—and I apologize if the term doesn't...because it's kind of an economics term—churn, in that we have people who come into our community and leave it and come back and forth because we are a northern centre.

Fortunately, because of the multiple relationships we have and the way that the housing first system is designed, we can reconnect with people when they come back into the system, but we are definitely a major centre that has a lot of people coming to the community looking for resources. We don't necessarily have the ability to connect with them quickly, particularly in this time when so many things are really difficult to navigate.

• (1745)

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** I know, just from my experience, the importance of wraparound services as well when it comes to housing. It's one thing to have a place to go; it's a whole other ball game if we can have services that help in that process, like jobs, personal development or anything else.

I just have one more question, and this is for anybody.

Could we get on record what the differences are, if there are any, between homelessness in rural, remote, northern communities versus urban centres, and what some of the differences and challenges could be between the two. please.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Nobody is jumping at it.

It is a very difficult for us to say that we have depth on that question from our particular vantage point, given the roles we play around the table. I that know Matt is from a smaller community in Alberta.

Matt, do you have any comments to add on that? I'm going to call you out now because I haven't done it yet this whole meeting.

**Mr. Matthew Ward (Manager, Planning and Engagement, Homeward Trust Edmonton):** I think part of what I would observe, from my an experience in a smaller community and working now in a more urban environment, is that range of access to services. That is a huge driver of that churn, the types of services that one might need to access versus what's available in the community where you live, the difference between living in Edmonton versus living in my community of Driftpile Cree Nation. It has 1,200 members and is very small in northern Alberta.

I think that's where you start to see the barriers in access and what happens to people when they don't have access to those things. Chief Leon might have more of an observation of the day-to-day situation in terms of access to housing on reserve. I think it's a huge barrier.

When you go into the city, I think some of those barriers turn into things around access to addiction and mental health services, the shelter systems and larger cycles that people connect to in those places versus rural areas, where you'd see the larger difference.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ward.

We're going to Mr. Vaughan, for five minutes.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** Thank you for the presentations today.

To Mr. Lawson-Swain, within your housing envelope, how many distinct indigenous nations do you serve?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** I want to break that down into two different types of populations that we deal with.

First and foremost, for the local host first nations, the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations are pretty much on urban reserves. They are very closely situated to Vancouver, or within Vancouver, and 51% of their members live on reserves. We have served 49% of their population over the last 40 years. We have touched upon a number of their needs in their community for that long.

Throughout the province of British Columbia, of the more than 200 first nations that exist in B.C., we have served 51% of those nations, as well, through the work that we do.

More importantly, with the work that we do, we have people from all over Canada coming to where we are situated. Of the more than 600 first nations from all over Canada, we serve about 360 of those different nations. When we talk about urban services and urban resourcing, we know for a fact that the first nations communities aren't going to be funded.

If we have five of their community members living in Vancouver, for example, they're not going to create an office in Vancouver to serve those five members. They're dependent on organizations like Lu'ma to meet the needs of their communities from all over Canada, because we serve such a huge population of different first nations right across the country.

• (1750)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Some within the AFN movement have said that instead of creating a fourth stream of funding for urban indigenous residents, it should simply be the three NIOs that manage it. The complexity you just displayed shows why that would be short-sighted, because they don't actually have accountability to those members sometimes. Moreover, there also is no method of dividing up the dollars, so that you don't take money away from reserve funding or treaty funding organizations.

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** I agree with that. The situation of not having a fourth direction is really quite offensive to me. We have, over the last 40 to 60 years, built infrastructure in urban centres. We have thousands of board members across the country. We have thousands of volunteers. We have thousands of staff. We have an infrastructure that would take 50 to 100 years for first nations to establish. Unfortunately, they don't have the ability to serve their members when they're situated across the country the way they are.

In our scenario, if my three kids are registered to Norway House First Nation, their chief is not going to come here and meet their education, housing and health needs. It's just not going to happen. They don't have the ability and the infrastructure to do that.

I'm thankful and supportive of the government's recent actions to support first nations, Métis and Inuit people, as distinct people. We all support that. However, we also support the fact that 80% of the population lives in urban centres, and we're not meeting the current needs of those people in the current structure we have, and nor would we with the amount of money that is being allocated to the three distinct nations.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** If we're going to transfer block funding, multi-year funding, which is the recommendation you put forward here, with indigenous-led design and deliver housing programs, what steps have been taken to make sure there is an organization on the other side of the table to actually hand over block funding, to manage that funding, to manage the disbursement of that funding to the different urban, rural, remote areas, and to northern settings?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Currently, under the Reaching Home program, we have an indigenous caucus from across the country that represents the different community entities from across the country. In that scenario, there's a ready opportunity to provide block funding to that type of an agency to meet the needs on the Reaching Home side.

Clearly, there is a distinction between housing programs and homelessness programs. Those who are providing housing don't necessarily deal with the issues of homelessness and the dire needs of homeless populations to be served. The 24 hours a day, 7 days a week care, the hardest to house of the populations, the supportive housing services that they need on an ongoing basis, they're quite different from the family housing projects across the country where

you're providing merely a subsidy for someone to survive and function on a daily basis.

I support the fact that there should be a distinction between the two: a Reaching Home pot of resources that continues to go on a national basis to indigenous organizations in urban, rural and remote communities; and a pot of money that goes for a housing strategy for urban, rural and remote indigenous communities.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Would you see a single organization blending those two streams into a continuum, so they work together, but not necessarily at the same time on the same issue? Would you see that as part of a [*Inaudible—Editor*] structure that would be functional?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Yes, it would.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Schmale, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and our witnesses.

This is a great conversation today, by the way. I'd like to build on what Chief Ralph Leon Jr. was talking about, if I could, and then I'll swing back and forth because I've got a lot of questions here.

I'd like to build on the comments that were made regarding the relationship with the federal government. From what he said—if I interpreted it correctly—the current relationship with the federal government isn't working. The status quo isn't working, so we need a new relationship that also focuses on the economic reconciliation as well. Did I understand what you're saying correctly?

• (1755)

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I believe so. When we try to do things, communication takes time. Maybe there's changeover or maybe there are elections coming up and everybody has to go like this for a little while till the election is over. Then we get lost in the system. We try to communicate with different ministers to have meetings with them and it's just not happening.

We have resolutions from the AFN that are just not being looked at. They're not being read. We just had an AFN meeting—our BCAFN meeting—with some of our ministers, and the only reply we got was that they were sorry that they didn't have time to look at our resolutions. Those resolutions are very important to us. They affect everybody on reserve, off reserve, in nearby cities and in nearby communities.

A lot of our native housing here in the Fraser Valley... If I go to native housing nearby, I would never see any of my own people in there. I've never seen my neighbouring communities' people in there. It's all people from every other place and there's no place for our own people to go.

If we had that block funding for housing and infrastructure, we could do it. I know Sts'ailes can do it.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I liked what you said, too—and it's something that's come out in different testimony in this committee and others—about how the federal government has a block of money, then it goes to the province and then it goes to another level. Eventually, as it works its way through the system, that amount you're getting is smaller and smaller, until it comes to your community. Then you're basically looking at the bigger pie and saying that you should be getting that, not this.

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** Holy, man, you just hit it right on the button. That's exactly the way it goes with that three or four-pronged funding. The main funding is from the federal government and it goes to the province in Victoria and then it goes to the municipalities. Then Indian Affairs comes here and dictates what we can build, how we can build it and when we can build it.

We Sts'ailes are ready to do all of that on our own. I don't know if we're looked at any differently from those who are in treaty or non-treaty. We're an independent band. We're a successful band. I have full confidence that a lot of our neighbours can probably do the same. Even those who are in treaty could do the same. They could manage their own funds.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** What about the idea of a first nations infrastructure institute where communities can do public-private partnership, manage their own money and kind of take out the middlemen, so to speak, which are the different levels of government? You'd be able to go to this indigenous, first nations, Inuit or Métis-led organization and give your proposal and get on with it, because it's run by people who live in your community or nearby.

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I think it's an awesome suggestion. When I give out a portfolio, if it's housing, you're in charge of all funds, all infrastructure and so on. If we did that with the federal government and the MP of housing, if he was elected, if he was appointed to be the housing infrastructure MP, then he looks after that money. It follows that this MP, whoever he is, if it was done that way and comes straight to the communities that applied for that money for housing infrastructure.... We never get dollars for those who live off reserve.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** What about potential off-ramps from the Indian Act for the bands that want to get away from it? Would you support something like that if there were the ability to do so, to choose whether or not you wanted to remain or leave?

**The Chair:** Make it a very quick answer if you could, Chief. We're out of time.

• (1800)

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I fully support not utilizing Indian Affairs. As I said before, they take the majority of our funds and by the time our funds get to us, for me to build a new house, what I get from them is very little: \$20,000. If I was to go to a nearby city, I would probably need \$200,000. There's no balance.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief, and Mr. Schmale.

Next, we have Mr. Long, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Chair.

Good evening to our witnesses. Thanks for your presentations tonight. They're very informative and interesting.

I want to follow up a little on Mr. Vaughan's line of questioning.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** A point of order, Mr. Chair.

There is no interpretation.

It's working now.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I want to follow up a little on process and I'll give you a quick example. I was an MP first in 2015, and one of the first meetings I had was with a group that wanted to do some housing in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. No, it wasn't an indigenous group, but it was a group that wanted to do housing, so I was excited to have the meeting. I was excited to go back to Ottawa and advocate for housing, but then I found out very quickly that housing was provincial, and the feds had agreements with the provinces on housing. It led to one frustration after another. Then obviously I know that federally we came forth with the co-investment housing program and the rapid housing initiative.

Mr. Lawson, I read an article or saw something online about you and the headline was "Indigenous-led projects seek housing solutions". There was a picture of you with the steering committee. I understand your objective and what you want to do, but what can we do federally to make that happen? We can deliver dollars directly to a rapid-housing initiative, or we can do housing agreements with the provinces, but in the end what do you need to make it happen for you on the ground, to go from announcements to housing being built?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** I'm going back to a little history in housing. When the Meech Lake accord was happening and the provinces and the feds were arguing about the division of powers, the provinces wanted the authority over housing and the feds devolved their national housing program and the dollars that went with that to each of the provinces. We ended up in that particular case as short-changed communities—all of us did across the country. What ended up happening was that the provinces decided to take this transfer of housing into their communities, like B.C. for example, did really well with the monies it received. But in other provinces that wasn't the case. Saskatchewan is an example, I think you heard testimony from Robert Byers, indicating that the province doesn't provide any housing. They're not interested in doing homelessness services.

A patchwork of programs across the country causes a shortage of housing for us all across the country. If we had a national housing strategy for the indigenous community, we could avoid part of that.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I'll just jump in here. A few witnesses in past testimony talked about potentially having an indigenous CMHC-style organization that could oversee that. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** As I think I mentioned earlier, we support the creation of a national indigenous housing coalition or council that would be responsible for delivering resources across the country. Should it be CMHC-like? I'm not so sure. There are good things about CMHC and there are not-so-good things about CMHC. The good things that I recall, because I used to be a CMHC employee years and years ago, was the section 56.1 program I mentioned earlier, which seemed to work really well across the country.

In the current CMHC model, it's not working and functioning quite as well as it used to, because they lack the legislation or the regulations or guidelines to actually have that happen. If we had a national indigenous housing council that had some authority and responsibility and had the resources, it would allow the indigenous community to decide what the priorities are, like we do in the Reaching Home program, where we have community advisory boards that set priorities and set policies and set principles. We need to do that on a national scale for indigenous housing for us to address our needs.

• (1805)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Okay. Thanks for that.

Ms. McGee, thanks for your testimony. I think I read that Home-ward Trust had a goal of creating 900 units within five years. I also looked with interest at a proposal you had to build a 50-unit supportive housing complex at McArthur Industrial. Is that correct?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Yes.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Is that project built now? Where is that project?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** It's one of the projects right now that is in front of the rapid housing initiative review.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Okay.

This question will be very similar to the one I asked Mr. Lawson. From a process standpoint, let's say you were in government and you had an opportunity to kind of sculpt or script how the funds would come through to you. How would you like to see it flow through to you?

**The Chair:** Please be brief, if you could. We're into extra time here.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** I will be very, very quick.

We need to be held accountable and given metrics around what we're expected to deliver, but this circular kind of expecting us to be able to make 15-year commitments on support dollars that nobody in Canada commits to, other than on a yearly basis, doesn't invest in the organization and doesn't invest in the system. This expectation that the system will continue to work and that we'll figure it out creates this very conditional feedback loop, which makes it very difficult to really move things forward.

I think there needs to be confidence in the local operators and the system. You know, hold us accountable, but I think trying to predict the future is hard for all of us.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McGee, and thank you, Mr. Long.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have two and a half minutes, please.

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

My question goes to Mr. Lawson-Swain.

At the beginning of your testimony, you said, in a very heartfelt way, that you wanted to see a day when your communities have the same access to housing as non-indigenous communities. That is perfectly legitimate.

If you had a solution for us this evening, given your realities, what would that solution be?

How could we best proceed? How could we best respond to your needs, given all the federal programs?

[*English*]

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** I'll go to my earlier comments and maybe to those made earlier by Adam Vaughan. We are in desperate need of a fourth direction and some national funding, and to be recognized as urban indigenous peoples with the right to create our own governance and provide resources to our communities in the manner we see fit across this country. We have not had equitable access to resources and money to do that, and we need that rapidly.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** What kind of dialogue do we have to engage in to reach the solution you are advocating, given the sometimes different realities among indigenous peoples?

• (1810)

[*English*]

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Thank you for that. I agree. Definitely, the realities for our communities are different right across the country.

I think there's a significant synergy across the country for urban organizations, whether it be through the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, which participates on councils like that across the country. There are urban native housing providers across the country. There are those groups that are funding through Reaching Home.



I think what we could be doing is using Reaching Home as an example of what we can do to deliver resources on the ground and to have the community make the decisions on what the priorities are and how the money is to be spent. I think that model is there for us to look at, and we should be examining that rather quickly so that we can mimic that for a national indigenous housing council to allocate resources across the country.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lawson-Swain.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Next is Ms. Gazan, please, for two and a half minutes.

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

I have a question for you, Madam McGee. You spoke a lot about declining mental health. In the riding I represent, Winnipeg Centre, I certainly see a rapid decline in mental health and increasing rates of homelessness as the pandemic persists. With outbreaks in our shelters, our community is in dire need of housing, and certainly low-barrier housing, but also in need of more mental health supports and wraparound services within these housing units.

I wanted you to speak to the importance of having these kinds of wraparound supports, but also wraparound supports that are culturally relevant to the people who are needing housing. I say this because in Winnipeg 70% of this shelterless community is indigenous, yet the services and the housing support just continue to be lacking. Could you speak to that?

Thank you.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Certainly. Really quickly, I said that we don't know what we don't know in some contexts, but in others, I would have to say that we could not have more evidence for the importance of certain types of support environmentally: sleep hygiene, how people are supported and housed, how they survive a day and how much that erodes their mental health and contributes to long-term challenges. There's such a wealth of evidence in support of the need to address those challenges and barriers.

Included in that, when it comes to cultural supports, I would layer.... We talk about culturally informed supports, and that may mean different things to different people, but really, from a mental health lens, it is also about safety. It's also about recognizing the trauma community members have faced.

What contributes to our own experience of safety can vary. I think that's where, when we talk about culture, we are talking about many aspects of what we may think about in terms of culture. We provide training and support for land-based cultural experiences, but also, just more deeply and richly, there is that idea of trauma, the impact of trauma and the importance of safety, and how we create safety when we're supporting people, being really tangible and directly related to mental health.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McGee.

Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

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

Go ahead, Mr. Vis.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Chief Leon, if you were given more opportunities to do things like building micro homes, as you mentioned, how many more people do you think would come back to the traditional territory of the Sts'ailes First Nation?

Secondly, has the federal government been able to provide or do the regulations allow you to look for innovative housing solutions, or does that create more barriers for you?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I think it will create more opportunity for our people to come home if we're able to do more micro homes. Like I said, the majority of our people live off reserve, and those are only the band members. We have 300 community members who live here also; we didn't utilize those numbers. I think there are some barriers in the ways that we apply for funds.

• (1815)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** You mentioned earlier the challenges that band members had in accessing housing off reserve. Generally, where do band members from Sts'ailes go when they're not living on your traditional territory? What are some of the first-hand challenges you've heard about?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** Right now we know of a lot of our people being in Chilliwack and Abbotsford, and a lot of our people live as far away as California or England. They're just everywhere. Wherever a job is created, a lot of them go there. There's no opportunity here; then they'll go elsewhere.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** How has the high cost of housing in Chilliwack, Mission and Abbotsford impacted the ability of your members to find adequate housing?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** It's impacted them quite a bit. We have quite a few who are homeless right now in Chilliwack and Abbotsford. Some of them sought my help—your help—with COVID funds. That helped them out a little bit, but still, Chilliwack doesn't have a place for our people to be housed. The chance for them to afford a home out there is pretty slim.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** What final advice would you have for me as your representative, and for members of this committee? What can we really do to help people in rural settings such as yours to make a difference in the lives of your band members both on and off reserve?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** I believe transportation is a high priority. We're trying to get a health centre here. We just do not find enough people to work for that. For our people to work off reserve, it's pretty challenging to get to Agassiz, Mission, Abbotsford or Chilliwack. The bus, the public transit, doesn't come here. That's one big barrier to jobs, finances and all those things. That's one thing I'd ask for.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Do you feel sometimes that things are stacked against your people, even though they want to succeed and they want to have those jobs, and that because they're living in substandard housing on the reserve, it impacts other aspects of their personal and professional lives?

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** Yes, it does. A lot of them can't afford Wi-Fi or even a telephone. They're stuck on social assistance or whatever it may be with those barriers to transportation, and they're trying to get out. You can tell when it's SA day or when they need to go to the food bank. They're all out near the highway hitchhiking. Our people have to stop and give them a ride. That's a big barrier.

What I'd like you to do is to come here again and communicate with my chief administrative officer and some of our council and just hear them out.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief Leon.

Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Next is Mr. Vaughan, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Thank you very much.

To Susan McGee, I have a quick question about provincial health systems and whether or not additional.... When you talk about supportive housing and housing people with high needs or high acuity, how have funds from the provincial level flowed, in terms of harm reduction, in terms of psychiatric and mental health support and in terms of addiction issues? Is the provincial core of that strong enough to support an indigenous-led housing program?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** We have some really good examples of projects that I think, quite frankly, are internationally recognized, including Ambrose Place, which I know you're familiar with. At the same time, to scale these—when we're talking about the dedicated resources in advance that we would need to support the many projects that we would have to do to really meet this need—there isn't currently a commitment to scale alongside the capital that we hope to roll out. It's a real challenge.

I have been impressed. When we have the opportunity to bring in Alberta Health Services to our projects, they do see the population we are serving as their clients once we can get them housed. I think that is a really important part of how we frame and set up the project models we're working on.

It's on a project-by-project basis. It is something that continually needs to be shepherded. It isn't really, again, solidified within our program models, and so every program is new.

That has been a challenge in supporting and clarifying harm reduction, I think, for a relatively new audience. Some people hear "harm reduction", and they don't fully understand that it does still continue to support individuals on a recovery journey. We're working on that.

• (1820)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** If the study produces the results we all want it to, and an indigenous urban housing program is self-directed, self-standing, and is funded appropriately, would the work with indigenous people still need to overlap in order to make sure there were no cracks for people to fall between?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Overlap, yes, but integration among aligned goals and strategies can create huge possibilities. We do spend a lot of time trying to negotiate little micro arrangements. The alignment and integration approach needs to be a higher level expectation. They absolutely need to work together at a very minimum.

When we demonstrate the successes, not just in our community, but across Canada, there has been exceptional work done. We need to share that and build confidence that we can do that and more.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** To Mr. Lawson-Swain, with regard to the vision you enunciated, one of the challenges in getting this done is managing the development dollars, so that they become self-fulfilling. Would you see a role for financing, not just supportive housing and deeply affordable housing, but also just housing? There's a significant number of indigenous people who are affluent. They make a living, and do good work in the community. Would you also see a role for building indigenous-led market housing, indigenous-led housing developments, to allow people who succeed to also live within the community?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Absolutely. We're currently at this point in time building a project in Vancouver that is exactly that. We're using the private market for financing. We're using CMHC to create housing options from shelters all the way up to home ownership in one complex. It's important for us to recognize that when we build housing projects, we build communities. We're not just building one-off units. For many of the people who are out there buying and can afford to buy market or affordable market housing units, they also want to be part of our community.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** In fact, their investment could roll back into the provision of other housing for people without needs.

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Absolutely, and it's a way for those who are more affluent to have an opportunity to support, with the revenues they're producing from their rents or mortgages, the overall building and structures, so we can support those with lesser incomes.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I've got one last question. There is a requirement around only financing residential components within CMHC programs. They don't do, for example, community health, ceremony space, study space, what have you.

With an indigenous-led program, would you see a need for greater flexibility for communal space as part of housing programs to deal with some of these non-traditional spaces or non-traditional requirements to support people through your housing?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Absolutely, and we have a good example of that in Vancouver in one of our projects called the Vancouver Aboriginal Children's Village. In that project, we built a cultural space on the main floor. We built offices that support the tenants and the occupants, who are in the building for support services, and they should be part and parcel of one another.

In B.C., the provincial government looks at that and says the commercial piece of the building cannot be more than 33% of the overall building structure. We have to then find the financing to support the commercial part of that, and that often makes it very difficult for us to complete these projects.

We used our own equity, by the way, that we acquired throughout the years to create the necessary funding to fund the commercial piece to the building as we moved forward, but that, generally, was not provided by CMHC or the provinces.

• (1825)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Enabling legislation would have to give you that flexibility, is that correct?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vaughan, and Mr. Lawson-Swain.

We're going to go back to Mr. Kent for five minutes.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Thank you very much, Chair.

It has been a very interesting and informative session tonight.

We've been talking about the fact that big-dollar ambition and big-dollar programs face the shrinkage of bureaucracy and other levels of government and sometimes...very small or greatly diminished outcomes. We know that the rapid housing initiative by itself is \$1 billion to be disbursed, ideally, in six months, with 3,000 units built within a year and part of that going to indigenous housing in urban and rural situations. If that were to be rolled out continuously—twice a year at \$2 billion for 6,000 units—over ten years it would still fall far short of the indigenous housing objective of 73,000 units and \$25 billion investment.

I'll come to you, Mr. Lawson-Swain and your background with CMHC. With regard to indigenous housing, would you rather see... Perhaps a \$25-billion upfront commitment from the federal government is an unrealistic expectation. Would you like to see that \$25 billion delivered again to, if not a CMHC-like organization, but an indigenous-led national organization, which would itself disburse that \$25 billion?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** The short answer is yes. We definitely would enjoy that opportunity. We have a good example of what can happen. The indigenous housing or the Indigenous Homes Innovation Initiative that was created by one of your ministers in the Liberal government was an example of an opportunity for first nations, Métis, Inuit and the urban community to come together and work together. We demonstrated that we had the capacity and the ability to deliver money. It's that kind of creativity and that kind of confidence that we have to have in our indigenous communities, so that we can deliver those dollars to ourselves and do it not only more rapidly, but better.

I can give you an example. On the Reaching Home side of the funding we allocate, because we allocate funding for 26 different municipalities here in the GVRD for both native and non-native, we have two different CABs. We have a non-indigenous CAB and an indigenous CAB. The indigenous CAB delivers their money in record time, all the time. They set their own priorities and have it out the door as quickly as possible.

On the non-indigenous side, it takes very long for them to come to conclusions and make decisions because they're not acting as a unified voice as a community. That's something that we do.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** In the brief time left, I have a question for Ms. McGee.

Recognizing the difference between the aspiration of new units being built, your “no wrong door” approach is an interesting one in terms of ensuring that, by the three levels—the names list, the coordinated list and the match list—you identify the greatest need and equitable distribution of what's available.

Could you explain that a little bit?

**Ms. Susan McGee:** All of the orders of government—and within orders of government there are different contracts that we administer—and our partners have very complementary, but unique outcomes expected, timelines, when money needs to be spent and the qualifications around it.

That's the role we play in the middle, to really maximize that for our community. Everything comes in and then we prioritize to make sure that we most efficiently put all of the resources...and recognize that being able to do that, we can balance the fact that some things do get held up or some things happen faster than planned. We're able to do that.

That's our approach as the entity in our community. It's not that every community needs to respond in the same way, but it has certainly served us well in that we've never slipped money as a community. We've been able to leverage considerable buy-in, not just in terms of real money coming through the organization, but influence, in the way that we're able to work with others on this rather complex issue.

• (1830)

**Hon. Peter Kent:** It's not just the provincial government, but the municipal government in the case of a large city like Edmonton.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** That's correct.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Thank you, Ms. McGee.

Next is Mr. Turnbull for five minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks. It's nice to have another round, because I did have a few more questions.

Mr. Lawson-Swain, you mentioned in your previous remarks Impact Canada and the indigenous homes innovation initiative. I think you might be on the steering committee for that, which is great. My understanding is that 24 innovators were selected from a very large number of applicants. Can you tell us a little about that work and how it might impact the way forward?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** I think it's important to recognize that when we were all coming together across the country and representing different regions, we had to clear the room from politics and had to recognize that we had a specific goal in mind. That goal was to get housing dollars out, or innovation dollars out, to as many innovators as we could across the country. From our perspective, we were looking at this as a status-blind approach. It didn't matter to us if we were first nations, indigenous, Métis or Inuit or urban, although we did recognize the importance of each of our roles in that room.

We quickly came to a consensus model before we started any work, and we utilized elders and traditional teachings to get us to that point. Once we got there and got over the hurdles of doing away with the politics of how we're going to allocate funding, the rest of the process was fairly simple. We acted in good faith with one another. We used our traditional beliefs. We acknowledged one another and we selected leaders among that council.

That's a very good model to look at. It's an opportunity to assess something different. That's in addition to the model we currently use through the Reaching Home program for community advisory boards to have input. I think those are two really good models to look at.

Also, again, coming back to section 56.1 of the National Housing Act, that piece of legislation still exists; it's never been repealed. It's something that we could utilize to help create this process moving forward.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** That's great. Building on that, something else I've wondered about is that in different places and documents I've been reading, I've noticed multiple references to indigenous-led businesses, to some of them being community-based or social enterprises. I wondered if innovation in the housing space might include benefits for indigenous communities beyond just the creation of the housing, but also design, management, construction and construction projects. Many different aspects to building housing could benefit the economies of indigenous people.

Would you agree with that? Do you see those opportunities? Could you outline any of those for me?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Absolutely. That's a really good question.

I want to go back to my opening comments when I said that Lu'ma began 40 years ago as an urban native non-profit housing society. We did that under section 56.1 of the National Housing Act. At that point we quickly realized that we needed to have far greater resources than what we were given by CMHC to do the work we were doing, whether those were wraparound services or economic benefits. We all talk about economic reconciliation as part of the work we're currently doing.

When I first started, I named the number of companies I represent. All those companies, by the way, are owned by Lu'ma Native Housing Society. The one we take pride in recently is the Lu'ma Development Management Company, where we provide development services to the broader indigenous community for social-purpose real estate. Currently we're in the process of building almost half a billion dollars of social-purpose real estate throughout the province of British Columbia. We've only been in existence for three or four short years.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** What is social-purpose real estate, if you don't mind defining that for the committee?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Generally, it's any project that has social benefit or social purpose. It could be social housing, affordable housing. It could be an office building, but the intent and purpose of that building is to provide social services. Anything with a social benefit for the broader community is what we propose and what we work on.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

Ms. McGee, you also have a social enterprise operating. I think it's a furniture bank, is that correct?

● (1835)

**Ms. Susan McGee:** Yes, that's correct. Find is separately branded, separately operated, and provides furniture at no cost to community members who are experiencing homelessness, getting into housing. It allows them to shop for the furniture they're getting, that is donated.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McGee.

Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you very much.

My question goes to whoever wants to answer it. We have talked a lot about realities in terms of housing, of course, but here is what I would like to know.

As you see it, are there any specific realities that affect seniors in terms of housing, homelessness or other difficulties?

[English]

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** That's a really good question. Our matriarchs and patriarchs here in Sts'ailes are long outliving their sea island homes—their CMHC homes—that were built in the sixties and seventies. It's just not working. With the system now with ISC—Indian Affairs—we need to revisit the reno monies, the RRAP monies and all of those kinds of programs that happen. I believe it's not working. We need the block funding just sent to communities.

**Ms. Susan McGee:** If that question was to all, I would only add one really quick response.

In this environment, particularly with homelessness, there are two things.

The actual experience of a person who's had a long life of homelessness really is analogous to a senior at 45 or 50 years of age. When we talk about seniors in our work, it varies.

The other thing is that in planning for housing and these supports, we often have have-nots amongst the have-nots. We really need to be intentional in prioritizing our resources. Once we get to community-level decision-making, we can, unfortunately, put the needs of seniors against the needs of, in some cases, individuals with significant mental health issues and a long life experience of addiction.

Both of those populations very much warrant support, and I would never oppose investment in seniors housing, but we really need to avoid putting those needs up against each other.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McGee.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Ms. Gazan, you get the last word. You have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I like getting the last word.

My last question is for Mr. Ward. One of my first teaching jobs was as an administrator for an adult-ed program on a first nation. I had to write so many proposals for little chunks of money, and for those little chunks of money, the amount of human resource hours I had to spend.... To get \$5,000 I would have to, for example, write four follow-up reports.

This is my question for you. How does proposal-based funding negatively impact the ability of indigenous organizations or institutions to address housing and homelessness in a meaningful way that is both long-term and sustainable? I say that because I know, particularly in indigenous communities, that it's year-to-year funding, so it's hard to develop long-term housing plans when you don't know what's going to happen year to year.

I'll let you respond to that.

**Mr. Matthew Ward:** Sure. I'll be short, because I think the answer is pretty clear. It's a huge barrier.

I think it's part of the value add. As Susan had mentioned for Homeward Trust, a lot of these organizations that are really relied on to deliver these services have demonstrated they can do it. The need to annually revisit their ability to do that pulls away from their ability to focus on the work that needs to happen.

I think I will just keep it short and leave it there.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Just very quickly, I know that with a lot of housing stock on reserve, even when we have houses built we often don't get money to fix our existing housing stock, so we're constantly in a crisis. We get a new house, but we have one house that isn't usable.

What is needed to address this, which I know is a huge issue, in regard to funding and sustainable funding so that we can develop long-term plans in our nations?

• (1840)

**Mr. Matthew Ward:** I don't know if I'm the best person to answer that question. While I have experience with on-reserve housing in my personal experience, professionally I work in the context of an urban environment in proposal writing.

That might be a better question for Chief Leon, Jr.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Chief, please be very quick, if you can. You actually get the last word.

**Chief Ralph Leon Jr.:** Thank you for the last word.

This is of high importance for us. We have a mental health team here that tries to look after a lot of those issues. We have a [*Inaudible—Editor*] group here that we also work with, where we can focus on those with any issues. We try to get on them, if it's from the education department, housing department, or children and family, and try to work it all together so that it all works for the individual or the family.

That was a good question.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Thank you to all of the witnesses, first for hanging around and waiting for us and then for being so patient and so comprehensive in your answers this evening. We very much appreciate it. It will greatly aid the work we're doing here.

Colleagues, the support team from the House of Commons—the clerk, the analysts, the translators, the people in the room—have put in some extra time to allow us to have such an excellent meeting. We don't say this often enough: Thank you.

Colleagues, I think we're ready to adjourn. Is there anything else anyone needs to raise?

**Mr. Marcel Lawson-Swain:** Can I just add one comment to Madame Chabot's comment about seniors?

I think it's really important to recognize something when dealing with seniors. From my own experience, I can tell you about my mother-in-law. She was in residential school, and because she is not in a special seniors program for indigenous people, she finds herself in a place where she feels like she's back at residential school again. So she starts her life out that way and she has to end her life that way.

I think Canada needs to do more for seniors and indigenous people in that regard. We need some specific indigenous seniors programs.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lawson-Swain. That is a sobering and thoughtful note to end on.

Thank you, colleagues.

We are adjourned.

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