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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



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

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• (1530)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 13 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 January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

In order to ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline our standard rules. Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. You have the choice, on the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. When you are done speaking, please put your mike back on mute to minimize any interference. Should any technical challenges arise, just let me know. We may need to suspend in order to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, October 9, 2020, the committee is resuming its study of urban, rural and northern indigenous housing.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin the discussion with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by questions. Our witnesses today, whom we're pleased to have with us, are as follows: from Ajungi, Madeleine Redfern, president; from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Jeff Morrison, executive director, and Steve Sutherland, manager, indigenous caucus;

[Translation]

and Ms. Heather Johnston, executive director of Projets autochtones du Québec.

I now yield the floor to Ms. Redfern.

[English]

Ms. Redfern, welcome to the committee. You have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern (President, Ajungi Arctic Consulting): Wonderful. Thank you so much for the invitation.

Just to give the members a sense of who I am, I am Inuk. I live in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. I have been involved in a wide range of issues affecting my communities and my people for over 30 years, including housing and homelessness as well as ancillary issues with respect to education, training, social justice and more.

I think most of the members are very familiar with the housing crisis we face in Nunavut. I can tell you that as a former politician—I was the mayor of Iqaluit from 2010 to 2012 and then from 2015 to 2019—housing in my community and in the territory was one of our priorities. I actually worked very closely with one of our shelters. Through not just patience but almost stubbornness, I assisted in being able to help them open up a new shelter: 16,000 square feet, 30 shelter beds, 30 transition housing beds, new offices, new programming space and 11 apartments, five of which, I believe, have been made into affordable housing.

I'm no longer in politics. I'm working with the women's shelter here in Iqaluit to help them with their COVID space response, with their financials, as well as with submitting applications recently into Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, our regional Inuit association. I'm happy to say that they got some funding and are just waiting on the response from CMHC for their rapid housing—

The Chair: Ms. Redfern, I'm going to have to interrupt you. Apparently, our sound is not coming through very clearly. If you can just stand by, we'll see if we can improve that.

In the interest of efficiency, we'll hear from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association and then go back to Ms. Redfern, when hopefully the sound quality will be better.

Mr. Morrison, welcome to the committee. You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Jeff Morrison (Executive Director, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I apologize, Ms. Redfern, for taking part of your remarks.

Thank you to the committee for inviting us to speak on this critical issue. CHRA, for those of you who are unfamiliar, is the national association representing social, non-profit and affordable housing in Canada.

I'm also joined by my colleague today, Steve Sutherland, who is the manager of our indigenous caucus. That's the caucus that represents the subset of our membership that represents urban, rural and northern indigenous housing providers across Canada. I am happy to be joining this call from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Urban, rural and northern indigenous housing providers have been around for decades. Indigenous housing providers are qualified and skilled, and have a strong track record of providing affordable housing, despite years of underfunding and an aging housing stock.

[*English*]

While CHRA and our caucus applaud the committee for undertaking this study, we believe that action is long overdue. CHRA and our caucus drew attention to the unique housing challenges facing urban, rural and northern indigenous peoples in our 2016 consultation brief on the national housing strategy. We felt that the absence of a dedicated plan in the national housing strategy, or since, has represented a glaring omission in that overall strategy.

The need for a dedicated strategy is clear. Indigenous peoples are 11 times more likely to experience homelessness than non-indigenous peoples. Over 24% of housing for indigenous peoples was below adequacy standards, compared with about 12% for non-indigenous households. According to a survey we conducted in 2019, our estimate for the cost to repair and renew the existing stock of urban indigenous housing came in at approximately \$725 million, with stories, for example, of one housing unit that was over 75 years old and had never been repaired.

Sadly, the COVID pandemic has exacerbated these disparities. In fact, I don't have to look any further than my own board of directors at CHRA. Our board member who represents the northern territories also is from Nunavut. She lives in Arviat. Due to overcrowding in her own personal dwelling, she, and then most of her extended family, contracted COVID before the holidays. Thankfully they've recovered, but sadly it's a story that we've heard all too much.

In 2018, after years of consultation and discussion, our CHRA caucus released a detailed vision and plan for an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy. This plan, which is called the "For Indigenous By Indigenous" strategy, or FIBI strategy, identifies the key elements that our caucus believes need to form the basis for a dedicated strategy.

[*Translation*]

I will now hand over to my colleague Mr. Sutherland, who will talk a little more about this vision.

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sutherland (Manager, Indigenous Caucus, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): Thank you, Jeff.

I would also like to begin my comments by acknowledging that the land I am on is in Gatineau, which is the traditional unceded ter-

ritory of the Algonquin Anishinabe. As all of us are joining from many places near and far, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and caretakers of the lands that you find yourselves on. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility for improving relationships between nations, and to improve our own understanding of local indigenous peoples and their cultures.

As Jeff stated, a for indigenous, by indigenous, or FIBI, strategy is required over and above the national housing strategy already announced in November 2017. We have sent a copy of this document to the clerk for committee members to review, but let me please identify just a few of its key recommendations.

First, the FIBI strategy calls for the development of a for indigenous, by indigenous national housing centre that is indigenous designed, owned and operated. Its purpose would be to measure and develop better data, information, research and evaluation on urban, rural and northern indigenous housing, and to administer, manage and deliver any investments allocated under this strategy, as well as monitoring any outcomes. We are finalizing a draft governance structure for such an organization, and we can share that with the committee in the coming days.

Second, we believe that we should increase the supply of stable, safe and affordable housing by 73,000 units through dedicated funding streams that would be administered by this centre.

Third, we need to increase support for tenants' well-being and long-term success with wraparound and culturally appropriate services.

Fourth, we should accelerate action on indigenous homelessness through a dedicated funding stream in Reaching Home and a dedicated strategy to ending chronic indigenous homelessness.

Fifth, we have to put a focus on northern housing. A comprehensive FIBI strategy needs to work in partnership with the territories and northern indigenous groups to eliminate the very large gap in core housing need facing indigenous peoples in Canada's north.

Our estimate is that the funding required for this FIBI programming would be \$25 billion over 10 years, which would complement the funding already found in the national housing strategy.

A FIBI housing strategy would not only address the housing needs of Canada's urban, rural and northern indigenous peoples, but also demonstrate the federal government's commitment to reconciliation. It would respond to both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and the calls for justice in the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report.

Jeff, I will pass it back to you.

• (1540)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Mr. Chair, once again we want to say thank you for your time today. We look forward to the discussion and questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with the representative of Projets autochtones du Québec.

Ms. Johnston, welcome to the committee.

You have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather Johnston (Executive Director, Projets Autochtones du Québec): Thank you.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee and to present on behalf of Projets Autochtones du Québec.

My name is Heather Johnston. I am the executive director of the organization PAQ, as we're called. I just want to clarify that I am not an indigenous person.

I will start with a very quick introduction of our organization. Our mission at Projets Autochtones du Québec is to create a better everyday life for first nations, Inuit and Métis women and men who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk in urban Montreal. We provide a wide range of accessible services and referrals that meet the basic needs and promote the well-being of the urban indigenous community in downtown Montreal.

We're not just a physical space, however. We are a supportive community for Montreal's indigenous homeless population. We are a home to people who have experienced profound trauma and stigmatization, where they can find compassion, dignity and respect. PAQ supports community members on their healing journey and on their own terms.

My comments today are made in memory Raphael "Napa" Andre. Raphael Andre was found dead earlier this month in a portapotty in downtown Montreal. Raphael was a tall, quiet Innu man. He was loved by his family and friends, and he was well known in the street communities of Montreal. He was a member of my organization. He used our shelters frequently over for the past seven years. He was at our shelter the night before he died.

We have seen a lot written about Raphael and the cause of his death—the curfew, lack of shelter spaces and public indifference. There is perhaps some truth in all of these explanations, yet they don't tell the whole story. Raphael Andre died because he was homeless.

Indigenous people experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates. Obviously this is an outcome of colonial legacies combined with ongoing systemic discrimination. The majority of indigenous peoples in Canada now reside in urban areas. It is a population that is expected to continue to grow. In Montreal, the 2018 homeless count indicated that an indigenous person is around 27 more times likely to be homeless than a non-indigenous person. An Inuk is roughly 80 times more likely.

When we look closely at the question of housing for Canada's urban indigenous peoples, there are three important elements that I believe must be in place if we're to change these statistics. Had these been in place for Raphael, perhaps we could have prevented his death.

First of all, Raphael needed a home, not just an apartment with a room. He would not have coped well living independently. He needed permanent, stable housing with wraparound harm reduction services that would meet him where he was at. He needed a home where he could live life on his own terms, with 24-hour intervention support for addiction and mental health issues. Housing for urban indigenous people will require more than bricks and mortar. It needs to offer services adapted to people's real-life needs and preferences.

Raphael also needed access to culturally adapted health care services. Most indigenous peoples living in the streets express a profound mistrust of the mainstream health care system. The experience of Joyce Echaquan is the experience of every one of the people who use our shelter. We work with people every day who refuse to seek medical care, to the detriment of their own health and sometimes their lives, yet good health care is a fundamental building block to independent living. Housing and health go hand in hand. We cannot consider one without the other. There is a long road to travel to repair the trust in the health care system. This must be a priority for all who seek to address the profound inequality experienced by the urban indigenous.

Thirdly, and finally, Raphael needed a place where he could build community and find healing with other indigenous people. This notion of interdependent community will be an important component of any housing that is adapted to the real-life needs of the urban indigenous population. Too many housing programs favour solitary living arrangements where people are pushed out into the suburbs, far away from community and completely alone. They do not cope well and often abandon stable housing to return to their life within a street community. Housing options need to be in urban areas where indigenous people congregate. They need to include both private and communal spaces where people can benefit from privacy, but also friendship, connectedness and community.

• (1545)

We cannot accept as inevitable the homelessness of our neighbours. Let Raphael's death be a rallying cry, not for more shelter beds and not for more soup kitchens, but for access, without barriers, for all urban indigenous peoples to permanent, safe, appropriate and affordable housing, with the support necessary to live an interdependent life.

Thank you very much. It is a real honour to present to the committee today.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnston.

Next, we're going to go back to Ms. Redfern.

I have been advised to ask you, Ms. Redfern, to plug in your mike and we're going to restart the clock for you so you can start from the top, but please just unplug and then plug in your microphone and then hopefully that will do the trick.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours. Thanks for your patience.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I don't know how much of my initial introduction was done, so I'll just go quickly over what may be repetitive.

I'm based here in Iqaluit, Nunavut. I have been working on housing and homelessness and other related issues for 30 years. I was the former mayor for the City of Iqaluit for two terms.

Most importantly, with respect to this topic, I assisted a men's shelter in getting two new buildings, that is, 16,000 square feet, with 30 shelter beds, 30 transition housing beds, new offices, a new programming space and 11 apartments, of which five are to be used for portable housing.

I am now working in the private sector and assisting the Iqaluit Agvvik women's shelter in securing funding, so that they too may now be able to secure funding for transition and affordable housing. I am also on the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness board, so I am definitely connected at the local level and the national level.

The issues we face for housing and homelessness in Nunavut are mostly well understood and known. The challenge I find, as both a former politician and now in the private sector, is the lack of coordination between the different levels of government and Inuit organizations, and the disconnect that happens with our communities that may not even have shelters and definitely struggle with sometimes not having the community organizations that can apply for funding.

There is a challenge, as well, with the high level of staff turnover with all the levels of government on this topic, as well as with the Inuit organizations. It's like a game of Snakes and Ladders. You're always trying to move forward, but every time you have an election, a change in leadership, a change in staff, a lot of that work that was being done is lost. For the next person who comes in, often there are delays and there is not good handover on the files, and it just feels as if you're never catching up.

The federal government has provided the government in Nunavut with almost \$300 million for the next 10 years to help with the development of more public housing, as well as some affordable housing. Unfortunately, it's nowhere near what is required, because 3,000 units, at a cost of approximately \$630,000 per unit, would require almost \$1.89 billion. You can imagine that the \$300 million is a tremendous shortfall.

Nonetheless, even when there is additional funding, like under the co-investment program or recently the rapid housing initiative, I find there's not enough people with the capacity to develop those applications. We end up seeing, time and time again, our region not submitting applications or not enough applications.

I really think the priority in being able to solve the issues here is more leadership, co-operation, coordination and capacity development. There are ways in which we can solve this, but not working together is definitely, I think, the number one challenge.

Thank you.

• (1550)

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

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

We will go to Ms. Falk for six minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you very much for each of your testimonies and information. There are a couple of things I wanted to comment on.

Ms. Redfern, before you were interrupted in your remarks, I wanted to make a comment on when you put your name on a ballot to serve communities. I want to thank you for doing that, because each one of us knows how difficult that is, but I wanted to make a note about the bureaucracy. In my previous working experience, cutting red tape and bureaucracy is one of the reasons.... Having all this red tape everywhere made my job harder. It was harder to be able to assist people, so I think you make a great point about the lack of coordination. I don't think it's just on this file, I actually think it's overlapping on a lot of different subjects.

I also wanted to say to Ms. Johnston, I believe it was, on the bricks and mortar, "more than bricks and mortar", we've heard that a lot within this study thus far. Also you made a comment about the need to build community. I'm a big advocate for community. I'm a mom of young kids. I think we need more community in society as a whole, and it's so important, especially when we talk about recovery or we talk about healing and reconciliation. That's such an important component in all of this, not just when it comes to housing but in society as a whole.

The first question I have would be for Mr. Morrison or Mr. Sutherland. My riding is very rural. I wouldn't say we're remote, but it could be remote. If you're three hours away from a store, for example, in my mind, that's the definition of "remote". If you have no way to get there because there's no public transportation, and you may not have a vehicle, I see that as remote. I'm just wondering about the difference between urban, rural and remote homelessness and what that looks like.

• (1555)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Perhaps I can start off.

Thank you, Ms. Falk, for the question. Coming from a small northern Ontario town myself, I can appreciate that.

There has, at times, almost been a stigma or perhaps a perception that homelessness is a downtown city problem. Certainly it is. I'm sitting in downtown Ottawa. I live downtown, I walk home 10 minutes and I'll see a number of homeless people on my walk. I'm sure any downtown core will face the same, but it's not confined in any way, shape or form to our urban centres. In fact, in rural settings, whether it's rural Nova Scotia, rural Alberta, no matter where in the country, homelessness is present. There's actually an organization that's been created, the National Alliance to End Rural and Remote Homelessness, to address this problem head on.

It's often, though, more hidden in rural and remote settings. It tends to be more in the form of couch surfing. It's not as visible. In terms of a distinction, I would argue that, in fact, although the circumstances and the causes are certainly unique, the prevalence of it is certainly equal in either rural or urban settings.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

My follow-up for that is this: Is there a difference in programs that are available for rural and remote versus urban? In the fight against homelessness, do people in these areas have the same access or do they meet the same qualifications as, say, an urban organization?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: One of the challenges facing rural communities or smaller communities, at least from a federal perspective, is that under the federal Reaching Home program, there are a number of community advisory boards, CABs, which serve as, essentially, the local coordinator for homelessness services in those regions. I may be corrected on the number. I believe there were 62 prior to the most recent expansion of Reaching Home. However, that still leaves a large number of more rural and smaller communities out of those CABs, out of those structures. Something we had called for some time ago was an increase in the number of CABs available.

In terms of the service, can you find, for example, front-line support services in a rural community versus an urban one? It's a greater challenge, for sure.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Ms. Redfern, I just saw you shaking your head. Do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I think it's important to realize that there are 3,500 municipalities in this country. There are 62 designated communities under Reaching Home. That falls significantly short in covering every municipality.

I agree that there is a lot of undetected homelessness in our communities, especially in the north where you can't live out on the streets. You would simply perish.

The big distinction or difference is that in the most remote areas, you can't just hop on a Greyhound bus and get to an urban centre. The cost of an airline ticket out to Ottawa is at least, on a good day, \$2,000. When you're homeless here, you don't even have the benefit of being able to get to an urban centre. Yes, we know there are never enough shelters, but there are often more services available in those urban areas.

Even in Iqaluit we have three or four shelters. We have a soup kitchen and two food banks. In some communities there are no shelters. There are no food banks. There is literally nothing, so it is that much harder for those people to get services, especially if

they're dealing with addiction or mental health issues. You can't even get from the nearby community of Kimmirut to Iqaluit without having several hundred dollars, and that's just for a one-way ticket.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Redfern and Ms. Falk.

Next is Mr. Dong.

Go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

First, I want to thank all the witnesses for offering their time, advice and observations. I had some questions coming into today's meeting and your information definitely helped me to answer some of those questions. I will try my best to ask questions to all three groups.

First, to Ms. Redfern, thank you very much for your advocacy and your years of service to your community.

In terms of meeting the government's objectives to eliminate chronic homelessness in Canada, what measures specifically do you see as being needed in this new strategy to end homelessness in the north?

• (1600)

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I'm a data geek, and I think it's important for my territorial government to actually get a little bit better data. We know that at least 3,000 houses are required in this territory of approximately 38,000 people.

The biggest issue, as I said, is having all three levels of government and Inuit organizations working better together. I actually recognize that my Inuit organizations have quite a lot of money in the bank and are going to get a lot more money from the resource development. I think the only way to solve that is by seeing the Inuit organizations play a bigger role in using some of the millions, if not billions, of dollars that we have to help our people out of homelessness.

That requires a bit of a change in the leadership mindset, which is a perception that only the federal government and sometimes the territorial government have a responsibility to deal with this. As I said, the money in the bank doesn't really help anyone at the end of the day.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Wait just a second, Mr. Dong.

Ms. Redfern, the sound quality from your mike is causing some challenges with the interpretation. I'm not sure that there is anything we can do about it, except to ask you to speak slowly and clearly, and we'll do the best we can.

Go ahead, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair. I hope I get that half-minute back in my total allotment.

Thank you very much, Ms. Redfern. Having that change to the mindset of leadership was a very good recommendation.

My second question is to Ms. Johnston. Thank you very much for sharing with us the story of Raphael. It was very powerful and I think it will stick with me for quite some time, guiding my work going forward.

In terms of housing for indigenous people in urban or rural settings, do you think that the existing housing stock is adequate to meet the cultural needs of indigenous communities? What should be done to address it if it's not adequate?

Ms. Heather Johnston: Thank you.

I can really only speak to the urban situation. That's where I work and that's what I know best. My work is very much focused in downtown Montreal so I'll speak specifically to that. I would say the housing stock is definitely not sufficient. It's not sufficient in either quantity or quality. Obviously we look at the numbers of indigenous people who are homeless in urban Montreal. We know there's a lack of affordable housing on the market and obviously that seems to be easing a little bit in Montreal and other urban areas with the pandemic. However, the stock that is coming on the market is not necessarily affordable housing.

I think the more important issue that I tried to raise is in the type of housing that is available. What's really missing is this supported housing, what we call "housing with wraparound services". A lot of the social housing units available in Quebec are single units. They are often out in the suburbs. There are very few supports that go with it. Time and time again, our experience has been that when we try to put people from our community who have been using the shelter—and who may have been chronically homeless for years—into that type of housing, it is not adapted to their needs. Often within months, they are back on the street.

That also goes back to the question of community, but having the supports in place to allow people who are chronically homeless and have mental health or addiction issues to live independently takes those wraparound services. When those are not available, when we put people in individual units out in the suburbs with no supports, that does not respond to the question of homelessness or to the need for housing in any way, shape or form.

• (1605)

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you.

Can I ask Ms. Redfern to chime in as well? Can you give us a bit of perspective from the north about how the national housing strategy is going to improve the housing stock situation up there?

The Chair: Please give a brief answer if you could, Ms. Redfern.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: The \$300 million will help build some much-needed public housing—just not enough, unfortunately. The \$9 million for affordable housing... Again, I think the Nunavut Housing Corporation is trying to see how it can best use that along with other monies to build more units. The challenge will be in the fact that there's not enough money to meet the entire needs of the territory.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Redfern, and Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

My first questions will be directed to Ms. Johnston.

First, thank you, Ms. Johnston, for accepting our invitation. It is a privilege to have you here.

Next, I would like to pass on our best thoughts about Mr. Raphaël André.

I also wanted to salute your initiative. You are a not-for-profit organization, or NPO, fairly new to Montreal. Your goal is to respond to the needs of homeless indigenous people living in Montreal. Your presentation allows us to learn more about your organization and the services it offers.

Our study focuses on the challenges and barriers related to housing for indigenous populations, particularly in urban areas. You mentioned some of the challenges, including the provision of services. In terms of housing, in particular, you said that current housing does not meet the needs of the population you serve.

How could those needs be adequately met?

Ms. Heather Johnston: The issue of housing for the urban homeless population needs to be approached from a number of perspectives.

People experiencing homelessness in an urban setting are part of a true community, a community of solidarity. We see a lot of interdependence between these people. One of the current realities is that providing individual housing far from this community is a failure. These people are unable to adapt to a solitary life away from the community. Geographically, housing must be found that is within the community. This is extremely important.

In my opinion, housing that would adequately meet the needs of these communities would be balanced in terms of private and common spaces. We manage transitional apartments for the homeless indigenous community in Montreal. They are often individual units and there is no common space. Despite the great demand and the high rate of homelessness, we sometimes have difficulty allocating these units to individuals. When one lives alone in a dwelling and there are restrictions on visitors and consumption, one does not have the opportunity to live a community life. We can provide housing, but it may remain empty. There may be a high turnover of occupants. We can see that this leads to failure.

Housing must therefore be located in the centre of a community. It must be adapted to community life, and it must provide access to the mental health and addiction services that the community needs. There is too much “dry” housing, that is, housing in which people are not allowed to use. There is a need for housing that is adapted to the needs and realities of this community. There is housing that is vacant, but oftentimes, we can't get people into it. People don't find stability, because the housing doesn't really meet their needs, the needs of the community.

• (1610)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you for your answer.

Is there a forum among all housing programs, including the national housing strategy, where you can identify these needs so that the programs really meet what you have just described?

With respect to the strategy, could there be better communication? My understanding is that housing is being built, but it is not meeting the needs. How can we make sure it meets the needs? After all, that's the goal.

Ms. Heather Johnston: We need to develop housing programs; it takes more than housing, it takes a program. Housing must meet the needs of individuals as well as those of families. Intervention needs must be considered. We don't just provide housing, we provide intervention, psychosocial and medical services. We provide community spaces.

In Quebec, we work a lot with the organization AccèsLogis Québec, a Société d'habitation du Québec program. Programs like AccèsLogis Québec simply offer a building. You have to design housing programs, not building programs. We need programs that meet all the needs of people, which are complex.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnston. Your time has expired.

Ms. Chabot, it is with great pleasure that I inform you that your microphone is on your head.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I know; it's a challenge.

[English]

The Chair: Next is Ms. Collins for six minutes, please.

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Collins. You have the floor.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Thank you so much.

My first two questions are to Ms. Redfern.

We heard from Ms. Johnston about the importance of on-site wraparound housing supports. I'm coming to you from Victoria, the homelands of the Lekwungen speaking people, the Esquimalt and the Songhees first nations. We have the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness here, which offers culturally supportive, affordable housing. I have spoken to them and many others who have talked about how wraparound housing supports are so important and crucial in supporting the emotional and spiritual health of individuals.

I am wondering if you could first speak about what types of wraparound housing supports you're aware of in Nunavut, and whether you believe the federal government needs to be doing more regarding targeted support for wraparound on-site supportive housing.

• (1615)

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: When developing the new program for Uquutaq, what was important was to make the community groups aware of, under the Reaching Home funding, the value and need to develop stronger and better partnerships among the groups, so we were beginning to facilitate that. Part of the problem sometimes is that, especially with the highly transient population, you get new people coming in and they really focus on their own instead of remembering to reach out.

We do have a bit of a challenge, as well, in trying to increase the number of Inuit who participate on the community boards.

I'm a big proponent, also, of our needing to see more Inuit actually staffing these community groups. Tukisigiavik is one group that does a lot of that, where you don't know who the Inuit board members are versus the staff and Inuit clients. That's the best model, so reminding and getting the groups to work together so that the clients have access to more services is really important.

There's quite a lot available in Iqaluit. As I was saying earlier, unfortunately in the smaller communities there's a lot less. There may be no shelters. There may be a fly in, fly out mental health worker. The vacancy rates for those are very high in the government. It's 50%. There is yet to be an addictions treatment centre, but there are plans to develop that. There is funding for these. The challenge for the groups is to be aware of the funding to set up these societies. Sometimes you can get that far, but then there's a lack of buildings for these societies to work out of.

If we're going to tackle this, I absolutely agree with you that we need to look at what a client or a community needs to help people who are most at risk, homeless or near homeless, to have these support services so that they can address a lot of the challenges they face to be successful. This includes more training and education, and housing tied to Inuit employment plans to therefore have more local people access housing. A lot of our housing is staff housing, and predominantly people in the south coming up get prioritization for that.

There's a lot of things that need to be looked at.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Ms. Redfern, thank you so much.

I have about two minutes left, so I want to ask Mr. Morrison and Mr. Sutherland to elaborate a bit on this.

The government has been promising an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy for years, without action, so I wanted to hear from you on what you see as the critical next steps to ensure that we have that kind of strategy, that it is by and for indigenous people, and how crucial this is to address the current housing crisis we're seeing.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Thank you for the question.

I think the critical next step is to act. We are looking to get, as soon as we can, an announcement of an urban, rural and northern indigenous strategy. As Steve and I mentioned in our remarks, our caucus, which is made up of urban, rural and northern indigenous housing providers, has developed—it wasn't us but they who developed it—a vision and, in fact, guidance and a plan for what that strategy could look like. It's our so-called FIBI strategy.

We are just finalizing a governance structure for what an operational structure to operate that strategy would look like. In fact, there are other models already in place that we've modelled this FIBI strategy on. This is in Minister Hussen's mandate letter, so I think now is the time to say, okay, we've done the study and there's consensus. Now, let's act.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's great.

I might have just 20 seconds. Could you quickly talk about the needs of people with disabilities and indigenous peoples with disabilities in the strategy?

• (1620)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: There's no doubt that the needs of indigenous peoples with disabilities are a unique situation. Between what we hope will be an urban, rural and northern strategy, as well as some of the investments already contained in the existing national housing strategy, we feel that there are opportunities to combine and to layer some of those programs.

As well, I think it was Ms. Redfern who talked about the importance of partnerships with municipalities and other orders of government, so that we're building not only the bricks and mortar but building in an absolutely culturally appropriate way to ensure accessibility for those with disabilities. Those all need to layer on top of each other.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrison and Ms. Collins.

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

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much to our witnesses for the testimony. It's a great conversation today, by the way, and there are great questions.

I want to start with my friend Ms. Redfern, if I could, who has been dealing with -40°C weather.

I perked up when you mentioned jurisdictional issues and the challenges that go from there. You touched on it a bit. I could be wrong, but I think you had a bit more to say on that. Did you want to expand a bit more? I'd love to hear about that.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Thank you.

I think we often put up jurisdictional barriers as a way to say that one level of government is not responsible for fixing the housing or

the homelessness issue, when in fact I believe we all have a responsibility. It's often just a question of coming together in the same room and figuring out what particular role one can play or is prepared to play. It's too often used as a way of not moving forward.

Having been in politics and having seen what can be done, such as the Uqutaq shelter, I will say that's actually one excellent example where five different main actors, including different federal departments, actually for once got all their acts together and helped each other make something happen. It took a lot of work, effort and finessing, but it can be done on a larger scale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Yes, I agree with that for sure, and I'm glad you mentioned that. Do you think there is an easier way? I'll ask other panellists too, but I'll continue with you, Ms. Redfern, if I could.

Yes, the federal government has the primary responsibility for this, but for a lot of the programs that get started, whether they be federal, provincial, municipal or with other stakeholders involved, the process always seems to be very complex and very difficult to access. Some people on the call mentioned whether they know or not that the program actually exists in the first place, but then there's filling out the application, which seems to be even more complex these days than ever before. There's the staff time it takes, along with the waiting period and then the implementation. Then, when you finally get it, by the time you sign the contracts, sometimes that window to complete the project is very narrow.

I'll start with you and then open it up to the floor.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I think I had the benefit of being in politics at the same time as actually helping the community group, truth be told, with the vast majority of their applications, so I managed to get first-hand experience that a lot of what was being requested was for the purpose of due diligence and to ensure that the funding was actually going to go to a project or to a group that was going to deliver.

The problem is that, with the community organization board, I had to produce probably almost a hundred different types of documents for the CMHC co-investment application. Some of it, I saw, had little or no value—and I understand the respective roles of what a politician or a government is required to produce.

I think we saw in the past how for the Auditor General of Canada, in particular with what had been the former Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, there tended to be an onerous amount of extra paperwork for northern, remote or indigenous communities. I think that stems from a perception that they lack capacity and that we can't trust them.

Yes, sometimes we do have capacity issues, but figuring out what is the necessary and good data to demonstrate that a project can and should be funded, and recognizing that timelines and some flexibility are absolutely required.... As I said earlier, it was almost out of sheer stubbornness that we managed to get the Uqutaq project to the point where the doors opened, with an extremely patient seller of the two buildings, because most of our local contractors would not have waited two years for the CMHC co-investment process.

Similarly, right now we have a very sympathetic seller for Agvvik, but you can't expect that level of patience.

I was just talking to the Nunavut Housing Corporation guy, and he said that we get these high-level political directions that we need these programs to work, and then the bureaucrats are meeting with the bureaucrats and things just stall. We need to see some better direction or some better accountability between the bureaucrats and the politicians, because the money is not going out the door. The people are in need. People are dying, and that's just not acceptable.

• (1625)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I agree. Thank you.

Mr. Morrison, I'll get to you on my next round.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Redfern and Mr. Schmale.

Finally, Mr. Vaughan, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I'm going to ask some quick questions, so I hope the answers are as quick as the questions.

On page 19 of the national housing strategy, we talk about the specific need for an urban, rural and northern housing strategy. That was when it was released, but in the interim—and this is to Mr. Sutherland—we have opened all programs. Under previous iterations of housing programs federally, indigenous groups were forbidden from applying to certain programs simply because of their indigenous status, whether on or off reserve.

You're aware that we have opened the co-investment fund, the rental housing market fund and the Canada housing benefit. All housing programs within the national housing strategy have been opened to indigenous groups to apply. Is that your experience?

Mr. Steve Sutherland: Yes, that's correct.

I would only add that many members of our caucus have expressed concerns about the application times and processes for indigenous providers, as Ms. Redfern said.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: You would recommend a capacity-building component to an urban strategy to make sure that it's going to be urban-led and urban-delivered, and that the management structure also be supported through a program.

Mr. Steve Sutherland: Sure, I would suggest not only the capacity piece but also designing the application processes, in part, with indigenous peoples at the same time.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: To Jeff Morrison, when the homelessness partnering strategy was transitioned to Reaching Home, are you

aware that we added six new communities, a 10% increase, to the number of designated communities? It's the first time an increase had ever been financed as part of the program.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Yes, and in no way, shape or form do we want to suggest that the government has done nothing on homelessness. I think the Reaching Home program and the reforms to it have been welcome.

To the earlier question about rural and remote, though, I think this is an opportunity to expand Reaching Home to some of those communities outside of the core 62, or whatever the number is now, to reach them.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madeleine Redfern, the northern community was given a special carve-out that was separate and distinct from the rural community. Can you explain why it's so critical to make sure northern and rural communities are separated because of the unique governance structure of the territories?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Part of it is the unique governance structure, but also there is just the reality that you can't ship construction materials up here 365 days a year. There are some very unique challenges with respect to timelines that require way more flexibility for a project to be multi-year.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Would you support block funding over multiple years as opposed to project-by-project or year-by-year application funding?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I absolutely support multi-year funding. If that requires putting forward a five-year or 10-year plan or strategy that then gets updated, it is something that at least builds in some mutual accountability as to whether things are moving forward, and where and why they are not.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Thank you.

Madam Johnston, in terms of Quebec, the Quebec housing model is designed by the National Assembly and the Quebec government. It's delivered by the Quebec government. It's the decision of to where to build housing, what kind of housing, who to build housing for and in fact who to house. Those decisions are all governed by the Quebec government the same way that the health accords for mental health and addiction services are also totally the jurisdiction of the Quebec government.

Is that right?

• (1630)

Ms. Heather Johnston: Yes, that is correct, except under the Reaching Home funding there is an indigenous component that is still managed by the federal government.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: If that system is not addressing the needs of a very particular racial group in the province—and your testimony seems to suggest it does not—is that not the very definition of systemic racism?

Ms. Heather Johnston: I feel like that's a bit of a loaded question.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: We've heard from Quebec leaders that there is no systemic racism in Quebec. I think we're seeing here in the housing sector that, without an intentional federal program and intentional federal goals set around indigenous housing in urban centres, we are subject to a system that has failed a racial group.

Ms. Heather Johnston: I would just respond to that by saying that when there are these tensions between federal and provincial levels and when there are these complex systems, it's the community groups trying to provide housing, design housing projects and seek funding that suffer from those tensions and those complexities.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: When the system fails a specific racial group in the province of Quebec, that is systemic racism, is it not?

The Chair: Provide a short answer, if you could.

Ms. Heather Johnston: Yes. I think we only have to look at the case of Raphael Andre to see how systemic racism plays out in the lives of people.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: The last question is for Mr. Morrison.

The Chair: That was the last question.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: It's no problem.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Louise Chabot: That was a nice essay on systemic racism, Mr. Vaughan.

I will focus my questions on the subject of housing.

First, Ms. Johnston, thank you for your replies. It is my understanding that your organization needs different sources of funding to develop its services.

How might federal government programs contribute to the development of your organization?

Ms. Heather Johnston: The federal government, of course, has different forms of funding, but the provincial government is the main source of funding for community groups like ours.

As other witnesses expressed, we need simplified and clear funding systems. In our organization's experience, we often have to deal with different federal-provincial transfer programs, and we get stuck because of the tensions that exist between these two systems.

This is currently the case for the Reaching Home program for designated communities, where there is a federal-provincial transfer of management. There is a great deal of anxiety and angst among community groups about how this will be managed and what changes will result from this program. There are many unknowns in this transfer of the federal program to the provinces, which makes it difficult for those who provide housing on the ground. This is an

example of the complexity of the situation between the two levels of government.

A similar phenomenon can be seen with respect to the differing priorities between Housing First and social housing strategies. The latter may be more likely to adopt social housing construction strategies. These tensions and the complexity they create do not, therefore, make it easier to provide housing for those who need it.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnston.

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

We'll have a final question from Ms. Collins, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'm sorry, Chair. I missed the instructions from the chair.

The Chair: Ms. Collins has the last two and a half minutes, and she's about to ask her first question. She's been thinking hard, and I know it's going to be really good.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I didn't hear you, as well. Thank you.

Ms. Johnston, we know that this government and consecutive governments have massively and systematically underfunded indigenous housing. I would argue that is systemic racism on the part of our federal government. You don't need to comment on that part.

I'm wondering about your organization. What kind of dollar amount would be required for your organization to be able to meet the needs of the people you serve, and how important is it that the funding is sustainable?

Ms. Heather Johnston: I'll start with last part of the question in terms of sustainability. Obviously a lot of community organizations providing housing work on these year-to-year annual budgets, where it's hard to see past the next nine to 12 months. Obviously stability of funding and the ability to plan are hugely important in any funding program that's designed.

The reality is that a small community organization like mine can provide a limited amount of housing to the indigenous community. We can provide housing that's responsive, that's culturally adapted, but the overall response to the crisis of housing for urban indigenous peoples requires a provincial response, a response at all three levels of government. I can't put a dollar figure on what I would need to resolve the issue.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's okay.

Because we only have a minute left, I want to ask one more question to you and it's about indigenous peoples in Canada. They are the youngest and fastest-growing population.

With this in mind, how important is it that the federal government create and implement an urban, rural and northern housing strategy to meet the needs of young indigenous peoples and young indigenous families?

Ms. Heather Johnston: I'm very sorry. You were cutting in and out. Could you really quickly repeat it?

Ms. Laurel Collins: For sure. It was mainly about indigenous peoples being the youngest and fastest-growing population, and the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy meeting the needs of those young indigenous peoples, young indigenous families.

The Chair: Give a brief response, if you could, Ms. Johnston.

Ms. Heather Johnston: Obviously, it is absolutely critical. If we're going to stop what we see as chronic homelessness—and I see this every day—of people who have lived for 30 or 40 years on the streets, we need to respond to the needs of people when they are young. We need to have strategies in place to prevent homelessness.

We see huge waves of young indigenous people arriving in the streets of Montreal. We need strategies. We need programs to respond specifically to those needs, so that we're not, 30 years from now, trying to provide services for people who have chronically spent 30 years living on the streets of urban cities.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnston. Thank you, Ms. Collins

To all of our witnesses, thank you so much for being here and for your patience as we deal with this new reality and the technical challenges that come with it. Thank you for the work that you do and for your comprehensive testimony here today. It will be extremely helpful to us.

With that, colleagues, we're going to suspend to allow this panel to disconnect and to test the microphones for the next panel. We'll be back in three minutes.

We stand suspended.

• (1635) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1646)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We are continuing our study of urban, rural and northern indigenous housing.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses. As an individual, we have Elizabeth Sam; and from the Vancouver Native Housing Society, we have David Eddy, chief executive officer.

Ms. Sam, we're going to lead off with you. For your opening statement, you have five minutes.

You have the floor. Welcome to the committee.

Ms. Elizabeth Sam (As an Individual): Hi everyone. My name is Elizabeth Sam. I'm Dakelh from Nak'azdli Whut'en. I am a Lhts'umusyoo. That's the Beaver clan. My parents are Ruby and Brandon Taylor. My grandmother, who I live with and care for, is Lillian Sam. She is a well-respected elder here in Nak'azdli.

I would like to acknowledge that I am on the unceded territory of the Dakelh people.

I am a third year sun dancer, a woman's pipe carrier and a fire keeper for our local sweat lodge. I have lived life on the red road for six years, which means no alcohol. That is my form of resistance against the powers that want me to be a drunk, uninformed indigenous statistic.

I am a newly elected councillor for our band office and will be serving a four-year term, but I don't represent them today. I speak as an indigenous woman who has struggled with intergenerational trauma and has overcome many obstacles, including homelessness.

I want to talk a bit about the earth, the land and the connection that indigenous peoples have with the earth. The earth is our home, so it is a reciprocal. If you think about sharks, whales and the small fish that eat the plankton and bacteria off the whales, that is like humans and the earth. We take care of the earth, and the earth takes care of us.

I know that we need more houses here in Nak'azdli and on other reserves in the nation.

The thing about Mother Earth is that our culture, language and ceremonies are all connected to the land. This is why we protect the land and want to ensure that first nations' traditional lands are protected from industries and infrastructures that will pollute the water and the land, because if we don't have the water and the land, none of us will survive and we won't be able to build homes on the land.

With intergenerational trauma and colonization—being disconnected from the land and having your identity taken away, being removed from your land and told to live somewhere else—this is where you get mental health issues, depression and anxiety. If you're away from home you lose your culture, your ceremonies and your pride in being an indigenous person.

I know that when I was living in Vancouver, before I moved home when the pandemic hit, I was feeling the effects of depression and anxiety from being away from home. Then, when I moved home in March, it was instantly just a weight off. I was feeling more at home, more myself and feeling safe again.

I feel like it's not just indigenous people who are connected to the land; non-indigenous people come from the land also. I know a lot of Caucasian or white people who do ceremonies on the land, and cherish and protect the land because they get so much from it.

Unconditional love is what helped me to come back from addictions, self-sabotaging cycles and all of that trauma. I just think that unconditional love is what we need to be giving to the homeless people, to all people, and unconditional support. If people feel like they are valued, loved and heard, they will want to try harder to live a better life.

How can the government help? It can be through more education in elementary and high school about how to rent homes, interest and mortgages, loans and saving money. I didn't learn any of that stuff in high school. I'm sure we all learned some stuff that is not even relevant in my life today, so more education on those types of things. We did touch on mortgages and interest in some of the math, but it wasn't what it should have been. They should have been teaching gardening and stuff like that.

I don't have too much more to share, other than the importance of unconditional love for other human beings.

• (1650)

Since we're talking about reconciliation and the era of reconciliation, I wouldn't be able to reconcile.... Let's say, Mr. Chair, I was in a fight with you and I was supposed to reconcile with you. I wouldn't be able to reconcile with you until I reconciled the issues within myself, and then you reconciled the issues within yourself. Then we could reconcile. That's kind of how it is for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Canada.

Were there any questions?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sam. We're going to hear from Mr. Eddy and then there will undoubtedly be questions. Thank you very much for your remarks.

Mr. Eddy is next, on behalf of Vancouver Native Housing Society.

Welcome to the committee. You have five minutes for your opening statement.

Mr. David Eddy (Chief Executive Officer, Vancouver Native Housing Society): Before I begin with the body of my presentation, I want to acknowledge that I am privileged to be speaking to you today from the traditional and unceded territories of the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

My name is David Eddy and I am the CEO of Vancouver Native Housing Society. We were created to serve the urban indigenous community in Vancouver in 1984. We have about 850 residents within 20 buildings.

I am here to speak about the urban indigenous community and the federal plan for an indigenous housing strategy. I'm on the working group of the CHRA indigenous caucus. CHRA is the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association and their responsibility and *raison d'être* is to ensure that every Canadian has a safe place to call home.

I am on the indigenous caucus working group and we are trying to convince the federal government of the importance of looking at the urban, rural and northern—or as we say, URN—indigenous housing community as a distinct sector. Right now, the federal government only looks at indigenous people in Canada as three distinct entities. Those entities are first nations, Inuit and Métis.

It strikes us as incomprehensible that there is not a separate distinction for the inhabitants of the urban, rural and northern native communities. We know from the last StatsCan survey that only 13% of indigenous folks live on reserve. There is no question that the vast majority of indigenous people in Canada are urban, rural or

northern constituents and call these areas home. For them to be more reasonably supported, represented and accounted for, we've come up with a proposal that we call FIBI, which stands for “for indigenous, by indigenous”, that supports our contention for a fourth strategy: the urban, rural and northern strategy.

In the seventies through the mid-nineties, Canada was regarded as the envy of the western world in terms of its housing programs, which were created and supported mostly by the federal government. In 1978, CMHC came out with the urban native housing program. It was an innovative, well-thought-out, highly regarded and, some even said, well-funded housing initiative. It took into consideration the unique needs, challenges and obstacles that members of the urban indigenous communities had to face. It recognized, for example, that capacity needed to be built, and to an extent, it funded that. It was ahead of its time, and looking back, I don't think it would be a stretch to say that it was a sincere attempt at reconciliation before reconciliation was regarded as the concept it is now. That's the kind of government recognition we would like to see again for our residents.

This is not a complicated matter from the point of view of mathematics or fairness. Where it seems to get tricky and intractable is in the political arena. We have never received an opinion from the federal government as to how our rationale might be faulty, ill-conceived or nonsensical. Whenever we present to government, we get asked questions that imply those asking understand and are empathetic to our dilemma. We see folks nodding their heads, scratching their chins pensively and it's like Archimedes in the bathtub, a eureka moment. We think that finally they get it. Then the session ends, people go on their way and we never hear back from them.

It has been a rough row to hoe over the past number of years, but we are finally starting to get traction. These committee sessions are the most obvious evidence of that. There have been statements made and different resolutions passed recently by various bodies to look at URN as a viable fourth distinction. There are over 100 urban native housing organizations across the country, many with over 40 years of experience in providing housing and services to this distinct and unique population. It would be bordering on criminal to separate these residents from their long-term, trusted and caring providers. This system ain't broke; please don't try to fix it.

In B.C., we have the first grassroots indigenous housing authority operating and managing urban indigenous housing providers in the country. The Aboriginal Housing Management Association, known as AHMA, oversees the operations of 41 member organizations and has done so independently for the last nine years. Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services does similar work out of Sault Ste. Marie and is the largest housing provider in the province.

• (1655)

From Newfoundland to Yukon, our sister organizations are delivering essential housing services to members who do not fall under the three distinct categories recommended by the feds. That is a massive amount of experience and expertise that stands to be lost, to say nothing of the lives and communities disrupted if a fourth distinction of urban, rural and northern housing communities is not recognized and embedded into an indigenous housing strategy.

Thanks for hearing me.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Eddy.

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

Mr. Vis, you have six minutes.

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

Mr. Eddy, it's nice to see you again. I want to just touch on some of the comments made about the co-investment fund by members in the previous allotment. They talked about the applications being overly cumbersome.

Can you share with us how much time and how many supports the Vancouver Native Housing Society has to put in just to complete an application with CMHC?

Mr. David Eddy: In fact, we are on the cusp of putting in a co-investment fund application—we have to go through our provincial funding first because that's the nature of the co-investment fund—so I can't speak to direct experience. I can tell you that nobody I've spoken to in housing across the country says it's a walk in the park by any stretch of the imagination. It is complicated and cumbersome from what I've heard.

Mr. Brad Vis: With regard to FIBI, in the last hour we heard about \$25 billion over 10 years to compliment the existing federal national housing strategy. Under FIBI, if the Government of Canada was to invest that type of money into urban indigenous, rural and northern housing, what would be the economic benefit for young, indigenous people in Canada?

• (1700)

Mr. David Eddy: It would be massive. As was stated earlier, the indigenous demographic is the fastest growing and largest demographic of any in the country, including the immigrant demographics. There is a massive need. I think it's something upwards of 60,000 to 70,000 units that would be required in the next 10 years to put a serious dent in any kind of effort to make housing more available and affordable for indigenous folks.

Mr. Brad Vis: Would it be right for me to assume that all of the construction would be undertaken by indigenous tradespeople as well?

Mr. David Eddy: I don't think you could say that. We would make efforts to engage as many indigenous folks as possible, but we talked earlier about capacity and such, and the lack of programs for indigenous people to be trained in various trades. That would have to dovetail in. It would be part of the FIBI effort to build this housing. Definitely, there would be a portion of that money going towards training indigenous constructors.

Mr. Brad Vis: Indigenous Services Canada does operate some programs for urban indigenous folks. Unfortunately, it still has not gotten back to our committee with a full breakdown of how much money and staff are involved. Do you ultimately believe that it would be better if we reduced the size of Indigenous Services Canada and the services it provides to indigenous people today, and transferred those services to indigenous-run organizations to serve indigenous people?

Mr. David Eddy: I'd have to defer to my boss to answer that question, as he works for ISC.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

Mr. David Eddy: I'm just kidding you.

I think if it is done in an effective manner and folks already working for ISC, especially the indigenous ones, were to be segued into those other jobs or that other organization, then absolutely.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

Mr. David Eddy: For indigenous, by indigenous by definition speaks to that.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

In our testimony on Tuesday, I asked one witness about some of the improvements we've seen at CMHC in responding to indigenous clientele. What do you think CMHC does really well right now, and what do you think it does poorly?

Mr. David Eddy: What they are starting to do again—which they did really well in the 1970s and 1980s, as I alluded to earlier—is get back in the game. I think housing, to a large extent, belongs with CMHC. When I look at the rapid housing initiative, as quick, rapid and intense as that process was—we put in a submission to the rapid housing initiative—I think there was a lot of good to it. This is especially apparent if you compare it to the national housing co-investment fund, which was so overloaded and cumbersome.

With the rapid housing initiative, you had 30 days to get your proposal in. They'd get back to you in 30 days, and then you had a year to build something. That strikes me as exciting and challenging and really gets things done quickly.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, sir.

I'll end with one comment. I agree that for the large municipalities in Canada that got the funding right away, that was the truth. However, I wish that type of approach had been extended to the smaller rural and remote communities that needed access to these funds just as much. Unfortunately they were subject to an application.

We really appreciated your testimony today, sir.

Mr. David Eddy: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Next we will go to Mr. Turnbull, please, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to both of the witnesses for being here today and for sharing your knowledge, expertise and lived experience with us.

Maybe I'll start with Mr. Eddy.

I heard you mention the scale of funding or investment that's required and the number of units of housing.

I also wondered if I could comment on whether you've done an assessment at all or have anything to add on the situation of inadequate housing. There is probably lots of existing housing—nowhere near enough, everyone recognizes—on which, in addition to massive investment in new housing, a significant investment is required to upgrade. This existing housing may be inadequate and overcrowded.

Could you speak to that and to the scale of that investment?

• (1705)

Mr. David Eddy: Yes. Of our 20 properties, 10 are over 30 years old and coming to what is known as the end of their operating agreements, which in our case is 35 years. We have some housing that isn't ready for redevelopment. That's the sort of logical next step after the operating agreements expire, so we have to keep those buildings up. Through processes such as replacement reserve, modernization and improvement, and other tools, we do try to do that on a regular basis. However, every year that costs more and more money, and even though replacement reserve might have been regarded as adequate 30 years ago, the amount that we put in turns out to be not so, as everything is so much more expensive.

For example, I can think of three buildings that we have now that are going through capital refunding to the tune of \$4 million and \$5 million for each property. This is an ongoing example, separate and distinct from redevelopment or acquisition of new housing, which we also actively chase.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you. There are as many challenges with refinancing as there are in redevelopment.

Ms. Sam, I'm going to you now. I want to thank you for your testimony as well and for your lived experience. In particular, I wanted to pick up on the theme of unconditional love and support. We have heard from other witnesses that in communities there seems to be a need for a kind of ecosystem of supports to go along with the housing. We've heard that from many other witnesses.

Could you speak to gaps in services and supports that might need to be filled in your community? I resist talking that way because I'm not sure it's always about “filling holes”, as a metaphor, but maybe you have some insight as to what is needed.

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: Thank you.

In my community, we have people who moved home 20 years ago and they're still on the waiting list for a home. Someone who just moved home last year, with their master's degree, is now on that list. I'm sure they could wait 20 years. Some people are still on that list.

Probably more services.... I don't know if you've ever heard of the Fire Pit in Prince George. They help you to get housing, get jobs and stuff like that. Probably more services like that, where you go to a business and they help you with many different things, like maybe your health and staying healthy, getting a home, getting a job and maybe addiction services.... We need more places like the Fire Pit—if you wanted to look that up—in Prince George.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Will do, and thank you for that. If you have any information, we'd love for you to table that with the committee, or we can look it up as well. I appreciate that.

In terms of the cultural elements that are unique to a for indigenous, by indigenous urban, rural and northern housing strategy, how do we have this program designed uniquely, and what are those unique cultural elements that need to be at the centre of it?

I'll start with Mr. Eddy and then I will go to Ms. Sam.

Mr. David Eddy: We would first start off with the name of the building. We would go to two examples in our last two buildings that we developed. One was called Skwachàys and the other Kwayastut, and those names were given to us by Chief Ian Campbell of the Squamish Nation.

Skwachàys was the name of the area pre-contact in Vancouver, and the folks from the north shore used to canoe over to the Skwachàys, which was an area of salt marshes. There was a lot of great hunting and fishing in the area. Up through the salt marshes were underground springs, and those springs were regarded as portals to the spirit realm. It was described as a place of transformation as well. The name fit perfectly with what our purposes were and what we developed as a theme, which we call “community building through the transformative power of art”. I'll come back to that in a minute.

Kwayastut is a 100-unit building in uptown Vancouver at Broadway and Fraser, and we attached to that a 12,000-square foot, state-of-the-art youth building. There are 30 youth from the youth centre who live in our building. The youth centre is operated by another entity known as Broadway Youth Resource Centre. Kwayastut, the chief told us, means “finding one's power”. It was again very appropriate for the indigenous youth who were in the building.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you to both witnesses.

Ms. Sam, first of all, thank you for your testimony, and I congratulate you on your journey and your commitment. I would like to ask you a question about the report that has been released on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. I know that you have been a member of a coalition on this issue.

In this report, much emphasis was placed on housing. I imagine that this notion is very important when it comes to the safety of women, children and girls. The report also talked about the creation of indigenous communities. It emphasized that housing must be adaptable and that strong communities must be built in urban areas to enable indigenous nations to take ownership of their space and cultural identity.

Can you tell me more about that?

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: Thank you for the question. It was hard listening to your voice and then also the translation.

You mentioned the coalition. I chaired the meetings for the RCMP and the Vancouver Police, and the organizations that keep them in line, the CRCC and stuff like that.

When I worked for the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs in Vancouver as a policy analyst, I chaired those meetings, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Coalition.

I think your question was on the importance of “Red Women Rising”, the reports that have come out for the missing and murdered indigenous women’s inquiry and having those businesses.... Can someone clarify the last part of the question?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I’ll be more precise.

In this report, there was a strong emphasis on the housing issue. Based on your understanding of the many recommendations highlighting the importance of creating cultural communities and safe housing for women, has there been any progress?

Are these concerns being addressed in some way?

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: Okay. Thank you so much for clarifying this. I haven’t seen any progress, but I haven’t been working with housing specifically of late, since I moved home.

I totally agree with the reports about culture and housing. Also, Mr. Eddy’s program and the FIBI strategy—by indigenous peoples, for indigenous peoples—is a big thing. Indigenous people teaching other indigenous people their culture, unconditional love, how to heal themselves and how to be healthy and happy is really a family and nation thing, especially with the people specifically in my village.

Mr. Eddy’s program, FIBI, sounds pretty interesting and I can’t wait to hear more about it.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you very much for your answer.

Mr. Chair, do I still have time to ask Mr. Eddy a question?

The Chair: Yes, you have two minutes left.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Eddy, thank you for your presentation.

You began your intervention by pointing out how desirable it would be for housing strategies, particularly those aimed at indigenous people, of course, since this is the subject of our study, to distinguish between northern, urban and rural settings. Currently, this distinction is not made, and you added that the population is much more present in urban and rural settings, in general.

What would an effective urban-rural policy look like?

[*English*]

Mr. David Eddy: There would be a separate distinction that the federal government would put into the housing strategy for urban, rural and northern indigenous people in general. Given that they are by far the largest group in those four groups, it only makes sense that they would have a separate distinction.

Also, there’s been 40-plus years of urban native housing experience with all those housing providers in the country. There are well over 100 of them who have created, developed and nurtured communities over that period of time. If suddenly that were to stop and be taken over by one of the other three entities, then it would be like rebuilding and reinventing a wheel that already worked fine.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Eddy.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

The last round of questions will come from Ms. Collins, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Ms. Sam.

First of all, congratulations on your election, and also thank you so much for sharing a bit about your personal story and your insights. I find your words really powerful.

My first question is around low-barrier, 24-hour, seven-day-a-week safe spaces, and what they can do as a life-saving measure for indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. Can you speak about the importance of those spaces? To your knowledge, are there any barriers in establishing and sustainably funding those kinds of low-barrier, 24-7 safe spaces?

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: Thank you for the congratulations.

I think the big barrier right now is the pandemic.

There is a new centre that opened up in Prince George, which is an hour and a half away from me, from Nak’azdli. That place has been exceeding expectations. They’ve been helping a lot of people, because it is a 24-hour place where they can go to get warm and comfortable, and get a warm drink. They do have the cultural aspect there.

Yes, you already talked about the funding. If we were going to have a 24-hour space here in Nak’azdli, to support even the village that’s beside Fort St. James—we’re basically one town, the reserve and then the town—I wouldn’t want it to be accessible to the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Yes, it’s just getting more funding for that and getting the nursing staff. We’re low now in nursing and doctors. We need more nurses and doctors here and more mental health supports, so more funding.

• (1720)

Ms. Laurel Collins: In the last session of this committee we'd been talking a lot about the need for wraparound supports and supports that are culturally and spiritually relevant.

I'm just curious about your thoughts about the government including these kinds of wraparound supports within its funding for indigenous housing.

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: This might be a little bit off topic, but I would love to have more programs for MPs, like all of you, and people who work for the House of Commons, and to have someone like me come in and teach you about intergenerational trauma and indigenous peoples and how they overcome those things, just so you can get a better insight. I'm sure you read the books and you see the news and you see all the stuff. I don't know if you've seen comments coming even from John Rustad, as an MLA, about the vaccines and stuff, and that there's just so much racism. Just more awareness and education for you all, I would say....

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thanks for that.

I have another question. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for the government to establish a guaranteed livable income for all Canadians, including indigenous peoples, to meet all of their social and economic needs.

I am curious if you believe a permanent, guaranteed basic livable income would help ensure indigenous peoples have access to housing and have their right to housing met.

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: I think yes, but also let's say that I was living on the streets in Vancouver or Prince George. If you gave me \$800, \$900 or \$1,000 every two weeks, and I was living on the streets, what am I going to do with that money? I'm not going to get a house to rent.

I think it starts with the individuals healing themselves and taking a look at what they're running away from and why they need alcohol and drugs to live. We need more programs for healing and stuff like that to get them back to their culture and get them back to being a healthy, thriving human being.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's wonderful.

In the last hour before you joined us, I had mentioned that I am coming to you from Victoria, which is the homeland of the Lekwungen-speaking people, the Esquimalt and Songhees first nations.

We have the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness, and they do culturally supportive and low-barrier access to affordable housing. It seems so important right now.

I know a lot of individuals who have experienced homelessness have previously experienced child welfare. I am just curious about your thoughts about what could support young indigenous peoples who might be aging out of care, and I'm thinking about a guaranteed basic livable income and how that might help youth homelessness and indigenous youth.

Ms. Elizabeth Sam: I have never been in care or anything like that, but while I was in Victoria, I did an internship with the B.C. government's indigenous youth internship program, and that's how I got with the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs on the second part of the internship.

In the first part I was working at MCFD, actually, in Victoria, at a provincial office. I helped to chair a meeting with the youth who were in care, and then I have some friends in Vancouver who have been in care their whole lives and they've aged out. They're artists and singers.

Laurel, with me, it all comes down to healing. You're not going to be able to live a healthy life and get a house and do anything like that if you don't heal what is harming you—so more healing programs for the youth and more supports.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sam, and thank you, Ms. Collins.

Witnesses, that concludes questions from members of Parliament.

We have about six minutes left in the meeting and we have some other committee business we need to attend to.

I do want to sincerely thank you for being with us this evening, for your testimony and for the work you are doing. We are quickly approaching the end of witness testimony. This will be extremely valuable to us as we set off to draft our report and recommendations within a few weeks. Thank you once again. You're welcome to stay, but you're free to leave.

Colleagues, at our last meeting Mr. Vaughan had verbally presented a motion. It was suggested that it be provided to the committee in written form, and it has been. I would propose that we deal with that motion. We have fairly limited time but it concerns the next four meetings of the committee.

The most recent version of the motion has one typo in it—actually it has two. That concerns the fourth date, so the next four meetings of this committee are February 2, February 4, February 16 and February 18, although the notice of motion incorrectly calls it February 28. The other typo is in Mr. Vaughan's name, but we all know that.

I would ask you to use the “raise hand” function if you want to speak to this.

I recognize Madam Chabot.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Vaughan, thank you for making this clarification and for presenting the written motion.

Mr. Chairman, the correction made to the date, February 18, is acceptable to me.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I just wanted to speak in support of the meeting with Jesse Thistle and the second hour with CMHC, which is the rapid housing initiative. There was a comment from my colleague, MP Gazan. She was hoping to have the minister appear, so the CMHC for one hour and the minister for one hour. I'm just wondering if we could adapt the schedule to make sure that's included.

Also, just maybe as a point of clarification because I am filling in, is there no steering committee? Is the committee business on February 2 going to be a whole two-hour session, or do you do a steering committee? Then that could be a shorter time and then potentially we could have the minister for the second hour.

The Chair: There is a steering committee and we're trying to secure whom we can on the rapid housing initiative.

I am going to let Mr. Vaughan speak to that as he has a line into the minister's office.

With regard to committee business, there is a steering committee. Anything the steering committee does needs to be ratified by the full committee, so I am in the hands of this group here on whether the February 2 meeting is the steering committee alone or all of us. I'll take your advice on that.

Mr. Vaughan, could you respond to the availability or willingness of the minister to be part of the rapid housing initiative update on February 2 or February 4?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Tuesdays are impossible for the minister. He's on the COVID committee that meets when cabinet meets, and it's going to be too difficult. Thursdays are the more likely date if we're going to get the minister on this.

We're also pulling together the department and getting the statistics so we have as fulsome a disclosure as possible as to where we stand on rapid housing. February 2 looks a little soon. CMHC is really buried right now getting out the project-by-project applications, so there's a bit of a challenge there. The way it's proposed is based on what I got from the minister's office and his availability potentially, and also where CMHC thinks it can land. February 4 is the best date for that, considering how close February 2 is.

In terms of February 2, we haven't really had a refreshing. Since Parliament rolled over and we had the proroguing and then re-established, we haven't had a chance to ask some of the new members what they want as studies, and so on. While the steering committee does meet and tries to deal with what the committee assigns it, we haven't had a fulsome canvass of the new members of some of the other studies that might have emerged since we first set priorities way back in the spring. Actually, it was this time last year that we decided to do this study, and COVID got in the way of that a bit.

I think a longer meeting was the reason we put that on the table in terms of trying to make sure we have all members, and new members of the committee, make their contributions to setting the agenda going forward. That's why that meeting is a little longer than it normally would be.

Other than that, as I said, this is the schedule we're hoping to meet and I hope it meets with the committee's approval.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Vis, please.

Mr. Brad Vis: I'm indifferent on the specific date, whether it's the Tuesday or the Thursday, regarding the rapid housing initiative, but to Mr. Vaughan's point, I think it would be helpful if the department had collated all of the applications to date and was able to share more detailed information with the committee.

Secondly, as a friendly request to the analysts, in advance of the study, our first hour-long meeting on the rapid housing initiative, would they be able to get a copy of the actual application and share that with all committee members? Could a copy be provided of the first announcements made by the department on the program so that we're all working from the same information?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

We'll go to Mr. Turnbull, please.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I want to express my support for this and ask that, in addition to the other typos that we just corrected, Jesse Thistle's name should have an "e" on the end. It's not "Jesse"; it's "Jesse".

Thanks.

The Chair: We need to buy a couple of vowels. Thank you.

Ms. Collins, please.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Perhaps I'll let Mr. Kent speak before I go ahead again.

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

I wonder whether we need the full two hours on February 2. Certainly, witness selection could follow off-line with submission by the end of the week, next week.

I understood that Jesse Thistle was going to appear with the minister as a recipient of the scholarship. If we move Jesse Thistle to the second hour on February 2, it would perhaps give us some flexibility with the minister and CMHC on February 4. It's just a thought. This is not obstruction; I'm just asking.

The Chair: I actually think that makes good sense.

Ms. Collins, please, go ahead.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I was going to make almost the exact same suggestion.

The Chair: All right. I see no one else on the list.

Mr. Vaughan, are you waving at me? Go ahead.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Yes. That's a friendly amendment.

The one thing I would add to Mr. Vis's comment is that, first of all, the applications are still online. You can still go to the CMHC website for the rapid housing initiative. It's a two-page application form. That process is still publicly available. I'll make sure I send it across to the committee chair and they can send the link to everybody.

On the issue of detailed information, the one challenge we have with this, which I hope everyone appreciates, is that a number of the big cities are still in the process of acquiring properties to meet the commitments they've made. They're pretty sure they have them, but disclosing the exact address before the real estate deals close could have implications. I don't want to have a bidding war start when they see that government money is on the table around a property acquisition. Therefore, just to foreshadow that, the details might not be quite that specific.

The second piece of it is that, with a number of the applications in the project stream, of course, in some cities, one of the unfortunate side effects of this is that we've seen non-profits competing with each other for similar sites. There will be some discretion exercised by CMHC not to disclose particular names and particular buildings until real estate deals are closed.

I hope the committee can understand in a highly competitive real estate market, especially in some of the major urban areas, the challenges that CMHC is facing in full disclosure. They will give, as much as possible, unit counts, locations, unit costs and that sort of thing, but exact property addresses might be difficult.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

I don't see anyone else on the speakers list.

I believe the proposal to invite Jesse Thistle on February 2 is considered to be a friendly amendment. With that, I think we're ready for the question.

Can we proceed by consensus, or do we require a vote? The motion is as presented in the notice of motion with—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Just as a point of clarification before we vote, Mr. Chair, we would then have at least one hour with the minister on the 4th. Is that included in the motion?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: We're efforting to get that and to get CMHC officials. We don't have details yet. I hope you can appreciate that ministers' schedules are not as easy to move around as ours are—and ours aren't that easy, either.

The Chair: The minister has been invited and we're doing our darndest to secure his attendance.

The motion is before you, with the friendly amendment of the invitation to Jesse Thistle being extended for February 2, and with the best efforts to be used to secure the attendance of the minister on the 4th on the update.

Do we have consensus on the motion? Do we require a vote?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Do we have consensus to adjourn the meeting?

I see that too. Thank you very much, everyone. Have a wonderful weekend. We'll see you next week.

We are adjourned.

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