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• (1300)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

[Translation]

Welcome to the eighth meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[English]

We are gathered here today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

[Translation]

Today, we are starting our second study on the effects of the housing shortage on indigenous peoples across Canada.

To begin the discussion, we are pleased to welcome the Hon. Marc Miller and his officials, and the Hon. Patty Hajdu and her officials. We also welcome Patricia Roset-Zuppa, vice-president, policy development at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

After the first hour, we will be very pleased to welcome another group of witnesses.

[English]

We will be receiving national and regional indigenous organizations in the second hour. We will have Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse, Assembly of First Nations; Natan Obed, president, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; and Chief Lance Haymond, Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.

[Translation]

Those of you taking part in the session in person are familiar with the health measures, so I will not repeat them.

[English]

You also know the procedures that we follow in these committee meetings.

In order to maximize our time, without further ado, I invite Minister Hajdu to take the floor.

Minister, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am very pleased to be here with you.

[English]

I'm very happy to be with you this morning.

I am physically on the Robinson-Superior Treaty territory area and the homeland of the Fort William First Nation, with, of course, contributions by many Métis people over the years.

I'm very honoured to be speaking to the committee today. I'm thrilled that you're conducting this study on the ability of indigenous people to have adequate, safe and affordable housing. It's an absolute necessity for the work of reconciliation, for safety and security and, in fact, for the economic development and prosperity of indigenous peoples.

Unfortunately, successive governments have not prioritized housing for indigenous peoples. As a result, indigenous peoples are more likely to live in overcrowded homes and experience higher rates of all kinds of challenges, including mould and other poor housing conditions.

[Translation]

The 2016 Census of Population estimates that roughly half of indigenous people live in a dwelling in need of some type of repair, while only one-third of the general population lives in a dwelling of similar conditions. The census also showed that indigenous peoples living on-reserve are about eight times more likely than non-indigenous peoples off-reserve to live in crowded conditions.

[English]

You can see that we have a lot of work to do. Indeed, access to adequate and safe housing is connected to building healthier and more prosperous communities.

Without a safe place to call home, inadequate housing affects children and families, and it makes them more likely to experience respiratory problems. They have a higher risk of contracting infectious diseases like tuberculosis, COVID-19 and, of course, the ongoing mental health challenges that are exacerbated by crowded living.

I've heard many examples of how inadequate housing has affected indigenous people and leaders from coast to coast bring this up as one of the top issues that their communities are facing, but this is not a new situation. I'm thrilled that my mandate from the Prime Minister asks me "to make immediate and long-term investments" to close the housing gap "by 2030", and I ask the members of this committee to support the government as we prepare to do this crucial work.

The government is working with indigenous partners on long-term approaches to ongoing current gaps and to addressing housing challenges. In August 2021, the Assembly of First Nations and the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy released a joint study that identified the need for housing in first nations communities at about 55,000 new units and 81,000 renovations on reserve. To close that gap by 2030, the government is committed to providing immediate and sustained funding for housing on first nations.

I'm working together with first nations partners to codevelop the national first nations housing and related infrastructure strategy. This plan was endorsed by the Assembly of First Nations chiefs in 2018, and I'm committed to working with the Assembly of First Nations toward the advancement and implementation of the strategy.

Through the implementation of this strategy, first nations access to sustainable housing will be increased in a way that meets their needs and priorities, respects regional and cultural differences and supports the transition to first nations care, control and management of housing, based on their capacity and their prioritization. Both organizations play complementary roles in addressing housing needs on reserves. While ISC handles funding directed towards capital infrastructure, loan guarantees, housing innovation and capacity building, CMHC focuses on social housing and renovations.

I'm also working with my cabinet colleagues to implement the Inuit Nunangat housing strategy and the Métis housing subaccord. I'm also working with the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and the Minister of Northern Affairs on the codevelopment of a northern, urban and rural indigenous housing strategy.

The government has made a number of important investments to ameliorate the need for housing in indigenous communities and for indigenous peoples. Since 2016, and as of September 30, 2021, the government has supported the construction and repair of homes for first nations households and communities on reserve. This includes building 7,873 new homes and the repair of well over 15,000. The figures don't include the units that are funded through the national housing strategy and its programs.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

In addition to new constructions and renovations, ISC is also acquiring and servicing 1,384 lots, of which 1,035 are complete and 349 are in progress.

In the 2021 budget, we announced new investments to improve infrastructure, including housing.

[*English*]

This additional funding will financially support first nations communities to build 800 new homes, renovate 2,000 housing units and ensure that 500 additional lots are being serviced. We know that these kinds of investments make a huge difference in the lives of families and individuals.

Mr. Chair, as I said in my opening remarks, this is a very important study that you will be conducting, and the work the government is doing with first nations and indigenous people is just a start. The need is great. You will hear that from witnesses, and there is much more to do, but this government is committed to making the investments to reach the 2030 goal and close the housing gap for indigenous peoples.

Meegwetch. Nakurmiik. Marsi. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Hajdu.

I'll now pass the microphone to Minister Miller.

Minister Miller, you have five minutes.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Thank you, Chair.

Kwe Kwe. Tansi. Unnusakkut. Good afternoon.

I want to acknowledge that I am on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people here today and coming to you from Ottawa. It's nice to see you in person again.

Thanks for this invitation on such an important issue.

[*Translation*]

Indigenous peoples in Canada face the worst housing outcomes in the country, as Minister Hajdu described.

We know that overcrowded, inadequate and expensive housing remains a key factor in the persistent physical health, mental health, and other social and economic challenges faced by indigenous communities.

In Inuit Nunangat alone, close to 52% of Inuit live in overcrowded homes. Tuberculosis and, more recently COVID-19, are prominent among the impacts this may have on health.

The situation is unacceptable. We know that we have to work harder and quicker to close the gap and to support the partners in their work, so that we can be sure that everyone has access to a secure and healthy home.

• (1310)

[English]

For Inuit housing needs, we are working with, notably, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Inuit lands claims organizations and other federal departments to implement the codeveloped Inuit Nunangat housing strategy. The strategy sets out important joint work to address Inuit housing needs, and it is rooted in an approach to self-determination where Inuit play a direct role in the delivery of housing in Inuit Nunangat.

To support its implementation, we have committed \$13.2 billion through, in particular, the national housing coinvestment fund.

[Translation]

Since 2016, we have committed \$490 million over 12 years to support Inuit-led housing in Nunavik, Nunatsiavut and the Inuvialuit Region. Along with repairs to many existing units, these investments will result in close to 500 new units being constructed in these regions by the end of 2022. In budget 2021, we have invested \$517.8 million in Inuit land claim organizations in order to support infrastructures in Inuit Nunangat.

[English]

In Nunavut specifically, we have already invested \$331 million to help 2,962 households access safe and secure housing. We have also provided \$25 million to the Government of Nunavut to support their immediate housing and infrastructure needs, as well as \$10 million to create an estimated 24 new affordable homes in Nunavut since 2016.

As well, we established an intergovernmental task force to respond to the critical housing and infrastructure needs in Nunavut. We also continue to play an active role through codevelopment and implementation of other distinctions-based approaches to housing and infrastructure, including the Métis nation housing strategy, through the work at modern treaty and self-governing first nations tables as well.

To support Métis nation housing infrastructure, we committed, in budget 2018, \$500 million over 10 years. With this funding, Métis partners built or bought 1,158 housing units, repaired or renovated 2,096 housing units, and provided annual rental supports and subsidies, importantly, for 7,584 housing units.

Since 2016, we have also committed \$18 million for northern first nation and Métis communities in the Northwest Territories, as well as an additional \$25 million for the Northwest Territories to support their immediate housing and infrastructure needs. We have also established a dedicated intergovernmental task force to respond to the critical housing and infrastructure needs in the Northwest Territories.

In Yukon, housing and infrastructure needs are determined by each self-governing Yukon first nation. Their efforts have resulted notably in the building of 90 units and 13 new developed lots, a water main project and energy efficiency upgrades to existing housing and community-based infrastructure.

[Translation]

We will continue to work with indigenous partners on the best ways to address the problem and we are directly supporting indigenous-led approaches in our desire to develop our policies jointly.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss this important work. I look forward to taking your questions.

Meegwetch. Nakummek. Marci. Thank you. Merci.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Miller.

We will now turn to Patricia Roset-Zuppa, vice-president, policy development, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Ms. Roset-Zuppa, you have five minutes.

Ms. Patricia Roset-Zuppa (Vice-President, Policy Development, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Thank you very much, and thank you for the invitation to contribute to this important study.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure to appear before this committee on behalf of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

[English]

I'm joining you today from Ottawa on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. I have gratitude for this land and respect and appreciation for its many generations of caretakers.

CMHC is Canada's national housing agency. We are guided by a bold aspiration that, by 2030, everyone in Canada will have a home that they can afford and that meets their needs—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Forgive me for interrupting you, Ms. Roset-Zuppa.

Mr. Chair, the interpretation is not working.

• (1315)

[English]

The Chair: Okay. We'll just pause here, and I'll pause the time. Let's see if we can sort this out.

I'm going to assume that we can resume.

I apologize, Ms. Roset-Zuppa. Please continue.

[Translation]

Ms. Patricia Roset-Zuppa: No problem.

[English]

CMHC is Canada's national housing agency. We are guided by a bold aspiration that, by 2030, everyone in Canada will have a home that they can afford and that meets their needs. We're doing this in part by delivering the national housing strategy, a multi-billion dollar plan grounded in a human-rights-based approach to housing.

To achieve the goal of the strategy, our corporate aspiration, and to support Canada's goal of reconciliation, we know that we must do more to address the diverse and pressing housing needs of indigenous peoples.

Canada has a severe shortage of housing supply and that disproportionately affects indigenous peoples. According to 2016 census data, the rate of core housing need among indigenous households is 18% compared with the national average of 12.7%. This data reflects crowding, the need for major repairs and unaffordable conditions.

Indigenous people are also overrepresented among the 35,000 people who experience homelessness each night in Canada. They are also more than twice as likely to experience hidden homelessness, especially in the north, compared to their non-indigenous counterparts. Indigenous housing needs are complex and they are urgent. They are most dire across the territories, where approximately one-third of the indigenous population lives in unacceptable housing.

There is much work to do with indigenous partners to resolve this. We must continue to build and expand on what is being done by and with the federal government. For example, first nations, Inuit and Métis nation organizations alongside Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada recently codeveloped distinctions-based housing strategies for first nations, Inuit and Métis. CMHC is very proud to be an active partner in this work.

Still, the majority of indigenous households live in urban, rural and northern areas, and they also need access to safe, adequate and affordable housing.

That's why we were pleased to see that the mandate letter of the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion includes the commitment to engage with indigenous partners and to codevelop an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy. This strategy was one of the main recommendations of the previous HUMA committee's report, and we at CMHC are ready and fully committed to support this work.

In 2019, we also set up a new indigenous and northern housing solutions team to increase the uptake of our housing programs and help to navigate our funding options and application process. As a result, the number of indigenous housing projects committed to has increased exponentially and will continue to grow.

Take, for example, the rapid housing initiative created to address the urgent need for housing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The program received strong interest from indigenous groups, and nearly 40% of all units created under the first round of this \$2.5-billion program will benefit indigenous households.

I think one of the most important changes at CMHC has been a major shift in our approach to indigenous housing. We're working with indigenous partners to make existing programs more accessible, to build stronger relationships and to support self-determination. This work is being led by our indigenous and northern housing solutions team. It is supported by our new vice-president of indigenous relations and will be guided by our reconciliation action plan.

First nations, Inuit and Métis people best understand the distinct housing needs of their people and communities. They are best placed to find solutions that work for them, and we are committed to helping them to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and the rest of the committee, for studying this important issue. I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.

● (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roset-Zuppa.

We'll now proceed with the first round of questions, beginning with the Conservatives.

Mr. Vidal, I believe you're speaking first. You have six minutes.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here again.

Minister Hajdu, again we're here on a Friday afternoon. I think we did this together not too long ago.

The study we're embarking on today as a committee obviously is in regard to the effects of housing shortages on indigenous peoples. Over the past several months, the communities of Black Lake, Fond du Lac and Pelican Narrows in my northern Saskatchewan riding have announced tuberculosis outbreaks.

Minister Hajdu, you talked a bit about that in your comments.

We're talking about dozens of outbreaks and over a hundred cases. That's nearly double what it was a few years ago, and much higher than it has been in over a decade. Rates of tuberculosis in Saskatchewan are continually above the national average, but northern Saskatchewan, where we make up 3.6% of the province's population, is responsible for half of the province's cases, according to a study from 2021 that looked at outbreaks of tuberculosis.

The recently released departmental results report from Indigenous Services Canada for the year 2020-21 admitted that "the development of [the] tuberculosis reduction action plan for First Nations was not completed" as planned. What's more concerning is that in the 2022-23 departmental plan for ISC, I don't see any mention being made of any measures to prevent these outbreaks.

I guess my questions are threefold. I'll throw all of them out right away for Minister Hajdu.

Why is it that in a developed country like Canada in 2022 we continue to face tuberculosis outbreaks? What can I tell my constituents in northern Saskatchewan about when they can expect the government to release its action plan, and will it include targets? Finally, will this plan include some actual measures to deal with the overcrowded, unhealthy housing in these communities?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much.

Through the chair, I'm happy to say that I was in Saskatchewan last week, I think, or the week before last; time takes on a new meaning in COVID. On the last trip I took, I was in Saskatchewan and I had a chance to meet with the FSN and many other individual chiefs in the region. We talked a lot about housing. As a matter of fact, in my opening remarks, I reflected on the leaders who have spoken to me about housing and, as I was saying those words, I was reflecting on the conversations I had specifically in Saskatchewan.

As you know, budget 2021, for example, commits \$6 billion for infrastructure, including shovel-ready infrastructure projects and operations and maintenance costs, along with many other investments in first nations health, including \$5.5 billion, for example, to improve health outcomes through timely access and culturally appropriate medical care.

You point out that housing is a critical ingredient in defeating infectious diseases like tuberculosis, and I would agree. I'd also say that we have to work more quickly on supporting culturally appropriate medical care and access. Many of the first nations leaders I spoke to on that trip talked to me, quite eloquently, actually, about the exclusion they felt from appropriate medical care from the Government of Saskatchewan and spoke about the need for urgency in the codeveloped health legislation and in appropriate and culturally appropriate care that can be provided closer to home for people who are treating, in some cases, very difficult to treat illnesses like tuberculosis.

There's work on the housing front and on the social determinants of health, but also on the actual delivery of health care that, as you know, we deliver in partnership with provinces and territories.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you for that. I want to turn my attention to Minister Miller for a minute.

Minister, you and I have had a number of conversations about a project in northern Saskatchewan that we've been trying to have some success on. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It involves the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and a company called One Sky Forest Products. The the idea behind this project was an opportunity to invest in a very successful project that was going to create all kinds of dividends for many first nations in northern Saskatchewan and allow them to participate in the solutions to the housing crisis we face in northern Saskatchewan.

As it turns out, this project didn't fit the normal kinds of operating procedures of the federal bureaucracy and, to put it bluntly, the lack of flexibility became the barrier to getting this project off the ground. I'm just curious to know if you could respond to this. How do we justify to these northern communities, when they want to be

part of the solution, that we can't get these projects across the line to allow them to participate and be part of that solution?

• (1325)

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, MP Vidal, for the question. I know that I've changed roles, but I've still been following this with my team.

Clearly, on whether the facts in this case point to your conclusion that there is a lack of flexibility and funding in the way we work, I don't want to necessarily talk to publicly, out of respect for the communities in question, but I think the conclusion is not inaccurate insofar as what we've heard time and time again from communities, which is that lack of flexibility in our programs really hampers, confuses and delays, particularly in housing. In this situation, when we're talking about tuberculosis on one hand or COVID on the other, it actually can have real impacts on people's health and well-being.

While I won't question the facts and the premise, or at least discuss them or ventilate them publicly, I do think the conclusion is not inaccurate in many things we do. It's part of the reason why, under my portfolio, under modern treaties and the grant basis on which monies are allocated, it's really that the federal government works, codevelops and then gets the heck out of the way.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Really quickly, then, would you agree, Minister, that we need to find opportunities for these communities to invest in projects where they can be part of the solution rather than rely strictly on government programs?

Hon. Marc Miller: Again, it depends on what issue we're really tackling. Whether it's an issue of inequity or it's really the underfunding by the federal government or other institutions that's created that, there's one approach. Then there's economic development, which is very much the case in question that you were championing. That's another approach that we need to take.

It's multi-faceted and goes across a number of departments, but yes, I do agree with you on the principles.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vidal.

We'll now go to Mr. Weiler from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Weiler, you have six minutes.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank our ministers and officials for joining us for today's really important meeting on a study that's very much top of mind.

My first question is for you, Ms. Roset-Zuppa. It was a very special moment last week when I had the opportunity to announce, in partnership with the Squamish Nation, 80 units of new affordable housing that will be built within the next year for the benefit of the Squamish Nation. I was hoping you could talk a little bit more about this project and other programs within the national housing strategy that are supporting the creation of new, permanent affordable housing for indigenous peoples.

Ms. Patricia Roset-Zuppa: Thank you very much for that question.

I think you might be referring to a project done under the rapid housing initiative. The rapid housing initiative, which I would say is a very important and successful program, was introduced specifically as a COVID response because of the incredible needs that really intensified, especially during COVID, among those households that were already facing deep housing needs.

Under the rapid housing initiative, there were two rounds of funding for a total of \$2.5 billion. What made this program a bit different from others was that it was 100% contribution funding for 100% of the capital dollars. There was a real urgency behind it. Units were meant to be provided and realized within fairly short order, including through modular housing, for example, as well as other building techniques. Really, it was for proponents to be able to apply and for us to get funding out the door as quickly as possible, but also acknowledging some flexibilities in northern indigenous communities, where we know that housing would take a bit more time to get out the door.

Certainly, we've seen great success. About 40% of the units under the rapid housing initiative have been committed to indigenous projects.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: That's great. As part of your opening testimony, you mentioned the creation of a new committee to help indigenous people with accessing some of CMHC's funding. Maybe you could speak a little bit more about how that committee operates, if it's reaching out directly to first nations or if you're waiting to be contacted to be able to assist in that regard.

• (1330)

Ms. Patricia Roset-Zuppa: I was talking about an internal team within CMHC for indigenous and northern housing solutions.

Mr. Chair, may I bring in my colleague here to speak to that? He's directly delivering this and working with indigenous partners.

The Chair: You may if Mr. Weiler agrees.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Absolutely.

Ms. Patricia Roset-Zuppa: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ben.

Mr. Benjamin Williams (Director, Indigenous and the North Housing Solutions, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Thank you.

Patricia was talking about some of the structure changes we made back in 2019 in order to be, honestly, more flexible and more agile and responsive to indigenous housing needs. Through that, we created a dedicated team for indigenous clients. The team is divided into roughly two groups. One works directly with first nations com-

munities across the country for us to be able to better understand housing needs and actually respond to them. A second group processes and prioritizes applications.

That way, we are getting better results, quite frankly, through the national housing strategy focused on indigenous households.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

Minister Miller, what often came up in our last study on barriers to economic development for indigenous peoples were the challenges that the lack of affordable housing creates. I know that it consistently ranks as one of the top priorities, if not the top priority, for first nations in my riding, including self-governing first nations.

I was hoping you could speak a little bit more to the indigenous-led projects or partnerships related to housing and infrastructure that your department is involved in.

Hon. Marc Miller: First of all, I acknowledge some of the confusion that can be created. Whether it falls under Minister Hajdu or Crown-Indigenous Relations or CMHC, it's difficult to navigate for MPs, and it's difficult to navigate for indigenous communities. That is part of the job we have in parsing and figuring it out, so that we're putting our best foot forward to communities that are in dire need.

When it comes to self-governing nations, that is one of the distinctions we funded in budget 2021, with over \$500 million going to self-governing nations across the country, whether in Quebec...or a good number of which are in B.C., including Sechelt, which benefited from close to \$10 million of investments in affordable housing.

It isn't enough and I readily acknowledge that. It's something that we'll have to relentlessly invest in to close the gap by 2030. One of the challenges is quantifying it. Self-governing nations, as part of their advocacy, put forward a very well-thought-out analysis of where the gap is and what was needed to close it, and budget 2021 allocated those amounts.

We don't go around patting ourselves on the back on it, because that gap is there and it is expressed in real human need. However, we're willing to move on it, whether it's through these investments or it's through rapid housing or others. Even, I would note, B.C.—that's where we need provincial governments on board—is leading the way with its own investments into housing, which are very significant.

The Chair: Mr. Weiler, you have about 10 seconds.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: I'll cede my time then. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gill, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank Ministers Miller and Hajdu and their officials, and Ms. Roset-Zuppa and Mr. Williams, for testifying before the committee today.

I have a huge number of questions, as I am the member of Parliament for a constituency where almost 15% of the population is indigenous. It is a vast territory where people live in places with no air or road access. Sometimes, they travel from one community to another by snowmobile. The needs are great. The communities are remote, yes, but they are also isolated.

There is one thing I would like to find out because I find it important. There is a lot of general talk about figures and strategies. There is talk of budget 2021 and what was in the budget statement. But we don't really see anything concrete, anything actually happening, with a few exceptions I might mention in my own constituency. This is all about Maslow's pyramid. Shelter is a basic need. We need to be protected and physically safe in order to live. It's as simple as that.

I would like to talk about the many impacts that the housing shortage has on First Nations. Ms. Hajdu told us about COVID-19, of course. Its effects are made exponentially worse by the housing shortage. However, I would like to hear more from her about other effects because COVID-19 is a recent problem going back to 2019, whereas the shortage has been going on for 60 years.

Can she talk about a number of other effects that the housing shortage has on First Nations?

• (1335)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, Mrs. Gill.

[English]

Thank you very much for your questions and your comments around the effects that a lack of housing has on people. You're right that it's not just health effects, although those are well documented and well studied. Many people consider housing to be the foundation of wellness, whether we're talking about physical wellness, mental wellness or the ability to learn, grow and play.

I also spoke to many indigenous leaders over the last several months about the ongoing strain of crowded conditions. People told very moving stories of housing that would incorporate 15 to 20 individuals in a household, and—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I have to interrupt you, Madam Minister, because I would like to move on. I see that you are well aware of the extent of these problems. We are talking about people's physical well-being.

In our last session, we talked about economic development, among other things. I would like to know whether you also agree with me in saying that the housing problem cuts across other issues. We are talking about economic development and about other topics that we have put on the committee's agenda. But, in reality, all those topics flow mostly from the housing issue.

Do you also agree with that?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In principle, absolutely. Without a safe place to call home, it's very hard for people to study. It's very hard for people to raise families, for people to—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Excuse me, Ms. Hajdu. I feel that I may not have been clear.

I am talking about the committee's studies, not studies by individuals. I was talking about our studies here at the committee, where everything is interrelated. The housing issue relates to everything else. That's what I meant.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think we're agreeing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: So I will have some other questions for you at that time, because the clock is still ticking.

You said that you wanted to invest \$6 billion to eliminate the housing shortage by 2030. Just looking at what is happening in Quebec, very specifically for First Nations—I am not talking about Inuit—we have \$3.9 billion to eliminate the current housing shortage in five years. You also know that the demographic curve is exponential. It means that we will never even manage to eliminate the shortage. That is according to my calculations. You could do the calculations again, it's basic arithmetic. Just in Quebec, with 225 units per year, it will take 44 years before the housing shortage is eliminated. That doesn't even consider population increase.

Does your department consider it?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It is something that our department takes into consideration and the \$6-billion number that I referenced was the amount in budget 2021 alone. In fact, the department is working closely with indigenous leaders, communities and researchers to understand the gap and to be able to plan out to 2030 what those investments will look like in order to close the gap.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Do you have a figure already?

The point is that \$6 billion is not a lot. Nevertheless, it was in the statement. What has been allocated from that amount of \$6 billion?

You should have a figure. Then, by the rule of three, we should be able to arrive at the amount we will need in 2030.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you, Madame Gill.

Firstly, I'll just note that you referenced that \$6 billion is not a lot. I anticipate your support then for budget 2022 as we continue these investments in housing.

I wanted to offer those comments, because it isn't simply the frame in which you're putting it. That is a very important one in terms of the speed at which we're deploying programs that have already been accepted to and codeveloped, but there's also a much larger discussion to be had, as we work towards ensuring that land is given back.

Daniel, do you have any additions to that?

• (1350)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I'll continue. I can't hear anything.

It's been 26 years since the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management was signed. One hundred and thirteen first nations have enacted land codes and report that under no circumstance would they consider returning to the Indian Act.

Could you basically update the committee...? First of all, you answered my question that you support moving to that type of model. Is there a plan—or where are you in that plan if you are planning it—to have a first nations housing authority replace the current system that we have now?

That's kind of a broad question.

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't have a clear answer to that. I would say that those solutions aren't ones that we impose. In reflection, while there are well over a hundred communities that would choose to organize themselves that way, it isn't perfect for everyone. The ones that have availed themselves of it, have availed of it in a way that serves their people.

That is all I would have to offer on that. On an independent housing authority, perhaps Minister Hajdu or some of the officials could chime in on that.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can give an overarching endorsement of Minister Miller's top line, which is that it's not going to look the same all across the country. This has to be indigenous-led and indigenous-supported, and each region and each community has a different perception of how that work will unfold.

Deputy Minister Fox, you've been involved in these conversations, and perhaps you can add a few comments.

Ms. Christiane Fox: I would make maybe two comments.

On the indigenous housing institution, this is definitely something we're looking into. It's been proposed by the national housing council as an idea to address remote, urban and northern housing challenges. As we look at transferring service, as we look at self-determination, I would say that's definitely a model we're looking on.

When it comes to the proposal with respect to the indigenous first nations land registry and land codes, I think it is an important part of self-determination. We see that as sort of stepping away from being under the Indian Act, which is a really important self-determination action.

We obviously work very closely with indigenous communities when it comes to additions to reserve. Sometimes those are straightforward, but sometimes extremely complex, as you can imagine, with provincial, territorial and other first nations. However,

we look to see how we can support our indigenous partners as they work through those issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

We'll now go to Mr. Powlowski.

Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to the ministers for being here.

My question is for Patty. She knows, but for the sake of other people in the committee who don't know, she's sitting right now in Fort William First Nation, which is in my riding.

As she knows, a very big issue—in fact, it's the one most important issue that Chief Collins of the Fort William First Nation came to me with—is the issue of getting federal funding for a chronic care home in Fort William First Nation. Certainly, COVID has illustrated I think for all Canadians the importance of chronic care homes and the fact that the elderly should be able to, hopefully, spend the last years of their lives in good surroundings. That isn't always the case in Canada.

I know, and she probably knows, that it's been a bit of a battle trying to find funding for that. Hopefully, we've found a source of funding in the green and inclusive fund from Infrastructure Canada. The problem, I think, is fairly ubiquitous in first nation communities and probably also among the Inuit. Is there funding specifically—either from you or CMHC, which may want to comment on this—for chronic care homes in indigenous communities?

• (1355)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, MP Powlowski.

Technically, today I'm not on the Fort William First Nation. I'm in my constituency office in my riding, but it's still within the territory of Fort William First Nation.

You're right. I've spoken with Chief Collins as well about this project and about the idea that indigenous people are often facing care needs far away from home or in non-culturally appropriate settings. That's certainly something that I think we can all relate to as members of Parliament for various regions across this country. My office is working with Minister LeBlanc's office on this application to the green infrastructure fund.

The question of infrastructure priorities is different across the country. Of course, each community has been completing or has completed their infrastructure planning process, and some of those do contain plans or desires to create all kinds of different care facilities.

Maybe I can turn to Chris, who can talk a bit about what she's seeing in that infrastructure planning that's happening across the country.

Ms. Christiane Fox: Yes, definitely. I think that \$6-billion investment is really meant to be for schools, for health infrastructure and for other types of facilities.

In some cases, we're seeing creative approaches to multi-purpose buildings. You may have your indigenous early learning and child care centre in the same area as you would have a long-term care home. Between the programs at Indigenous Services Canada, CMHC and Infrastructure, we really try to look at what is that community infrastructure plan, what that asset management plan looks like and then how we can best support it through the various Government of Canada programs.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: To follow up, maybe I can ask someone from the department about this. From my office, when we look at how to assist indigenous communities with this kind of problem, we don't really know where to start. We go to Indigenous Services, CMHC and then the Ministry of Health.

Is there any one place or person that communities can go to and say "this is the issue" and ask which ministry they should start off with to try to address the problem?

Ms. Christiane Fox: I'm happy to take that. Thank you for the question.

What I would say is that for our regional executives across the country we do have a footprint across the country at Indigenous Services Canada. They are really meant to be that single window, where they work with communities on what their needs are. Sometimes, as you note, it can be something that Indigenous Services Canada provides, and at times it's broader than that.

I think that it can be—and we can appreciate this—overwhelming to navigate all of the government programs, so we really are trying to take a community-centred approach to see what the needs are, what the priorities of the community are and then how can we turn around and work with our colleagues in the federal system to try to address some of those needs. That's the approach we try to take. We work very closely with CMHC and Infrastructure Canada in that regard.

The Chair: Mr. Powlowski, you have about 10 seconds.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Ms. Roset-Zuppa, you mentioned hidden homelessness. You didn't explain it. What is this?

Ms. Patricia Roset-Zuppa: Thank you for that question.

Hidden homelessness is the case of people being homeless but not going to shelters, for example. They might not have their own stable housing but are couch surfing with family members or friends, or going from home to home, so we don't necessarily have a good recording of it.

I must say that, for further experience and expertise, when it comes to homelessness, we do a lot of work with our colleagues at Infrastructure Canada. I hope that helps answer your question in brief.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Powlowski.

[*Translation*]

I am now going to give the floor to Mrs. Gill.

Mrs. Gill, you have two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have another question for Minister Hajdu, but Mr. Miller can answer as well.

We talked earlier about demographics. I wanted to know whether housing forecasts take demographics into consideration.

I was talking about First Nations, but I would also like to talk about Inuit. If I recall correctly, in 2017, a Senate committee said that as the needs for housing in Nunavut were increasing, the funding was decreasing. The watershed years, so to speak, were 2021 and 2022.

I would like to know whether you have corrected that situation.

Thank you.

• (1400)

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As a short answer, Madame Gill, yes, the planning does take into account growth projections.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: That answers my first question.

However, I did ask two at the same time. My second question was about Nunavut.

As I was saying, the funding curve was decreasing at the same time as the curve showing the demand for housing was increasing. That was in 2017, your party was in power at that time.

I would like to know whether there is an up-to-date table showing the funding amounts allocated to housing needs. Those data could be useful for all communities. It would be helpful to be able to have data like that.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We can certainly arrange to provide the data to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you very much.

I have one last question, if I have time, Mr. Chair.

We have also talked about remoteness and isolation. I was wondering whether that was considered as a factor. We talked about economic development and that, to build a house in Nunavut, or on an island, or 2,000 km away, the cost of materials and labour are not the same as in other regions. Clearly, \$300,000 in one region is not the same amount as in others.

Do you consider those factors in the grants you make available and the work you do?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Yes, Madame Gill, there is isolation, the increased cost of delivery and materials in the north, and in fact some delays. In budget 2021, there was an additional \$134 million related to the cost of COVID-related delays.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Perhaps I can provide a little clarification.

Thank you to our panellists who are joining us today. We have Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse from the Assembly of First Nations.

[*Translation*]

We also welcome Chief Lance Haymond, from the Assembly of First Nations Quebec- Labrador. He is accompanied by Guy Latouche.

[*English*]

We also have Natan Obed, president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami with us today.

It's the same procedure as usual, panellists and committee members.

We'll start off with a five-minute presentation from Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse.

Chief, you have the floor for five minutes.

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse (Manitoba Region, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you.

Good afternoon. Welcome to each and every one of you, first and foremost.

I am coming to you live from the Treaty 1 territory here in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I am from a small first nations community where I was raised with my parents and my four brothers. It's called Pinaymootang First Nation. It's a small community in central Manitoba.

I'm coming to you from the Assembly of First Nations. I am responsible for the housing portfolio.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, *meegwetch* for inviting the Assembly of First Nations to address the focus of your current study, which is the effects of the housing shortage on indigenous peoples across Canada.

First nations have been living with the impacts of a housing shortage for generations. First nations housing suffers from decades of federal underfunding and neglect, which has led to a host of negative outcomes in health, education and economic progress. There are regular news media reports of first nations trying to manage COVID-19 outbreaks amid overcrowded houses with no space for isolation. I suspect that you would want to focus, as the federal government and the Assembly of First Nations have been doing jointly over the last few years, on how to fix the problem.

First nations are moving toward the control of our own housing as part of the solution to the housing crisis. Now the Minister of Finance must do her part, which is to fulfill Canada's treaty fiduciary and other obligations by making the needed guaranteed investment of \$44 billion to meet the current first nations housing needs, plus an additional \$16 billion to accommodate the population growth projected to 2040, for a total of \$60 billion.

First nations reasonably expect the full amount of that investment now as the federal government has, since 2016, repeatedly told first nations that it is committed to fully addressing the housing shortage.

The Assembly of First Nations submitted to you the 2021 research report that we commissioned, which provides the breakdown of estimated costs to address overcrowding, replacement of units, repairs, renovations, servicing of lots and other costs. With the data now on hand on the real cost of the unmet first nations housing needs, there is no excuse for delay. Anything short of full funding will not result in first nations raising the standard of our housing to a level comparable to that of mainstream Canadians.

The control by first nations of our own housing is a key pillar in the national first nations housing and related infrastructure strategy, a copy of which the AFN office made available to you and upon which I can expand during the question and answer period.

The solution has several additional requirements of the federal government. One is to conclude as soon as possible agreements with those first nations that are willing to assume care, control and management of their housing. This process has already started. Another is to codevelop and design, with the Assembly of First Nations, sufficiently funded and first nations-exclusive federal housing programs for first nations that choose not to assume control of their housing in the short or medium term. Also needed is an additional federal investment of \$21.37 billion in community infrastructure, without which additional housing is not possible in many cases.

The Assembly of First Nations has requested an additional \$2.6 billion of federal investments over the next five years for programs and services aimed at preventing and eliminating homelessness. The Assembly of First Nations is developing a national action plan on first nations homelessness that is based on first nations administering our own homelessness programs.

The Assembly of First Nations is working with Infrastructure Canada to provide recommendations based on research and engagement of first nations on priorities for the first nations distinction-based funding stream of the federal Reaching Home program. The current budgets of the federal government homelessness programs for the first nations are insufficient compared to the immense needs. They must be adequately funded to be successful.

In closing, Canada's obligation under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes full financial support for first nations to manage and control our own housing.

I want to thank you for your time today. *Meegwetch* and I'm ready to take questions that you may have.

• (1415)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Woodhouse.

We'll have our second speaker now.

Chief Lance Haymond, you have five minutes.

Chief Lance Haymond (Housing Portfolio, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the members of the committee for the invitation.

My name is Lance Haymond and I'm the chief of the Algonquin community of Kebaowek. I am the housing portfolio holder for the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, and I also sit as the representative for Quebec on the AFN's chiefs committee on housing and infrastructure.

I'm coming to you from the unceded Algonquin territory of my community, which is located about 400 kilometres north of Ottawa.

The effects of housing shortages on first nations peoples are numerous. The reason is quite simple. Housing has ramifications in all spheres of our society, including health and education, not to mention the efficient functioning of the economy. Links can be made with other aspects of society such as employment and community development.

I don't need to tell you that housing is an important determinant of health. I would go even further and say that it is an important factor in the academic success of our children. It's very difficult for our children to study and do homework when they live in overcrowded conditions with multiple generations of their families living in the same house, vying for space, time and opportunity.

It also contributes to economic activity in many of our communities. It provides much-needed employment. In short, affordable and adequate housing does more than reduce poverty and improve public health. It is a basic condition for personal and social development.

The state of the housing situation in first nations in Quebec is something that has been well documented for over 20 years, since we started to gather our statistics in 2000. We have reliable data that indicates that 10,000 housing units should be added in Quebec to make up for the accumulated backlog, owing in particular to overcrowding, population growth, migration of members who, potentially, wish to live in the community, and the need to replace condemned housing.

Our figures also indicate that 8,000 housing units require renovations or repairs, and that 9,500 residential lots must be serviced to build the new housing units. As Regional Chief Woodhouse indicated, the number nationally is staggering. For the Quebec region, the investment needed is \$3.9 billion.

It should be noted that we build on average around 225 housing units per year within our communities with regular funding levels. Instead, between 1,000 and 2,000 units per year should be built to eliminate the accumulated backlog, and we're projecting this over a period of five to 10 years.

This portrait confirms the housing shortage that is experienced in many of our communities. I come back to the fundamental role that housing plays in society. This role is not currently being fulfilled due to the magnitude of the needs facing our communities.

There is also an overrepresentation of first nations members in unenviable statistics. I am thinking, for example, of the overrepresentation of our people in the legal system, in homelessness, particularly in urban areas, and in cases of respiratory and other health-

related illnesses and problems. All of this is certainly related, at least in part, to the gloomy portrait of housing that I have drawn for you.

It is therefore not surprising that, in the report of the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec, in 2019, Commissioner Viens sets out this striking observation. He said that from the outset of the commission's work, the major housing crisis affecting aboriginal peoples has indeed "emerged as the epicentre" of many problems experienced by first nations and Inuit.

There is not only a need for new investment. We need to tackle the root cause.

It has been recognized that aboriginal communities face significant housing issues. We do not see, in the short term, that there will be a radical change in the housing situation of our communities. We face great challenges, some of which are as follows. Our population is young. It is increasing rapidly—in fact, four times faster than that of the province over a 10-year period, despite the fact that the housing shortage is slowing down growth in many of our communities. Another revealing figure is that the median age of our members in Quebec is 28, compared to 43 for the non-indigenous population. In some communities, the median age barely exceeds 20 years.

• (1420)

The increase in our housing needs is supported by the growing demographics. The increase in construction costs is felt by everyone, but that particularly affects us because the capital budgets of our communities are not adjusted accordingly. Housing is a sector that is chronically underfunded.

There would be so much more I'd like to tell you, but I'll stop here. It will be my pleasure to answer your questions and to tell you more about the particular challenges in remote regions, about our vision of the future and, more particularly, in relation to a way out of the crisis.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me. *Meegwetch.*

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Haymond.

I'll now turn to President Obed. You have five minutes.

Mr. Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): *Nakurmiik.*

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon to all the members of the committee.

ITK is the national representational organization for Inuit in Canada, the majority of whom live in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland encompassing 51 communities across the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, the entirety of Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec and Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador.

There are three things I hope you'll take from my brief presentation.

First, the Inuit Nunangat housing crisis is decades long. It has persisted to the detriment of Inuit health, educational attainment and economic development. Decades' worth of data show that Inuit experience worse housing outcomes and attendant social and economic challenges than non-indigenous Canadians. This crisis has existed since the Government of Canada coerced Inuit into communities, in many cases after World War II, and has not abated since the advent of Inuit living in fixed communities in the way in which the Government of Canada had hoped that they would.

Second, we need to continue the work of overturning colonial housing policies that systemically marginalize Inuit, who estimate that the cost of ending the Nunangat housing crisis is almost 10 times more than what the federal government is currently providing to Inuit.

Third, we need legislative and policy changes that respect Inuit rights, including the implementation of comprehensive land claim and self-governing agreements and the enforcement of our human right to housing.

Inuit and the Government of Canada jointly recognize that the lack of appropriate and affordable housing is a national crisis. This is the first statement contained in the Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, which was jointly developed through the Inuit-Crown partnership committee and released in 2019.

In the early 1990s, the first aboriginal peoples' survey found that 40% of Inuit households were in core housing need. In 2016, little had changed. That year, 40% of Inuit were in core housing need compared with about 11% of non-indigenous Canadians. We need legislative and policy changes that respect Inuit rights, including the implementation of our land claim agreements, as I've said earlier.

The federal housing policy has changed significantly since 2019 with the passage of the National Housing Strategy Act that recognizes the right to housing as a fundamental human right affirmed in international law, including by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ratified by Canada.

While Inuit applaud this change, we were disappointed by the absence of recognition and commitment to enforce implementation of our human right to housing. Our right to housing must be recognized in Canadian law and given expression through meaningful distinctions-based policies and enforcement mechanisms that advance our right to self-determination.

We must reinvest also in Inuit Nunangat housing delivery. Until quite recently the federal government's inadequate response to the perennial housing shortage in Inuit Nunangat was to build on its relationship with provinces and territories. That relationship changed in 2016 when the Government of Canada began directing distinctions-based housing investments towards Inuit through federal budgets. This was an important move, but \$40 million per year over 10 years is not enough. Inuit estimate that it will cost almost 10 times more than this to meet the Government of Canada's housing commitment.

In our view, the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion will need to make substantial renewed investments in Inuit housing

in order to meet his government's commitment to close the Inuit Nunangat housing gap by 2030.

Without these legislative and fiscal tools, the Inuit housing and public health crisis will surely endure. We have heard of a shared intent and a level of ambition by the Government of Canada to end infrastructure deficits and housing deficits within indigenous communities by specific, targeted dates. We now call on the Government of Canada to put the framework in place and get the money flowing so as to make good on the shared ambition that we all have to end the Inuit housing crisis.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you, President Obed.

We will now proceed with the first round of questions, beginning with the Conservatives.

Mr. Schmale, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses. Thank you for your testimony.

I'll start with you, Chief Haymond. In your testimony, you laid out some pretty challenging conditions and the situation as a whole. You also said we need to get to the root cause.

Can you expand on that a little bit? What are the root causes we have to address in order to help fix some of the challenges you laid out in your testimony?

Chief Lance Haymond: By the root cause I mean ensuring that every family who requires it has adequate and suitable housing that meets their needs. It's the foundational piece that's required. It's pretty hard to address the social ills, the addiction issues, the overcrowding and all of the other challenges that exist when families and individuals don't have a place to call home.

The root cause of a lot of the challenges we see with our people, the migration to urban centres and the challenges brought on as people move out of the communities, is really representative of the fact that there's not adequate housing in our communities. They end up migrating out to urban areas and run into a whole host of new challenges. Our principal philosophy is that providing adequate and suitable housing will be one of those main issues where families and individuals don't need to worry. Then we can start tackling other issues, such as job creation and better health services and educational outcomes for our children.

Again, when I talk about the root cause, a lot of the challenges we face as first nations people stem from the fact that we don't have adequate housing.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay. I'm very sorry to hear that.

Is some of the problem with the CMHC and the way they do their operations? I think we're hearing it from a number of people. Are you noticing issues, even barriers or blocks, to people accessing a mortgage, proper insurance and even loans for renovations? Are you seeing the CMHC as a potential organization that might need a bit of a redesign?

• (1430)

Chief Lance Haymond: The simple answer, quite frankly, is yes. Again, they've managed on-reserve housing programs for a number of years. They've remained static. They have not changed while our realities and our world have changed.

Quebec's vision is not only to have additional investment. We're also looking at building our capacities within our communities and looking at new and innovative ways to meet our housing needs. I don't necessarily view CMHC or Indigenous Services as not doing what they need to do. In fact, in Quebec we have the only tripartite committee that exists across this country where we sit down with CMHC and Indigenous Services and try to find solutions that work for the first nations in Quebec. I view CMHC and ISC as partners in finding ways to move forward.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Chief Haymond. I have more questions for you, but I think I'm running out of time very quickly.

Chief Woodhouse, you talked about negotiations with first nations who want control of their own housing. Can you give us an update on that?

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse: Thank you for the question.

Yes, many first nations have created their own control of their housing. There are many different models out there, and I would encourage you to...or I'll get back to you with some different examples of the many first nations communities who want control and who continue to face many barriers when it comes to different parts: the lack of funding and many other issues.

Thank you.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Maybe I could pick up on that. You talked about barriers. I mentioned CMHC earlier and their lack of movement, I guess, on a changing situation on the ground. Maybe I'll get you to comment on that. Then I'll get to my next question.

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse: I'll say this. When it comes to CMHC, I think having them working more closely with first nations would be helpful. We hear time and time again from many first nations communities that they're trying to work through even the small details of things and they feel like they're going to be left out of the housing process or the allocation of housing, when some things can be fixed, I'll say. One of them could be that maybe sometimes people change reporting, or.... Even communication from CMHC towards our first nations community is very problematic. Sometimes I feel like....

I'll say for Manitoba first nations that requesting CMHC to meet with them is very problematic sometimes. It's very frustrating when our first nations have diverse issues, but many of them are common issues for certain things, like when it comes to things like rapid housing. Some people felt that they were left out of rapid housing when they should have been included, or that because they were isolated, they were left out of it. That's just one example.

I'll leave that there, but I think there's very much room for improvement and very much room to improve the communication between CMHC and first nations communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

We'll now go to Mr. Battiste.

Monsieur Battiste, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would really like to start off by congratulating and acknowledging the leadership of Regional Chief Woodhouse in getting the historic agreement-in-principle on child and family services and Jordan's principle. I know that she worked hard on that, and I want to congratulate her for her efforts on that before I get to the questions.

Also, I would like to acknowledge that I'm really happy to hear that there is an AFN chiefs committee on housing. I know that six minutes often isn't enough time to get your interventions in place, but we would be more than happy as a committee, if you have innovative approaches to housing, if you would please share that. For the next four meetings we will be doing this study, so you would have a bit of time—I would say a month—to prepare a document that can help us make better recommendations for those on reserve.

My first question is around many of the challenges on the reserve that I'm hearing about from many of my constituents, such as Chief Leroy Denny. They talk about reserves being in place for sometimes 100 years, sometimes more than 80 years, where indigenous communities were centralized in the areas by government programs and now, many years later, they're running out of land. It's hard to find land on reserve to build houses even if they have the money.

Chiefs, do you believe that a part of the solution is additions to reserve? How can we speed up the process of additions to reserve to reflect the growing population increases of first nations?

Chief Haymond, I'll start with you.

• (1435)

Chief Lance Haymond: Thank you very much for the question.

Again, I think it's really dependent upon the individual communities and the region. Most certainly, land or access to land becomes a problem. As you mentioned, when reserves were first created, many of them were only 10, 15 or 20 hectares in size, but demographic growth and legal decisions like Bill C-31 and Bill S-3 have added significant numbers of new people to our communities, and thus a requirement for additional lands.

Additions to reserve is one way of acquiring those lands. It's quite complex, difficult and challenging, and I speak from experience. It took us 10 years to double in size from 20 hectares to 40 hectares, so I speak from experience. Additions to reserve may not be the only solution. I believe Minister Miller has spoken openly about giving land back to first nations, so we're really interested in and curious as to what that could look like.

Again, as an Algonquin leader and as a community whose nation has unceded territory, we believe there may be other avenues to explore, to not solely rest on the process of additions to reserve, which, as I mentioned, takes too long, is too complex and, again, can be rather difficult when the provinces or the municipalities we're adjacent to decide they don't want to give up the land.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I'm hearing you loud and clear that we need to speed up that process, and I agree with you.

Before the treaties and before settlers arrived, indigenous people were able to access their resources, such as timber and many things like that, to create their own homes and to create their own furniture.

Perhaps Cindy or Chief Haymond can answer this next question. Do you believe that housing is an aboriginal right under section 35 of the Constitution?

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse: I absolutely feel that it's a right. It also creates economic stability in many of our first nations. More importantly, my grandfather, Chief Richard Woodhouse, signed Treaty 2 in 1871, and we were always told we had the right to housing, education and all of these other things.

It's an absolute right. More importantly, it's a human right. Every Canadian deserves a home, but we've given up a lot in this country. Many of our people are living in third world conditions, and that's unacceptable.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: The last question I'll ask is about housing. Housing on reserve is important for homes for people, but it's also important for creating jobs for carpenters, electricians and plumbers.

Can you talk a bit about what housing means to first nations communities on reserve?

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse: Absolutely. I know of one community that created its own housing committee and its own housing development corporation within its first nation community. The spinoff on that was enormous to the families and to the community. It was also helpful in making sure they knew how to repair their own homes and knew how to keep the economy going. It ensured that their children, the young people who came after them, were becoming plumbers and electricians.

It was about creating economic stability for themselves and their community. It meant so much to so many people. It's so important to create an economy within first nations communities, instead of always contracting it out.

• (1440)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I'm hearing loud and clear that housing is also part of the economy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses. I very much appreciated the testimony from Chief Woodhouse, Chief Haymond and Mr. Obed.

I was struck by two words that I find very important.

Chief Haymond, you used the word “epicentre”. Mr. Obed, you used the word “crisis”. We should keep both words in mind, not only for the entire duration of the study but also for when we are making our recommendations. As I see things, when we are talking about all the difficulties that First Nations can experience, we must absolutely retain the term “epicentre”.

I will be talking about Quebec more but clearly, it is a concern for all indigenous First Nations and Métis everywhere in Canada.

Last November, I took part in the Grand Economic Circle of Indigenous People and Quebec. I'd like to tell you a story to show the extent to which the housing issue is important for First Nations in Quebec.

I wanted to take part in a number of the activities. A number of sessions were scheduled, including one on housing. All the chiefs told me that I should absolutely take part in the one given by the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, the AFNQL. I know that Chief Haymond was there. For the chiefs, it was an absolute priority. The effects were a major topic and Chief Haymond talked about them a great deal.

Chief Haymond, could you tell us about the various solutions that are possible? You talked about underfunding.

Could you tell us, for example, about housing strategies for Quebec? Is there another solution you would like to propose?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Haymond: Absolutely, and thank you for the question.

While we hear and we speak about a national housing strategy, we're agreeable to that happening as long as there's room for regions like Quebec to take charge and take the lead in developing the housing solutions for our communities.

• (1455)

Chief Lance Haymond: I'm sorry. Can you just repeat the question again?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Could you comment on how an indigenous-led solution to the investment in housing, and also the infrastructure gap, would be key to your community's pathway to economic prosperity? Could you provide some ideas as to what that might look like specifically for your communities?

Chief Lance Haymond: There is definitely a socio-economic component to this. Own-source revenue and government funding will all contribute toward finding a global solution. The challenge for us is that, while it can create some economic opportunity, it may not solve all of our challenges. It most certainly is a way to look forward.

Again, when we look at the socio-economic opportunity, we need to move beyond the dependence on social housing. When we talk about jobs and own-source revenue, what that really does is open up opportunities for us to invest directly in our housing and for our members to move away from social housing to being eligible for a mortgage. Then we begin a conversation about home ownership. It's an important transition that has to happen.

In the meantime, not all communities are set up in the same way. We have a real different reality in Quebec, where we have isolated, urban and rural communities. The economic opportunities are more limited in those remote communities because of a lack of jobs and more dependence on social programs.

Where we want to explore this new concept really is in all of the areas, but we know that for communities in more urban areas where they have access to jobs, we see the different types of housing and opportunities that exist. Again, there's work to be done, but it is part of the solution going forward.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Chief Woodhouse and President Obed, I have a really limited amount of time left. Rather than ask a new question, I'm going to ask each of you if have any comment on that same question or if you might want to add to what Chief Haymond already suggested.

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse: Thank you, and thank you for that question.

Absolutely. Many times our first nations communities.... Many Canadians don't know that we're not eligible for mortgages, even if we wanted to. It can be very frustrating when we're left out of the economics of our country because of the Indian Act. We have to ask for ministerial loan guarantees and all of these things.

I don't know how much more I can add to what Chief Haymond has said. He's the expert in his community and for Quebec. I'll leave it there.

I want thank you for your time today. Absolutely, we have a long way to go and we have a lot of things to learn from each other on moving forward. I look forward to that and to further discussions on many of these issues that can close the gaps that exist between Canadians and first nations people.

Meegwetch.

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you.

President Obed, did you want to comment briefly or are you okay?

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll just jump in briefly.

There are a few different components to that. First and foremost, the majority of Inuit live in social housing. Through the Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, we imagined we were going to have a diverse set of circumstances. Growing home ownership within our communities is going to help us in fiscal wealth and in economic development.

Pushing to end the housing crisis will also allow for community-based businesses and regional businesses to benefit and get away from a south-north connection, where we get all of our resources and all of the expertise from the south. We have such an intermittent access to these developments in small communities.

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

Mrs. Atwin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

I'm going to use my time to pick up on an issue that my colleague MP Battiste brought up. It's around limited land.

As the member of Parliament for Fredericton, I have the honour of representing two indigenous communities, which are St. Mary's First Nation and Oromocto First Nation. One is an urban community and the other is a much smaller kind of municipality, but they both have this issue of limited land as their communities continue to grow.

Chief Haymond, perhaps I'll address you.

Is this a limitation that you're also seeing in Quebec communities, and perhaps more broadly throughout Canada in your role? If so, what path would you suggest to address this, considering the long and cumbersome additions-to-reserves process?

Chief Lance Haymond: It's a good question. Again, I don't want to speak on behalf of all first nations across the country, because our realities are very different and there is leadership within those regions who will speak to what they need.

In Quebec most certainly we are seeing that land is at a premium. With growing demographics and small communities, meeting housing needs is going to be a challenge. The only current way to increase the size of our communities is the additions-to-reserves process. Again, it's been reworked and improved. I think the work is still ongoing on this policy, so we need to find a different mouse-trap.

Additions to reserve will work in certain circumstances. Many first nations across this country are treaty first nations, so the land they require, I'm assuming, would be part of those discussions under treaty rights and treaty land entitlement. In Quebec, given that most nations have unceded territories, I think there is an opportunity we can expand and increase the size of our communities by sitting down and having discussions with Crown-Indigenous Relations about recognizing our rights and title, rather than going through a comprehensive claims process, a specific claims process or the additions to reserve.

We believe that is a viable opportunity, but again, it takes political will. There is a third player that has to come into this discussion, and that's the province, which will not get involved in most instances. What they like to do when we talk about housing needs, particularly of our urban members, is to just simply shrug it off and say that it's a federal responsibility.

Again, there are opportunities to expand our land bases, working in collaboration with the province and the federal government, and to quit being dependent on additions to reserve and these other processes that are complex, take time and have a huge host of challenges.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: *Meegwetch*, Chief.

President Obed, for the Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, I'm just wondering what role the Inuit-Crown partnership committee plays in measuring progress on that. Do you have any general comments around the progress or lack thereof?

Mr. Natan Obed: We do have a mechanism within the Inuit-Crown partnership committee process where, once a year, we reflect on the work we have done to date and the progress we have made.

On this particular strategy, there has not been as much progress made as we would have hoped. Part of that is because of the pandemic and because of the penultimate focus of the Government of Canada and of Inuit leadership on a COVID response over the last two years. There still is a lot of work to do, and we have committees in place and we are working through some of these challenges to ensure that we get the most out of all federal departments that have anything to do with the housing continuum.

Too often we are told to go directly to Indigenous Services in relation to housing, when we know that CMHC has a wealth of experience in data collecting and summaries, and in understanding the housing market and its different parts. It isn't just the "dollars and cents" money situation that we're looking for. We are looking for the full breadth of knowledge that the federal government has to be applied to working on interventions and the housing crisis for Inuit Nunangat.

• (1505)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: How much—

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to hand the floor over to Chief Haymond for the few seconds I have left. He may have something to add in terms of solutions or problems. Or perhaps he might wish to share his main recommendations with us.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

[*English*]

Chief Lance Haymond: Thank you, Madam Gill. I think I would just reiterate what we spoke about. The state of the housing situation as we identified it presents several challenges, but it also offers us a share of the opportunities. We spoke about the socio-economic impacts that could result from the federal government funding the catch-up project that we have been discussing. The links between housing and other spheres of society have been demonstrated, so investing heavily in first nations housing could benefit us in other areas, especially in stimulating the economy and addressing some of the social ills and future social development of our communities.

Our figures also show that every time the federal government has made additional investments in housing, for instance through Canada's economic action plan, the impact on the core needs has been visible. We can demonstrate in Quebec that it reduces core needs, which means that the impacts are being felt locally.

I guess my final message is that we need stable, predictable funding and that the current funding levels are insufficient to meet our needs. When we're telling you we need to build 1,000 to 2,000 units per year and the current funding level allows us to do only 245, that speaks to a huge gap. Then when you take the data that Regional Chief Woodhouse spoke about, which has been diligently collected by the AFN over the past couple of years so that we have a national picture, you get a clear sense of the scope of the issue.

Again, I think that for Quebec, home ownership is part of our solution, but not for all communities. We need to work and find different tools. Regional Chief Woodhouse spoke of ministerial loan guarantees. Here in Quebec, many first nations do not require ministerial loan guarantees as they have been able to establish relationships with banking institutions like the Royal Bank and the Bank of Montreal. These banks work with the communities to provide mortgages for our members who have the ability to repay. Subsequently, we will move the spectrum from dependence on social housing towards one in which we have a mix of social housing for those in need and home ownership for those who can afford it.

Again, thank you very much, Madame Gill and other members of the committee, for inviting me and the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador to speak about the challenges but, more importantly, the opportunities and the plan we've developed.

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