



AHMA NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

21 October, 2016

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

– Article 23, UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights

Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) is a housing authority that is a model of effective self-governance. It provides housing (which should never be confused with simply providing shelter), and allocation of resources to housing providers. By 1994 the federal government ended new allocation of units within national housing programs. Then by 1996 the already fragmented federal programs were devolved to the Provinces. As an indigenous solution, AHMA was created to establish harmony and control of provincial and federal units allocated to its Indigenous community. Since its formation in 1996 AHMA has worked within the Urban Housing Strategy to build relationships and support non-profits and Community Based Housing Organizations (CBOs) to manage housing success. AHMA builds relationships and partnerships with individuals, municipalities, governments and community based organizations and is poised to work with CMHC to expand this model nationally.





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Executive Summary – General Comment

1. The National Housing Strategy must have an Indigenous pillar that specifically addresses culture and is administered with self-determination by Indigenous stakeholders as partners.
2. Housing providers have an evolving role as communities change. AHMA is a proven model of a housing authority successfully working with providers to be agile and responsive to local needs. It is well-positioned to continue this support and extend it to a national model.
3. Housing must first be clearly defined and measured. Its definition is more than shelter and it measures more than units. The definition must include its role as part of a civil society, community and culture. It must be measured by tenant relations and successful thriving families.
4. Self-governance is at the core of any successful housing solution with culture and regional diversity being essential considerations. This requires emphasizing the humanity of those being served. Partnerships are critical to self-governance and therefore all parties must be at the table working together to define needs and solutions of communities. This will make a national housing strategy a Canadian Housing Strategy.
5. Just talking about housing is not good enough. Success must be measured by actions. The National Housing Strategy is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make Reconciliation more than an intention and put in motion with measurable actions. This is a natural progression of Truth and Reconciliation recommendations, now a movement.
6. Programs must facilitate transition through life's stages. Youth have specific needs as do families, elders the marginalized and the disabled. Housing cannot be addressed in a silo and should be supported with programs that factor in education, health, financial literacy among other essential life skills. Home ownership needs to become an attainable goal so people can visualize themselves growing in homes that match their growth and stage of life.
7. Take a whole-person approach. Cross-pollinate supporting organizations and recognize the full picture of the person receiving services. Determine who is accountable for those services and how. Make clear all the services people can access on-reserve/off-reserve.
8. Any housing solution must take a holistic community approach and include capacity-building opportunities. Strengthening communities with services and facilities such as banking, community planning and construction/repair to keep people employed and thriving should be part of housing solutions.
9. Immediately address housing agreements on the verge of expiring with renewals or alternate plans –this is urgent.
10. Recognize the intangible aspects of housing or expect to fail. People need purpose, housing must be close to that purpose whether it's family, work, interests, community, other or a combination. They cannot flourish if they have a distracting worry about their security or the assurance of a healthy home.



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Introduction

Let us never forget that individual people are at the heart of each and every home, each housing unit. Although delivery of housing solutions requires institutions, our only hope of achieving success hinges on remembering we are tasked with empowering others through self-determination who in turn will help communities thrive. AHMA and its member housing providers see the National Housing Strategy as a key moment in history to exemplify self-determination. More than a National Housing Strategy, this is an opportunity to create a truly Canadian Housing Strategy that stands out because stakeholders are partners collaborating on solutions.

Together with our members, we have identified issues and tactics to affect a Canadian Housing Strategy that is transformational. While all recommendations are based on an Indigenous housing perspective, many can be adopted more widely. They are all actions that put Reconciliation in motion and are all measurable. AHMA can speak on Indigenous off-reserve issues from a BC perspective but is ideally positioned to work further with the Government of Canada to develop an Indigenous pillar that advances housing in the national Aboriginal continuum.

Note for the purposes of consistency the term Indigenous is consistent with Government of Canada language but also references the word, Aboriginal.

About AHMA

Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) administers a self-determining Aboriginal housing sector for British Columbia to ensure all Aboriginal People have safe affordable homes to live and grow.

AHMA is transparent, accountable and focused on building capacity for off-reserve Indigenous people in BC. AHMA is a made in BC success story of urban Indigenous housing providers collectively advocating and delivering on province-wide housing commitments. With self-determination and a regional approach, AHMA supports housing providers with asset management, units and governance to address their community's unique needs. Our approach is consistently agile and responsive.

Stakeholders are partners. AHMA collaborates with off-reserve housing authorities to deliver solutions and recognize the diverse social, cultural and regional factors that influence successful outcomes. This document exemplifies AHMA members collaborating to reflect their individual priorities while presenting them as a cohesive collective effort.

Vision

Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous, Inuit, Métis and non-status Indian people have come so far in defining and drawing on their strengths to galvanize their communities. The Truth and Reconciliation movement has helped advance our ability to move beyond the injustices of history. Truth helps us acknowledge the past while Reconciliation moves us along the path to a healthy future. But more than being a theory or a general concept, Reconciliation is only meaningful through actions that explicitly support Urban and Non-Urban Indigenous communities. We see the National Housing Strategy as the right opportunity at the right time to fully recognize and empower Indigenous housing providers to continue their work to house all Aboriginals in need of housing. To do this effectively we support a National Housing Strategy with an Indigenous pillar.



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The Realities, The Opportunities

Housing encompasses the many fundamental aspects to human existence. Addressing housing provides a spectacular opportunity to not only take action but demonstrate empowerment and focus on a healthy high-functioning future for all of Canada's Indigenous population. The National Housing Strategy is a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity to recognize the needs of the Indigenous communities and the opportunities for healing, strengthening and growth. The findings and recommendations in this report emphasize actions that will lead to housing solutions and advance Indigenous communities. Not limited exclusively to Indigenous populations, they can be applied to the housing crisis this country faces as a whole.

Reality: Housing is a fundamental human right

Housing serves as a hub for all aspects of life. Education, health, financial literacy, economic growth, capacity-building and entrepreneurship cannot exist, let alone flourish unless the assurance of a safe, clean home is not a preoccupying worry. Specific barriers exist for First Nations that fuel the housing crisis. The vulnerable, many youths in care and women in transition houses will be turned away from housing by prejudice and ignorance, preventing them from breaking the patterns that keep them in this situation. A supply of units is needed but emphasis must be on programs to end the cycle. Home ownership should be a reasonable, attainable goal for anyone, regardless of their situation.

National Housing Strategy Opportunity:

Embed safe and affordable housing as a foundational priority in all initiatives, ensuring access is available to anyone needing housing. But approach measurement of success with a human lens to determine the success of families and tenants.

Reality: Supply must be refreshed with a holistic view to communities

A critical step in any strategy is to define essential housing standards. Construction and updates should extend the sustainability and life of houses while keeping in mind that they are part of a community that will grow and require constant capacity development. Without that, and the necessary annual funding, crowded conditions will drive people to inadequate alternatives. There is no doubt that housing units are required but in planning, we can anticipate the needs of the community as a whole and recognize the transitions that people undergo. This is a huge opportunity to plan with a vision of enabling people to remain and grow in their communities if they choose. Aboriginals are perfectly positioned to lead in demonstrating community-focussed growth.

National Housing Strategy Opportunity:

To empower each community by providing resources to self-evaluate and self-determine methods of addressing housing issues within individual communities.



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Reality: Housing is a lifelong continuum

For youth – those emerging adults with their cultural and economic future ahead of them – who are aging out of the system there is inadequate preparation in financial literacy and managing personal affairs, including housing. This important demographic is being set up for failure.

In other demographics, seniors and people with disabilities have different requirements for housing that must be adapted to their restrictions and meet their physical needs. And homelessness should not be a life-long norm but rather be temporary by addressing systemic barriers.

Programs such as Ready To Rent prepare renters for the various changes and challenges that can happen in day to day “rental” life. Those who successfully complete the program are more engaged, driven and proud of their successes indicating this program is a suitable model to expand.

National Housing Strategy Opportunity:

To develop initiatives that support capacity-building, growth and planning, creating employment and learning opportunities that can be home-grown and directed back into the community. This will create a positive cycle where skills are fostered at home so the community reaps the benefits of the brain trust and skills. Programs should feature financial literacy to help individuals self-identify as inhabitants and eventually home-owners.

Reality: Housing is the simplest of needs with complex aspects unique to Aboriginals

Housing support cannot continue to be delivered in the silo method of pre-determined programs that do not respond to local needs or allow for self-determination. Programs that include education and capacity-building will enhance the livability of solutions. Ultimately people need a purpose and homes must be located close to that purpose, be it family, work, interests, other or a combination of these. While this is common of all citizens, First Nations, Aboriginals and Indigenous people live between two solitudes of on-reserve and off-reserve, often moving back and forth between. Yet federal and provincial governments and housing services are delivered completely distinctly and usually roll-out of new programs that are pre-defined. This piecemeal approach neglects to deliver support to the whole person.

National Housing Strategy Opportunity:

To replace jurisdictional and bureaucratic barriers to Indigenous Peoples with an AHMA-based model that puts responsibility in the hands of regional providers and supports individuals through delivery of meaningful solutions that address housing issues.

Reality: Funding can become significantly more efficient with collaboration between services

Funding frequently goes toward the same service or a function that has been repeated in another system. Opening channels of communication between institutions and service providers serving the same populations should reduce redundancies.

National Housing Strategy Opportunity:

To increase exchange between service providers to enrich existing efforts and reduce silos recognizing recipients and communities are a whole rather than parts of a system.



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Recommendations

1. Create a designated Indigenous Pillar in the National Housing Strategy. Put humanity first. Emphasize the need rather than the numbers of individuals receiving housing support. Ensure they are respected and cared for and not seen as a statistic. BC Housing has proven the AHMA model ensures proportionate allocation of funding to achieve this. Address full spectrum of instruments to include market strategy, general housing strategy. Recognize the needs of the North require a distinct approach or pillar.
2. Make Reconciliation a measurable action by assessing housing based on successful families and tenants rather than units. Let's Talk Housing is a start to a National Housing Strategy, but it is meaningless if talking doesn't result in measurable action that empowers those it supports. Put Reconciliation in motion: ensure there is funding for programs that imbed safe, affordable housing as a foundational priority. This should occur across federal, provincial and municipal initiatives (jointly funded). Programs must have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that include baselines with measurements that are:
 - a. Results-based – the human experience such as success of families and tenants
 - b. Progress-based – encouraging innovation and community-centred collaboration.

KPIs will ensure comprehensive delivery of services and accurate data collection. Use the opportunity to measure Reconciliation innovatively, based on success.

For example, rather than just measuring number of homeless, measure number of people taken off the street.

3. Put self-determination at the core of every effort, use AHMA as a model to facilitate self-determination in housing and develop responsive programs. Any housing body must have an advisory committee. Any authoritarian patriarchy model will fail. Federal and provincial governments truly wishing to engage with Indigenous leadership as partners must recognize that delivery of services is best managed in the hands of the providers who understand the diversity of the community they serve and can grow with them. This self-determination is essential to empowerment and building trust. AHMA was originally formed on a self-governance model and as a result has developed an extraordinary brain trust and solid track record in a collaborative approach. It upholds the government's obligations while working with those in the field.
4. Define housing. Establish a common lexicon that includes housing an essential part of a community, measured by success of families and tenants.
5. Increase program partnerships that support individuals and communities –they are essential to successful housing solutions. Relationships with stakeholders must be the core of any strategy and cannot be put at risk. A whole-community approach that collaborates with health and education authorities, for example, is far more likely to result in successful housing outcomes because it incorporates the elements that make housing a success. Ready to Rent is an outstanding example of cross-pollination of disciplines that keep people safely housed. Investing in education reduces rehabilitation expenses.



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Recommendations (cont.)

6. Design and modify homes to accommodate the cultural need for socialization. The National Housing Strategy must develop new and modify existing structures to respect the need to:
 - a. Connect tenants to services
 - b. Build/renew housing stock that facilitates people gathering
 - c. Allow units to be connected recognizing the need for including social culture as a design feature
7. Include culture in programs. Include tenant relations as a line item to facilitate social support and friendship centres. They keep communities healthy and alive. Look to those delivering services to advise on culturally appropriate community responses. Support and flexibility are key to ensuring integration of culture is respectful and appropriate for the community. Take a lifecycle approach: develop initiatives that support capacity-building, growth, planning, employment and learning opportunities. Include home-ownership as an attainable goal.
8. Address the barriers of living on-reserve. Without capacity-building and community planning, the opportunities to live on-reserve are too limited, driving many away. Job opportunities and an emphasis on purpose is critical to strengthening communities. Hand-outs decrease purpose and diminish sense of self-worth –two key elements of a healthy society.
9. Establish minimum criteria for quality of life and living conditions. Sub-standard, unhealthy conditions are impossible to flourish in. It's essential to look at the lifecycle of housing. Problems exist outside the delivery of housing services, for example landlords take advantage of individuals in housing programs by providing unclean, unsafe conditions. Therefore, the entire delivery system must be re-evaluated and opportunistic abuses of housing prevented. Deliver only safe, healthy housing with adequate space to sleep, eat and live.
10. Look at housing stock in individual communities, identify needs of the demographics. Take a community-centred approach to evaluate present and anticipated needs of people as they age to inform decisions on housing stock. Do units serve a social purpose? Can they be renewed/re-purposed to extend subsidies for units needed? Is there adequate supply?
11. Strategize and renew operating agreements –immediately. Support CBOs in portfolio planning. Most agreements on existing sustainable and good quality housing need to be renewed before expiring soon. Others will expire leaving authorities with new significant assets. When subsidies expire, societies depending on them will struggle to survive or will no longer be able to provide safe, affordable housing in their communities. Portfolio planning will prevent this and increase efficiencies. A one size fits all approach won't work. Provide management support to consider the spectrum of possibilities and ensure sustainability of community and homes.



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Recommendations (cont.)

12. Acknowledge that secure adequate housing is fundamental in holding a successful job, having self-confidence and assurance as well as the ability to abide by the law. These are some of the struggles Indigenous people face on a daily basis. They are all influenced by housing. An investment in housing and support mechanisms to achieve a good quality of life will result in safe, harmonious, thriving communities which in turn provide healthy, educated and prosperous societies. A truly transformative Canadian Housing Strategy will not only measure people being housed but people working to provide housing.
13. Create value through efficiencies. Delivering housing should make sustainable economic sense by reinvesting in local communities. Self-determination has a huge role to play here.
14. Acknowledge history. Be aware that stigma and racism exist for those seeking housing. Increasing education and awareness of the general population about Aboriginal history will potentially help diminish this.
15. Include a short-, mid- and long-term strategies to any plan. To ensure promises are fulfilled, goals are achieved and measured, strategies must not only address current issues but contain a plan to respond to issues in the future. Ensure an evaluation process that includes the stakeholders.
16. Create more market supplements. They help address rising costs and overcome landlords' racism.
17. Acknowledge that many aspects of housing are non-material. Success includes growing a sense of belonging, purpose and contentment and productivity in individuals.