



# Aboriginal Housing Management Association

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POSITION STATEMENT ON SUPPORTIVE  
HOUSING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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**2023**



## **ABORIGINAL HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION**

Founded in 1996, the Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) is an umbrella organization of 55 Indigenous housing and service providers. AHMA's members oversee 95% of Indigenous housing units across the province for those not living on reserve. This includes over 5,500 units that provide homes to an estimated 10,000 Indigenous individuals and families living in urban, rural, and northern regions of BC with over 2,000 additional units currently under development.

In addition to providing Indigenous peoples, their families, and communities with affordable housing, AHMA's members offer many support services. These include homelessness prevention, parenting skills, mental health programs, substance use support, and more. AHMA members provide a culturally safe space for Indigenous peoples to make their home—wherever they settle, by facilitating connections to community and cultural resources. This includes housing and supports for those experiencing homelessness and wanting to transition to supportive housing.

In 2022, AHMA released BC's first Indigenous community-led Provincial Urban, Rural, and Northern (URN) Indigenous Housing Strategy. This report outlines a 10-Year strategy to address the housing needs of off-reserve Indigenous people in BC. The report reflects extensive engagement and input from existing Indigenous housing and service providers in BC, as well as tenants, stakeholders, government agencies, and Indigenous organizations. The strategy includes thirteen strategic actions and an implementation plan that identifies the funding, resources, and activities required to implement the strategic actions.

To learn more about the work AHMA does, please go to [www.ahma-bc.org](http://www.ahma-bc.org).



## INTRODUCTION

This document outlines AHMA's position on supportive housing in BC. In summary, AHMA's position is that there must be funding, resources, and political will to support Indigenous-led Supportive Housing sites across BC. Furthermore, AHMA views and defines Culturally Safe Supportive Housing as **subsidized housing that is delivered through an Indigenous lens, with culturally supportive programming for Indigenous individuals and families at risk of homelessness**. These supports help people reconnect with their culture, encourage empowerment, help them to heal, and give them the space and assistance required to build relationships with their wider community. The key characteristics of Culturally Safe Supportive Housing include:

- Connection to culture (in addition to clinical approaches)
- Ongoing and stable funding
- Coordinated and connected services
- Consideration of compatibility among tenants
- Strategically located
- Flexible resourcing
- Separate facilities for those experiencing a relapse
- Recognizes the impact of colonization by acknowledging the unique history and structure of urban Indigenous populations
- Developed from teachings by those with lived experience

This position paper is timely given that the BC government announced in its Budget 2023 documentation that there would be up to \$440 million over three years in operating and capital funding for the Supportive Housing Fund (SHF) to deliver more supportive homes<sup>1</sup>. This includes 3,900 additional supportive housing units for people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, it correlates with the Minister of Housing's mandate letter from December 2022, in which he is directed to "work with Indigenous partners to identify and deliver on Indigenous housing priorities for the province"<sup>3</sup>.

This position paper will begin by providing a background on the history of supportive housing in BC, the current landscape, the goal AHMA is working towards (increasing culturally safe supportive housing opportunities for Indigenous-led organizations), and recommendations on how to achieve these.

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<sup>1</sup> BC Government. "Budget and Fiscal Plan 2023/24 – 2025/26". Accessed April 24, 2023, [https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2023/pdf/2023\\_Budget\\_and\\_Fiscal\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2023/pdf/2023_Budget_and_Fiscal_Plan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> BC Government. "Homes for People". Accessed April 24, 2023, [https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Homes\\_For\\_People.pdf](https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Homes_For_People.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> BC Government. "Kahlon Mandate". Accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet-mlas/minister-letter/kahlon-mandate.pdf>



## BACKGROUND

In 2018, the BC government announced that, as part of its Rapid Response to Homelessness program, it was launching the Building BC: SHF. The fund included investments of \$1.2 billion over 10 years to build and operate 2,500 units of supportive housing for people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness<sup>4</sup>.

A call for expressions of interest was immediately issued to identify non-profit housing providers who were interested in providing property management and supportive services for new housing projects under the SHF<sup>5</sup>.

As of July 2022, the Province has opened more than 4,400 new supportive homes for people experiencing homelessness, with a further 2,100 underway around BC<sup>6</sup>. However, of the 35 housing providers who have been successful in obtaining funding through the SHF, just two of these are Indigenous-led organizations, and just one is an AHMA member. From data obtained directly from BC Housing, AHMA notes that out of the 2,948 supportive housing units either in development, under construction, or completed, just 80 are managed by an Indigenous-led organization – 35 units by the Aboriginal Housing Society of Prince George (an AHMA member) and 45 units by the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society. All of these are under construction, indicating that there is currently not a single unit under the SHF that is completed and managed by an Indigenous-led organization.

Some AHMA members have found creative ways to fund their supportive housing, including through the Provincial Homelessness Initiative. But the fact that there are inconsistencies in how funding is obtained and that few Indigenous-led organizations are accessing the SHF - a fund specifically developed to build and operate supportive housing - indicates that the system is not working for Indigenous communities. Despite this, Indigenous individuals continue to experience homelessness at a disproportionately high rate – 39% of survey respondents in the 2020 Point in Time (PiT) Count identified as Indigenous, even though they only represent 6% of BC's total population<sup>7</sup>.

Ongoing conversations with AHMA membership, Health Authorities, and other partners have also indicated that the development of a supportive housing framework was done quickly, and the consequence is that supportive housing is developed and operated inconsistently across the

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<sup>4</sup> BC Government. (2018). *Province launches new Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund*. BC Gov News. Accessed July 26, 2022 from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018MAH0106-001524>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Government of BC. (2022). *New data will guide response to homelessness in B.C.* BC Gov News. Accessed July 26, 2022 from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022AG0035-000364>

<sup>7</sup> The Homelessness Services Association of BC. (2021). *2020/21 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C.* Prepared for BC Housing. Accessed July 26, 2022 from <https://www.bchousing.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2020-21-BC-Homeless-Counts.pdf>, page 8



Province. As the numbers above demonstrate, this puts Indigenous organizations at a disadvantage as they are not accessing an equitable share of the fund.

Furthermore, AHMA's Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy, which was published in 2022, highlighted the current/unmet and projected need for supportive housing in off-nation Indigenous communities<sup>8</sup>. The strategy estimated that the current unmet need for supportive housing is 4,681 units (864 specifically for those requiring intensive support because of experiences of homelessness, 1,768 for those with mental illness and substance use challenges). This conclusion is based on data from various sources, including the size of population groups with unique needs, the rate of core housing need, and the prevalence of need for support.

More recently, the BC government announced through Budget 2023 that additional funding of \$440 million over three years would be invested into developing and operating 3,900 more supportive housing sites. This falls short of AHMA's estimate that 14,702 Indigenous households will require supportive housing (2,325 specifically for those requiring intensive support because of experiences of homelessness, 2,280 for those with mental illness and substance use challenges). This is based on population growth projections as well as data on flows of people out of various systems, such as homelessness, incarceration, and child welfare. Factoring the turnover of units that will be created, it is estimated that approximately 5,400 units of supportive housing units will be needed over the next 10 years (846 specifically for those requiring intensive support because of experiences of homelessness, 1,341 for those with mental illness and substance use challenges).

There is a clear need for more supportive housing for Indigenous people. However, some Indigenous-led organizations are either unwilling or unable to access the SHF. This indicates that Indigenous groups are facing unseen barriers, and the system is failing to address inequities experienced by Indigenous people and Indigenous communities. Indigenous people are overrepresented in populations experiencing homelessness, yet they are not accessing equitable amounts of funding that are set aside specifically to address homelessness, as demonstrated by their low uptake of the SHF.

**The following sections explore AHMA's position on why Indigenous organizations are struggling or unable to access the appropriate funds, the challenges associated with the operationalization of supportive housing for Indigenous organizations, and why it is crucial that there are more Indigenous-led supportive housing sites.** In order to identify this information and come up with solutions, AHMA heavily engaged with eight AHMA members who

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<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal Housing Management Association. (2022). *British Columbia Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy*. Accessed July 26, 2022, from [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/573e02ab62cd943531b23633/t/6201693e2bbce05d5cae4031/1644259653966/AHMA\\_BCURNIHousingStrategy\\_220124.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/573e02ab62cd943531b23633/t/6201693e2bbce05d5cae4031/1644259653966/AHMA_BCURNIHousingStrategy_220124.pdf), page 35



operate or have indicated an interest in supportive housing<sup>9</sup>, 17 AHMA staff across nine teams, and other stakeholders, including Health Authorities, BC Housing, Indigenous-led service providers outside AHMA membership, BC Non-Profit Housing Association, the Housing Policy Branch at the Ministry of Attorney-General and Responsible for Housing (MAG), and the Residential Tenancy Branch. AHMA has also been participating in a government-led consultation process regarding supportive housing and the *Residential Tenancy Act*, as well as various tables, including the Vancouver Supportive Housing Leaders Forum.

## GAPS IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM

For the purposes of this paper, the gaps identified in the supportive housing system by AHMA and its membership have been themed into **access, operationalization, and cultural safety**.

### Access

As highlighted in the background section of this position paper, the numbers show that **Indigenous-led organizations are not accessing funding for supportive housing projects**. Less than 6% of organizations receiving funding under the SHF are Indigenous-led, and less than 2% of units funded under the SHF are by Indigenous-led organizations<sup>10</sup>, even though Indigenous people represent 6% of the population BC and 39% of the population experiencing homelessness<sup>11</sup>.

This is largely because few Indigenous-led organizations appear to be applying for SHF funding, and of those that are, few are successful. Despite significant experience running shelters for populations experiencing homelessness and providing various wrap-around services that mirror supportive housing criteria, a lack of previous supportive housing experience means applicants cannot provide required supportive-housing-related data to support their application. This gap illustrates how the RFP process does not accommodate organizations with no experience in supportive housing but wishing to expand into it.

There are two components to the issue of access and the process listed above. Firstly, while AHMA does not have details regarding why few Indigenous-led organizations are not applying, we have heard from members that application processes for funding are resource-intensive, and it is hard to compete against larger organizations that often have professional teams who

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<sup>9</sup> Aqanttanam Housing Society, Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association, Coastal First Nations, Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, Vernon Native Housing Society, Kamloops Native Housing Society, Kekinow Native Housing Society, Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society

<sup>10</sup> Government of BC. (2022). *New data will guide response to homelessness in B.C.* BC Gov News. Accessed July 26, 2022 from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022AG0035-000364>

<sup>11</sup> The Homelessness Services Association of BC. (2021). *2020/21 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C.* Prepared for BC Housing. Accessed July 26, 2022 from <https://www.bchousing.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2020-21-BC-Homeless-Counts.pdf>, page 8



undertake proposal writing. This capacity challenge makes it difficult to obtain long-term stable funding, especially funding for capital sites.

Further, smaller organizations, which is often the case for Indigenous-led organizations, are often at a disadvantage in the SHF RFP process if they lack the capacity and/or skillset to prepare proposals to the standard required by the government or are not yet able to provide the required data despite the desperate need for supportive housing for Indigenous people.

Issues surrounding access to the SHF and how proposals are evaluated were discussed in the Ernst & Young *Financial Systems and Operational Review of BC Housing*, published in May 2022<sup>12</sup>. The report highlighted two key findings regarding the SHF. Firstly, there is less supply in the market for projects eligible for funding through the SHF relative to other funding programs, and therefore BC Housing uses an opportunity-based model to select projects rather than always using a competitive RFP process. The report implied that the process being followed to date lacks transparency, especially as it was confirmed that there were no documented evaluation criteria to formally assess an SHF project's alignment with program goals or provincial priorities. Therefore, there is no guarantee that projects approved for SHF were good candidates in terms of program requirements, and potential opportunities for other providers may have been missed<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, the report also found that the process for BC Housing to select providers to operate properties under the SHF and the Expression of Interest list for the fund were not documented, meaning that elements of the process were based on qualitative criteria that are not written down for anyone else to see. This disadvantages providers who have not been successful in obtaining SHF funding, as it limits their ability to challenge decisions<sup>14</sup>.

### **Operationalization**

Once a provider has managed to obtain funding to develop supportive housing, there are several challenges associated with operating the site. **One of the most significant challenges is understanding how supportive housing fits under the RTA.** This has been an ongoing issue since supportive housing entered the market, as there are various interpretations by legal advocates, housing providers, BC Housing, and the Province as to what supportive housing is and what legal framework it should be operated under.

According to legal advocates who participated in the Ipsos consultation in May 2022, supportive housing falls under the RTA. The government's Residential Tenancy Policy Guideline also confirms that the RTA applies to supportive housing<sup>15</sup>. However, BC Housing confirmed in June

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<sup>12</sup> Ernst & Young. (2022). *Financial Systems and Operational Review of BC Housing*. Accessed July 28, 2022 from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/organizational-structure/crown-corporations/ey-report-bc-housing.pdf>, page 38

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, page 39

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, page 46

<sup>15</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/housing-and-tenancy/residential-tenancies/policy-guidelines/gl46.pdf>





2022 that supportive housing is exempt because it has a rehabilitative component, such as an addiction recovery program. This is the rationale for putting clients on program agreements instead. However, it is causing significant confusion in the non-profit housing sector, which are now operating supportive housing inconsistently, and this gives operators less confidence in the system as they are forced to operate in a legal grey zone.

A specific example was seen at a Residential Tenancy Branch hearing in April 2022 regarding the Vancouver Native Housing Society (VNHS). VNHS has blanket guest policies, requiring tenants to seek permission if they wish to have guests for more than 14 days per calendar year. This aligns with BC Housing's Tenant Book, which was most recently published in March 2017<sup>16</sup>. However, the arbitrator advised that blanket guest policies with prescriptive time periods do not align with the RTA. Instead, guests must be permitted for an undetermined duration, and should a landlord be concerned about a guest living in the unit, the landlord should address this on a case-by-case basis. The consequence of this is that supportive housing providers are balancing requirements as per operating agreements with BC Housing versus legislative requirements under the RTA and challenges how to effectively navigate the RTA in the supportive housing context.

This confusion regarding the legislative framework for [supportive housing is further impacted by delays at the Residential Tenancy Branch, which means that dispute resolution processes take too long to be heard](#). This means that some supportive housing providers are looking for ways around the RTA to address their operational challenges, as they lack confidence that the system will support them in a timely and appropriate as they try to navigate increasingly complicated tenancies.

[Indigenous organizations' capacity to take on supportive housing is another challenge](#). This was a common theme during discussions with members, as they are already operating at their maximum and are cautious about expanding their services. Not only do organizations need more resources to recruit staff, but there also needs to be further consideration as to how more Indigenous staff can be recruited to ensure cultural safety, and how to recruit and train more people into roles, rather than relying on recruiting already fully trained staff, to expand the candidate pool. There also needs to be further consideration to reduce burnout of staff. This can be achieved through appropriate and ongoing funding to retain trained staff, accurately identifying, and delivering appropriate training where needed, and ensuring that service providers have strong relationships with partners so that they are not being stretched to deliver services beyond their means. This particularly applies to medical and mental health services. AHMA can also help by engaging with its members to provide guidance on how to complete RFPs for supportive housing, as this would help address capacity issues amongst membership and help relieve some of their work pressures.

Finally, [service coordination is an operational challenge for Indigenous-led organizations](#). Many of the raised concerns align with conversations raised in other policy areas, such as complex

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bchousing.org/publications/BC-Housing-Tenant-Handbook.pdf>





care, especially regarding the need for planning infrastructure, location, transportation, and coordinated resources to help people access the supports they need. The solutions put forward by AHMA members, such as a Facebook group, provide a temporary solution. However, a more formalized platform that is co-designed with participants will help coordinate resources on an ongoing basis. Ideally, the platform would be for both Indigenous and mainstream providers. This is especially important given that a recent RFP submitted on the BC government's BCBid website for a supportive housing proposal requires proponents to engage in BC Housing's Coordinated Access model<sup>17</sup>, even though AHMA members consistently express that the model is not successful and is not aiding them in their efforts to help Indigenous people find the appropriate housing successfully. More work is required to develop a model that truly connects the various services and ensures a streamlined process for both those using the system – including tenants, potential tenants, and service providers.

### **Cultural Safety**

AHMA's position is that **there must be more support and resourcing to establish and operate more Indigenous-led Supportive Housing sites**. This is because it is not just about funding supportive housing and building as many physical structures as possible, but also about ensuring those structures are the right ones for Indigenous peoples, and that they provide culturally supported and safe housing. AHMA notes that there has been significant growth and evolution within BC Housing, including the development of an entire supportive services arm. To better support the Indigenous supportive housing sector, AHMA would also like to explore the option of building its own supportive services department to ensure that the sector receives culturally safe, appropriate supports as it navigates this space.

Regarding physical structures, AHMA notes that BC Housing's definition of supportive housing "is subsidized housing with on-site supports for single adults, seniors, and people with disabilities at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These supports help people find and maintain stable housing."

This definition guides the type of projects that are eligible for funding under the SHF, but the definition itself is fundamentally problematic. It is focused on individuals, which excludes families and couples. Therefore, those who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness have fewer housing options if they are in a relationship or wish to be housed with their families. Restricting these dynamics lacks reconciliation by failing to recognize the fluid nature of Indigenous family structures. The definition also notes 'supports' at a high level, without highlighting the specific need for inclusion of culture to support Indigenous peoples obtain and maintain tenancies. AHMA's definition of supportive housing is deliberately broadened to be inclusive of those with families and to highlight the need for specific cultural programming that is delivered by Indigenous organizations.

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<sup>17</sup> Government of BC. (2022). *Supportive Housing Operators Service – Vancouver BC – Lot : 1 / Amendment: 0*. BCBid. Accessed July 28, 2022. [https://new.bcbid.gov.bc.ca/page.aspx/en/bpm/process\\_manage\\_extranet/3493](https://new.bcbid.gov.bc.ca/page.aspx/en/bpm/process_manage_extranet/3493)



Considering specific cases where there was a lack of cultural safety, AHMA notes that in February 2022, BC Housing, along with AHMA, undertook a review of Smithers Community Services Association and Goodacre Place following concerns about the deaths of six Indigenous residents over the period of a year within their supportive housing facility<sup>18</sup>. The review found that larger issues of anti-Indigenous racism in the community had impacts on services provided within the community, and despite this, 56% of Goodacre's residents identified as Indigenous, it was not required by BC Housing to provide cultural supports.

In response, AHMA undertook its own research in 2022 to understand cultural supports in non-Indigenous-led supportive housing across BC. The scan identified that on average, 60 percent of residents identified as Indigenous. It was also clear that [non-Indigenous-led providers were unclear about what cultural supports are and were unable to provide concrete examples of what they may entail](#). At most, some interpreted cultural supports as the recruitment of a tenant support worker who could act as a liaison and connect people to other organizations. This alone indicates the need for more training for tenant support workers to ensure they can connect Indigenous tenants to cultural supports outside the housing facility. In addition to this, providers admitted that they often rely on their staff to informally figure out how to support Indigenous people and determine what does or does not work. This work is done on an ad hoc basis and often leaves frontline staff feeling alone in their choices regarding how to support Indigenous tenants appropriately, which can ultimately lead to staff burnout.

Many non-Indigenous-led providers who had obtained funding for support experienced challenges in accessing these supports as they often lacked the connection to Elders, knowledge keepers, and people with skills and abilities to provide cultural support to Indigenous residents. Providers also very rarely connected their Indigenous tenants to their Nation communities, which further limited their ability to provide additional support to the tenants. The lack of connection to those who can offer cultural supports meant it was difficult for some providers who had the resources, time, and money to provide support but did not have meaningful connections to spend allocated resources in this area. The lack of connection to Nations meant that tenants are not able to access status and therefore access supports that will help prevent homelessness and address substance use and mental health issues.

Finally, the scan showed that funding for cultural safety services is inconsistent as it comes from a variety of sources, including BC Housing, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and Health Authorities, and is usually accessed by larger providers with established relationships with these various government departments. This makes it difficult for smaller providers to access cultural support funding and given that many of AHMA's members are small organizations, it means that Indigenous-led organizations are missing out on this funding.

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<sup>18</sup> BC Housing. (2022). *Goodacre Place Review*. Accessed July 28, 2022. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/573e02ab62cd943531b23633/t/620c314dce6fc63269d908e7/1644966221911/Goodacre-Place-Review+%281%29.pdf>



## **Conclusion**

The gaps in the current system can be themed into three categories: access, operationalization, and cultural safety. Indigenous-led organizations rarely apply for supportive housing funding, and even if they do, are often unsuccessful as they lack experience specifically in supportive housing and therefore do not have the data to support their applications. Staff are also already operating at full capacity, which makes it hard to find time to apply for funding opportunities, especially if they are competing with larger organizations that have professional proposal writing teams.

Even if an organization does successfully obtain funding, there are challenges with understanding the legislative framework that supportive housing falls under, as different parts of government and the sector approach this in different ways, which means current supportive housing providers are operating in legal grey zones and often find themselves facing hearings at the Residential Tenancy Branch. Operationalization is further challenged by difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff.

Finally, more work needs to be done to ensure cultural safety within supportive housing. This includes ensuring that Indigenous organizations receive equitable access and funding to supportive housing opportunities and ensuring that mainstream supportive housing is well connected to Indigenous services and cultural supports so that Indigenous people feel safe wherever they choose to make their home.

## **FINDING SOLUTIONS**

Addressing current issues surrounding how Indigenous organizations and people access supportive housing in a culturally safe way requires a multipronged approach and will involve stakeholders from various sectors working together – including health and housing. Throughout this research process, AHMA has been advised of multiple solutions at both the frontline and policy levels to address various concerns. These have been themed into two categories: funding/RFP processes, and cultural safety/community connections.

### ***Funding and RFP processes***

1. Publicly acknowledge that there is a need for specific Indigenous-led supportive housing projects. By recognizing the importance of a For Indigenous, By Indigenous (FIBI) approach publicly, the government will place more accountability on itself to realize these projects.
2. Develop a dedicated funding stream for supportive housing for Indigenous-led organizations. This action will recognize the unique circumstances of Indigenous supportive housing organizations, including the fact that they are a) often smaller organizations with less capacity to complete complicated funding applications, and b) many do not have formal experience in supportive housing yet, which currently disadvantages them in the existing



RFP process.

3. Develop a Call for Interest process for supportive housing opportunities so that AHMA can work with members who are interested well in advance of application deadlines.
4. Communicate information transparently (BC Government and BC Housing) regarding what the planning cycles are for supportive housing, including projected RFP opportunities and funding allocation milestones. Open and early communication will enable AHMA and its membership to develop project proposals well in advance. Discussions with BC Housing in November 2022 confirm that AHMA can both support AHMA members in their application *and* participate in RFP evaluation tables as long as this work is split between two different departments. AHMA may wish to also explore the option of developing a Memorandum of Understanding with organizations such as the BC Non-Profit Housing Association to identify other means of providing general support to those interested in expanding into supportive housing.
5. Standardize how supportive housing is defined and the processes for accessing it. This will make it clearer for organizations to pursue and expand services in supportive housing and provide more options and services for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. AHMA is also advocating for the definition to be expanded to include couples and families.
6. Provide funding for AHMA's revitalization team, and AHMA's training and capacity team so that they can provide more hands-on support for members going through the supportive housing RFP process. This includes assistance in preparing funding applications, building AHMA membership capacity to write more effectively, and providing more assistance to get supportive housing projects off the ground.
7. Ensure that feedback is automatically provided when Indigenous organizations apply for supportive housing funding, rather than waiting for them to seek the feedback. This ensures that the information required to improve applications is always provided in a timely manner.

### ***Cultural safety and community connections***

8. Ensure that all organizations, Indigenous-led or not, are required during the supportive housing RFP process to explain how they will involve tenants in program development and decision-making processes, and how the organization will connect to local Nations and/or Territories, cultural liaisons, and the wider urban community.
9. Formalize training for service providers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to deliver supportive housing in a culturally safe way. AHMA is an expert in this area and is currently developing a framework that can be rolled out more widely.



10. Facilitate recruitment of more Indigenous people to improve cultural safety for those accessing and receiving services, as well as alleviate capacity pressures currently experienced by Indigenous organizations. This includes working with local First Nations and providing further funding for cultural liaisons and recognizing that these services and connections must exist not only within Indigenous organizations, but the wider community so that Indigenous people, wherever they live, are accessing services that are culturally safe.
11. Build connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led organizations and local Nations from the absolute beginning of the supportive housing process, including incorporating longstanding relationships with Elders to ensure relevant cultural protocols are put in place.
12. Coordinate existing resources effectively, including the development of a portal that provides a one-stop-shop for different services within that local area and enables providers to share information about local services in real-time, including transportation options to get tenants to appointments. While there is a coordinated access model in BC, this currently does not work for many service providers and a new approach needs to be explored. Service coordination must include representation from corrections, health, children and family development, mental health, as well as infrastructure and transport.
13. Ensure Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led organizations have relationships with relevant Health Authorities from the absolute beginning of supportive housing development. There must be space to enable western medicine to be merged with Indigenous healing.
14. Incorporate medical staff into supportive housing in different capacities. For example, there could be units embedded within a facility so that health staff can also live on-site and therefore build meaningful connections with tenants over time.
15. Consider how service providers can help tenants connect to Nations that are based outside of BC.

## **HOW AHMA WANTS TO BE ENGAGED ON SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

1. AHMA wishes to be the operator of all Indigenous supportive housing agreements, with appropriate funding set aside that is Indigenous-specific. This means that all Indigenous supportive housing will be administered by AHMA, and the relevant tools will be handed over to AHMA to manage.
2. AHMA wishes to negotiate with the Province to have a supportive services department within the organization to align with BC Housing's recent growth and evolution in order to ensure that the Indigenous supportive housing sector receives adequate, culturally safe and



appropriate support.

3. BC Housing to work with AHMA as the leader in cultural safety in the context of housing. This means working with AHMA to develop policies, procedures, training, and operator agreements.
4. When Indigenous-led organizations express any interest to BC Housing in expanding into supportive housing, BC Housing will provide that organization with information about AHMA and our ability to support and assist the Indigenous organization as they move through the RFP process. AHMA received confirmation from BC Housing in November 2022 that AHMA can both participate in the RFP evaluation process *and* support members with applications (if they request) so long as these tasks are split among different teams.
5. AHMA to be involved in supportive housing development processes from the absolute beginning. This includes any work prior to the physical development of sites. This will enable AHMA to facilitate key cultural steps such as connecting to local Nations and local Indigenous organizations, ensuring Elders are included, and that design of the building is appropriate. Where needed, AHMA will also help build connections to local organizations such as Health Authorities and Friendship Centres.
6. AHMA to work in partnership with BC Housing to develop operator agreements and policies and procedures, as well as provide ongoing guidance for best practices regarding cultural safety and cultural protocol.
7. AHMA to be the lead on defining and developing benchmarks for cultural safety in supportive housing sites. This also includes developing and delivering training on cultural safety.
8. Relevant government departments (corrections, health, mental health, transport and infrastructure, children and family development) to work in partnership with AHMA to improve the relationship between service providers and their local government providers so that resources are connected, and users of the system feel safe.

## **NEXT STEPS**

AHMA is continuously working with various levels of the government, particularly the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and BC Housing to identify opportunities to advance Indigenous-led supportive housing projects. AHMA reports back to membership on both an annual basis and as significant developments arise to provide updates about progress in this space.