



Indigenous Advisory House on Homelessness

2023-2024: Cumulative knowledge and pathways forward

Contact information:

Celeste Hayward

Director of Operations

Aboriginal Housing Management Association

Phone: 604-921-2462

Email: chayward@ahma-bc.org

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I. About the Indigenous Advisory House on Homelessness

Since 2021, the Indigenous Homelessness Strategy Steering Committee (IHSSC) has come together to discuss the need to integrate the current strategizing processes for addressing experiences of homelessness in BC, and the need to use evidence-based, strategic actions to address the disproportionate overrepresentation of Indigenous people’s experiences of homelessness.

Part of the IHSSC’s work has included overseeing a major data and information collection project throughout BC, which documented stories of Indigenous homelessness. This information was used to develop an Indigenous-led homelessness strategy which was subsequently submitted to the province in October 2022. One of the recommendations was to establish an Indigenous panel that would drive the implementation of the homelessness strategy.

In March 2023, the Province announced that the Indigenous Homelessness Strategy Steering Committee (IHSSC) would be funded to transition into the Indigenous Advisory Committee on Homelessness (IAC), now the Indigenous Advisory House on Homelessness (IAH). The aim of the IAH is to inform and drive Ministry policy and decision-making processes related to the implementation of the provincial homelessness strategy. Membership of the IAH is leveraged from existing IHSSC members and includes diverse Indigenous perspectives. The IAH focuses on rolling out solutions that will help address Indigenous experiences of homelessness. This is done in partnership with other organizations and ministries, including the Ministry of Housing (HOUS), BC Housing (BCH), and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA).

The IAH supported HOUS policy and decision-making regarding homelessness in several areas, including input on the implementation of the Belonging in BC Homelessness Plan, future phases, and additional matters relating to homelessness and impacts on Indigenous people and communities.

The IAH would like to work with the Province to ensure designated funding streams and Indigenous-led implementation and evaluation to address Indigenous homelessness in BC. The IAH is pleased to provide this submission to HOUS to inform our collective actions. Our submission is based on what we heard during extensive member engagement from 2023 to 2024.

II. Recommendations and Strategic Actions:

The following recommendations have been put forward by the IAH:

1. The Government of BC supports the approach of Indigenous-led solutions to Indigenous homelessness.
2. The Government of BC works with the IAH to create a functional model for the co-development of policy related to Indigenous-led homelessness solutions.

The following strategic actions have been identified by the IAH:



- Advance Indigenous-led approaches by supporting Indigenous-led housing and service providers to improve the availability and accessibility of culturally safe service delivery models aligned with actions identified in the Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People's Act (DRIPA) and MMIWG2S+ Calls to Action.
- Actively pursue a cross-ministerial approach to addressing homelessness.
- Work with the IAH to move from consultation to Indigenous-led co-development of Indigenous homelessness policy and implementation plans. Indigenous-led co-development in BC must be endorsed by and accountable to BC First Nations as rights holders, including BC First Nations' rights to address homelessness in their culturally distinct ways. To implement co-development, First Nations must be directly engaged at the community level.
- Ensure that there are designated funding streams for Indigenous outreach approaches, with accessible transition opportunities when people are ready, including an emphasis on connections to cultural supports and culturally safe health supports, transitional spaces and sustainable housing options.
- Create Indigenous-specific eviction and housing loss prevention funding streams. Indigenous-led housing providers need to have the tools, funding and supports to keep Indigenous people housed stably, especially those with complex needs that may fall further into homelessness.
- Create Indigenous systems navigator positions at all public-facing services (i.e. RTB).
- Enhance funding for wages for people to work in Indigenous-led programs across BC, along with training, health support and wellbeing support for those providing services. Ensure accessible and specialized culturally safe mental health, addictions, medical supports, and training are available for Indigenous housing and service providers across the housing continuum to support Indigenous community members.
- Funding and support for an Indigenous-led organization to collaborate on the Point in Time (PiT) Count and work with the IAH to create a plan for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) communities and Indigenous organizations to access disaggregated data from the PiT Count and the Integrated Data Project. This includes distinctions-based data on Indigenous homelessness to ensure that the specific needs of FNMI and Indigenous communities are adequately addressed.
- Work with the IAH to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to understand what models are working and what areas can be improved. It is crucial to develop performance evaluation mechanisms that have the Indigenous component embedded and integrated from the very beginning of program development.



- Develop mechanisms to ensure that the work of the IAH and HOUS is directly accountable to BC rights holders. A clear connection must be developed between how IAH engagement informs HOUS’s implementation of homelessness policies and initiatives.

III. Understanding the Need

Decades of underfunding and failed fiduciary duties have led to a critical housing and infrastructure gap for First Nations communities across BC.¹ The well-documented challenges and limited access to essential infrastructure – including housing, education, healthcare, connectivity, and other essential services – resulted in entrenched intergenerational inequality. While poor housing conditions and shortages have been reported for decades,² governments and governing agencies have continued to rely on ineffective, short-term solutions. The current funding mechanisms lead to an inability to create strategic long-term plans and access sustainable operations and maintenance funding, further exacerbating housing issues and vulnerabilities to homelessness.

Indigenous community members continue to be widely overrepresented across the homeless population in BC and face increased rates of eviction and eviction into homelessness.^{3,4} The 2023 Report on Homeless Counts in BC identified that 40% of those who reported experiencing homelessness identified as Indigenous. This number has climbed to over 80% in some Northern communities. Housing insecurity is further compounded for Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse peoples.⁵ Inequalities are even more pronounced for Indigenous people with disabilities or health conditions due to reduced access to employment, education, vocational training, and disability-specific support.⁶ High rates of Indigenous homelessness are attributed to the lack of affordable, safe, and accessible housing in combination with intergenerational trauma resulting from colonization, cultural genocide, and policies that actively sought to dismantle Indigenous culture, families and communities.^{7,8,9}

¹ A comprehensive analysis by the Assembly of First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada cites an infrastructure gap for First Nations in BC. This includes capital investment of \$58.4 billion, and Operating and Maintenance investment of \$12.3 billion. The full report can be accessed here: [1-AFN-Closing-the-Infrastructure-Gap-by-2030-National-Cost-Estimate-English-report-1.pdf](https://www.afn.ca/~/media/1-AFN-Closing-the-Infrastructure-Gap-by-2030-National-Cost-Estimate-English-report-1.pdf) ([bynder.com](https://www.bynder.com))

² See Colbourne, Pomeroy, and Landry (2022). Assessing First Nations Housing Need in BC. Report prepared for BC Housing.

³ Xuereb, S., & Jones, C. 2023. Estimating No-Fault Evictions In Canada: Understanding BC’s Disproportionate Eviction Rate in the 2021 Canadian Housing Survey. Balanced Supply of Housing Research Partnership.

⁴ First United (2023). BC Eviction Mapping Interim Report, May 2023. <https://firstunited.ca/how-we-help/bc-eviction-mapping/>

⁵ Native Women’s Association of Canada (2020). Indigenous Housing: Policy and Engagement. Final Report to Indigenous Services Canada. See also Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2023.

⁶ AHMA (2023). Exploring Inclusive Housing for Indigenous Peoples Living with Diverse Abilities: An Environmental Scan. Available on AHMA’s website: [Research & Data Reports – Aboriginal Housing Management Association \(ahma-bc.org\)](https://www.ahma-bc.org/research-and-data-reports-aboriginal-housing-management-association)

⁷ Thistle, Jesse. 2017. Definition of Indigenous Homelessness. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

⁸ MMIWG - National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. 2019. Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Volume 1a.

⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba.



Intergenerational trauma, combined with the legacy of colonization, has resulted in greater system involvement and acuity for some Indigenous people. While accessing or trying to access services, Indigenous people frequently report significant experiences of racism, social profiling and discrimination.^{10,11,12} Fragmentation between and across systems further exacerbates challenges to get basic needs met. The negative experiences and harm presented by many services can lead individuals to resist further system involvement, leaving people with few options but remaining homeless or precariously housed without support. Indigenous communities have repeatedly emphasized the need to feel safe when accessing services.^{13,14,15,16}

It is also essential to recognize that homelessness across Indigenous communities is different and reflects a notion of home connected not just to a physical structure but also to the broader community and land. Home is viewed as a web of relationships and responsibilities that support more interconnected and holistic notions of home. Homelessness is, in this sense, more about being without community and relationships.¹⁷

The needs of Indigenous Peoples at risk of and affected by homelessness are best addressed through interdependent healing processes originating within community; for Indigenous and by Indigenous.^{18,19,20,21} However, current funding streams accessed by FNMI communities and Indigenous-led organizations often do not adequately reflect the needs or include the necessary supports. Funding structures and evaluation mechanisms will have to change to better support FNMI communities and urban and away-from-home Indigenous community members.

¹⁰ Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society. 2022. Unsettling Stigma with the Indigenous Street Community in Victoria, BC. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://acehsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/stigma-poster.pdf>

¹¹ BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy. 2022. Appendix A: What we Heard Report [2022-08+BC+Indigenous+Homelessness+Strategy+-+FINAL+V5+\(004\).pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/gov/indigenous/indigenous-homelessness-strategy/appendix-a-what-we-heard-report)

¹² NWAC - Native Women's Association of Canada. 2020. Indigenous Housing: Policy and Engagement. Final report to Indigenous Services Canada. Retrieved from: https://nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/Indigenous-Housing-Policy-and-Engagement-%E2%80%93-Final-Report-to-Indigenous-Services-Canada_2022-05-05-154820_xsl.pdf

¹³ Barker, C., and A. Dion. 2012. "Trauma and First Nations Peoples." Legacy Education: Knowledge to Support Families. A Symposium on Understanding Impacts of Residential Schools on Families, Addictions and Violence. Upstart and FCSS. Calgary, Alberta. Slide 27. Quoted in Pinnow, Joanne. 2014. "Socio-psychological impacts of intergenerational trauma and trauma responses." Aboriginal brief. FCSS Calgary Research Brief 6. Calgary: City of Calgary, FCSS Calgary. p.10.

¹⁴ Allan, B. and Smylie, J. 2015. First Peoples, second class treatment: The role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Toronto, ON: the Wellesley Institute. p. 31-34.

¹⁵ BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy. 2022. [2022-08+BC+Indigenous+Homelessness+Strategy+-+FINAL+V5+\(004\).pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/gov/indigenous/indigenous-homelessness-strategy/appendix-a-what-we-heard-report)

¹⁶ NWAC, 2020. See also Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2023

¹⁷ Thistle, Jesse. 2017.

¹⁸ Canadian Council on Social Determinants of Health. 2013. Roots of Resilience: Overcoming Inequities in Aboriginal Communities – Final Report.

¹⁹ Barker, C., and A. Dion. 2012. "Trauma and First Nations Peoples." Legacy Education: Knowledge to Support Families. A Symposium on Understanding Impacts of Residential Schools on Families, Addictions and Violence. Upstart and FCSS. Calgary, Alberta. Slide 27. Quoted in Pinnow, Joanne. 2014. "Socio-psychological impacts of intergenerational trauma and trauma responses." Aboriginal brief. FCSS Calgary Research Brief 6. Calgary: City of Calgary, FCSS Calgary. p.10.

²⁰ Allan, B. and Smylie, J. 2015. First Peoples, second class treatment: The role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Toronto, ON: the Wellesley Institute. p. 31-34.

²¹ BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy. 2022. [2022-08+BC+Indigenous+Homelessness+Strategy+-+FINAL+V5+\(004\).pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/gov/indigenous/indigenous-homelessness-strategy/appendix-a-what-we-heard-report)



IV. What we heard

Key themes emerging from IAH meetings:

1. **Indigenous experiences of homelessness continue to worsen across the province.** IAH members emphasized that engagement is crucial because homelessness changes daily, and the context shifts across the province. Access to resources, extreme weather events, and the connection between on-reserve and off-reserve housing are crucial to consider.
2. **Indigenous-led responses.** Indigenous leadership is key to supporting Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. More thought and planning needs to go into how we can ensure new tools and frameworks support Indigenous-led responses.
3. **Cross-ministerial approach.** The IAH has repeatedly emphasized the importance of a cross-ministerial approach in conversations about addressing Indigenous homelessness.
4. **Funding structures.** While the Belonging in BC Plan does largely align with the BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy, many of the programs do not have specifically earmarked funds for Indigenous people.
5. **Solution-oriented co-development.** There is a disconnect between the government's need to discuss key policy issues, versus the sectors' need to access funding for Indigenous-led programming. Solution-oriented consultation and connection to funding opportunities to the sector via the IAH are key to implementing the Indigenous Homelessness Strategy, rather than focusing only on discussing high-level policy issues. IAH members have decades of key frontline experience and are well-placed to share information and determine their networks' broader needs, interests, and capacity for programs. Indigenous-led co-development in BC must be endorsed by and accountable to BC First Nations as rights holders, including BC First Nations' rights to address homelessness in their culturally distinct ways. To implement co-development, First Nations must be directly engaged at the community level.
6. **Reciprocity in meetings.** The IAH has offered feedback on several HOUS policy priorities. In turn, the Ministry needs to come back with clear timelines and information on how feedback is being incorporated. It is important to see movement in spaces where people are giving up their time.
7. **Evaluation and how success is measured.** Further and ongoing discussions are needed regarding KPIs to understand what models are working and what areas can be improved. Developing performance evaluation mechanisms that have the Indigenous component embedded and integrated from the beginning is crucial. It is also essential that the province engages with Indigenous communities on culturally appropriate methods for data collection, evaluation, and reporting, and acknowledge the importance of data sovereignty. Indigenous communities and those with lived/living experiences must have decision-making authority on whether Indigenous homelessness-related projects are working or not.
8. **Cultural safety.** The IAH has asked BCH and HOUS to support local governments and organizations to ensure that the work being done in the community is culturally safe and trauma-informed. Cultural safety must be included in all parts of processes, policies, and



procedures for operations, governance structures, and ensuring culturally specific services rather than pan-Indigenous approaches.

9. **Cultural supports.** Leading with culture and tradition is crucial to supporting people. The IAH has highlighted that funding is needed for housing and service providers to be able to offer cultural supports.
10. **Retention and Recruitment.** The IAH has expressed an urgent need for higher wages, training supports, culturally relevant services, and support for staff experiencing burnout or vicarious trauma. Wages have not kept up with the demand, resulting in high rates of staff turnover that negatively impact program outcomes and cultural safety. Enhanced funding for wages for people to work in Indigenous-led programs is needed across BC, along with training, health support, and well-being support for those providing services.
11. **Specific populations.** IAH members have emphasized that seniors, Youth, 2SLGBTQIA+, and people with diverse abilities or disabilities experience additional barriers to accessing housing and services. People exiting corrections also have increased difficulty accessing culturally safe housing. Unsupported individuals released from corrections are more likely to re-offend and re-enter the justice system.
12. **Outreach.** The IAH highlighted the need to build the capacity of the whole sector so that organizations do not have to keep chasing proposals for critical outreach positions. Flexible funding, like Reaching Home, provides the best model for Indigenous outreach programs. Overall, more ongoing and flexible funding for outreach is needed because Indigenous organizations are currently operating in unsustainable proposal-based approaches. Ongoing outreach funding needs to include resources for wraparound supports, including cultural supports, as well as rent subsidies to keep people in housing.
13. **Eviction and housing loss prevention.** Indigenous-led housing providers need to have the tools, funding and supports to keep Indigenous people housed stably, especially those with complex needs that may fall further into homelessness.

V. Legislative Responsibility:

Canada has a constitutionally recognized fiduciary obligation to First Nations. and British Columbia is obligated by comprehensive legislation that commits the province to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) as the framework for reconciliation. It is critical to uphold these obligations across all levels of government while recognizing the urgent Calls to Justice identified in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report. Relevant articles and actions to the collaboration between the IAH and HOUS are summarized below.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

In 2016, the Government of Canada endorsed UNDRIP without qualification and committed to its full and effective implementation. On June 21, 2021, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* received Royal Assent and immediately came into force. It creates a lasting framework to advance the implementation of the UN Declaration at the federal level.



UNDRIP re-affirms the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination. It sets the framework for Indigenous peoples across Canada to self-govern, control their own institutions, and determine their own development, strategies, identity, and membership. UNDRIP also affirms that First Nations have the right to exercise jurisdiction and control over housing and social programs and supports the right of First Nations to determine their priorities and strategies. This is outlined in the following articles:

Article 4: “Right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.”

Article 18: “Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions.”

Article 21 (1): “Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.”

Article 21 (2): “States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.”

Article 23: “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 programs affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions.”

Article 32(1) states that: “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.”

Article 33: “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions... Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the structures and to select the membership of their institutions in accordance with their own procedures.”

Truth and Reconciliation – Federal Context

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) was formed in 2008 to document the impacts of Canada’s residential school system on Indigenous peoples. In 2015, the TRC released 94 calls to



action, including the recognition that UNDRIP was the “framework for reconciliation” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act – BC Context

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA) were adopted by BC on November 28, 2019. DRIPA legislates all 46 articles of UNDRIP, as called for in the TRC. It obligates the BC government to create and follow a lasting framework to advance the implementation of the UNDRIP.

In 2022, the BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) published the *DRIPA Action Plan for 2022-2027*; with 89 actions organized around four key themes:

- Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government
- Title and Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Ending Indigenous-Specific Racism and Discrimination
- Social, Cultural and Economic Well-Being

The Action Plan commits the province of BC to a distinctions-based framework when working with First Nations. Within this context, First Nations’ land rights must always be upheld and their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent must be achieved on housing decisions located on their traditional lands. The Action Plan also outlines a role for (non-distinction) Indigenous organizations – such as AHMA and Friendship Centers – in self-governance, including the following:

4.21 – “Bring together key Indigenous urban leaders to create a provincial urban Indigenous advisory table to develop and implement a five-year plan to address the priorities of urban Indigenous Peoples, including a focus on Elders, youth, children, women, men, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and persons with disabilities.”

4.23 – “Undertake a cross-government review of provincial supports and services for Indigenous Peoples in urban settings and develop a plan with clear timelines that will provide greater collaboration and coordination to meet needs.”

4.25 – “Work with Indigenous Peoples to build more on- and off-reserve housing and pursue new federal contributions.”

Twenty-four of the actions in the Action Plan either impact housing or should be considered in the context of housing and homelessness. Key themes of these 24 actions include:

- The need to shift away from short-term transactional arrangements to the co-development of long-term agreements.
- Addressing gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ and helping children reunite with their families.
- Data sovereignty.
- Improving methods to deliver health and mental health supports.
- Upskilling Indigenous peoples.



- Development of a Provincial Urban Indigenous Advisory Table.

MMIWG2S+ Final Report and Calls to Justice

There is a significant connection between homelessness, housing, and the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit+ people (MMIWG2S+). The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (National Inquiry) identified that the experience of homelessness and inadequate housing is linked to the disproportionate level of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Violence and the risk of violence increases for those with mental health challenges, addictions-related challenges, and those with histories of homelessness or other adverse housing situations, including experiences in foster care.

The National Inquiry released its final report in 2019, which outlined 231 Calls to Justice. The Calls to Justice identified “governments as having a legal obligation to fully implement these Calls for Justice and to ensure Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people live in dignity.”

Three Calls to Justice that specifically address homelessness are as follows:

4.7: “We call upon all governments to support the establishment and long-term sustainable funding of Indigenous-led low-barrier shelters, safe spaces, transition homes, second-stage housing, and services for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who are homeless, near homeless, dealing with food insecurity, or in poverty, and who are fleeing violence or have been subjected to sexualized violence and exploitation. All governments must ensure that shelters, transitional housing, second-stage housing, and services are appropriate to cultural needs, and available wherever Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people reside.”

18.24: “We call upon all governments to address homelessness, poverty, and other socioeconomic barriers to equitable and substantive rights for 2SLGBTQQIA people.”

18.25: “We call upon all governments to build safe spaces for people who need help and who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, which includes access to safe, dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA shelters and housing, dedicated beds in shelters for trans and non-binary individuals, and 2SLGBTQQIA-specific support services for 2SLGBTQQIA individuals in housing and shelter spaces.”²²

VI. Conclusion:

The consistent overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in homeless populations shows that current processes and strategies are not adequately addressing or preventing homelessness for

²² As cited in the Assembly of First Nations National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan. [National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan \(bynder.com\)](#)



FNMI and Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led approaches to help empower Indigenous people have been disturbed and dismantled through colonization, and are further impacted by persistent funding shortfalls for Indigenous initiatives. Reintroducing and supporting traditional and innovative Indigenous-led engagement, practices, and perspectives will help to address the unique complexities, structures, and challenges of Indigenous homelessness and uphold legislative responsibilities to FNMI and urban and away-from-home Indigenous communities.

The IAH meetings and member engagement consistently emphasize two key needs in addressing Indigenous homelessness: ensuring designated funding streams for Indigenous organizations and communities, and ensuring Indigenous-led implementation and evaluation. This submission highlights the strategic actions developed by the IAH based on these key needs. The IAH looks forward to working towards these collective actions with HOUS to implement Indigenous-led solutions to address and prevent Indigenous homelessness in BC.