

National First Nations Housing Strategy

Vision

All First Nations members living on or away from their community have a right to shelter and they must be provided with an opportunity to access safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing.

Overview

The substandard and deplorable housing conditions in First Nations are a persistent and growing phenomenon. Current housing programs do not meet the increasing demand of new housing units brought on by the higher than average population growth, overcrowding, and deteriorating units as a result of poor construction and impacts from mold. Between 2010 and 2031, it is estimated that there will be a backlog of 130,000 units, 44% of the existing units will require major repairs and 18% will require replacement.

While many First Nations have undertaken innovative and successful initiatives to address the backlog, many more rely on federal programs to provide homes for their members. Federal agencies have created programs designed similar to off reserve housing initiatives to try to make them fit in First Nation communities.

Federal Programs are not meeting the need for First Nations housing nor have they been successful or effective in decreasing the current backlog of housing in our communities. Every attempt has failed to address the shortage of units in our communities.

Given existing barriers, patchwork programs and attempts at integrating First Nations housing programs to mimic municipal or corporate housing programs is not the solution.

A Rights-based Approach

A “Rights-based Approach” is the foundation of the strategy. First Nations maintain Treaty, indigenous and human rights to safe, secure homes. These rights are intrinsic, inherent as well as set out specifically in Treaty and agreements guaranteeing First Nation economies and way of life. These rights are also informed by and substantiated through various International declarations such as the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, and direction from Chiefs-in-Assembly resolutions.

UNDRIP Article 23 states:

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.

UN Special Rapporteur on Housing, statement October 4, 2005:

“the human right to adequate housing is the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity.”

AFN Resolutions

The Chiefs-in-Assembly, at the AFN 2007 Annual General Assembly, affirmed future principles and actions with Resolution No. 14/2007 which called for a comprehensive approach that includes all aspects of housing, from social housing and the care and control of band-owned housing to individual home ownership. The Chiefs-in-Assembly directed the AFN to advocate for a balanced Housing Framework that maintains the ability of First Nations communities to move forward with local, territorial and regional housing strategies. This resolution provided the platform and fundamental objectives for the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek Pilot Project with Mike Holmes and the Holmes Group.

Resolution 81/2008 called for a direct and inclusive role for First Nations in the evaluation of the 1996 On-Reserve Housing Policy. The evaluation process included a critical look at the manner in which the policies, programs and activities of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada - AANDC) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) were devised; the degree of First Nations consultation and influence in the developmental process; regional variations of interpretation of policy intent and decision making; and that the evaluation process be seen as the starting point of meaningful participation in all future activities in the renovation of the 1996 Policy in preparation for the next Treasury Board Submission and its accompanying Memorandum to Cabinet.

After a two-year process it was acknowledged that housing programs, activities and initiatives were developed outside of the scope of First Nation needs and priorities and had no meaningful First Nations input.

In the absence of a cohesive strategy on the part of the Government of Canada, it is incumbent on First Nations to forge a direction for the future of First Nations Housing both on and off reserve.

Resolution 83/2011, *Housing as a National Priority*, continues previous resolutions that called for the recognition of First Nation Governments to manage and control housing and infrastructure programs from a local, tribal council, Treaty organization, or provincial/territorial organization structure.

In response to the above-mentioned resolutions, this draft strategy provides a framework of options for new management and delivery structures for First Nation housing. This strategy will set out a series of general principles and objectives as well as specific commitments to provide direction and a transparent mechanism for measuring success. This is to be achieved with the engagement and free, prior and informed consent of First Nations and their duly mandated organizations at the local, territorial and regional levels. It is to be guided by the AFN Chiefs Committee on Housing & Infrastructure and its Technical Housing Working Group.

A comprehensive National First Nations Housing Strategy will include all aspects of housing, from social housing and the care and control of band-owned housing assets to individual and private homeownership.

Current Challenges

Federal Programs are not meeting the need

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC):

AANDC does not cover the full cost of housing. In addition to government funding, First Nations and their residents are expected to secure funding from other sources for their housing needs, including shelter charges and private sector loans.

First Nations Market Housing Fund:

“Budget 2007 confirmed an investment of \$300 million to create a First Nations Market Housing Fund (FNMHF) designed to give First Nations people living on-reserve a better chance to own their own home by

providing a backstop for private sector loans. The Government of Canada expects that the Fund will assist with the generation of 25,000 housing units over ten years.”

This target has been grossly overstated as current information indicates that, after 5 years in existence, only 2 homes have been built from this program.

Canada’s Economic Action Plan: *Recent one time funding announcement such as Budget 2005 \$295 million fund and the Canada Economic Action Plan \$400 million fund have served to alleviate and reduce the backlog but these were not sustainable fund*

Mold in First Nation communities:

The presence of mold and exposure of its toxic components to our members is prevalent in many homes. The three federal government departments, AANDC, Health Canada (HC) and CMHC have developed a Communications strategy related to mold in First Nations communities, but have not identified resources to remediate the mold.

Floods and other extreme weather events:

Flooding continues to plague some of our communities. The federal government has displaced our members, some for over two years, but has not made any solid effort to assist communities in repairing or replacing their homes or relocating the communities to get away from the low lying flood prone areas.

Extreme weather events such as tornadoes are a growing concern as these become more prevalent and have destroyed homes in First Nation communities. It is expected that climate change impacts may increase the frequency of extreme weather. Preparedness and mitigation measures are inadequate and funds to support critical infrastructure designed to create resilient communities are not yet in place.

Objectives of the Strategy

This strategy will focus on several objectives:

- Provide support and information on all available options of financing housing, whether existing or developing innovative models. This will include negotiating a new funding mechanism and work to see the transition of funding for current Government of Canada housing programs attempting to address social and public rental and homeownership, capacity development activities and initiatives to support a First Nation Institutional Network for Housing as well as investigating the feasibility of an Investment Trust, which would act as the generating body for financing of all housing on-reserve.
- Support the development of regulatory environments necessary for any First Nations to fully exercise its authority in housing; such as, certification, codes, standards and process.
- Investigate and research approaches designed to increase the amount of units on the ground for our members while addressing the continuum of need.
- Provide capacity development, knowledge transfer and resource management to our people, to ensure well informed decisions are made with respect to housing, while assisting in building First Nations capacities to exercise housing responsibilities successfully and sustainably. The capacities required for success would include social, human, financial and technical elements.
- Foster partnerships, which could include industry, private sector, professional associations, unions, public foundations, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations.
- Promote a higher quality of life for First Nations, through healthy, safe and sound building practices while maintaining culture and traditions, through the use of local materials and local labour, limit energy consumption and build in an environmentally friendly fashion to the highest of standards;

- Facilitate the development of a Public Foundation/Non-Profit Corporation that will act as a mechanism of advice and support to both established and emerging housing entities that will function at the local, territorial and regional levels.
- Providing information and research for the effective development of a First Nation housing program; such as, appropriate authority models, land tenure, financing, construction standards, community planning, contacting and default management.

Specific actions of a strategy include:

The strategy will recommend a multilateral partnership approach to strengthen relationships and benefit from the sharing of information and best practices. While the creation of a First Nations Institutional Network is being explored, preliminary work on the Housing Virtual Centre of Excellence can be viewed on the Assembly of First Nations Housing website

Considerations

Quantitative data for advocacy:

In 2005, in order to build support for the Kelowna Accord, the AFN derived the need to address the backlog in housing. At that time the figure of 80,000 new units were required to meet the backlog for housing units. In order to advocate for adequate housing, research on the current needs and future projections is in its beginning stages. In order for the AFN to effectively advocate for improved housing for First Nations additional research and data will be needed to quantify the current backlog, future projections from growth, replacements and renovations. Support from regional organizations in this data gathering will be required. The AFN is working with the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) on capturing information through a national First Nation survey component to attain the needed data, which will be targeted for implementation during April 2014.

Investment Trust:

An alternate funding approach needs to be investigated. Therefore, a feasibility study should be initiated to investigate the possibility of setting up an Investment Trust that would consider accessing current funding mechanisms while respecting regional autonomy and existing initiatives.

Types of Housing:

Thriving communities consist of a mixture of housing types; social, public rental, homeownership, cooperative, communal, transitional etc. Given that the focus of housing types has primarily been focused on Social and Homeownership, research is required to determine if other models will prove beneficial on reserve and fit within the First Nation composition and culture.

Utilizing Local Materials:

Many of our First Nations have access to resources, which could help to decrease the cost of housing in their communities. Harvesting and processing of available local lumber is such an example.

Partnership and Collaboration Initiatives:

To meet the continuum of need, this policy will actively pursue and explore partnerships outside the standard realm of housing. It will consider an International exploration with various countries that have adopted

unorthodox methods; American delivery systems of housing and first and foremost discussions with First Nation Industry.

Current partnership initiatives provide examples and practices to build from. Two examples are the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek/AFN/ Holmes Foundation Pilot Project and Habitat for Humanity.

The Atikameksheng Anishnawbek/AFN/ Holmes Foundation Pilot Project:

Key Features

- Defines an Institutional Framework that reflects the interests of First Nations as the ‘Authority Having Jurisdiction’ and supports the exercise of that authority in a professional manner that respects First Nation interests at local, territorial and regional levels.
- Defines the parameters of a ‘Regulatory Environment’ that provides a stable structural mechanism for the community in support of good governance. This includes all of the key features that open the door to investment and economic development. Elements such as Codes, Standards, Regulations, Policies, Permit Processes, By-Laws, along with Compliance and Enforcement Measures.
- Defines the means of ‘Operational Control’ over housing while satisfying the continuum of housing need in any given First Nation. A variety of Housing Authority Models that illustrate professional practices for the independent control of housing under a mandate from Chief and Council and supported by community consensus. This allows for appropriate property development and property management on or off reserve with a focus on governance, financial control, management, administration, operations and asset maintenance.
- Development of “First Nations Sustainable Development Standards” that will define the process that a First Nation should consider when developing a long term plan that will correct gaps and weaknesses while enhancing the First Nations ability to control all aspects of housing. Each step or stage of the process will be illustrated from concept and strategy development to planning, design, implementation, operations and maintenance.
- Continued development of a virtual ‘Centre of Excellence’ that will act as a compendium of tools, models and best practices for all aspects of housing. These will act as critical ingredients to the variety of elements identified to support the process outlined in the “First Nations Sustainable Development Standards”. This Centre will be the hub of a virtual network of established and emerging centres and will provide linkages to other web based housing information.
- Development of a performance based ‘First Nation Sustainable Housing Standard’ that will act as a reference document for the renovation of existing substandard housing and the building of new housing units. The standard will be based on getting beyond the minimum standards of the National Building Code through better building practices, appropriate methods and materials, increased energy efficiency and durability, a focus on healthier occupant environment, and a refined sense of cost effectiveness.
- Define the complete range of capacity building measures necessary to achieve full and effective performance for all aspects of housing. Illustrate and link First Nations to all of these measure and potential facilitate their delivery.

Habitat for Humanity:

Habitat for Humanity has successfully demonstrated that its program can address aboriginal housing needs in the urban setting. It has also shown the program will work on settlement lands. The next challenge will be to adapt the program procedure and policies for on-reserve lands.

Communication Strategy

This strategy will develop a communication plan and protocol that will assist in engaging partners such as industry, universities, suppliers, governments and developing awareness of First Nation housing needs. Potential engagement of a “spokesteam” spearheaded by a national voice to promote, educate and gain support for First Nations housing issues.

This Communications Strategy will include events and tactics such as:

- National Day of Action on First Nation housing.
- Media information and outreach, use of social media networking as a means of sharing information and creating greater awareness of First Nations housing issues.
- Increased collaboration and common messaging with NGOs and supporting organizations
- Seek support for producing a series of regional documentaries followed by a national impact documentary.
- Engaging the Assembly of First Nations Tri-Council to provide additional direction and support.

Implementation of a National First Nations Housing Strategy

Moving Forward

- Initiate a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of setting up a First Nation managed entity that would consider accessing current funding mechanisms while respecting regional autonomy and existing initiatives.
- Continue to support and model practices from the AFN/Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation/Holmes Group Pilot Project;
- Continue development of a Virtual Housing Centre of Excellence to support First Nation capacity to fully deliver all aspects of housing within their territories.
- Initiate the Communications strategy to create greater awareness and understanding of First Nations critical housing needs and encourage investments and adequate resources to address these.
- Initiate efforts at data gathering to support AFN advocacy and facilitation role.
- Continue cultivating and seeking partnerships that will meet the continuum of need of First Nations housing on and away from community.