



*What We Heard  
Report  
Summary:  
Indigenous  
Housing Capital  
Program*

Alberta Seniors and  
Housing

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# WHAT WE HEARD REPORT SUMMARY: INDIGENOUS HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAM

## Background

The Government of Alberta is committed to honouring the principles and objectives of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

In support of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the government approved Proposal 4D: Increase the supply of off-reserve, non-market, affordable housing for Indigenous peoples in need.

In Capital Plan 2016-19, the government approved \$120 million in funding for an Indigenous Housing Capital Program. The development of the program was also included as a component initiative under the *Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy*, which was released in June 2017.

As such, Alberta Seniors and Housing was tasked with developing a program to increase the supply of off-reserve, non-market, affordable housing units for Indigenous peoples in need. As a required step in the development of the program, Seniors and Housing conducted engagement with Indigenous stakeholders.

## Province-Wide Listening Tour

A province-wide listening tour was carried out to gather information on the needs of Indigenous peoples in Alberta with respect to affordable housing. A survey was also conducted inviting feedback from Indigenous individuals and organizations.

Pre-engagement with Indigenous leadership informed the subsequent listening tour. Pre-engagement meetings were held in Calgary and Edmonton from March 7 to 20, 2017 with the following organizations:

- Metis Settlements General Council
- Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta
- The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women
- Treaty 7 Management Corporation
- Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association
- Métis Nation of Alberta

The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations was not available to attend a pre-engagement session. The pre-engagement process confirmed participants for engagement, the engagement methods to be used and the protocols to be followed at engagement sessions.

Given the large scale of the engagement, invitations to participate in roundtable workshops were limited to Indigenous organizations and organizations that serve Indigenous peoples rather than individuals. In recognition of the importance of obtaining feedback from those

experiencing housing insecurity, an online survey was designed to accommodate both organizational and individual feedback.

Invitations to participate in the listening tour were sent to a total of 211 organizations representing a wide range of housing-related stakeholders and services, including the following:

- First Nations, Metis Settlements and Tribal Councils
- Addiction and mental health services
- Community services
- Emergency and shelter services
- Family and children services
- Housing providers and agencies
- Women’s organizations

The purpose of the listening tour was to collect feedback from Indigenous organizations and organizations that serve Indigenous peoples on three key questions:

- Who is most in need of affordable rental housing?
- What type of affordable rental housing is most needed?
- Where is affordable rental housing most needed in Alberta?

## Listening Tour Activities

The province-wide listening tour included half-day workshops and an online survey.

- 16 workshops
- 13 communities
- 92 organizations
- 200 completed surveys
  - 149 individual responses
  - 51 organizations

**Workshops** – discussions were primarily focused on capital investment needs. Seniors and Housing also recognized that the affordable housing needs of Indigenous peoples living off-reserve relate to more than the availability of built units alone.

Participants received an information package with background information to assist in preparing for the workshop discussions. Journey mapping was used at the workshops to solicit feedback from participants about the experiences Indigenous peoples have when trying to access affordable housing in Alberta.

Journey mapping is a qualitative technique for understanding how people navigate through a complex system, such as affordable housing. Participants worked in small groups to identify challenges and solutions related to four “phases” along the affordable housing journey:

- **Searching for affordable housing**
  - Who is looking for affordable housing?
  - What are the barriers?
  - Where is the greatest need? (Type and location, including current supply.)
- **Securing affordable housing**
  - To offer input about the process and agencies people engage to secure affordable housing including any barriers related to availability, waitlists, application process, income thresholds and qualification criteria.
- **Staying in affordable housing**
  - Factors that influence peoples' stay in affordable housing including things like income stability, social/cultural supports, proximity to amenities such as schools and transportation, safety and security, physical amenities, and personal circumstances.
- **Short-term housing aspirations**
  - Future goals related to affordable housing (i.e., whether they aspire to market housing, whether they want to return to their home community, whether they prefer rental housing, etc.).

Workshop participants were also invited to engage in a “dotmocracy” exercise where they individually voted on their highest priorities related to the following questions:

- 1. Who has the highest need for affordable rental housing?**
  - Elders, families, single-parent families, multi-generation families, single people, seniors, women fleeing violence, persons with special needs.
- 2. What type of affordable rental housing is needed most?**
  - Single-family homes, duplexes/townhomes, apartments, single resident occupancy, seniors apartments, senior lodges.
- 3. What are the highest needs for livability when it comes to affordable rental housing?**
  - One-two bedrooms, 3+ bedrooms, one level, accessible for persons w. disabilities, parking, pet friendly.
- 4. What is most important when determining location for affordable rental housing?**
  - Close to grocery stores, doctors, child care, wraparound supports, cultural gathering spaces, transit, schools. (Safe neighbourhoods were also a concern.)
- 5. Where is affordable housing needed the most?**
  - Maps were provided and participants placed a dot on the location in Alberta they thought needed affordable housing the most. If the engagement session

was in an urban area, participants also placed a dot on the urban neighbourhood that they thought needed affordable housing the most.

The dotmocracy voting exercise provided quantitative data to support the qualitative data obtained through the journey mapping process.

**Online survey** – an anonymous online survey was designed to provide a secondary means of gathering feedback.

The survey was not intended to be a broad-reaching public engagement tool, but rather a way for those who could not participate in the workshops to be able to provide feedback. The survey followed the journey mapping framework and was designed to answer the three primary engagement questions:

- 1 Who is most in need of affordable rental housing (e.g. Elders, families, single parents, etc.)?
- 2 Where is affordable rental housing most needed (e.g. specific cities, towns, neighborhoods, rural areas)?
- 3 What type of affordable rental housing is required (e.g. size, structure, proximity to certain amenities)?

A paper copy of the survey was also made available to participating organizations to accommodate any individual respondents with limited access to internet.

The survey was available between May 31 and July 5, 2017. In total 200 surveys were completed with 75 per cent of respondents identifying as individuals and 25 per cent representing organizations with an interest in affordable housing for Indigenous peoples.

## What We Heard

The purpose of our engagement sessions was to collect input from Indigenous organizations that serve Indigenous peoples on three key questions. We heard the following:

- Who is most in need of affordable housing? **Families.**
- What type of housing is most needed? **Three or more bedroom homes.**
- Where is affordable housing most needed in Alberta? **There is high need for affordable housing in all areas of the province.**

The conclusions of the survey and dotmocracy data in relation to the questions framing this project are summarized below. These conclusions represent the most frequent responses received in both engagement exercises. However, it is important to note that while these conclusions have emerged from the available data, neither method is statistically significant. They offer insight into the perspectives of participants but do not necessarily reflect true need across the province. Other sources of data may be necessary to determine housing need.

## Who is most in need?

- Families, especially single-parent families and multi-generational families
- Elders and seniors
- Single people

## What type of housing is most needed?

- Housing form:
  - Single-family homes
  - Apartments and condos
  - Duplexes and townhomes
- Attributes:
  - Long-term tenure
  - Safe and secure
- Size
  - 3+ bedrooms
  - 1-2 bedrooms

## Where is housing most needed?\*

- Location
  - All areas of Alberta
- In safe neighbourhoods with proximity to:
  - Wraparound supports
  - Grocery stores
  - Schools
  - Transit

It is difficult to pinpoint where the needs are highest solely through this engagement process as the data set is based on the subjective perspective of those participating in the engagement. Other than Fort McMurray, the areas identified as having the highest need are a direct reflection of the number of people participating in the engagement or survey in those areas. Participants generally selected the area where they worked or lived, and likely did not have enough information to comment on needs in other parts of Alberta. However, it was clear that regardless of the particular community, the greatest need for housing was in safe neighbourhoods close to amenities.

Further evidence-based analysis of the needs and existing affordable housing options for each region and location is recommended.

## Themes and Priority Issues

When discussing a topic as complex as housing, it is very difficult to compartmentalize the capital aspects of housing from the human and social elements. The engagement sessions were

designed to answer the three questions above, but were also designed to understand the context and human realities so that programming designed to support affordable housing can be as successful and effective as possible. The following 11 themes emerged:

1. **Racism and discrimination** – landlord racism and discrimination were consistent undercurrents in feedback received throughout the engagement process.

**Solutions:** tenant advocacy, landlord accountability

2. **Education (tenant law and lifeskills)** – many Indigenous peoples move from reserves or settlements into towns and cities looking for employment, education, or proximity to health care and other services. This transition can be challenging for a variety of reasons.

**Solutions:** tenant education related to landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities

3. **Need for housing advocates, support and followup** – more Indigenous advocacy and support for housing in general. A clash of worldviews affects tenant/landlord relationships and limits the access of Indigenous peoples to appropriate housing.

**Solutions:** wraparound supports (connection to landlord, interview support), help with moving logistics and start-up costs, greater Indigenous presence in housing organizations, 24/7 access to case workers would help those experiencing crises that could affect housing security.

4. **Barriers inherent in the current system and its policies** – the current system and its policies created barriers for people accessing housing. Many policies perpetuate poverty and housing insecurity.

**Solutions:** more flexibility in the rules and policies. Policies need to be more human-centred and based on respect, not punishment. People suggested that increased collaboration and partnerships along the entire spectrum, including all levels of government (Indigenous included), landlords, housing authorities and developers, would be helpful in addressing the challenges.

5. **Start-up costs, procedures and documentation** – one of the biggest challenges people face is successfully navigating the application and move-in process.

**Solutions:** the housing application would be better approached in stages, rather than needing to have everything completed up-front to apply. Allowing references from non-landlords would help those who have not rented previously.

6. **Lack of affordable inventory** – not enough supply of affordable units to meet the demand across Alberta. In particular, there is a need for larger (3+ bedroom) affordable units that can meet the needs of families.

**Solutions:** when setting thresholds, take into consideration all the costs facing a tenant (e.g. maintenance costs, health care, etc.). Some participants preferred the term “appropriate” housing over “affordable” housing. Participants indicated a need to balance profit with social needs.

7. **For complex issues, eviction is not the answer** – many people seeking affordable housing are dealing with complex issues related to physical and mental health, addiction, trauma, domestic violence, and chronic unemployment. These people require a more holistic approach to housing that includes greater advocacy and wraparound supports.

**Solutions:** increasing cultural awareness amongst landlords and providing more advocacy and support to tenants can help to navigate these complex challenges.

8. **Choice and self-determination** – the system needs to empower them to choose living arrangements that are best for them and/or their families.

**Solutions:** prioritizing safety would go a long way in addressing needs and reducing the likelihood that a unit will be turned down. Build units in safe, desirable areas and ensure transit support and outreach support are available.

9. **Homeownership** – owning a home is equated with pride and having safe, stable, long-term housing.

**Solutions:** consider homeownership programs.

10. **Integration of culture and leadership by Indigenous peoples** – include culture in the system and ensure leadership by Indigenous organizations on the issue of affordable housing.

**Solutions:** money and decision-making power around Indigenous affordable housing should be controlled by Indigenous organizations with the proven capacity to manage housing programs.

11. **Centralized information and support** – a one access window where individuals and families could find current information and appropriate support.

**Solutions:** improved communication and co-ordination between ministries, agencies, landlords, bands, and advocacy organizations. Landlords and bands must be included in these discussions.

## Conclusion

The What We Heard Report summary provides a snapshot of all engagement information/data for consideration in program development.



The information gathered through both the engagement sessions and the survey shows that the demographic in most need is families (who) and the most needed type of housing is 3+ bedroom homes (what) that are in safe neighbourhoods with wraparound services nearby (where).

Participants were very clear to qualify the above by saying that any Indigenous affordable housing program:

- Must be designed and delivered by Indigenous governments or organizations who are accountable to their communities and citizens.
- Must be legitimate to Indigenous peoples, “[n]o more painted feathers or sashes on a building, Indigenous communities must be included in caring for their own” (Edmonton session participant).
- Must include applicant’s perception of success of the project at the anniversary milestone.