



---

## Background Paper on Housing

---

### Vision:

- We must meet the challenge of creating new approaches and sustainable, transformative change in First Nation housing. The current approach has failed.
- First Nations articulate a vision that shifts the focus from dependence to a model of sustainable delivery of housing and all appropriate infrastructure requirements. In this way, First Nations can not only respond to the need for housing but also to create opportunities for home ownership, employment and economic development.
- The AFN proposes to work with the federal government to address immediate needs - including the delivery of additional housing allocation to address the existing back log as well as addressing renovation requirements - while at the same time working to develop the long-term sustainability of on-reserve housing.
- Strategic investments are required immediately to relieve the crisis and begin the shift towards new, sustainable First Nation housing systems.
- To achieve this shift, First Nations governments must be effectively and meaningfully engaged at the local, regional and national level.

### Issue Statement

- Housing is a central priority for First Nations as a safe and secure home environment is a critical link to education, health, economic development and employment.
- Study after study has shown that inadequate housing translates to a poor start in life for the growing, younger generation of First Nation citizens.
- The shortage of First Nations housing in Canada has reached crisis proportions. According to the April 2003 Auditor General's Report, there is a shortage of 8,500 units across the country. However, internal INAC figures suggest that the actual shortage is 20,000 units, with an additional 4,500 new units required annually simply to stop the backlog from increasing.
- A recent publication from the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador states that there is a shortage of 8,700 units in Quebec and Labrador alone, while other First Nations representatives argue the figure is as high as 35,000 nationwide.
- In addition, the Auditor General states that almost half of the existing 95,000 houses require renovations. Again this number is considered low by many First Nations. Given the current rate of construction and the expected demographic explosion (over 50% of First Nations are under the age of 25) this problem will continue to grow.





- INAC estimates that there are 16,000 houses that require major repairs and over 5,000 houses that need to be replaced. These needs far out-pace the current resources available for repairs; only 3,300 units are replaced each year, leaving a growing shortfall that results in further deterioration of current housing conditions. Again, many First Nations consider these numbers low.
- Exasperating this situation is the number of First Nations citizens moving back to First Nations communities, in tandem with a demographic growth in the population that is several times that of the rest of Canada.
- The AFN has proposed a Strategic Framework for this change and distributed the document to all of the First Nation communities across the country requesting a review and input, with the intent of ratification at the December Assembly.
- The Framework outlines a process to initiate Data Collection from all First Nations communities to establish the true scope of the housing crisis.
- The Federal Government must understand the direct link between adequate housing and the health and well being of all Canadians and act accordingly.
- The Federal Government has tabled another surplus measured in the billions.
- There is no place for these types of housing issues in a 21<sup>st</sup> century, first world country like Canada.

## Key Objectives:

### Strategic:

- Meaningful participation in establishing strategic direction for First Nations housing.
- Establishment of stronger networks between housing providers of all types.
- Sharing of information and expertise amongst all housing providers, private industry and communities.
- A creation of a National First Nations perspective on the issues of Housing, Infrastructure, Economic Development and Community Planning.

### End of next session:

- Establishment of a senior level negotiating table between First Nation and federal government to begin addressing key policy changes and real funding requirements.
- Planning a national policy conference on housing and infrastructure as suggested by the Prime Minister





## Key Questions/Discussion Topics

### Generic

- The federal government needs to clarify with Treaty nations a modern understanding of existing Treaty terms regarding housing (RCAP).
- A discussion is required on the distinct rights of First Nations and how government policy should support those rights. It is the unique nature of First Nations Rights which drives the need for the creation of innovative and unique approaches to policy development. Policy development must address the unique characteristics, relationships and approaches to housing and infrastructure.
- The distinct rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people cannot be compromised in order to satisfy a uniform Aboriginal Policy approach by the federal government.
- What type of streamlining can take place to increase the efficiency of the delivery model?

### Focused

- How can we best address the immediate, critical issues of overcrowding and housing shortage levels?
- How can we work together to transform the First Nation housing crisis in a manner that respects community principles and moves on housing and infrastructure reports and recommendations?
- How can we address access to economic opportunities that should exist in communities as a result of construction in and around their territory?
- How can we increase opportunity and incentives to share natural resources (timber, gravel, water) to increase value of their capital, housing and physical infrastructure economic initiatives?
- How can we create and take advantage of 'spin-off' economies?
- A discussion of land use and management issues relating to housing and infrastructure needs and First Nations Land Registries.
- A discussion of the benefits and potential savings by both First Nation governments and federal governments as part of the steps forward.
- What are the roles of the Provinces and Territories?
- Are there resources available to use a training component in the new housing economies to shore up the aging population of Canada's off reserve work force?





## Results:

### Short term

- Secure funds to immediately address housing backlog.
- Develop joint Action Plan aimed at factors that enhance the standard of living and environment of First Nation communities .
- Identify new infrastructure and capacity building initiatives that:
  - Improve access to adequate housing
  - Support economic growth of communities
  - Improve community infrastructure
  - Build an appropriate information base and communications plan
  - Design a framework around enhancing community ability to respond to public-works type issues; fire safety requirements; capital planning; maintaining community assets; and related support areas
  - Outline structural capacity support requirements: administrative and financial controls, training and professional development
  - Explore homeownership options (economic development opportunity and “means to encourage pride in ownership”)
  - Identify performance standards and processes
  - Builds 21st century infrastructure through best technologies, new approaches and best practices
  - Consider community wellness and infrastructure from a cultural and recreational viewpoint; telecommunications and technology access and high speed access needs; economic growth; and transportation infrastructure
- Facilitate compliance mechanisms.
- Bring existing housing stock up to standard.
- Establish better, more effective coordination of various processes between First Nations, CMHC and INAC, Infrastructure Canada.
- Build on the success of some communities by ensuring financial and technical support for comprehensive community planning,
- Encourage partnerships among First Nations communities to create purchasing power.
- Develop and share models that improve access to financing such as revolving loan funds and public/private partnerships as well as models that create First Nation development companies or other institutions that build houses and create revenue and employment within our communities.
- Provide access to the Canada Infrastructure Program to build housing and economic development infrastructures.
- First Nation involvement in developing a federal report card on items relating to housing and infrastructure; hard results on addressing shortages in housing, funding levels.





- Assistance in capacity development to support First Nation policy development on housing and infrastructure.
- Promote public education within First Nations on home ownership, generating options resulting in incentives and opportunities for home ownership, and seamless transition.
- Share examples of communities that have been successful with new development and innovation.
- Explore sectoral alliances on Housing and Infrastructure.

### Long Term

- Increased investment in housing and infrastructure; secure long-term, sustainable funding envelopes.
- First Nation institutional development to support policy development on housing; promote public education within First Nations on home ownership; generate options resulting in incentives and opportunities for home ownership; and delivery of federal programs in a seamless way that is accountable to First Nations.
- Development of a fully equipped construction labour force.
- Implementing the First Nation plan on Housing and Infrastructure. The draft strategy facilitates increased control by First Nations over housing and infrastructure.
- Developing a framework whereby First Nations housing authorities control program service and delivery.
- Overhauling, revising and redesigning the existing structure that responds to the needs of First Nations on housing, capital projects and infrastructure - and establishing a First Nation organization.





## Cross-cutting Issues

- Current policy framework in other areas - ie. Effect of third party management on housing development in communities.
- Environmental issues i.e. on-reserve environmental governance; watershed management; contaminated sites clean-up
- Language and culture play an important role in creating a healthier living environment for First Nation individuals and families. i.e. cultural knowledge, including respect for oneself, others, and the environment and our relationship to both physical and spiritual environments, may be examined and used to help improve quality of home and environment; implementing culturally sensitive building plans.
- Health concerns regarding mold and vermiculite contamination
- Health concerns around potentially cancer-causing contaminants like vermiculite
- Public health concerns with unsafe drinking water (25% of First Nations drinking water infrastructures are high risk for contamination, according to the INAC Infrastructure Survey, 2003)

## Options for Provincial/Territorial Involvement

- Explore access to existing Infrastructure or service delivery for Communities within close proximity to Municipalities or Regional Districts
- Explore capacity for training and work exchange/experience between First Nation communities and Municipalities

