



Aboriginal Housing Management Association
Celebrating 25 Years

December 6, 2023

If Our Voices Were Heard

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The housing crisis in Canada is reaching its breaking point and unsurprisingly, leaving Indigenous people behind with some of the highest statistics for experiences of homelessness. As a young Indigenous person, I have personally experienced homelessness and it felt like I lost my self-worth. Starting the car every few hours to stay warm, and waking up at sunrise just so I could move and make sure no one knew I was sleeping in my car, was better than the alternatives. I felt alone and I remember crying myself to sleep most nights. Safe, affordable housing would have made all the difference in my world.

Beyond the dire lack of housing, minimal action on equity and gaps in accountability have resulted in Indigenous Peoples continuing to experience intergenerational poverty and homelessness at far disproportionate rates. Recent data shows that Indigenous people are 13 TIMES more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous people. This is an unacceptable equity issue. Housing is not only an essential factor for reconciliation but also a central determinant of health and well-being. For every dollar spent on housing, there is a 7X return on investment because access to safe, affordable housing helps solve a wide variety of issues financially, emotionally, physically, and socially.



The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) is an active participant when it comes to engaging in political processes, and collectively with their partners, they have formally called on the Federal government for the following in a media release; to allocate resources required to implement year one of AHMA's Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy. To create a Federal Acquisition Fund to support the community housing sector in acquiring rental housing properties to protect their long-term affordability. To refresh the current approach to taxation and government revenue generation to reduce the financial burden on non-profit and cooperative housing providers. And lastly, to adjust the budget of the Co-operative Housing Development Program to account for the lost capacity due to higher interest rates and construction costs.

AHMA has been leading the change in Indigenous housing for over 25 years. They are an Indigenous-led organization that collaborates with a multitude of housing providers. In Canada, they were the first For Indigenous, By Indigenous (FIBI) housing authority. Now, AHMA members provide housing for over 10,000 Indigenous families not living on reserve in BC. With the shared vision of a national FIBI organization, Margaret Pfoh, Robert Byers, and David Seymour assisted in the creation of the National Indigenous Collaborative Housing Inc. (NICHI) which was formed in November 2022 by Indigenous housing providers across the country.



“AHMA is committed to supporting the work of NICHI,” says AHMA CEO Margaret Pfoh. “Reconciliation requires solutions and implementation to be led by Indigenous Peoples. We are grateful for the initial funding announced by the federal government to support urgent needs and we hope to see the federal government make a solid commitment to NICHI with the \$4B earmarked for URN Indigenous housing.”

NICHI prioritizes housing as a human right with a goal to achieve a national urban, rural and northern Indigenous Housing Strategy that is fully Indigenous-led. NICHI advocates for holistic, serviced-based community housing that empowers Indigenous communities. In recognition of the need for immediate action, the federal government announced funding of \$281.5 million from Budget 2022 would be transferred to NICHI in June 2023 to address the critical need for safe and affordable urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing projects. NICHI has now announced that funding applications will be open on November 24, 2023 and close on January 12, 2024.

Prices and rents are incomprehensibly high in the housing market and wages are far too low to keep up with housing costs. For anyone making less than \$35/hour, which is 50% of the population, there is literally nothing available. I personally had to leave the city because rent was \$2,400 plus utilities, and that was considered affordable but for those of us making just above minimum wage, it is impossible to make ends meet with 70% of your wages going to housing alone. Utility costs are high, insurance costs are out of control, healthcare is getting further out of reach for those in need due to an overwhelmed system, existing infrastructure is aging and in disrepair, and millions of affordable housing units are needed.

In all of this, it is marginalized and vulnerable populations who experience the most severe consequences. AHMA has stated that they are seeing homelessness increasing firsthand and immense pressure is mounting on underfunded URN Indigenous housing providers. In Northern BC, between 75 and 88% of those living in informal settlements (or encampments) are Indigenous.



While NICHI is primed and ready to make progress with this crucial work, and the Government of Canada made a 2023 public commitment to provide long-term funding of \$4B over seven years, this investment has not yet been allocated to NICHI for the delivery of URN Indigenous housing. Considering this delay, AHMA is calling on the Government of Canada to make a clear and immediate commitment to support NICHI and its goals to advance housing for URN Indigenous populations.

In the book *'Indian in the Cabinet'* Jody Wilson Raybould wrote "When our voices are lost, our opportunities are diminished."

This has made me, as a young Indigenous reader who has suffered from homelessness herself wonder, if our voices were heard, would our opportunities start to flourish?