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# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** Welcome to Meeting No. 5 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of September 23. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

I remind members that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would like to now welcome our witnesses: Carol Camille from the Lillooet Friendship Centre Society and Juliette Nicolet from the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres.

Ms. Camille, you have the floor for five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Carol Camille (Executive Director, Lillooet Friendship Centre Society):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee for rural, urban and indigenous housing.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the St'atl'imx and the St'at'imc people, which I both work and live on, as well as the traditional territory that all of you are on while we are having this meeting today.

My name is Carol Camille. I'm with the Lillooet Friendship Centre. For the past 12 years, I have been their executive director.

The original purpose of the friendship centre movement across Canada was to support the migration of indigenous people from reserves to cities or urban centres. We were a place of coming together and referrals for community services. Today, friendship centres have expanded so much that we offer services in education, em-

ployment, health, addictions, stopping violence, recreation, emergency shelters and so much more.

Friendship centres reflect our communities and are identified as a hub for services. We have a small budget and about 36,000 points of service, so we know the importance of overlapping our resources. We know how to make a dollar go a long way to link up services for multiple purposes. We have a strong history of collecting evidence to show funders that supporting organizations is a good investment.

Lillooet Friendship Centre has six Upper St'at'imc bands surrounding our community. There is an urgent need for housing in all the communities. Currently, there is inadequate housing rentals within the Lillooet area. Many houses are sitting empty and they leave our community with a gap in services. A lot of out-of-town owners are renting out to contractors at an overinflated price. For the landowners and the homeowners, it's less energy and commitment on their part, so it's easier to rent to those contractors as they come into town for short stays. However, with almost a zero rental ability in the Lillooet area, we are seeing families of three generations and sometimes even four generations living in the same household.

The local indigenous communities have long wait-lists for housing on reserve. Therefore, these wait-listed families are forced to reside in urban communities sometimes even a great distance from their own immediate families.

Some larger urban friendship centres have housing programs, but most rural and remote friendship centres do not and, like the Lillooet Friendship Centre, those friendship centres are then tasked with seeking safe, affordable housing for indigenous individuals and families who require housing, or are homeless or at risk of being homeless. We work with families and landlords to find new housing sources and even to develop relationships with those landlords.

These are just a few tasks that my staff and I at the friendship centre do off the corner of our desks for our clients who come through our doors. We deal with these gaps in services in our community and start seeking funding support to fill those gaps.

All our support staff work with clients experiencing homelessness with personal healing from the harmful effects of colonization, residential school traumas, addictions and homelessness. For the past few years, we've provided meals and accommodations through our extreme weather shelter from the beginning of November to the end of March. Most recently—just last week—we got some additional support from the reaching home program to enhance the services provided for a 24-hour shelter service for our clients.

Indigenous communities all across Canada have said that they will take care of their members no matter where they live, but in the midst of the COVID pandemic that we are facing, friendship centres have seen that many band offices and client services have become hard to access. Services at friendship centres have seen an upward climb in supporting the indigenous clients that are in our community. Housing is one of those areas that we are having to face.

• (1535)

We are looking forward to being able to apply for urban, rural and remote funding for housing within our communities and working with community members to make that happen.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Camille.

Next, Ms. Nicolet.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet (Policy Director, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am in Toronto, and I would like to acknowledge that Toronto sits on the traditional territories of a number of different first nations who shared this area for all sorts of reasons. My house in particular sits very close to a former Seneca encampment.

I want to thank Ms. Camille, because she gave an excellent description of the work of friendship centres in so many communities across Canada. Her experience is reflected in Ontario.

With respect to the range of services provided and the challenges around housing, in Ontario we have a demographic situation that is slightly different from other provinces. For example, 85.5% of indigenous people in Ontario live off reserve. Ontario has the largest population and the largest proportion of indigenous people living off reserve. Many seek housing and experience extreme housing insecurity. Of course, COVID-19 has made that worse.

The friendship centres in Ontario and the OFIFC have really been at the front line of providing housing for a number of years and have seen that activity increase in the last six to eight months. Friendship centres directly provide 151 units of housing. There are 29 friendship centres across Ontario that directly deliver 151 units of housing. That number is increasing all the time. This is a relatively new development because the need is so great. The friendship centres have actually begun delivering housing directly themselves.

The OFIFC is also one of three shareholders in a housing non-profit, the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services Corporation, which

owns upwards of 2,400 individual units that are supplied in a variety of ways, with preference to indigenous clients.

I think the critical thing to understand is that the success of friendship centres in Ontario in creating a real kind of economic, social and civic shift in the indigenous community relies very much on the provision of culture-based services. When the national housing strategy came out, it was a great disappointment to us that there was no specific indigenous set-aside. This would have created space for culture-based services in housing and self-determination in housing by organizations such as ourselves and others to address the issue of housing in this country. Of course, COVID has come along and has demonstrated just how dire the situation is, so here we are.

It's important as well to understand what "indigenous-led" means. When we talk about things being indigenous-led, we're talking about things being governed by indigenous people, managed by indigenous people, administered by indigenous people, delivered on the ground by indigenous people, research done by indigenous people and evaluated by indigenous people. This approach has led to the great success of the friendship centre movement across Canada, and certainly in Ontario.

With respect to what the OFIFC would like to see, which is the development of a national strategy on urban, rural and northern indigenous housing, it is also important to understand how this might intersect with enabling legislation on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and that the self-determination aspect is a critical piece to ensure that service providers with the greatest expertise are able to continue to do their work.

I'm going to leave it at that for now.

Thank you very much.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Nicolet.

We're going to begin now with rounds of questions, starting with the Conservatives and the member of Parliament for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. Mr. Vis, please, for six minutes,

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Carol, I'm very pleased that you were able to take time out to be on the call with us today for my committee members.

Carol is a rock star in my riding. She just does incredible work. Every time I'm up in Lillooet I am impressed by how she's able to manage so much with so little.

My first question for Carol is as follows. In your experience, how does proposal-based funding impact the ability of indigenous organizations such as the Lillooet Friendship Centre to undertake long-term planning and address housing and homelessness needs in the Lillooet area?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** Thank you, Brad.

Proposal-based funding is always very challenging for friendship centres and other organizations, especially for housing, because housing is a long-term issue and project within our communities. Every year we're having to rewrite proposals. Mostly those proposals are for a maximum of three years. Quite often it's once a year that we're doing them based on our work plans as to what we need within communities.

The purpose of those short-term proposals is not beneficial to communities in the long run. I strongly believe that, when money is out there for our program, important issues like housing need to be longer-term projects so that we can look at guaranteeing that the funding is available for that long term as well, not just for a three-year period before we're back on the ground rewriting those proposals again. I know things change, but we could do those within the proposal writing time as well.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** That's very, very helpful information on extending the terms of the proposals.

I think you mentioned in your testimony a number in the \$300,000 range. Is that your total budget?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** We get core-like funding. It's not core funding, but core-like funding that is under \$300,000 per year, but we have 30,000 points of contact or services that we provide over a period of a year with clients.

• (1545)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** With that base funding you reference, you're not only providing language training from elders, but you're also operating substance abuse programs, you're providing personal mental health and addiction support, you're referencing people who are facing homelessness issues, you're working with youth who don't have a place to go after school and you're operating an emergency shelter.

**Ms. Carol Camille:** Yes, we're doing it with very limited funding and limited resources available for our community.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. Wow.

During the pandemic, there was an envelope for indigenous organizations to receive money to deal with some of the specific needs you outlined in relation to the ongoing homelessness struggles you face and how these are related to COVID-19.

Was enough funding provided to mitigate the pandemic's impact on indigenous people's experiencing homelessness in the Lillooet area? In your view, where is the funding needed most?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** In answer to the question, no, there's never enough money when you're dealing with that number of people. As Ms. Nicolet referenced as well, our number increased phenomenally around there, and so when we have clients who come in and they're accessing services like that.... During the pandemic we had on- and off-reserve clients who come in. What we've noticed is that

a lot of the on-reserve programming was shut down or hard to reach because everybody started working from home.

Friendship centres left their doors open. We dealt with the pandemic on the ground. We just deal with what comes up. Our service has seen a really large increase in demand for those, because the addictions and mental health people were struggling to reach their clients or their workers on-reserve, so those clients were coming over to the friendship centre to still get services provided to them when they needed them, not when somebody was able to call them back.

The funding that came out in the first round definitely did not meet the need within our community. I find that straight across the board for friendship centres in B.C., that was the same response. The second round of funding that has come out—

Go ahead.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I'm running out of time, and I want to interject with one more quick question.

**Ms. Carol Camille:** Sure.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I hate to cut you off, but we're so limited in time.

Just so everyone on the committee knows, when you're doing a government grant application, how many hours do you normally have to dedicate to a single grant application?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** If it's a new one, three staff members are probably putting in close to 60 hours apiece to put that together. If it's something that is a repeat, then it's a little bit easier, taking a bit less fewer hours, but those are a substantial number of hours at the administration department.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Finally, did the Reaching Home funding make a bit of a difference for you guys?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** We just received that last week, so we're hoping that it will. It definitely increased our program hours, and we're able to offer a 24-hour emergency shelter from now until the end of March.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you for your testimony today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vis, and Ms. Camille.

Next we're going to go to Ms. Young, please, for six minutes.

**Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon.

I'm very happy to be a part of this discussion this afternoon on urban, rural and northern indigenous housing. I'm from London, Ontario, where 26% of the general population identify as indigenous, but represent 30% of the population struggling with homelessness, which is a staggering statistic. We have the N'Amerind Friendship Centre in London, which recently celebrated their 50th anniversary. They have done such great work.

Maybe Ms. Nicolet you could talk about the origins of friendship centres and how housing grew to be one of the areas you have to address.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** N'Amerind is a venerable friendship centre in the Ontario friendship movement. It's one of the first. It's becoming more actively engaged in housing and housing delivery in the city of London, which we're very pleased about, and the executive director there, Al Day, is doing a really good job around the urban indigenous homeward bound project.

Friendship centres grew out of the migration of indigenous people from reserves into the cities, particularly following the wars. They came about as a result of people needing to get together to identify where services could be found that would meet the needs of the community, and grew to become social gathering places with a major cultural function. Across Canada friendship centres have been major players in the creation of housing service corporations in cities and towns. A number of smaller indigenous housing delivery organizations emerged directly from friendship centres in the sixties, seventies and eighties—more in the seventies, eighties, and nineties—to directly address this problem of people not having adequate housing, and particularly not having housing where they would not face discrimination from landlords on a regular basis. Racism in the housing market certainly continues to be a challenge across Ontario. Access to housing and access to affordable housing is difficult to begin with, and it's made more difficult because of the racism of landlords.

We know that some of our sister organizations, one of them the Ontario Native Women's Association, did a little experiment a couple of years ago in Thunder Bay. They sent a visibly indigenous woman to ask a landlord if something that was advertised was indeed for rent, and then got the answer “no”. Then a white woman asked 30 minutes later and was told to come to see it. We know that housing continues to be a significant challenge in our communities beyond simply the affordability issue. Friendship centres have stepped into the breach and are beginning to deliver.

• (1550)

**Ms. Kate Young:** This committee decided to do this study prior to COVID. COVID has made the problems so clear. How do you think friendship centres can help the gap moving forward, help us make sure we find housing for people?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Friendship centres have the advantage of being able to position a large range of services—described very well by Ms. Camille—that can be delivered either in conjunction with the housing or parallel to it, but in any case connected to the housing. That is really critical not just from a crisis intervention

perspective, but even beyond that in providing cultural supports and recreational supports, all sorts of different kinds of things that are tied to culture-based delivery that increase the adequateness of the housing, and also obtain far better outcomes over the long-term for a variety of intersecting issues.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Dealing with indigenous homelessness means more than just putting a roof over someone's head.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Yes, 100%.

**Ms. Kate Young:** That's what I'm trying to get at. I want to understand why it would be different—

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Sure.

**Ms. Kate Young:** —from other people who are living with homelessness.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I'll give you the example of Sioux Lookout where the friendship centre came to an agreement with the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services corporation and the district social service administration board. Most of the country doesn't know what it is, but it's a municipal-level social service delivery administrative body.

What happened there is that the housing services corporation built the housing, the service manager provided the land, and the agreement was that the friendship centre would provide the supports. If there had been no supports... What ended up happening in Sioux Lookout was that you had 98% or 99% of the homeless population being indigenous.

The friendship centre stepped in to provide the service. It filled up immediately, and 20 people who had been chronically homeless are now getting the kinds of supports that they want because it is an indigenous service provider that provides culture-based services. Where that is not the case, people stay away.

It's simply a question of whether you want people to get the services or not, because people will stay away in large numbers if the services are not culture based.

• (1555)

**Ms. Kate Young:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Young.

Thank you, Ms. Nicolet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies. Your testimonies about the reality and the services you offer sheds light on work that is very important to the committee.

Ms. Nicolet, I'll address you first. I've read some of your writings. First of all, you mentioned that the friendship centres you represent already offer housing.

Is this the kind of service you want to continue to offer?

How could the National Housing Strategy help you in this regard?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Thank you very much for your question.

I'll continue in English, for the benefit of your colleagues.

[*English*]

First of all, we anticipate that friendship centres are going to get more involved in the delivery of housing, because it is such a significant need. In fact, if you would like to look at an example in Québec, le Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, is currently well into a phase of beginning to deliver housing to students and is expanding their housing approach.

This is something that is happening across the board, across the country. Housing is just an area that friendship centres are going to be delivering in.

What is the way that the national housing strategy could best serve us? The best thing would be to have a separate strategy that is specific to urban, rural and northern indigenous housing. Historically, indigenous interests, indigenous concerns, indigenous challenges and indigenous successes have never been addressed in the context of a mainstream approach.

A separate, specific approach to address these issues is what's required. Failing that, at a minimum, a set-aside needs to be created inside of the national housing strategy as it currently sits. Although this will be a flawed approach, it is what is needed at a minimum—an implementation that considers allocations made from a separate pot of money and delivered independently by an independent body directly to indigenous—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** It would take an envelope.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Yes, exactly, it would take a separate envelope.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Sometimes we are led to believe that the National Housing Strategy is disappointing because it doesn't have a specific indigenous component. It's said that the strategy should have money earmarked for that. Beyond mere words, we are told that this would require real management of this money with the communities.

Are the current amounts sufficient to close all these gaps?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** No, absolutely not.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** How much do you estimate is needed?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** As a starting point, an estimated minimum of \$1 billion per year is required.

[*English*]

Ms. Camille actually said it quite clearly. There is such a high level of need that to actually make a significant impact, you have to allocate massive amounts of money.

To echo what Ms. Camille was talking about earlier, COVID exposed things, and what friendship centres ended up doing was playing catch-up on problems that have been entrenched for decades. These are systemic problems that you throw COVID money at, but COVID money is never going to actually address this. You need a massive investment.

Starting at \$1 billion would be a great way to go. We could spend it.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Thank you.

• (1600)

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, you have a minute and a half.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Okay.

We're talking about homelessness. In the reading I did, I found it interesting that the definition of homelessness is different for indigenous people; it can have several components.

Ms. Nicolet, can you tell us the status of this initiative?

Do some components better meet the needs of the communities?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** If I understood the question correctly, it deals with the different dimensions of homelessness in the indigenous community.

Did I understand the question correctly?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Are homelessness initiatives responding well to needs?

[*English*]

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Not in every case, but to some extent they are. Part of the challenge is also that there is insufficient indigenous control over some of the things taking place, and frankly, just an insufficient amount of money being thrown at these. One of the challenges we're having right now is this notion of coordinated access.

Coordinated access is not an approach that works for indigenous populations and communities. At least that's the position of a wide range of views in Ontario. There's an example of something being rolled out with not a huge amount of consideration for the specificities of indigenous populations. Yet again, that explains why a specific strategy is needed for urban, rural and northern indigenous housing.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Chabot and Ms. Nicolet.

[English]

Next is the NDP and Ms. Gazan, please, for six minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for Madame Nicolet. You indicated briefly in response to the questions from Madame Chabot how friendship centres support urban indigenous people in securing safe and affordable housing. I concur. I think the funding amount is grossly inadequate.

I know that your organization has done a lot of advocacy on prioritizing an urban indigenous housing strategy as a way to end homelessness and housing insecurity. In fact, you're quoted as saying, "The absence of any reference to urban indigenous communities in the national housing strategy constitutes a barrier to ensuring [that] the needs of urban indigenous people are rendered visible across government."

Can you expand a bit on that, briefly? I have a few questions and limited time.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I'll try to be brief.

That comment needs to be put in the context of the three-streams approach that the federal government takes as an approach to all indigenous things. Three streams—FNMI, or "distinctions-based", however you want to call it—necessarily elides the existence of urban indigenous communities in engaging exclusively, at an official or formal level, or quasi-exclusively with only the "representative" organizations.

It becomes very difficult for urban indigenous concerns and legitimate demands to be advanced from a policy perspective and then to actually get any kind of traction around implementation. The fact that it doesn't get mentioned is a continuation of the erasure of urban indigenous realities across Canada.

Does that answer your question?

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes, that's perfect.

Thank you so much. I wish I had a lot of time, and unfortunately I don't.

Madam Camille, since the announcement of the national housing strategy in 2017, the federal government has promised an urban, rural and northern housing strategy. However, there still is no strategy. In my riding, 70% of individuals experiencing homelessness are indigenous and over half were in child welfare.

Given that those experiencing homelessness are mostly indigenous, why do you think the government keeps failing to prioritize the human right of housing for indigenous people?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** I believe that concerns the ownership and responsibility of having to deal with our past and bringing it forward. Housing is central to healing from the traumas of the past. I think that once that acknowledgement is out there and we start working on it, there is an opportunity for things to change.

There is never enough money to put into it, especially when it comes to healing. Healing is the very depth of what is needed to answer some of the housing questions of all our indigenous communities and organizations.

It's really challenging when the housing project comes out and there is no strategy for it. Indigenous housing needs to be—and I've heard it said here already today—indigenous-led, indigenous-run and indigenous-operated for indigenous people, because that is where we will get most of our answers.

I hope that answers your question.

• (1605)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes. Thank you very much.

I agree. I think the dispossession of our lands, and then our being left homeless on our own lands is tragic.

My last question could be for either one of you. A 2016 report by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network found that urban indigenous organizations in all provinces are underfunded. Demand for services keeps rising, and yet governments continue to refuse to adequately fund organizations. At our last meeting on Tuesday, I raised the fact that the dollar amounts allocated for the indigenous strategy—and that, again, is not yet released—is a pittance in comparison to the actual need.

Can either one of you speak to the importance of funding that is adequate and sustainable on an ongoing basis?

Madam Nicolet.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** This harkens back a little to the question by Mr. Vis about sustainability. Three years is not sustainable funding. Let's start with that. What little funding is available is usually quite short term. Also, no government has not done this—it doesn't matter what stripe.

Everybody is really keen on funding things for one, two or three years—or maybe four, which is a good term. However, as Ms. Camille pointed out earlier, when it comes to housing, you need to have decades-long time frames, and that never happens.

That is a trend across programming. Provincially we have been able to negotiate better agreements. With the federal government, as well, we have a 10-year agreement around employment. That is the approach that needs to be taken consistently.

The amounts are always insufficient. Indigenous organizations are always operating at a deficit compared to their non-indigenous counterparts—absolutely consistently across the board. We see that Ontario, where the amounts are literally one-third to two-thirds different from the amounts received by similarly located organizations in the field of work they're in.

It is an ongoing struggle. What it speaks to, frankly, is systemic racism. We can underpay indigenous people and indigenous administrators. We can offer indigenous people crappier services. That's the mentality, and it is highly problematic.

It's great for government, because we friendship centres provide consistently high-level, quality services for very little money, and it ends up hurting us in the end because we do that, so we can continue to do it, and so government continues to underpay us.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gazan and Ms. Nicolet.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Next we're going to begin the second round of questions, with Ms. Falk for five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you to both of our witnesses for being here today.

I want to thank the friendship centres as a whole for what they do. As Ms. Nicolet was saying, there are many services; it's not just one particular service. In my riding I've been able to meet students with summer student jobs through Canada summer jobs who have been employed through the friendship centres. It's great to see what they're doing with education, elders and even addictions services and that type of thing. I want to thank you for doing this.

We've heard so far—and it's been a theme this afternoon—that the funding coming in isn't enough, not just for the housing portion but for all the services that are offered by friendship centres.

Since we know that the services vary so much, I'm interested in knowing how the centres differ from location to location, in the sense of rural versus urban.

Ms. Camille mentioned in her opening remarks that rural and remote centres may not have housing programs available to them. I'm wondering what the federal government can do specifically to help mitigate this. Is it just funding, or are there creative ideas? It's so important that there be an indigenous-based lens, absolutely, and that goal is enhanced by having indigenous voices at the table developing the policies.

I'm looking at what specifically can be done to help in the rural and remote areas.

• (1610)

**Ms. Carol Camille:** I think it's working holistically to relieve those socio-economic barriers; it's not just an increase of funding in one area, but an increase in all areas.

To prevent and end homelessness in urban and rural communities, there's a lot of stuff to maintain the continuum around employment and education. Housing is one area. We can look back in history and see that when aboriginal people are living in a home or an area, they tend not to move around as often if housing is available for them within their own local community.

Bringing in stronger programming around housing, education and employment and making things happen on the ground where they live will be instrumental in being able to maintain the continuum for housing.

I strongly believe that the smaller communities.... Quite often, if you're a population of under 5,000, you can't apply for some of these programs. There are some that are available for those smaller communities, but they would not even begin to deal with the inadequate programming that's in place.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you.

I want to touch on health and safety. Every person needs safe housing. It contributes greatly to stability in life in general, and indigenous people aren't excluded from this truth; they definitely need safe housing as well.

I wonder whether you've noticed differences between urban and rural and remote locations, and whether being in, let's say, a remote or rural location versus an urban location adds another or a particular or different vulnerability to what first nations people experience.

I don't know whether that makes sense, but what are some of the other vulnerabilities, if there are any, that they may experience just by virtue of being in rural and remote areas, which may affect the housing situation?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** The first thing that comes into my mind is around stopping the violence for our families. It is one issue that in rural and remote communities is very challenging for us. Providing them with a safe home or transition housing and getting families to safe locations, we usually have to parachute them out of the community and put them into another centre.

I am, however, a strong believer that we can do it at home as well. We need to be provided the same supports as those communities that we have to transport them out to. Definitely this is an issue we would strongly like to look into so as to be able to offer those services within our community.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Wonderful. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Camille. Thank you, Ms. Falk.

Next we have Mr. Turnbull, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, thank you for being here. This is great. I'm learning a lot already.

Ms. Nicolet, maybe I could ask you a clarification question or two first.

Earlier you said that about \$1 billion would be a good start. I just wanted to ask if you felt like that was for Ontario. I know, or I think, you were speaking on behalf of the federation for Ontario. Were you talking nationally?

• (1615)

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** If my executive director were here, she would say to me, "Tell them Ontario." So let's say, \$1 billion for Ontario, and you can add up for the rest of the country.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** All right. Thank you.

You also talked about coordinated access, and you said it doesn't work for indigenous people. I just want to clarify what you meant by that, because I've done some work in supportive housing. I know how integrated services work, and people talk about intensive case management. I want to just understand a bit better what you meant by that. Maybe you could unpack that for us.

Thanks.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I realize we're tight on time, so I don't want to take up too much of it.

The critical piece there is the inside coordinated access. There's reliance on relationships and on referrals. Eight or nine times out of 10, the relationships with indigenous housing providers and indigenous community organizations, such as friendship centres, don't exist, and where they do, referrals are not made as regularly as they should be. People don't self-identify for fear of being discriminated against, and even when they do, they're not necessarily sent to the right places. Again, it's this circumstance in which the system is built for actor A, who's devoid of any kind of characteristics, and then you plug in an indigenous person and you're surprised that it doesn't work. Well, it doesn't work because there are specific needs that will never be addressed by a process that assumes everybody is the same.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that. It's really helpful.

Building on that answer, I think indigenous friendship centres have incredible social, intellectual and cultural capital, but perhaps we're talking today about the financial capital and the physical capital that is associated with housing, i.e., physical assets, that need to be purchased.

You talked about, and I think I actually read, a report on your website that suggested that about one third of friendship centres in Ontario are moving towards becoming housing providers. You've suggested that many more would move along that path.

How can friendship centres leverage the capital they already have, and where can we help most in enabling them to be successful at becoming housing providers? How does that work? What does the model look like?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** In Ontario, there's a very specific set of circumstances, which are not necessarily replicated across the country. In the first instance, we have the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Ser-

vices corporation, which is an organization that the friendship centres work with regularly to actually develop capital. Friendship centres in Ontario are able to do that with OAHHS easily.

The other particularity in Ontario is that the provincial government provides a level of support for programming that is pretty much unmatched across the country, so we have a wide, wide range of provincially funded programs, including, for instance, child care.

One of the things to understand around housing is that there are all the different component pieces, and really, a blanket approach nationally is not going to work. For instance, in Ontario, maybe we need capital, but maybe we need operations, and maybe we need funding for the things that should be built around the housing. In other provinces, you'll need all three of those things, or maybe you'll need just one of those things.

This is where governments make the rest of us crazy. The lack of collaboration and inter-governmental coordination becomes very, very challenging and, frankly, stupid, because it's a lost opportunity to leverage what different actors are doing in the landscape to make a greater impact.

What can you do? I think you start by paying attention to what's happening on the ground in each place you're going, and then you figure out what's needed. You need to ask people. The needs in Lillooet are going to be different from those in Sioux Lookout or Moosonee, or Toronto for that matter. In fact, there might be more similarities between Sioux Lookout and Lillooet than there are between Toronto and Sioux Lookout or Toronto and Lillooet. Anyway, it's really about an approach that allows you to identify how best to leverage what funding you're providing as opposed to saying, "We're going to do this and it's going to be the same across the board", which is not helpful.

Does that answer your question?

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Thank you, Ms. Nicolet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

Your testimonies are very enriching—

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, could you please adjust your microphone?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I have a little bit of a delinquent side, and I'm often set straight. I'm sorry.

Ms. Nicolet, you're right that there can't be a uniform policy from one province to another because the realities are different. For example, in Ontario, 85% of indigenous communities live in urban areas, while the opposite is true in Quebec, where the majority still live on reserves.

How could the real need for quality and affordable housing be estimated? I won't ask you to put a number on it, since you said that the solution must be sustainable, that a long-term vision is needed, and that piecemeal financing is not appropriate. The solution must take into account the realities of indigenous peoples and the fact that management, in every sense of the word, must be done by these communities.

How could we really estimate this need if we had to quantify it? I'm talking about quality and affordable housing. It would give us a better perspective to get to work to really meet the needs rather than doing it piecemeal. Could we get this data?

[English]

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I would echo once again what Ms. Camille said, which is that there is a limitless need. We could do the math and give you a number that, you know, there are 10,000 indigenous people in deep core-housing need in Ontario. We could do the math and figure out what it costs to build a house for each one of them.

The reality of it is that housing is a piece of it and then there's all the stuff that goes around it. It is a large number and I would not be willing to say what the limit is at this point.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

If I have any time left, I'd like to ask a question about communication with the departments.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Ms. Chabot, but your time is up.

Actually, I was about to give the floor to Ms. Gazan, but my microphone was off. Clearly, you aren't the only one having technical difficulties.

[English]

Ms. Gazan, you have two-and-a-half minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've heard a lot during the pandemic about not leaving anybody behind, but we know that indigenous peoples in this country, as a result of wilful human rights violations, were left behind before the pandemic. It's now being exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly in the area around housing.

Madame Camille, you spoke about how people often have to leave their communities because of a lack of housing to go into urban centres in the search for a home as something that occurs frequently in the area you serve.

What kind of impact does that have on mental health? How does not affording this basic human right of housing impact the health of indigenous people living both on reserve and off reserve?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** It has a huge impact. It has an impact on the family left behind within the community and on the family having

to move to a new centre. They are dislocated. They have to reconnect with other services, make new communities and make new family there. It has a huge impact. Sometimes it even has an impact similar to that of being taken and moved to residential school.

They are being taken from their community by their own choice of having to have a roof over their family's heads and moving to a strange place and dealing with that. We also see that when they get into the larger communities, they're starting to get involved in less social and cultural stuff. They start to hit the street life. We're seeing an increase in drug and alcohol use from those who have to go away and be disconnected from their culture and their homes. There definitely is a huge impact around the families who have to go away.

• (1625)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Do you think one of the first courses of action governments can take, if they're really concerned about the mental health of indigenous people in real action terms, is to ensure that all persons, including indigenous persons, residing on Turtle Island are afforded the basic human right to a home?

**The Chair:** Give a short response, please.

**Ms. Carol Camille:** Most definitely that is what is required to give all of us as indigenous people a basic lifestyle.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Camille and Ms. Gazan.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Next is Ms. Falk, please, for five minutes.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** No, Chair, I think it's Mr. Schmale.

**The Chair:** Mr. Schmale, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, witnesses, for all your amazing testimony and the work you're doing in these communities.

In my previous role as shadow minister for indigenous-crown relations, I met with a large number of community leaders and financial stakeholders with respect to housing. The advice provided was often the same, and I think you both mentioned it in your testimony today: that indigenous communities want the tools to make their own decisions, including housing decisions, and they also need the financial ability to do so.

What it seemed to lead to is, as you mentioned, that it's not just housing, but water treatment, social programming, education, and.... The list goes on.

In respect to housing, I'd like to get your opinion on some of these themes. They're pretty big topics, and I only have five minutes, so let's talk about indigenous infrastructure programs, because part one of what you mentioned was in regard to funding.

Would a partnership with indigenous communities through infrastructure capitalization agreements such as Alberta's billion-dollar indigenous opportunities fund be a potential answer to housing, and specifically to create new revenue streams for communities to leverage capital towards further economic self-determination?

I will go into the next part after you answer. Thank you.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** With respect to funding, what is required is the means to be self-determining. I want to be clear: the thing that is required is the means to be self-determining and to be able to undertake culture-based approaches that are not necessarily tied to the market.

Take the case, for instance, of the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services Corporation. A range of options is provided by that corporation: rent geared to income, subsidies, and also programs that allow people to purchase their own houses. There is a specific program that allows women fleeing violence to purchase the housing they're living in. There's housing built specifically for that purpose for people to get into the housing market.

Market-driven approaches, however, are not necessarily going to be the ones that allow us the greatest flexibility to meet the needs of the community, because the need is so great.

Ontario housing markets are like those in B.C.: they're bonkers. It is thus more important for us to engage in approaches that emphasize affordability as well as flexibility and self-determination. That would be my answer.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. On the topic of self-determination, do you see the Indian Act as a hindrance to indigenous communities' being able to provide housing specifically—or it could be infrastructure or water, that kind of thing?

Also, would abolition of the Indian Act be worth a conversation, especially in this day and age, when you tie it to the funding component as well, in allowing groups—those who are prepared for self-governance, for sure—to make their own decisions in a wide variety of situations? Providing almost “off ramps” to the Indian Act is what I'm asking about.

• (1630)

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Friendship centres do not fall under the Indian Act.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I know that; I'm just asking in general. I'm sorry; continue.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I do not have an opinion on that. I don't know whether Ms. Camille has.

**Ms. Carol Camille:** My opinion is, of course, of a personal nature.

I think that if we're going to abolish the Indian Act, we need to look at an even playing field for indigenous people at the governmental level, so that indigenous people have a platform of equal governance straight across the board, whether it be at a municipal, provincial or federal level. That, I think, is key to that piece of it.

I'm sorry; that's a personal view.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** That's okay; that's what I wanted. I wanted to hear your thinking on a very sensitive topic. I think it's important, in this day and age, that we have that.

To build on what you're saying....

Chair, how much time do I have? I know you signalled the one-minute spot.

**The Chair:** You have about four seconds, so this is a good spot to wrap it up.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay.

Thank you both.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

Finally we are going to Mr. Vaughan, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** I have a couple of things.

Canada's national housing strategy addresses this issue through chapter 7, “Nothing About Us Without Us”, which refers to the absolute need to add a new chapter to the housing strategy to specifically address off-reserve housing. I hope you see this committee work and the mandate letters as part of the work we're doing to realize that commitment, which is critically missing from the national housing strategy.

To that end, Juliette Nicolet, you don't check status cards at friendship centres; you serve people both inside and outside the Indian Act, is that not true?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** That's correct. Friendship centres were conceived of and have always been what's referred to as “status-blind” and serve anybody, indigenous or not, coming through the doors.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** That is, Métis, Inuit and any first nations?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** Métis, Inuit, first nations, non-status—anybody who identifies as indigenous—and in a number of communities where the friendship centre is the only social service player in town, it serves everybody.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** And that's why it's critical to move outside the Indian Act and outside the national indigenous organizations, to set up a fourth independent and "all of the above" kind of service centre that attaches to people.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** That is correct. Frankly, that would address many of the outcomes of the discrimination intrinsic to the implementation of the Indian Act over a century and a half ago, or however long it has been.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** The other part of this that you have identified is that because of the way people have been displaced into urban settings, whether they are rural, northern or the large cities, you need a trauma-informed approach, and you need more than just housing; you need to build in spaces for ceremony, spaces for healing and spaces for a whole series of other services.

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** This is for child care?

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Yes, child care. Currently, CMHC only funds housing. Would you support an urban-rural northern strategy that supported more than just housing, so as to make the housing successful?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I would only if it were properly funded.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Right.

There is a patchwork of indigenous urban housing providers, rural providers and northern providers across the country, but it's asymmetrical. B.C. and Ontario have very strong provincial organizations, but Newfoundland, for example, hasn't. Then you have different organizations scaled to various provincial programs.

Is that why a national system is needed, rather than one dispensing dollars regionally or project by project?

**Ms. Juliette Nicolet:** I think what a national approach would allow you to do is bring different players to the table and, if done properly, allow everybody to have a voice, which would mean that smaller players or housing players in rural or remote areas would not be necessarily overrun by the Ontarios. It would, however, have to be equitable, because the interests of places where vast numbers of people are living also need to be adequately represented.

The advantage of a national approach is that you can build something that brings people together to address things properly and simultaneously to break it out to meet specific needs.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Madam Camille, in your approach in B.C., where there's a very strong B.C. indigenous housing corporation, would you also support consolidating all of the federal programs as much as possible, from Reaching Home through the national housing strategy and the funds that are acquired in other departments?

Would you also accept this idea of bringing in national consolidation of all funding streams, with additional dollars to solve the challenge, but leave it in the hands of indigenous administrators to make the decisions as to how to apportion the dollars rather than somebody, say, at CMHC or in the federal government?

• (1635)

**Ms. Carol Camille:** I have to second-guess my answer a little, because I have seen cases in history in which we put money out to indigenous people and then it's not.... We must have strong parameters around how it's going to happen, so that there isn't infighting

amongst.... But yes, I would recommend having it all together, because it is needed.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Would you recommend a process to have indigenous people create those parameters themselves?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** I would, if it's inclusive of everyone.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** An administrative component to this program, then, is also critically important, as are capital, operating and repair dollars?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** Yes, most certainly.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** In the work you do, you don't differentiate between status and non-status people in B.C.?

**Ms. Carol Camille:** No, although we're funded mostly through indigenous programming for indigenous people, we don't stop anyone from coming in. We're a small community and everyone accesses services through us.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Creating a urban, rural and northern strategy would allow you to fill the gaps where they exist, whether it's on reserve or off reserve. Whether it's a family who has one parent who is Métis and the other parent who is Mohawk, you would still serve the child of that union and serve them as an indigenous housing person in need of support.

**Ms. Carol Camille:** Yes, we would, most definitely.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Camille and Ms. Nicolet, for your testimony here today.

We are going to suspend as we check the mikes for the next panel of witnesses, but again, to each of you, thank you so much for the work you do. Thank you for the clarity of your testimony. It is greatly appreciated and of significant value to the work we'll be doing on this study.

We are now suspended for, say, three minutes until we get our next couple of witnesses in and set up. Then we'll hear from them.

Thanks again. We're suspended.

• (1635) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1640)

**The Chair:** We're back in session. I'd like to welcome our witnesses: Arlene Hache, a community advocate from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and Chief Lance Haymond and Guy Latouche, with the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador.

Ms. Hache, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Arlene Hache (Community Advocate, As an Individual):**  
Thank you very much.

I'd like to begin by thanking members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for inviting me to contribute to this very important topic of urban, rural and northern indigenous housing.

I'd like to give a massive shout-out to Adam Vaughan and Michael McLeod, who are champions of housing for the north; I appreciate their efforts, as a woman who has experienced homelessness.

I position myself as a settler and as a person with lived expertise of homelessness who came north as a young woman fleeing violence. Internally, the traumatic responses to childhood violence that I experienced revealed themselves in clinical depression, constant suicidal ideation and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Externally, they revealed themselves in a lifestyle of chaos, instability and risk that limited my ability to form and keep healthy relationships and to enter into and succeed in the workplace.

It was in this context that I met and connected with first nations, Inuit and Métis women and families who were similarly impacted by trauma, but at the genocidal level aptly described in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report.

As a first-hand witness for more than 45 years to the ongoing policies and practices that had been instituted by governments and housing service providers, I can attest to the dehumanizing, disempowering and destructive ways both systems have contributed to the current condition of epidemic rates of poverty, homelessness, addictions and violence in the north.

It was those colonial frameworks, portrayed in gaslighting ways as helping indigenous people who lacked all capacity to function without support, that drove me into the sphere of advocacy and into establishing a low-barrier, peer-led shelter, which I led for 25 years.

I can confidently say that I myself and other women I know with lived expertise of homelessness—and within an indigenous context, indigenous women and families—know specifically what the problems are and know specifically what the solutions are. We can provide concrete examples of both of those things.

I'm conscious of my time, but I would like to list a few of the challenges and a few of the solutions.

The challenges are that money and resources are held by governments and service-provider organizations that operate from a colonial framework today; that the voices of indigenous people and indigenous women are excluded from decision-making and solution designs; that there is hidden homelessness, and therefore it's hard to put a number on exactly what kind of housing you need and how many housing dollars you need; that there are housing monopolies, particularly in the north, and the housing monopoly includes the housing corporation that en masse evicts people into the street and into the bush without options for other types of housing; that there are punishing policies across government departments, a lack of housing stock and the divide between the “violence against women” sector and the “women's homelessness” sector.

The solutions include a national housing strategy. We have one, and I really appreciate that national housing strategy; it just has gaps. One gap it has is an indigenous-specific stream that is controlled by the indigenous community.

We need an urban indigenous housing strategy. We need the ability to access federal dollars outside of provincial and territorial governments, simply because, at least in our area and from my perspective, they are totally immobilized and don't know how to get money out the door.

Another solution is to ensure that indigenous programs are controlled by indigenous communities and organizations. Of course, I really support the Recovery for All campaign that was initiated by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the recommendations from the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network.

Another needed solution needed is to ensure that there is a gender-specific approach. It's not that women are more important than men at all; it's simply that they experience homelessness differently, and the contributors to homelessness for them are different.

Finally, what I could give you is two or three examples of clear indicators of what the problems are and what the solutions are, if I may. I don't know how much time I have left.

• (1645)

I'll just begin with one, and that is that an indigenous woman from a small community in the north won the first UN judgment under CEDAW against Canada and against the NWT Housing Corporation for racism and discrimination after she lost her housing due to partner violence. The UN recommended that the Government of Canada hire and train indigenous women to provide legal advice to other indigenous women around their rights and the right to housing.

That United Nations recommendation has not been fulfilled to this day, in spite of the calls for justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the woman who won that case remains homeless today.

The other example I'll give you is that the YWCA transition house in Yellowknife that was burned to the ground one night, and overnight, 33 indigenous families were homeless. All of those families were housed overnight in private market housing that sat empty, and they were able to get into private market housing through the use of a rental supplement.

The reason they couldn't get into it before is that the landlord who holds a monopoly in the north actually has an illegally stated policy that they don't rent to people on welfare. The Government of the Northwest Territories, which is their primary tenant, refuses to challenge that policy under human rights legislation or in court.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hache. I'm sure you'll get a chance to offer your third example in response to one of the questions.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We're a little over time. Thank you.

Next we're going to go to Chief Haymond.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Chief Lance Haymond (Kebaowek First Nation, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador):** Good evening. I too would like to thank the standing committee for the opportunity to present.

As mentioned, my name is Lance Haymond. I am the chief of the Algonquin community of Kebaowek. I'm the portfolio holder for housing for the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador. I also am the co-chair of the chiefs committee on housing and infrastructure at the national level with the AFN. I co-chair with regional chief Kevin Hart from Manitoba.

I have with me Guy Latouche, who is an urban planner and who works as an adviser for the AFNQL on the housing and infrastructure file.

We have been informed that the committee is interested in barriers to housing for indigenous peoples. Please note that we are concerned about this issue on an ongoing basis. In addition, we have well documented the housing needs and issues facing the first nations in Quebec.

It has long been recognized that aboriginal communities face significant housing issues. Since 1996, such major reports as that of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and that of the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in 2019, have largely addressed this issue.

The state of the housing situation in first nations communities in Quebec has been well documented over the past 20 years. We have been collecting data since 2000, updating it every four years, and we have the best data on housing needs in the country.

It should be noted that our current housing stock is made up of 15,541 housing units, but we must add 10,000 units, renovate 8,000 and provide infrastructure to more than 9,000 sites to meet needs. This means there is a financial need of nearly \$4 billion just for the Quebec region.

The need for new housing units arises in particular from overcrowding of houses, population growth over a five-year period, and the need for housing for members who currently live off reserve but would like to live in their home community.

The migration of members accounts for nearly 20% of the housing needs in Quebec. The housing situation outside the communities is not well documented; however, we know that aboriginal people who migrate to urban areas often find it very difficult to access adequate and affordable housing. It is not uncommon for these to be, in reality, off-reserve members whose band council is unable to serve them because of gaps in government programs.

This brings me to talk about the role of housing in society. Housing has decisive effects on the health and well-being of individuals and communities, on the efficient functioning of the economy and

on many aspects of the social and cultural characteristics of society. We often hear that housing is a determinant of health. It is true, and it is even more true in the context of the current pandemic.

It is also a determinant of the academic success of our young people and the economic development of many of our communities. Let us not forget that it is an essential factor of social inclusion.

In his report, Commissioner Viens noted that the severe housing crisis affecting first nations people appears to be the epicentre of many problems experienced by first nations in Quebec.

Several indications show that first nations housing is an underfunded sector. Over the years, federal budget allocations have not evolved in line with need. On average, between 225 and 250 housing units are added annually to the communities' housing stock. I remind you again that the current needs are for 10,000 housing units over a five-year period. This again is well documented.

Existing federal programs meet less than 15% of the on-reserve housing needs. The housing problem of first nations in Quebec is worrying. Populations are growing, the sector is underfunded and the gap between needs and achievements is widening.

I would add that one of the side effects of the pandemic is the explosion in construction costs. I fear, even if the status quo is maintained, that less housing will be built in first nation communities with the regular budgetary envelopes of Indigenous Services and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

The accumulated backlog is concretely reflected in the living conditions inside the housing stock: overcrowded housing and outdated units, many of which need major renovations.

The situation worsens if we consider the various challenges faced by first nations that create difficulties in implementing housing projects. In fact, our first nations must deal with a series of obstacles in the implementation of their housing projects.

● (1650)

We have identified five.

One is chronic underfunding and difficulties to access capital, as access to all currently available housing contribution and ministerial loan guarantee programs is, in effect, driven by the financial situation and resources of the community.

Second is the lack of capacity at several levels, starting with basic infrastructure. I am talking here about public water and sewer services, which are an essential prerequisite for any housing project and a prerequisite to access funding from our federal partners.

In some communities the problems arise even further upstream. They do not have the necessary land base to pursue new housing development. We must never forget the human aspect. Human resource capacities must be improved in several first nations.

Then there is location. Many communities, particularly those located in remote or isolated regions where the economy is not flourishing, depend heavily on social housing. However, the CMHC program barely makes it possible to build 60 social housing units per year in first nations communities in Quebec.

I find it wise to invest in housing within first nations communities. When we admit that housing plays a capital and central role in society, it is easy to imagine all the benefits of upstream intervention for all levels of government. This avoids having to deal with repeated crises.

We have a strategy in Quebec to get out of this crisis. It is based on three pillars: improving skills and capacities within the communities, implementing a housing catch-up project, and a new governance approach. This strategy calls on all stakeholders, and I will be quite blunt; we cannot hide from the fact that additional federal investment will need to be made so that we can start bridging that ever-increasing gap.

Thank you very much.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief Haymond.

Now we'll begin with questions, starting with the Conservatives.

Mr. Schmale is first, for six minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate the testimony from our witnesses. I'll be splitting my time with Ms. Falk as well.

I have two big questions on a couple of big topics. In my previous role on the committee for indigenous relations, I met a large number of community leaders and financial stakeholders regarding housing and fresh water—that kind of thing—and access to it. The underlying theme, it seemed to me, was that indigenous people should be making these decisions and also working with different ideas on how to finance them.

My first question is on the funding side. Would a partnership with indigenous communities through infrastructure capitalization agreements, like Alberta's \$1.1-billion indigenous opportunities fund, be a potential answer to issues like housing, water treatment, education and that kind of thing, specifically to create new revenue streams for communities to leverage that capital to further economic self-determination?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** Whom do you want to respond?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I can have either respond, or if one has a particular passion on this topic, I'd love to hear from them.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** Ms. Hache spoke first, so I will give her the floor.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I can't hear her, Chair.

**The Chair:** Neither can I.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** Can you hear me now?

**The Chair:** We sure can. Go ahead.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** I said it would depend on what the partnership looks like. At the end of the day, in my experience, partnership has such rigid parameters around it that it doesn't accommodate the way community people do things and the way that they are. Money matters, so it depends on who controls the money and who controls the structure of the partnership.

Of course, an influx of money that would build capacity in the community and create revenue streams makes sense. I think I would rely on an example in Ontario. It was amazing. The federal government moved more toward making sure that if somebody said they were working with indigenous communities, the money had to be held by the indigenous community, not by the support group. Ontario followed that model, and it was very interesting.

I work for a small native women's group. When that policy change happened, our group went from having \$100,000 to meet all of the women's needs in our community to over \$4 million, so it all matters. Who controls the money? Who controls the decisions? Is it really a partnership, or is it a co-optation?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** To quickly build on that—I do have to split my time—do you see the Indian Act as a hindrance to being able to make those decisions that you just mentioned, specifically in terms of control? Would you support, potentially, the abolition of the Indian Act, providing communities that want to get out of it an off-ramp to do so and those that want to remain the opportunity to do so?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** I'm going to turn that discussion over to the chief.

• (1700)

**Chief Lance Haymond:** Good afternoon again.

To go back to your first question, I agree with Ms. Hache. I really think the partnership needs to be clearly defined. The challenge when you talk about provincial entities—and in particular, Quebec—is that they are quick to tell us they are not responsible for indigenous housing on reserve. That's an immediate challenge.

We have seen instances, and the best example that comes to my mind is in B.C., where the provincial government is investing significant amounts of money to address the shortcomings in the federal funds. Thus, it will lead to more housing on reserve for the communities living in British Columbia. I think that if more provinces were open to having those kinds of dialogues it would be an interesting start and another option for us to look at.

In terms of whether that can be achieved inside or outside of the Indian Act, I really don't think it is relevant to the discussion. I think the political will and the nature of the partnership to be determined will ultimately lead to outcomes. It's not really necessary to simply remove the Indian Act to be able to develop investment funds that build capacity, generate income, and start helping us address meeting our housing needs across the country.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you.

I turn the rest of my time over to Ms. Falk.

**The Chair:** Forty seconds of it.

Go ahead, Ms. Falk.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Hache, I want to thank you for sharing your testimony and your experience. I think that's courageous and so wise because you have firsthand experience of this.

I'm really interested in rural and remote.... I know you talked about violence against women. How does access to safe housing have an impact on the health and safety of indigenous people, especially in rural and remote areas and locations?

**The Chair:** A brief answer, please. We're out of time.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** May I answer?

**The Chair:** Yes, please, briefly if you can.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** At the end of the day, safe housing is everything in rural and remote communities. Who defines safe housing is the question. How you access safe housing is also the question. We find that women are often flown from remote communities or rural communities into cities and into regional centres, where they're also at risk. It's just a different level of risk and a different type of risk.

Because they're not involved in the decisions about what that looks like, it creates another problem and a different problem. For example, when women are flown in from small communities, they often end up losing their children to child welfare. They often end up on the street and in a different kind of violence because they're not able to navigate cities or regional centres as much as they are the communities.

I actually think that's a broader conversation that needs to be explored further in a more open-dialogue way.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hache.

Next is Mr. McLeod for six minutes.

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the presenters today. It's a very interesting discussion indeed, and a very important issue to be reviewing.

My question is for Arlene Hache.

First of all, welcome, Arlene. It's good to see you here. I know you've had a long career spanning decades working on the ground, helping people, helping the homeless, helping women, helping families and helping people find shelter in the north. You've seen many programs. You've seen many projects come and go. Some were successful. Some were not.

I think you earlier started to talk about solutions. In your opinion, if you were in a position to design a program today that would best illustrate all your knowledge and expertise, what would that look like?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** Well, I think we have to start from where people are, not where we think they should be.

Twenty years ago we did low-barrier housing because I experienced homelessness. My goal was to get women out of the cold. How they behaved and my expectations were secondary to that. Now, 30 years later, everybody is on a trend talking about low-barrier housing as if it were a new thing.

That's how community people are: everything is low-barrier, because they're so inclusive. I think of low-barrier housing as housing controlled by community people, designed by community people and delivered by community people.

A community from the Northwest Territories contacted me today. It wants to develop a housing project, but to do it, the housing corporation is insisting the housing become the property of the housing corporation, not of the community. That's a case of "don't do it that way".

The other thing they talked about is vandalism in small communities. I said we're interested and we have the support of construction workers to train women to construct and maintain their own housing so that vandalism isn't an issue.

I think it's a question of tying education and skills into housing models and having diverse housing models. Women I know don't want to live with five other women and 50 other kids; they want their own home and they want to be able to support their own families in an appropriate way.

I could go on about lots of different solutions. There are many. I've seen them and I've seen them work. I'd like to have a deeper conversation with people about that.

● (1705)

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I also want you to touch on some of the challenges we're seeing with on-the-ground support. You mentioned that the Government of Northwest Territories has the NWT Housing Corporation, which has a number of programs. It focuses on the programs it delivers.

CMHC has one person in the north—one person who deals with people in the Northwest Territories and also deals with Nunavut. He's on holidays right now, so he's gone for two weeks; then he's going to have to self-isolate for two weeks. There's a month gone while we're trying to deal rapidly with housing applications. I'm getting a lot of calls from people asking where they should go and how they can get help.

Do you feel that if we had more capacity, more expertise in the regions of the north helping people apply and put proposals together, we would see more success in drawing down the number of applications?

I know that COVID has shone a brighter light on this, but the reality is that we still have programs we're having a hard time getting in the north, such as the co-investment fund and others.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** I'll give you one example. Do you remember the Arnica Inn? It's an example in which the two departments, the federal government's and the territorial government's, were not talking. The women's group was ready to go ahead; the person who owned the hotel was ready to go ahead. These two governments couldn't talk and blamed each other, so the deal was off the table.

COVID hit, and two weeks later the deal was back on the table, and within probably three months the hotel was bought, housing was provided, and people had housing. What that taught me is that those governments can work together.

You must have heard, though, that \$60 million given by the federal government to the territorial government has been sitting there and is sitting there two years later.

Of course I flipped out. I said, if you can't move it out, I can move it out for you. I actually know how to write proposals and know how to talk to community people.

I think you're right: we need more resources. My big thing, however, is that there's a perception that the federal government is too far removed to be the avenue of support. Not in my books; in my books, I'd rather work with the federal government any day than with the territorial government, because for some reason the territorial government is totally immobilized.

There have to be on-the-ground resources, yes, but there has to be a federal avenue to access those resources without necessarily going to the territorial government.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I hope I have enough time to ask one more question.

**The Chair:** Okay. Go ahead, very quickly.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I just want to mention the concern about putting all of the money for homelessness into the capital city in the Northwest Territories, which causes an outmigration from the small communities.

Could you just quickly touch on how it needs to be across the board?

**The Chair:** Please give short answer, Ms. Hache.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** At the end of the day, housing in Yellowknife is not required. It has to go to the communities, but they wouldn't have the capacity to write the proposals. All of that money, \$60 million, should not be located in Yellowknife, none of it.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hache. Thank you, Mr. McLeod.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Ms. Chabot for six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

I hope the sound is better. I had to change platforms at IT's recommendation.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for accepting our invitation to appear before the committee. Their testimonies are great.

My questions are for Chief Haymond.

I have several questions for you about the shortcomings of the programs put in place for First Nations. In fact, I have read that in the National Housing Strategy, the 2017-18 budgets provided \$600 million over three years, specifically to support housing on First Nations reserves. I understand from your testimony that these amounts are clearly insufficient. Among the gaps, you mentioned chronic underfunding. I would like to know if you are seeing any improvements.

You said that we need new ways of doing things in terms of governance. You said that one of the issues is that 20% of the need is for migration of members who live off reserve.

Could you tell us more about these issues?

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**Chief Lance Haymond:** First off, I'm not getting the interpretation.

[*Translation*]

I don't mind because I understood the majority of your questions. However, I will answer in English.

[*English*]

You're right that it has been a challenge. Current programs fall far short of meeting our housing needs in Quebec. We have figures that show that the needs of first nations in Quebec have gone from 7,000 units in 2000 to 10,000 units in 2018.

Part of the explanation can be found in the housing portion of the annual capital base budgets of first nations, which have remained the same since 1990. We know that over the past 30 years, the consumer price index has experienced a phenomenal increase; however, cost provisions for material and labour have not kept pace with the reality of building housing in communities.

This pandemic is the prime example of how this is going to cause further grief. I'll give you an example.

Earlier in March, just before the pandemic, my community negotiated a budget with Indigenous Services and the Province of Quebec to build a brand new police station. We negotiated a budget for \$2.7 million to build that police station. When we opened our offices back up in June and started to facilitate having the discussions, we went out and got a new estimate, and the cost had increased from \$2.7 million to \$3.177 million in the space of three months. That's just one example.

Our figures also show that significant improvement occurs when the federal government injects additional funds into first nations housing. When this happens, the needs curve does not decrease, but we see it flexing. Otherwise, the growth of the housing stock of the communities depends on regular federal budgets.

I mentioned earlier that CMHC's budgets build about 60 units in Quebec, and in total we build around 225 to 250 on average per year, but that's only because first nations communities are investing so many of their own dollars to achieve those meagre numbers of units.

The current and foreseeable context suggests a worrying future. In fact, the magnitude of the needs, the growing demographics, and the increase in construction costs risk leading us to a deterioration in the housing conditions of first nations members, with funding remaining status quo.

We've seen in particular that when CEAP in 2009-10 was put forward as a stimulus, it had a positive impact. The funding, \$600 million over three years, put more money into the system, allowing us to build more units.

I hope that responds to your question.

Thank you.

• (1715)

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

You mentioned the migration of members living off-reserve, which accounts for 20% of the need.

What problems or challenges does this cause?

[English]

**Chief Lance Haymond:** Well, it causes an increased demand in a community that already has huge housing needs internally. With the young demographics that we have, we see new family formations happening quite quickly, so the demand inside the community is already large. When members want to come back and live in communities, normally they get put on a waiting list, and they will wait in some instances for years—

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Okay.

[English]

**Chief Lance Haymond:** —unless they have the financial ability to move in the direction of home ownership, which is also an important aspect. Housing is not just social housing. We need to have a spectrum of housing that meets the various realities of communities.

In some communities close to urban centres, you will see that the vast majority of their stock is home ownership, but the further you get away from those urban centres, the more reliance and dependence on social housing increases; it's proportional to the distance away from major centres.

Often people leave because of poor housing situations, but after a while living in the city—as Madam Hache mentioned, with the in-

herent risks that come with moving to cities—these people want to come back to their home community for culture, for safety, and just for the reality of... Do you know what? As an indigenous person, it's hard to live in a city after you've spent the majority of your life living in a first nation community.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief Haymond.

*Merci, Madam Chabot.*

Next we have Ms. Gazan for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everybody, for coming here to provide your important testimony.

My first question is for Madam Hache. I just want to start by thanking you for the critical work you're doing in advocating for 24-7 low-barrier safe spaces. That's something I've fought really hard for. I have certainly worked very closely with my colleague Adam Vaughan, as well as with advocates in our community who've been fighting for this for nine years to get the first low-barrier safe space open just a couple of months ago. I really commend your work because I know it's life-saving work.

We also know that the need for low-barrier safe spaces for women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA individuals is part of one of the calls to justice in the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The first part is establishing how important it is as a life-and-death measure and ensuring that we not just establish 24-7 safe spaces but also ensure ongoing sustainable funding for these lifesaving places.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** First, I would like to say that these spaces have to be run by indigenous people. We've had, for example, indigenous women who have had to talk into a box outside to get into a shelter and they haven't been allowed into the shelter because there was an assumption that they had been drinking. Because of that, they have gone back home. So there has to be not only 24-7 but also ongoing funding, permanent funding, to ensure that women can move from high-risk situations to safe spaces to private-market safe spaces, if I can call them that.

It's a very long road, so those arbitrary timelines that people put on someone's journey from where they were to where they need to be are damaging and destructive and counterproductive, and they create a cycle. Our funding generally goes for one year—the maximum it's ever gone is three years—when actually we've been able to demonstrate evidence-based standards of excellence and excellent service delivery. So why wouldn't we make that permanent the way you do with education? You know, if you can demonstrate that you know how to do your job and do it well, why wouldn't there be permanent core funding?

• (1720)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

I have one more question for you, with regard to children in care.

I live in the city of Winnipeg. We have been called the epicentre for the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. In fact, we're the reason it started, because of an incident with the young Tina. That being said, we know that one of the groups at highest risk for violence, for being murdered or for going missing is girls aging out of care, indigenous young women aging out of care.

We know that even now, even though we know this is true as we've seen in the national inquiry, there's not enough action on the ground to make sure that our young women are safe. What are a couple of first steps that you think need to happen immediately to ensure safety for kids aging out of care, often into poverty and homelessness?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** The first thing that needs to happen is to again hear that voice of lived experience from those young people, because there is a presumption that the system is their advocate. In fact, I've had it said to me and, really, I've watched it over four decades. There's nothing more destructive to a community than child welfare bodies, child welfare authorities, because they are literally incapable of understanding or taking a strength-based approach. They talk about it, but they actually don't know how to do it. We developed a family support model that we went to elders with, and the elders told us that's how we talk about it all the time but nobody listens to us. There are natural traditional ways of supporting families, which no one is hearing about, so we have to go back to the community and talk to them about how they naturally support families, because they know how to do it.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much for your wisdom. I'm enjoying having you on our committee today so much. It's good for the heart.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** Thank you.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** My last question is for Chief Haymond.

Often governments speak about indigenous people as “vulnerable”, without recognizing that indigenous peoples have been made vulnerable by colonial policies. This continues today, and we know this through massive, systemic underfunding of our communities.

In your opinion, do you believe that the willful violation of indigenous peoples' right to housing is one of the reasons our communities are faced with this dire crisis during COVID?

**The Chair:** Give a brief answer if you could, please, Chief.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** The simple answer to your question is, absolutely yes. The fact that we have a high incidence of overcrowding, not having enough units to meet the demographic growth, is contributing greatly to the increased issues that first nations have to deal with. In some communities, people are not able to self-isolate when there is an incident of the pandemic, and communities have had to be creative in finding solutions.

The answer to your question is simply, yes it is.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you, Chief.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gazan.

Next we're going to go to Mr. Vis for five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Chair.

Chief Haymond, you mentioned earlier that with CMHC it was barely possible to build 60 units.

For the sake of the committee, can you outline in a little more detail the challenges you've faced with CMHC in reference to building homes in northern and rural areas for indigenous people?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** The issue really relates to CMHC having a national budget and that budget being allocated proportionally across the country. Quebec receives 7% of the national budget, which ranges, on average, from about \$140 million to \$200 million a year. Based on that 7% and the amount of funds available in the region, that is the number of units we can build with that funding. Lifetime costs are important.

I must come back to speak a bit about the relationship we have in Quebec with CMHC and ISC. We are the only region in this country that has the tripartite committee, where CMHC, AFNQL and ISC representatives sit down around a table three times a year. We develop a work plan and we work collaboratively together to maximize that funding so that we are building the units we do. There's no other jurisdiction or province in this country that has that relationship, and it has been beneficial.

The reality is that we need more money into the system. With Quebec's share being only 7% of the national budget, it means that the number of units we can build is limited by that amount.

• (1725)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** That's very helpful.

Another comment that you made today is that the provincial New Democrat government in B.C.—I'm assuming—is making up for the federal shortcomings.

From your perspective, can you elaborate on what the B.C. government is doing well or how it has stepped up to the plate to account for the shortcomings of the federal government?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** In B.C., there's a particular reality with over 200 first nations communities. Again, knowing that the needs far outstretch the budgets because of chronic underfunding, the government in B.C. made a decision that it was going to invest \$550 million to support housing being built on reserve.

I may have misused the terms “covering off” or “filling the gap”. I think the province recognized that the funding from federal departments alone wasn't meeting the needs. With some good lobbying by the B.C. chiefs, they were able to convince the government to invest in housing on reserve. Again, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, if you can address issues upstream, it sure makes it easier to address the other social ills we have to live with within the communities.

I think what B.C. has done is a nice project that can be replicated in other provinces and jurisdictions. The real challenge is whether there's the political will to support on-reserve housing. Our experience has always been that Quebec will look at us and say, "On-reserve housing is a federal jurisdiction, but we can help you address some of your off-reserve housing needs through our housing department, SHQ."

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. There are some challenges with distinctions-based funding.

Secondly, from what I'm hearing from you right now—you can tell me if this is correct or not—the federal government and maybe we as committee members need to pay a little more attention not just to the proportionality of funds going to provinces and territories, but also to specific needs in regions across Canada in accounting for, say, the unique challenges you face in the north, or that they might face in my riding in a very remote rural area.

Is that correct?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** It's partially correct. I think there's an opportunity to change that formula. The key driver of that formula—as it should be—is core housing need. Regions that have higher core housing needs and larger indigenous populations get a larger proportion of the budget, which, you know, at the end of the day makes sense.

For Quebec, being a small region with a small number of communities and only 7% of the budget, again, it's a fundamental challenge. It's based on the fact that this is the national allocation model, and the main criterion is the core housing need.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vis, and thank you, Chief.

Our last questioner for today is going to be Mr. Vaughan from the Liberals, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Thank you very much.

To the chief, that 7% number is driven by the population inside the Indian Act. The non-status indigenous peoples outside in urban spaces aren't counted and are therefore not part of that calculation. Is that right?

• (1730)

**Chief Lance Haymond:** No, that's not right. We provide our membership numbers to Indigenous Services on an annual basis. My understanding is that budgets are allocated based on those numbers. Then again, the main driver is core need.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Right, but if you're not a member of a band council and you're Mi'kmaq, say, and you've moved to Montreal, you wouldn't be counted in that calculation. Your allocation may actually be counted back in Nova Scotia if you belong to a reserve in Nova Scotia.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Right.

In terms of your building projects, have you ever built housing outside of your reserve?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** We have not. No.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Not in Montreal or in Val-d'Or nearby, say, or in any of the regional centres?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** No. Again, it's mainly because the financial resources are not enough for us to deal with on reserve—

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Right.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** —and again, it's really hard to extrapolate and provide services to your off-reserve population when they're spread across the province and across the country.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** While the AFN allotment and certainly the Quebec allotment for your reserve need to be strengthened, there also needs to be a parallel program to deal with indigenous people regardless of which province they come from who now reside in Quebec. There needs to be that fourth option available to indigenous people in Quebec as well. Would you agree?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** The fourth option? Can you explain that again a little?

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Well, say you are Mohawk from Six Nations in Ontario and you move to Montreal to go to law school, but your housing needs are being discriminated against. You, as a northern Quebec reserve, wouldn't provide that housing to that individual.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** No.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** You would expect a fourth program to pick up the needs for that person who may be finding himself temporarily in Quebec.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** Or we would hope that indigenous service providers who are already offering that service in that particular city would step up and provide that service.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Fair enough.

We've heard references to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. Are you aware that to access that capital money you not only must approve resource projects, but you must invest in resource projects? That's the way you access those dollars.

I'll ask Madam Hache about this as well.

As a requirement to gain funding for housing, you have to buy into resource projects and approve resource projects. Otherwise, you don't qualify. Is that a suitable way to screen money for indigenous housing?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** From my perspective, it's not. That's kind of heavy-handed, in that it's a high price to pay to access a human right and a service and to have access to housing.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Arlene Hache, could I ask you the same question?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** To put it bluntly, it's ass-backwards. If you have been continually structured into poverty, how are you to have the resources to buy into that scheme?

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** In terms of the Northwest Territories, one of the challenges that is not well known to people who live in the south is that a place like Behchoko does not have access to AFN money and also is not listed as part of the territorial housing program because it's seen as an indigenous treaty rights and treaty-holding organization. Is that one of the gaps that a northern housing strategy should, can and must address?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** It must, because the difference between the north and the south is that you actually have some indigenous governance system there. But in the public government system, there's a lot of facade or gaslighting to suggest that indigenous people have a voice in how that money is distributed and used. That doesn't exist. There is no indigenous housing provider in the Northwest Territories. There are only government housing providers, and those do not include indigenous government housing providers.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Based on a trauma-informed methodology for housing and a trauma-informed methodology for stabilizing people's lives, if it's not indigenous led, do you share the experience that earlier witnesses have shared with us, that indigenous people will not go into non-indigenous led housing programs if they don't feel it's their people running those systems?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** They don't go. Even if they do manage to scrape through and go out of desperation, they don't stay. If they try to stay, they're very often kicked out, which brings us to the other issue. There is no protection for indigenous people in non-indigenous housing such as transition housing.

There are huge numbers of dollars invested into housing, but they can literally eject tenants with no governance and no protection for those tenants. It's really different from private market housing.

• (1735)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I have just one last question. Would you agree—

**The Chair:** No—

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** —that a housing program has to extend beyond just housing and that medical services, child care and other supports need to be included in any urban-rural northern housing program?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** In the shelter we ran, there was a medical clinic, a daycare, a family centre and advocacy services. It operated just like a community, and communities don't leave people out and they don't marginalize people. It is an inclusive, wraparound service that moves people forward into productivity.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vaughan and Ms. Hache.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, the clerk has informed me that we can give you and Ms. Gazan a turn to speak. You'll each have two and a half minutes. We'll extend the meeting by about five minutes to allow for that.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you. It's appreciated that we still have the opportunity to hear from our witnesses.

Chief Haymond, in your testimony, when you talked about gaps, you said that the governance rules should be changed and that there should be new ones. My understanding is that this is to better address your concerns. I know that you've submitted several briefs on possible solutions or observations.

Is communication with departmental officials fluid? Do you feel you are being heard?

[English]

**Chief Lance Haymond:** The simple answer is yes. I think we are heard, again, because we have the regional liaison committee in Quebec, which puts Mr. Latouche, representatives from ISC and CMHC, and me together to find solutions. Absolutely I think it contributes to our finding real solutions.

The ultimate goal, as I indicated in my opening remarks, is to take care and control of first nations housing for our communities, but we have a lot of work to do. We need to build capacity in our communities. We need strong housing agents. We need chiefs and councils to really understand what the cost of housing is. Our big push right now is capacity building.

The second axis of our strategy really relates to what the different types of funding and programs are that we as first nations can develop, and that make the most sense for us in Quebec. I'm a firm believer that the solutions to our challenges in relation to housing will really come from us here in the region; we will find our own solution.

The third axis is to really change that governance with regard to how housing is delivered, in the sense that if we do one and two, we will determine the governance structure that we need to take over care and control and delivery of first nations housing to our member communities in the province of Quebec.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Chief.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

The last questioner for this evening is Ms. Gazan.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for you, Madam Hache, in regard to housing. In 2019, the government announced the Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, which was worth \$400 million. There were 53 Inuit communities in Canada. We know from the statistics from Stats Canada and CMHC that 39% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded homes; 33% are in homes in need of major repair, and 33% have core housing needs. We know what is happening during COVID, where cases have gone up from seven to over 70 in a couple of days. Do you think this funding, which is to cover a period of 10 years, is sufficient? Do you think, in response to the current issues arising with COVID and the rapidly increasing numbers, that the government needs to act now to save lives?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** That amount didn't even touch it. People will die, and the government needs to act now. The complicating factor is that the funding is structured through a public government system that actually is not controlled by Inuit in community, so women and families are not going to survive in that structure. They haven't survived and they're not going to survive.

• (1740)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Would you say this kind of culture of incremental justice when it comes to the human rights of indigenous people in Canada is resulting in a loss of life right now during COVID?

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** It's resulting in a loss of life and it's preventable. It's just preventable. Indigenous women I know have solutions to fix that. If the governments could get out of the way and resource indigenous women, we wouldn't be sitting here today.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Arlene Hache:** Thank you.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** How much time do I have, Chair?

**The Chair:** You have about 20 seconds, so time for one short question.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Can I please put the same question to Chief Haymond?

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

Chief, the last word goes to you.

**Chief Lance Haymond:** I didn't catch all of the last question. I'm sorry.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Is this history of incremental justice around providing human rights for indigenous peoples now costing lives during COVID?

**Chief Lance Haymond:** I would tend to agree, absolutely. Because the situation was already bad with overcrowding and having two or three generations living in the same home, since COVID has come into the community, it has most certainly been killing our people.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gazan.

Thank you, Chief.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** First of all, I'd like to thank both of the witnesses. It's very clear that we have a lot of work to do, and your contributions this evening are significant for us in the course of our deliberations. We very much appreciate your being with us.

To my colleagues and everyone, we're now past the appointed hour, so I'm going to wish you a good evening and a good weekend. We'll see you back here next Tuesday evening.

Thank you very much, everyone.

We are adjourned.

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