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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau





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• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

First of all, I want to apologize to our witnesses for the delayed start. We had a delayed vote in the House of Commons and then the committee members made their way over to the committee room.

Welcome. This is the ninth meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We are gathered here on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

[Translation]

Today, we are continuing our second study on the effects of the housing shortage on indigenous peoples across Canada.

To start the discussion today, we have three witnesses.

[English]

We have the Honourable Paulie Chinna, Minister Responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. We have Raigili Amaaq, chairperson, Igloodik Housing Association, and Eiryn Devereaux, president and CEO of the Nunavut Housing Corporation.

I don't need to remind everybody about the health measures that we are following in this period of COVID, so I won't dwell on that.

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 in English, French and Inuktitut are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or alert the chair.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. Please stick to the allotted time. We have one hour for this first panel. I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Without further ado, I would invite our first guest, the Honourable Paulie Chinna, to speak.

Minister, you have five minutes.

**Hon. Paulie Chinna (Minister, Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, Government of the Northwest Territories):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to appear before the committee on the important subject of the effects of the housing shortage on indigenous peoples across Canada.

First, I should make it very clear that I'm not appearing in a representative capacity for indigenous peoples but as a minister of the Government of the Northwest Territories, a government representing a population in which over 50% of our residents are indigenous.

I can also speak from my personal experience and observations as an indigenous person who grew up in Fort Good Hope in the Northwest Territories, a Dene community of about 600 people located near the Arctic Circle.

In my role as the minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation and also minister responsible for homelessness, I see the effects of the housing shortage on indigenous people in the north every day. Whether this is looking at the long waiting list for public housing in most small communities or meeting under-housed people on the streets of Yellowknife, by far the majority of these people are indigenous.

Our population distribution alone does not fully explain this. The impact of the residential school system, including intergenerational trauma, is one good reason. The Northwest Territories as a jurisdiction had the highest participation rate in residential schools of any Canadian province or territory. We continue to work with indigenous governments, communities and other partners to address these impacts through actions such as the implementation of the truth and reconciliation calls to action, but there is no quick fix.

Distribution of economic opportunities is another reason many Northwest Territories communities suffer from the lack of economic opportunities, which increases reliance on public housing. This is especially true in many of our smaller communities where the population is almost entirely indigenous.

As a territory, our reliance on public housing is greater than that of any other Canadian jurisdiction, other than Nunavut. While important progress is being made in adding new public housing units with the help of the federal government in recent years, the need is vast and requires a sustained effort.

Yet another reason is the cost to build, maintain and heat housing in Canada's north. These costs can be multiple times the cost of a unit in southern Canada. Over the life of the unit, these issues are not easily fixed either. They are the result of a combination of the remoteness of communities, harsh weather conditions and limited reliable transportation infrastructure.

What can be done to address these impacts and their impacts on the public of the Northwest Territories and, in particular, the indigenous population? I will offer a few suggestions specific to housing.

The federal government needs to continue to be our partner in addressing the Northwest Territories housing gap. This means sustained multi-year capital funding to increase the stock of new public housing in our territory.

The federal government needs to revisit its policy choice to wind down operating funding for public housing. This decision, made in the 1990s, had a disproportionate effect on northern jurisdictions because of the much higher costs of operations and maintenance in the north and the territory's much heavier relative reliance on public housing.

Work with the indigenous partner governments. We welcome Canada's recent efforts to ensure distinctions-based funding flows to the Northwest Territories indigenous governments for their housing priorities, as it does in the south. This can help the overall situation in the Northwest Territories. The Government of the Northwest Territories is taking steps to ensure that we support collaboration with indigenous governments for the best combined positive effect.

Finally, federal government housing funding to the GNWT needs to be flexible enough for the GNWT to determine its own priorities, which may be different from those of southern jurisdictions. We are seeing some encouraging signs that it is understood by federal partners, and we would like that to continue.

I look forward to hearing the committee's questions. I wish you well with your work, as the context of this study is very important.

*Mahsi, Mr. Chair.*

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now go to our second guest, Ms. Amaaq.

Ms. Amaaq, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Raigili Amaaq (Chairperson, Igloolik Housing Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm Raigili Amaaq, chairperson for Igloolik Housing Association. Currently we have 284 public housing units, including the new constructions and leased units. We recently allocated 20 new units. We have a population of 2,014.

I will speak about the community. When colonialism started by the federal government, they picked up families from their camps, brought them to Igloolik with next to nothing with them, and placed them in matchboxes and promised them two dollars a month. Today, families of these people are overcrowded, our grandchildren being some of them. Having lost his father to a sudden death, our grandson is grieving alone at our house without the love and sup-

port of his mother, because the other grandparents' house is also overcrowded.

Residential school had a great impact and is still alive and well with the shortage of housing and the mental health and well-being of the families.

If we were to be given funding for housing, I would ask for one bedrooms, also to respect the single people or couples that have no children and are not planning to have children. They couch surf trying to find that kind person who has a couch for them to sleep on.

Although there are 183 people on the waiting list, some still do not bother to apply, because it's next to impossible. Some people end up living with a parent or parents, cousins or siblings until the parent passes away and they can finally have the unit.

Is this only in Nunavut? Why should we still be living like this in 2022? We are in a crisis. We need housing. This is our reality in Igloolik.

Some families are still living in some units that were built in the late 1960s, early 1970s. Some were renovated, but there are still some of the very oldest units there, because there is no other housing available.

The homeowners are also overcrowded due to the lack of housing available. The cost of food is very expensive, and some public housing units house up to 16 to 20 in some families.

I think that's about it. Thank you.

• (1610)

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

We'll now go to our third speaker, Mr. Eiryn Devereaux.

Mr. Devereaux, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Eiryn Devereaux (President and Chief Executive Officer, Nunavut Housing Corporation):** I want to thank the committee for inviting me to speak here today and for the warm welcome.

The ongoing affordable housing shortage poses a substantial burden for indigenous people across our country. Nunavut is one of the hardest hit jurisdictions in Canada. My invitation to speak here today is a positive sign that the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs is taking this crisis seriously.

I'm the newly appointed president of the Nunavut Housing Corporation, although my career in northern housing and infrastructure began in 1994 when I got my first job in the community of Arviat with the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. I spent 13 years with that organization and then later served as assistant deputy minister of infrastructure with the Nunavut government as well as deputy minister of infrastructure and housing with the Province of Nova Scotia.

In the 20 years since Nunavut was founded, the housing shortage has only grown. Overcrowding is becoming the norm. Although both the Government of Nunavut and our federal partners have invested and continue to invest in maintenance and construction, the situation is not getting better. It's getting worse.

Ask Nunavummiut what their biggest worry is for the future of our territory and most will answer housing. Against a backdrop of chronic underinvestments in affordable housing, not a single person is untouched by this crisis.

Within the government we constantly ask ourselves how we will address the increasing pressures on supportive housing options for vulnerable segments of the population. That includes our elders, women, young victims of family violence and people without homes.

About 70% of the housing available in Nunavut is public housing. There are few alternatives to government-subsidized housing. In many communities the markets for private rentals or home ownership simply do not exist. In a territory of almost 39,000, there are more than 3,000 families on our public housing wait-lists. We estimate that the real need for additional new housing is closer to 5,000 units.

The Nunavut Housing Corporation maintains approximately 5,800 public housing units. We build about 75 to 100 new units every year. This comes nowhere near meeting the demand. We need to start building 250 to 300 homes each year over the next five to eight years to make a reasonable dent in the current housing supply gap.

Around 35% of all homes are overcrowded in Nunavut. For Inuit households, that number rises to approximately 56%. We know that unsuitable housing is a significant risk factor for tuberculosis, which is another crisis we are fighting in Nunavut, and of course for COVID-19.

Overcrowding is also a driver of many of the social problems in the territory, such as family abuse and the suicide crisis. This stresses our health care, justice and social services institutions. It poses an obstacle to employment, education and training opportunities for our residents. Earlier this year, the Nunavut community of Pangnirtung held the rare distinction of fighting outbreaks of COVID-19 and tuberculosis at the same time. You can imagine how this limits efforts to prevent the spread of either disease.

In addition to overcrowding, the poor condition of existing homes across Nunavut continues to be a driver of negative social outcomes. The number of homes requiring major repairs doubled from 20% in 2006 to approximately 40% in 2018. This compares to the national average of approximately 7%.

Mould continues to be a significant issue across our portfolio of existing public housing units. The Nunavut Housing Corporation has completed remediation work on approximately 150 public housing units over the past five years. Hundreds more units need to be remediated. We anticipate spending approximately \$30 million over the next five years to address the units in greatest need of remedial action. We will still have many more units requiring action, but limited funding impacts our schedule.

In Nunavut, as in the rest of the country, public housing remains the least costly way to address homelessness. The Nunavut Housing Corporation could put someone in a public housing unit for \$16 a day. By contrast, it costs \$74 a day to house somebody in an emergency shelter service. That's about five times the cost. A family violence shelter operating a 24-hour, full-service shelter can house someone at \$135 a day. That's eight times the cost. Putting somebody in a jail cell in Nunavut is equivalent to \$306 a day. It is almost 20 times the cost.

It's not only from a humanitarian perspective, but also a financial perspective that we can say that public housing represents a sound investment. The longer we take to reasonably address the housing crisis, the more it will ultimately cost to pay for it.

• (1615)

In 2019, the federal and territorial governments struck an agreement to provide nearly \$316 million over 10 years to repair and build affordable homes across our territory. We estimate it will take approximately \$3 billion to build the 5,000 housing units we need over the next five to eight years. That price tag is only going to get steeper with each passing year, as the cost of construction escalates. We all need to work together to close this staggering housing supply gap.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Thank you. *Qujannamiik*.

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

We'll proceed to the first round of questions, beginning with Mrs. Stubbs from the Conservative Party.

Mrs. Stubbs, you have six minutes.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

Thank you to all the witnesses who have given their time to be with us today.

I couldn't agree more and I know that all of us, regardless of what party we come from or what region we represent, agree completely that safe, secure, affordable homes are critical to quality of life, to standard of living and to health outcomes.

I have to confess that I sit here as a Conservative who's a proponent for limited government and responsible spending, but I am shocked and disturbed by what is clearly a colossal humanitarian failure to ensure sufficient housing for fellow Canadians in northern and remote communities. What I'm grappling with here is that governments of all stripes and over the years have failed to provide this very core necessity for human beings. I really am interested if we can get to learning about whatever other options or partnerships might be available through private sector partnerships or community partnerships to help be part of the solution.

Before we get there, I invite each of you to boil down the specifics in any way you wish on the existing challenges to your public housing programs and for your residents. If there are key barriers you could identify and a number of key solutions, I would welcome each of you to start off by talking about those.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Stubbs.

I'll suggest that Minister Chinna get us going.

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here as well. Housing is quite significant throughout the country, but I really want to press the importance of housing and the effects in the northern communities as well, and also of looking at the delivery and the funding that we do receive. I would like to look at direct funding to the Northwest Territories. We have been working with the indigenous groups too, as well as with their lobbying efforts.

For the Northwest Territories, we do have 2,600 public housing units throughout all 33 communities, but we haven't had a new housing delivery in decades. We have a delivery this year of 90 public housing units that are under construction right now through that delivery. We're trying to be very innovative with that approach and trying to create employment in smaller communities, trying to work with the indigenous groups as well. We are looking at the operation and maintenance of these units. The price to operate them is drastically increasing.

Throughout the territory, we have several different climate effects as well. We have coastline communities where erosion is affecting our builds. I had the opportunity to travel to Sachs Harbour last year shortly after we were out of session to look at the condition of those units. I was quite surprised to see the amount of mould issues in the housing units in the coastline communities and not being able to replace them and repair them. As the minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, one of the questions I'd ask is how much money we are going to continuously invest into these 50-year-old assets, looking at the timeline when they were built and the evolving of the Northwest Territories and looking at the significant impacts of residential schools and people returning to the smaller communities.

I know we have a time limit here, but I really want to emphasize looking at the funding that is available on housing delivery. I would like to see direct funding to the Northwest Territories. We have increased our partnership with the indigenous groups too. One of the things the territories has done is we've created a council of leaders working group where we have every indigenous group at that table trying to come up with housing solutions, but with the 2,600 units

that we have in the Northwest Territories with no increase in the past 50 years, our assets are deteriorated. We are trying to invest in them and they are just going to be beyond economic repair. We need to replenish that stock.

Thank you.

• (1620)

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

Ms. Amaaq, do you want to add anything? Please be concise.

**Ms. Raigili Amaaq:** Yes. We are still researching funding opportunities for community housing projects that could probably be funded by the federal government. Although we allocated 20 new units, it has created more conflicts because families want to get their own units.

One of the issues is having seasonal construction. We get our housing supplies during the summer and fall, and they come in by barge. The construction contractors are usually seasonal. They leave the construction for months, and then they come back when it gets warmer to finish the units. That's one of our issues here in Igloodik.

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

We have gone way over the six minutes, so I am going to go to our next speaker.

Mr. McLeod, you have six minutes.

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

First of all, I want to say how much I appreciate hearing our colleague MP Stubbs speak about the issue of homelessness. It strikes a chord with me as the member for the Northwest Territories where our situation is at a crisis level.

I really appreciate the minister of housing, Paulie Chinna, joining us. Paulie has done a lot of work as an advocate for the issue of housing.

We all know it's not going to be an easy solution. We all know there is no silver bullet that's going to fix it. We have 33 communities and every one of them is facing challenges. There is no one-size-fits-all.

Could the minister tell the committee what some of the barriers are that she sees for the northern communities and governments to access some of the programs and the funding dollars that are available? What can be done to make it easier to access these dollars? I hear quite a few indigenous governments and organizations speak of this challenge.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to MP McLeod as well.

We see the significant barriers in the Northwest Territories in trying to access the funding that is available from the federal government and looking at the criteria that is expected, as well as the lengthy process for that.

I really want to bring this to the grassroots. We have indigenous organizations and representatives that are trying to access this funding. They don't have the capacity to be submitting these proposals going forward with the amount of information that is required for these bills and for the type of housing they need. They don't have the capacity to try to address these strong concerns leading right to mental health, to overcrowding and to addiction.

Looking at those barriers, and working with the indigenous groups, I want to look at understanding those barriers for the smaller communities and isolated communities.

We're looking at one of the concerns that was brought up, which was pursuing and looking for consultants throughout the territory to submit these applications going forward. That is not just time-consuming, but to understand [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. The housing corporation has done that. We've hired an employee to work directly with CMHC here in the Northwest Territories to further explain what those criteria are like for the indigenous groups to access the funding.

The other thing is the operation and maintenance. The timing of the CMHC funding has put the Northwest Territories in a panic. We are looking at the year of 2038 and what that looks like for the Northwest Territories, and we're looking at our operation and maintenance funding for that as well.

There's also direct funding that can be available to the territories, so that we can work directly with our indigenous groups and the 33 communities, and start replenishing the 2,600 units that we've been operating and maintaining for the past 50 years.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Could you tell us what the Government of Canada can do to help reduce the cost of building new homes in the Northwest Territories?

Do you think there are ways to build local capacity in the communities to make construction and repairs of units more affordable?

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** Looking at cost savings for the Northwest Territories, we're going to see an influx of material coming in. We're already building duplexes. They're coming in at \$1.2 million, and that is throughout the territory. Depending which area we're constructing in, not all communities are accessible by highway. We have some communities that are only fly-in. We've got the winter road season, and due to climate change, every year we're shortened by a week and days. That's crucial to our communities.

Looking at cost savings on how we can deliver the partnerships with the indigenous groups right now is crucial. It's something that we really need to emphasize. Working collaboratively with them helps us to understand the crisis they are experiencing in the smaller communities. In terms of the cost savings right now, the material flying into the communities has pretty much quadrupled in price.

We're also working with the smaller communities in developing community housing plans. We're working with them to forecast the types of builds they want. We're also trying to financially forecast options for them. Right now, we're recovering from COVID. We have overcrowding. COVID has highlighted a lot of crises for us in the territories. Housing is the number one concern, and it needs to be addressed.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

[*Translation*]

The next person to take the floor is Mrs. Gill.

Mrs. Gill, you have six minutes.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd first like to thank all the witnesses, including Minister Chinna, Ms. Amaaq and Mr. Devereaux, for their speeches.

This is one of our first meetings, and once again we see that housing is the cornerstone of many of the difficulties and challenges that first nations people face.

When we hear Minister Chinna tell us that, in her region, many of the difficulties stem from the fact that some communities aren't connected by road and can only be reached in winter, we have a good idea of the difficulties posed by the territory. The difficulties may have the same consequences, but the solutions must be different depending on where you are in the territory. My riding can also identify with these same realities.

In some of the solutions that should be adopted, there is a lot of talk about centralization. I'd like to hear your views on the issue of centralization. Could there be, for example, a national strategy where everything would be deployed from the same place and from the same group of people, even though there must obviously be consultation? I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Would you prefer solutions to be adapted to the territories and to each community? In my riding, there are about 10 communities, and none of them have exactly the same needs.

My question is for the three witnesses.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Could Minister Chinna start?

[*English*]

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** I absolutely agree with that, and I'm looking at solutions for the Northwest Territories.

You are correct in that we deal with different aspects throughout Canada, and throughout each province and territory. It's quite unique, but very similar to the conditions in the way that we deliver housing in our smaller remote communities.

Transportation is one of the biggest hurdles and how we address that. I want to give you an example.

If we were to build in Nunakput, which is one of the higher Arctic communities, we are probably looking at close to \$1.5 million for a three bedroom house. If we were to build in the southern part of the territory, such as Hay River, Fort Smith and those areas where we're very close to the Alberta border, you would see a significant decrease.







Certainly over the last 20 years, since Nunavut became a territory, we've seen that growing housing supply gap. As I had mentioned, in our portfolio we have 5,800 public housing units to serve the population, yet the wait-list has grown to over 3,000. It's staggering. The reality is that we just don't see enough investment to meet that demand.

Over the last number of years, with the housing corporation building 75 to 100 units a year, it's like one step ahead and two steps back every single year. It just highlights the reality of the need for increased investment across the various levels of government.

As well, one of the members brought up the importance of leveraging other key stakeholder groups, including the private sector. Certainly we have to figure out how to do that. I'm hopeful that in the coming years we can leverage relationships with the Inuit orgs and other key stakeholders in the industry to find more investment, but it has to start with escalating the housing crisis to the point where we see increased investments coming from the federal government, as well as the territorial government.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout and Mr. Devereaux.

We now have a second round of questions, slightly shorter, and we'll start with Mr. Vidal from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Vidal, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank our witnesses today for their excellent testimony.

I'm going to begin with Mr. Devereaux.

In 2018, during a meeting of the environment committee, a director of infrastructure for your organization at the time, Gary Wong, noted significant cost factors in association with the remoteness and isolation. You referenced many of those today in your comments, and many of them beyond the infrastructure and housing costs.

As someone who represents a northern and remote riding, I understand the increased costs of transporting materials to remote sites, and I understand the value of experts and skilled labour in some of those remote communities. In 2018, Mr. Wong said:

There is a great desire in the north to build capacity, to therefore try to involve and train more local people to become familiar with infrastructure. It's almost for the next generation, because it doesn't exist today, and we're building toward that. It is a cost factor, and those economic development parts of contracting in the north are extra cost factors.

I'm curious as to what measures your organization has taken since 2018, based on Mr. Wong's testimony, to increase local skilled labour and whether you're seeing some success from some of those measures.

• (1645)

**Mr. Eiryn Devereaux:** I think we see it as a strategic initiative that's so important because the cost for us to have to import southern trade labour drives up the cost of construction throughout Nunavut. We certainly recognize the opportunity to have more local trade and labour involvement, and I think we do.

In each community, we look at the availability of labour and we put specific targets for local labour and Inuit labour in our construc-

tion contracts to try to drive that. I think we've made progress, but in all honesty, there is so much more we need to do.

It really is about small incremental steps. I think we're going in that direction, but we have to continue to figure out ways to drive more opportunity. Some of it is not only increased investment, because that is the primary message, but it's more sustained investment too. If we could have a larger construction program where we had funding in place for five years and 10 years, then I think you could say to those individuals that it's not just a one-year or two-year opportunity—in Igloolik we are building for multiple years—to try to keep them interested in that career opportunity.

More needs to be done, without question, to try to drive increased labour from Nunavummiut and Inuit across the territory.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you. I'm going to comment on the end of that.

I think maybe one of the things I heard from you is on the removal of some of that year-to-year program funding for a longer-term commitment that lets you plan out and do the education and development of the skilled force you talked about.

I apologize, Mr. Devereaux. I'm short of time and I have lots of questions.

I'm going to ask Minister Chinna a question as well, and we'll see where my time goes from there.

Minister, in visiting your government's website, I noticed that you offer education courses on home ownership as well as a home ownership initiative within the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. Can you talk to me a bit about these programs, maybe what you have found to be successful, and what some of the challenges have been with those initiatives?

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** For the corporation, it's strategic to be investing in the smaller communities to help them to build capacities, and looking at apprenticeship is one of our main goals. So far, the housing corporation has successfully seen 33 apprenticeships throughout our time.

The other thing I want to touch on quickly is rolling out the delivery of the 90 units. We have built it in as a requirement with the contracts coming in that they have to hire local and they have to at least be apprenticing one local individual on site when these units are being delivered in the smaller communities. We manage those numbers, and the contractors come in to provide an update on those apprenticeships as well.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** I just want to interject quickly, because I'm going to be out of time and the chair's going to cut me off.

Would you comment briefly on the home ownership program? I'm really curious about the home ownership program that your website talks about.

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** My apologies, but I'd just like to get a lot more information out there.

Those home ownership programs are to work with our clients so they're able to operate and maintain their homes, looking at the furnace bills, levelling and roofing, and they help them to support the long-term sustainability of those units and success of those clients. Those courses are reviewed as well, as we construct more at the ground level.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Monsieur Vidal and Minister.

We'll now proceed to Ms. Atwin.

You have five minutes.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses and committee members.

I'm speaking to you from the unceded Wolastoqiyik territory here in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Mr. Devereaux, you mentioned a little bit about the cost of not doing something and the forethought of what that looks like. Along the same line, is there room for consideration around what types of housing are being built? [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], antimicrobial building materials, for example, to deal with some of these challenges that have been identified with the current housing stock? I'm just wondering if any considerations have been made, or if there is even room to do that, seeing as you are confronting a humanitarian crisis at the same time.

• (1650)

**Mr. Eiryn Devereaux:** Do you want me to jump in?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Eiryn Devereaux:** Yes, I think there are great comments and feedback.

In 2022, I would probably say the design of our housing units in Nunavut would be comparable to energy-efficient designs across the country. We've certainly moved into that realm. I think opportunities exist for us to try to drive down the cost of construction by looking at higher-density development in which we look at multiplexes as compared to lower-density housing. I think that's important.

We do have a number of energy efficiency programs, and we certainly look to renewable technologies to help drive down the life cycle and ongoing operating costs of our units. It comes down to that investment equation. We need to be investing more money into a building program.

We need to ensure that we're building modest homes. I can attest that we are. We have a reasonably affordable design. I think that building envelope is a strong one. It has to be, because the environment and conditions up here are so harsh that if we didn't have a good envelope, we'd needlessly be spending an awful lot of money on O and M, operating and maintenance

I think it comes back to our ensuring that we have good, sustainable design and we're investing in additional builds.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you very much.

Minister Chinna, would you like to add to that?

**Hon. Paulie Chinna:** I'll try to be very quick. I will be cautious of the time.

What the housing corporation has done is to look into energy savings, the funding we're receiving, and the cost savings of that for the operation and maintenance.

One of the projects we have just finished involved looking at a biomass initiative for a 42-complex building area here in Yellowknife. We've also taken that into the smaller remote communities. We've just entered into a partnership with my colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure, looking at a biomass project in Aklavik. The biomass project will be incorporated with a school.

We're looking at different solutions and working together as a government to try to look at more of a cost-effective, efficient way to develop all programs within the territories, recognizing the cost of operation, maintenance and energy savings. That's all.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you so much.

Ms. Amaaq and to Ms. Idlout as well, thank you for speaking in your language. It's always a pleasure.

You mentioned the piece about having to disrupt the process of building, because obviously there are seasonal considerations. Would it be helpful perhaps for CMHC, the government or even the private sector to look into building a warehousing facility to build units in so you don't have to deal with the seasonal schedule per se?

**Ms. Raigili Amaaq:** [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut as follows:*]

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[*Inuktitut text interpreted as follows:*]

Were you directing this to me?

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead, Ms. Amaaq.

**Ms. Raigili Amaaq:** I think that's out of my....

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you.

Mr. Devereaux, do you want to comment on that piece as well?

*Qujannamiik.*

**Mr. Eiryn Devereaux:** Thank you for the opportunity.

I totally agree. It's certainly something that we've looked at over the last number of years and, again, it will come back to my sort of harping on the need for increased investment to increase that build program.





I'll say just a little bit about myself. For the past five years I've been the CEO of the Aboriginal Housing Management Association. I'll refer to it as AHMA from here on. I'm also a member of the indigenous caucus working group working with the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, which is based in Ottawa. I have a long-standing career dedicated to urban indigenous housing. In fact, my 28-year-old daughter's first words were not "mama" but "AH-MA". That is the years of front-line and lived experienced voices that we bring to the table.

I come to you today with grave concern and absolute, utter dismay at the release this morning from the Prime Minister's Office with this quoted wording:

Making a significant additional investment in Indigenous housing in 2022. It will be up to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to determine how housing investments are designed and delivered.

For us, this demonstrates once again this country's willful ignorance or purposeful discrimination that neglects to recognize that 80%-plus of all indigenous peoples are not captured in a distinction-based microfocus. I'm going to frame this from my own direct experience.

I'm a sixties scoop child. I was literally taken off the birthing table, fostered and then adopted into a non-indigenous family and non-indigenous community. I am only recently, at 53 years of age, affirming my matriarchal lineage. I am Tsimshian. Recent genealogical mapping verifies that I have deep and long-standing ancestral roots within the Lax Kw'alaams first nations.

My origin story, however, is the legacy of active attempts of government to remove the Indian problem through residential schools. My birth mother suffered the injustices of a legacy of trauma and she still suffers today. It's unimaginable pain for many, but a truth that must be purposely looked at. We cannot turn away any more.

Despite this recent affirmation of my ancestral connections, with the ongoing pain my immediate ancestors suffer through I remain completely dispossessed from my nation.

While I have a status card that verifies I am a status Indian, I have never been home. That's a trite word to the nearly 80% like me who have come to create a sense of belonging in for-indigenous and by-indigenous urban communities, created by the over 140 urban indigenous housing and support leaders for over 50 years now.

I'm sorry. My voice is cracking. May I just take a moment to have a quick drink?

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Absolutely, go ahead.

You have about a minute and a half. I didn't count the time you were drinking.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** I'll just remind you that this is not about me nor about AHMA, but about the thousands of voices past, present and future that must be responded to.

Dispossession is the heart of why we are all here today. The very systems that dispossess us are the same systems that government now either ignorantly or purposely hides behind, thus making the notion of reconciliation not much more than tokenism.

Thankfully, organizations like AHMA, with over 40 housing and service providers across B.C., have been working hard to address these issues. However, our efforts are neither sustainable nor should they be done without the federal government engaging in partnership.

I just want to frame a comment I heard from Honourable Minister Paulie Chinna. She talked about infrastructure and the challenges of our northern and rural communities. The actual challenges of our northern and rural communities are absolute barriers when I hear sentiments from our provincial government here in B.C. indicating that the cost of building in the north is so disproportionate that they may not be able to continue to fund them. We absolutely need the federal government at our table.

In 2018, in front of over a thousand witnesses from across the housing sectors, Evan Siddall, former chair and CEO of CMHC, stated that the federal investment was coming. Four years later, despite multiple references to urban, rural and northern indigenous priorities in ministerial mandate letters, there is still no dedicated funding stream.

The long and short of it is that we need the federal government to step up, partner with people like the Aboriginal Housing Management Association and urban indigenous housing leaders to ensure that representation is at the decision-making table by the 80%-plus of indigenous peoples who are dispossessed and not connected to their traditional communities.

*T'oyaxsut nūiism.* Thank you, everyone.

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

We'll now go to Mayor Kenny Bell for five minutes.

**Mr. Kenny Bell (Mayor, City of Iqaluit):** *Qujannamiik.* Thank you to the committee for the invitation to speak today.

My name is Kenny Bell. I am the mayor of the City of Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. I'm also the president of the Nunavut Association of Municipalities.

I took a lot of time and effort to choose my words wisely and precisely to ensure that I not only share important information but also the pain and sorrow that the lack of housing has brought to the citizens of Nunavut, especially Inuit.

I'm not here to speak on behalf of Inuit. I am here to speak as a friend, a lifelong friend. I was born and raised in the north.

As Mr. Devereaux pointed out in his speech, 56% of Inuit households experience overcrowding which we know contributes to many different social problems, including abuse, and to our long-standing and current suicide crisis. Inuit commit suicide 10 times the Canadian average, and most are young Inuit men.

As a parent, I know my first priority is to provide for my family, but how can one even start when it's almost impossible to find a roof to put over my family's head?

The federal government needs to change the way money is disbursed in the north and recognize that significantly more is required to meet the deficit in available housing stock. For instance, housing money for Nunavut in budget 2016-17 totalled \$316.7 million over eight years. The Government of Nunavut has estimated that it will be approximately 83 houses per year. Again, as Mr. Devereaux pointed out, there is a projected budget deficit of 3,100 to 5,000 units, and the population continues to swell, meaning Nunavut will never be able to catch up at the current rate.

Moreover, money is disbursed per annum and must be used by the end of the fiscal year. However, this doesn't always line up with Nunavut's relatively short shipping and construction seasons. Multi-year funding where funds are received in full and can be used up during the course of five or 10 years would enable better planning and more efficient use of all the funds.

I ran for mayor in 2019 because of our infrastructure deficits, including water and housing. I started a mayor's task force on affordable housing, and it has several important recommendations that I'd like to highlight today. I can make that report available to the committee members once it is translated into French, as it is currently only available in English and Inuktitut.

Inclusion of off-site improvements as qualifying expenditures under CMHC's and other federally funded programs would bring Nunavut in line with other jurisdictions where off-site improvements qualify for CMHC funding. One large part of the issue is the lack of developable land in the territory. Millions of dollars are required just to prepare land and extend infrastructure in order to support new housing units.

The second recommendation is to create partnerships with Inuit organizations. The GN alone cannot support the building of all new housing stocks. In fact, due to government procurement policies, the GN has seen construction-related bids inflated to a point where the GN is building at a significantly higher cost per square foot when compared to the private sector.

The third recommendation is to keep in mind the issue regarding the lack of developable land. The conversion of federally controlled buildings that are currently sitting empty to affordable housing may be an important factor in addressing the growing deficit.

The fourth recommendation is to reduce the amount of red tape that acts as a barrier to non-profit organizations accessing funding. For example, the rapid housing initiative requires a partnership at a government organizational level that includes a contribution agreement. While many southern municipalities and provinces have such agreements, Nunavut does not have that in place and there is no bureaucratic mechanism to support this.

The fifth recommendation is to require the completion of the work by the National Research Council on the creation of northern building codes. This will ensure that housing stock is built better, more efficiently and requires less O and M.

In response to a recommendation arising from the Senate study on housing throughout Nunavut and throughout Inuit Nunangat, the then minister of CMHC, Jean-Yves Duclos, told the committee in 2016 that the National Research Council was actively working on these standards. However, the building codes have yet to be seen.

• (1715)

In closing, Nunavut is the most unique, most beautiful and largest land mass in Canada. We have our challenges, that is for sure, but our two biggest issues, infrastructure and housing, can easily be fixed with more money. The simple answer is more money.

All of the social problems will take time, money and a lot of work across many different professions. Let's put a roof over our heads by changing to multi-year funding, a better release of funds and more money to give us a fighting chance at change.

Thank you. I will stick around for questions at the end.

*Qujannamiik.*

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

We'll now go to Ms. Harper, I'm assuming, for five minutes.

If I am wrong and it is Ms. Bennett, go ahead for five minutes, Ms. Bennett.

**Ms. Roxanne Harper (Director, First Nations Housing Professionals Association):** Thank you.

Good afternoon, members of the standing committee.

My name is Roxanne Harper. I'm originally from Natoaganeg First Nation located in the province of New Brunswick.

I am a board member with FNHPA, the First Nations Housing Professionals Association, and I'm joined today by our executive director, Ms. Candace Bennett. Both of us, I will let you know, are certified housing professionals.

The housing shortage that first nations face is not new. It has existed for many years and has, in fact, gotten worse due to the global pandemic. We know that 36.8% of first nations people living on reserve are living in what are considered overcrowded conditions. This is compared with 18.5% for those off reserve.

The housing shortage results from many things. Just to name a few, there is the increasing demand for housing assistance, chronic underfunding and inadequate human resources. Every day on reserves in Canada, first nations are confronted with the reality of the housing shortage. We know that some of our people, our elders, our children, our women and our families live in overcrowded and often unsafe conditions. This is not just a first nations problem. This is not just an indigenous housing problem. This is a Canadian problem requiring all of us to share in the solution.

At FNHPA we are a national professional association exclusively serving the needs of individuals who are working or aspiring to work in the first nations housing industry. As the only national association for first nations housing, we are dedicated to filling long-term capacity development gaps, addressing educational requirements that lead to certification, providing training and development and, of course, working with like-minded organizations and associations that can also help to support our members.

We have today identified three key issues directly related to the housing shortage that we believe are impacting first nation communities. The first one is that first nations require dedicated financial support to hire and retain qualified housing staff. We are requesting that the Canadian government designate long-term funding for first nations housing positions. Doing so would allow our communities to protect both people and property.

At this point in time, first nations must self-fund housing positions. This is often done by cobbling together special initiatives or any proposal-driven funding available by the federal government. This approach results in inconsistencies, inequities, and even worse, in some communities no housing staff at all. As housing deals with health and safety, it cannot be effectively done by an already overburdened administration at the first nation or on the corner of the desk by our chief and council.

At this point in time, we call upon the federal government to support long-term funding for these positions. We believe our communities would immediately view it as an investment and it would improve the quality of lives for first nations people.

In addition to that, housing staff would require dedicated and long-term financial support to continue their capacity development and to continue to access educational programs and training. These opportunities are often cost-prohibitive and not easily accessible. This is especially true when we look at the location of first nation communities and realize that most educational opportunities are available outside of the community.

If the federal government were to provide this support, first nations would immediately be able to increase how they can attract and retain qualified staff and plan for the future development of our staff, which would improve how we respond and react to the housing crisis. We believe that first nations need and deserve this level of support and, again, it would be viewed as an investment in our communities.

Third, we agree with many of our colleagues here today that it is time for a new approach to northern, remote and special access communities. We believe this is necessary. We know that housing needs are significant, that the building cost is greater and that hu-

man resources are stretched to the limit. The designs in many northern communities are often inadequate. We face a short construction season, and even something as simple as the lack of connectivity to access education and training.

● (1720)

We believe a better solution exists and we urge the Canadian government to redesign its approach.

As a final note, at first nations levels we are aware that our people are leaving the community to access better housing off reserve. This has an impact on both our cultural community and we know they go off reserve and apply to already overburdened aboriginal housing programs that exist.

On behalf of FNHPA and all our membership, we thank you for the opportunity to be here and we look forward to working with you to find real and lasting solutions.

*Wela'lin.*

● (1725)

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

We will now proceed with the first round of questions.

The first round goes to Mr. Shields.

You have six minutes.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I very much appreciate the panel we had before and the panel we have now.

To begin, I'll go to Ms. Pfoh.

We've heard a lot about funding, whether with this study or the previous ones we've done, and I think everybody is identifying that the colonial model of funding just doesn't work. In your experience, where do you see the will to change that?

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** It's an interesting question that you ask.

Having been in this industry for over 28 years, I was here when the federal government got out of the housing leadership role in the 1990s. They devolved all the funding to the provincial governments, and many of our provinces across this country devolved it further to the municipalities, all to the detriment of the urban indigenous portfolio.



Roxanne was bang on when she talked about an already overly burdened system. We are certainly overburdened, and it was only exacerbated when the federal government got out of investments in urban indigenous housing, because as she so rightly indicated, many of our communities, whether they're first nations, Inuit or Métis, are migrating into urban, rural and northern communities for multitude reasons and seeking a sense of belonging in those communities.

Without the ongoing investment from the federal government, most of our provinces fail to invest. Here in B.C., we were fortunate. The B.C. government did honour the Aboriginal Housing Management Association's request to be self-determined, to allow ourselves to administer our own programs. With over 25 years of experience and demonstration of our capacity, our 40-plus providers have paid off mortgages. We've divested. We've reinvested. We've branched out into social enterprise to become self-sustainable, because we have had to live off only the provincial funding that was transferred from the federal government to the Province of B.C.

The Province of B.C. has made some new investments, but there is no way they have kept pace with the need and growth in urban indigenous communities. Therefore, what we need to see is ongoing investments and the invitation from the federal government for urban indigenous leadership, whether it's AMHA, the indigenous housing caucus working group or other entities that have put recommendations to the federal government for solutions in urban, rural and northern areas.

I agree 100% that this government needs to stay vested and invested in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities, but they need to also recognize that we are underfunded in urban, rural and northern areas, and perhaps those most hard to access communities are the ones that are suffering the most.

As I said earlier, I just heard from our provincial government about a month ago that the cost for building in rural, remote and northern communities is so exacerbated right now with supply chain issues that they're considering not funding any more housing in those communities. We can't allow them to become ghost towns. We need the federal government, the provincial governments and the municipal governments to be working collaboratively.

The strategy we unveiled on January 26 outlines some very in-depth solutions that are inclusive of what many of the panellists have talked about. It's not just bricks and mortar; it's also skills, expertise, capacity-building, infrastructure, recruitment, retention and understanding what it means for cultural and trauma-informed work within our communities.

I hope that answered your question.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you.

I believe you have submitted or will submit that report.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** We did.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Ms. Harper, when you talk about the capacity, the nations' councils have a whole wide range of responsibilities that most levels of government don't, so I appreciate your comment

about not adding it onto another nation's chief and council's agenda to deal with.

**Mr. Bell,** I will go to you in the sense of the list that you have and what you live as a municipal leader.

I'm familiar with ATCO builders, who have had a 50-year history of building the best housing to staff people all the way to the Arctic Circle when need be.

Where is the will? Where do you think the will is to invoke that kind of capacity building, where they could build warehouses in the north and train people like they do in the south to build them in the north?

• (1730)

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** One of our major issues is that Nunavut has only 39,000 people. We are the largest land mass in Canada, with 25 communities and the largest community being the city of Iqaluit at under 8,000 people. It's just capacity. Even if we wanted to build buildings and build modular homes here in Nunavut, it would be hard. Plus, we have zero trees. We would still have to ship in all of the wood—

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I got that, but what if the will was to transfer massively in the sense of technology like ATCO builders? They build in the south, take that and transfer that knowledge and the materials to the north to do it.

Unless there's a will to do it, how do you see it's going to happen?

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** I don't know that there's not a will; I just don't think there's the capacity to undertake that right now. Right now, people are food insecure. They have no housing at all.

We are in a position where we are reacting to emergency upon emergency because of the lack of infrastructure and the lack of housing over the decades. We're not in a position where we can start new projects other than just the very basic ones. We need these houses built so that we can get people in them to continue on the process. We're literally at least 20 years behind the rest of Canada here in Nunavut.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** When we talk about updating our security in the north, maybe we should be talking about the security of the people who live in the north.

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** I agree with you 100%. It would be a lot cheaper to house us here in Nunavut than it would be to build military bases across our great land mass.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** We need both, but if we don't have the security of the people, then we don't have the land to protect.

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

We'll now go to Mr. Weiler.

Mr. Weiler, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses for joining our important meeting today. I'm really struck by their knowledge and expertise.

My first question, Mr. Chair, through you, is for Ms. Pfoh.

First, I want to thank you and AHMA for the work that's been done on the thoughtful urban, indigenous and northern housing strategy. Last week, we heard from officials at CMHC that a specialized committee was established to assist indigenous groups in accessing the national housing strategy programs.

In your recommendations, you mentioned that a fourth stream should be established for indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern settings. You also mentioned in your opening remarks that 80% of indigenous peoples are not connected to their traditional communities and not covered by distinctions-based programming.

I was hoping that you could share with this committee where you see the gaps in the national housing strategy that are not being filled and why it's important to have culturally appropriate and indigenous-led housing solutions.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** Thank you for that question.

I think the reality is that when you think about my story—and I share that not for consolation, not for pity, not for anything else than awareness—I've been working in this industry for 28 years. We see people from all nations, not only from within Canada but from across the world, who come here looking for safe, secure housing.

They come to urban indigenous community leaders like AHMA and our members and our providers because they have a sense of safety. They don't have to explain the trauma they live through every day. They don't have to explain why they're seeking education or why they're seeking employment. They don't have to explain that their child has been apprehended and is now living 15 minutes away.

I live in Mission, British Columbia. Abbotsford is 15 minutes away, but technically and theoretically are two different things. A woman like me, who has had a child apprehended, as an example, a child who is now living in Abbotsford.... I don't have a vehicle. I don't have transportation. The infrastructure to get me to my child is [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] The success of me meeting the criteria to re-obtain that parenting of my child is very limited, and this is considered a city—both Mission and Abbotsford.

The people in the urban, rural and northern regions are even more challenged in those capacities, so when we talk about needing that fourth stream, it's because we have lived this. We experience this. We know this. We've been doing this for over 50 years. Here in British Columbia, we have a collective experience of over a thousand years of understanding what culturally safe, trauma-informed work means when it comes to supplying the appropriate housing for our communities.

That is why we were fortunate when B.C. said yes and agreed to let AHMA do their own administration and to let AHMA create their own strategy, yet they can't sustain it. We need the federal government to step back into the game. Evan Siddall came here in 2018 and promised us they would, and we sit here four years later

waiting for action. We're waiting for an actual dedicated investment where somebody like AHMA, something like the CHRA's national housing council recommendation.... We submitted, over three years ago, through the national housing council round tables, a recommendation for a “for indigenous, by indigenous” national housing centre that can do exactly what AHMA is doing here in British Columbia. So, as Murray Sinclair once said, we laid a path for you.

● (1735)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Building on that, obviously AHMA is based in B.C., in a unique context in B.C., with the actions of the provincial government.

You answered this a bit in your question before, but do you see a need for other provincial AHMAs to be established across the country, or do you see that it would be better suited to have a national organization to represent indigenous housing providers off reserve?

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** I think it's going to end up being two steps. I think we're going to need a national body that doesn't have to be educated in all of the 150-plus years of colonial impacts and traumas that have happened to our communities. It's going to have to be a national centre that understands the urban challenges you've heard about from my brothers and sisters before me here, especially in the north.

I've travelled this country—I've travelled this world—at the request of indigenous communities and organizations asking for AHMAs in their own provinces. I was approached by Nova Scotia, which has a couple of urban indigenous organizations that are wanting to try to build capacity.

As you heard from Mr. Bell, you could throw \$10 million at them today, and they probably couldn't respond because they're sitting there with no staffing resources and no infrastructure to actually execute the delivery.

We're going to need to see both. We're going to need to see a national centre that understands urban indigenous issues, and we're going to need to see that national centre build capacity out in provinces that don't already have it. Ontario has it; Saskatchewan has it; B.C. has it, but there aren't very many others.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** As one of your recommendations, you noted that many vulnerable indigenous households face barriers such as a lack of awareness for applying for housing, complexity with applications, literacy challenges and more.

I'm wondering if you have any specific recommendations on how the Government of Canada could help address those barriers.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** Well, I think it lies in the “for indigenous, by indigenous” propositions that have been brought to the table. We need to have indigenous-led organizations where there are indigenous targeted populations to break down those barriers and facilitate that uptake.

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

We're now going to Madam Gill.

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill, you have six minutes.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to once again thank the witnesses, Ms. Pfoh, Ms. Harper, Ms. Bennett and Mr. Bell, for their testimony.

I don't want to be a prophet of doom, but I have a question. I realized that it often came to mind, but I never expressed it. It's about what will happen in the medium or long term. We've already talked about all the housing problems first nations have. Even if there were funding, it wouldn't be enough. As Ms. Pfoh said, we need something else.

What worries me is the breaking point. There's a housing deficit. At the same time, there are very young populations. I often talk about demographics. I see it in my riding, where there are a lot of children. We also see that housing built 40 or 50 years ago needs more than love. Some of it is substandard. I'm wondering if it's been determined where the breaking point would be. We already consider ourselves to be in a crisis situation, but when will it simply collapse?

This worries me, because Ms. Pfoh, like Mr. Bell, told us that recommendations had already been made, that we had ideas and that we knew what needed to be done, but that it was taking a long time. Of course, the situation may be different from one community to another, but when do you think an even more serious crisis could happen? I don't want that, but I think it's inevitable.

Do you have any idea what this might mean for communities in the medium and long term?

My question is for all the witnesses.

• (1740)

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Pfoh, perhaps you could start that off.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** I opened by indicating that I was going to say some things that would make people uncomfortable, but the reality is that in the immediate term, we've already reached that breaking point. Just look at the news reports that you hear and see every day across this country, here in British Columbia in particular, with regard to the opioid crisis, once again overrepresented by indigenous people. We have people literally dying on our doorsteps. My good friend at the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services in Ottawa indicates to me that almost every week somebody dies if not on his doorstep then down the street from his doorstep. These are indigenous people who are seeking a sense of safety and belonging in the urban, rural and northern environments. The short-term crisis is that we've already reached that breaking point.

If we start looking at the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, over 200 times in that final report the notion of housing was mentioned. The ongoing inability of the federal government to make dedicated investments into urban, rural and northern housing programs will continue to see those numbers rise among the missing and murdered, among the opioid users, among the homeless. We heard this just in Smithers. Look at the Goodacre report just released here in B.C. about how another provincially funded program targeting primarily indigenous communities was run through a non-indigenous entity. There's no sense of safety. There's no sense of belonging. People don't feel as though they can actually execute effective change to save their lives, and they reference that place as a place to go and die.

Without immediate change, we are going to see those numbers continue to rise. We've already reached the breaking point.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mayor Bell, do you want to comment?

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** Just quickly, I wholeheartedly agree with Ms. Pfoh. The breaking point has passed. I think we're probably 10 to 15 years past that breaking point here in Nunavut.

I've visited houses here in the city in which there are so many people living that people are living in furnace rooms, honestly, sleeping on the floor in a furnace room. This is not sustainable.

Most of our people in jail are indigenous. They can't even get away from each other if they need to. When there's family violence or family sexual assaults, or any of these things, they can't even get away. There's no place to go. The city is a little bit better than most communities because we have shelters, but our shelters are at capacity as well. Most communities in Nunavut do not have shelters, and this is even worse for them.

This is a serious issue and, at the end of the day, we need not only housing but also those supports to help people understand how to live in houses as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Harper, would you like to comment?

**Ms. Roxanne Harper:** Yes, please.

I would say that we will never break. Today I represent my community, which is a Mi'kmaq nation that has lived under colonization for more than 500 years. I'll tell you that we will never break. That is exactly why, for first nations, we need organizations like the First Nations Housing Professionals Association, which gives our people a national voice and a national lens. Together, collectively, we look for solutions that empower our people. We create opportunities whereby first nations can reinvest in themselves and we continue to move forward.

There is no opportunity for us to even consider anything less than a successful outcome.



**Mr. Kenny Bell:** Of course, we have the largest land mass. We're on Baffin Island, which I know is one of the biggest islands in the world. We have no shortage of land, but whether it is developable is the question. It costs a lot of money to develop roads here, and piping has to be below permafrost, which, of course, now, because of climate change, is moving at an alarming rate, and it's not predictable anymore. All of these things add to costs. The studies, even just to put the pipes in the ground, are extremely expensive. One dig for a water main break here in the city costs anywhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to fix. That is specifically because of a lack of resources, a lack of companies that can do the work and a lack of our own staff who can do the work. These are all capacity issues.

It's really hard to build new properties. What we've been trying to do is redevelop old property and use what we have already, but our piping is very old. Our sewage piping is very old. Our water sewage is very old. It's all very old.

Without the \$184 million we've asked the federal government to provide us for water infrastructure, we're really stuck right now. We're even at the point where we're asking developers to have time-release sewage tanks on their property, even though they have access to our infrastructure. We're that far behind right now.

Again, we need more money.

• (1750)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Idlout, that's our time.

Colleagues, we have to be out by six o'clock, because our interpreters are required elsewhere, but we have time for a very shortened second round, so we'll proceed with that.

Mr. Schmale, are you there? I can't see.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** I am.

**The Chair:** Okay, very good.

I would like to give you three minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I would love to take them.

Mayor Bell, I have a quick question regarding the housing funding, however it may be done.

Many municipalities, as you know, get the gas tax funding. It's given directly to municipalities, who then decide what they want to do with that funding. Not only that, they have the ability to look at what they're going to get anywhere from two, five or 10 years out, so you can plan and work as a council to meet certain goals.

Would something like that, where the funding is sent directly to municipalities, be even a fraction better than what you're dealing with now?

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** Absolutely.

I sit on FCM's board as well, and we've been pushing for a doubling if not tripling of the gas tax fund. I'm glad you call it the wrong name, because I always call it the wrong name. I'm not even

sure what the new name of gas tax funding is, but I really appreciate that.

It does help us, especially here at the city. It gives us some long-term planning ability with the direct funds we know we're going to receive every year. It's a great addition to our funding, for sure.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I guess it would also save staff time in terms of hiring consultants to try to apply and figure out what stream is doing what and what changes. I think it would be more efficient sending dollars that way, in my personal opinion.

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** Yes, I agree. The Government of Nunavut is responsible for all 25 communities, and this gas tax funding helps each community plan their own needs outside of what the government can provide. In our case, it really does help us a lot. There's also a finite number of things you can use that money for, which is understandable. We use it well, and we really appreciate it, and anytime it can be upped, doubled or tripled, we would really appreciate that, of course.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much, Mayor Bell.

Ms. Pfoh, I'll quickly turn to you. I think I have less than a minute left.

In terms of the CMHC, I noticed that you mentioned you're still waiting some six years out for the CMHC to adjust and even create a new funding stream to look at urban housing. Do you think the CMHC is achieving the goals set out for them even now to justify \$48 million in executive bonuses?

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** No.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** In your personal opinion, is the CMHC flexible at all to new ideas such as a new funding stream for a direct indigenous housing program for urban...?

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** I believe they say that they are. Romy Bowers and Holly Cooper have certainly said all the right things. I think the proof will be in the budget. It's maybe beyond the CMHC, and about whether or not the federal government will make the investment. CMHC is saying the right things—they will co-create it with indigenous leaders—but as I said, the proof will be in the pudding when we see the budget.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** If I heard you correctly, you said that although new money is always welcome, and it's always a good thing, part of the problem is that the current funding isn't doing what it's supposed to do. Did I hear that correctly?

• (1755)

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** You heard it correctly.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Oh, I did hear it correctly.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** Yes. What you heard from Mayor Bell is the same thing that indigenous housing providers across this country are challenged with. Access to those programs is cumbersome. The rollout is time-consuming. Some people were accepted three years ago and they have yet to see a groundbreaking. There's a multitude of reasons for that.

They're aware of this. I'm not saying anything to you that we haven't had a conversation about directly with Romy Bowers or directly with Minister Hussen. I've actually been tasked on a number of interviews and review panels with commentary. The reality is that I think this government is boxing themselves in.

This is not to be overly critical, but there is a need for governments to focus on reconciliation through direct work with first nations, Inuit and Métis leadership, but they have 100% excluded the urban in those conversations. You've just heard, through all of the witnesses, that there are capacity issues. So if this government were to say that we have....

I mean, we've asked my government here in B.C. for \$15 billion over the next 10 years, if you look at my strategy, and that's what we need in British Columbia alone for urban indigenous people. I can't even imagine what the entire country is going to need.

I think what really needs to happen is this: You're going to need to create that national centre, sooner rather than later, led by indigenous leaders for indigenous communities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Pfoh and Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Badawey, that went over four minutes, so I'll give you four minutes.

**Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.):** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Actually, Mr. Schmale brought up some great points. There's a whole different discussion we can get into with respect to long-term financing, debentures, etc., which can actually attach to what Ms. Pfoh was talking about with respect to the money that's needed.

I do want to preface my comments to all of you by saying, first of all, thank you for being here this afternoon. At the last session of Parliament, HUMA, the human resources committee, tabled a report recommending the creation of an urban, rural and northern housing strategy. With this, after the last election, our government appointed obviously our first ever Minister of Housing. As well, part of his mandate letter in December gave him a mandate to co-develop and implement a dedicated urban, rural and northern housing strategy with now Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, Minister Hajdu.

That's what we're working on now. We're working on co-developing the strategy for indigenous communities both on and off reserve. I want to open up the discussion, because it is timely—before the budget, and with them working on that strategy—and have some thoughts from all of you with respect to your input.

By the way, we're not going to try to fit this into four minutes. I will open up my door and my phone line for further discussion on this, as the parliamentary secretary for ISC.

Starting with the mayor, I'd like to hear some quick thoughts on that strategy as well as on the 41% of indigenous housing we're looking at moving forward with in the rapid housing initiative.

Did we lose Mayor Bell?

**The Chair:** We're not hearing you, Mayor Bell.

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** I'm sorry about that. There are two mute buttons. The sound broke up at the very last second there. All I heard was something about the national housing strategy.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** If I may, Mr. Mayor, I was referring to the housing strategy that both Minister Hajdu and Minister Hussen are working on right now with respect to the urban, rural and northern housing strategy. Second to that is the 41% of all units created under the first two rounds of the rapid housing initiative now going toward indigenous peoples.

What are some of your thoughts on how we're going to move forward and move down the road with those two initiatives?

**Mr. Kenny Bell:** Thank you again.

The city was lucky enough to receive \$5 million from rapid housing direct to city funding. We've turned that into \$10.7 million to make only 18 units, and that is because of the cost of building. The CMHC and Minister Hussen worked with us very closely to make sure we could qualify for these things and helped us through the process. This is something that I think most cities in Canada could do.

It was hard for us. We made a special program with the Government of Canada, the Government of Nunavut, Inuit organizations and the city to get this project done, so I think that all of these strategies are being worked on.

I think we need to re-examine exactly what that means. Again, just like everyone said—Harper and Pfoh—we need indigenous-led everything. Everything needs to be indigenous-led when you're talking about indigenous housing. They need to make sure they talk with all of the indigenous communities they can to get that done.

● (1800)

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** Thank you, Mayor Bell.

Ms. Pfoh.

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** Nothing about us without us is essentially where Mr. Bell is going with those sentiments. It's absolutely right.

To hit your two points, I'm going to say that the RHI, 41% to indigenous...from our experience here in British Columbia, would mean that it's targeting on nation, traditional, distinctions-based focus groups. Not a single urban, rural and northern submission was approved, despite the fact that the Province of B.C. stepped in to offer more money than the federal government was planning to invest in RHI in British Columbia in ongoing subsidies to support those programs. The RHI has not been a very great success for our urban communities here in British Columbia.



**Ms. Lori Idlout:** I will direct it to Ms. Pfoh.

Minister Hajdu was saying that indigenous housing is dependent on indigenous capacity. What are the capacity development needs that should be a priority?

**Ms. Margaret Pfoh:** I can only start by giving you an example and I'll be very brief about it.

Here in British Columbia we've seen a number of communities where there are no indigenous organizations to take the leadership and to deliver the programs. What we recommended is that there be partnerships. There are essential partnerships that need to be created if you're going to deliver targeted funding for targeted indigenous communities where there is not a capacity but there is perhaps another entity that does have that capacity so that there is mandated consultation and inclusion of indigenous at the table as the program starts to get rolled out.

We've seen it fail. Again, I'll reference the Goodacre report. It's not about blaming. It's not about pointing the finger, and it's not about accusations. It's about acknowledging that again anything for indigenous must be led by indigenous. If we don't have the capacity, then we need to work with indigenous people to help them gain that capacity and to ensure cultural and trauma-informed safety is

always at the forefront of any programming. I'm happy to expand on that.

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

If members of the committee have questions they want to direct to our witnesses today, please feel free to do so by email.

I would like to thank Ms. Pfoh, Mayor Kenny Bell, Ms. Harper and Ms. Bennett for coming today with their very strong and, may I say, very candid testimony. It's very much appreciated by all of the committee members. Thank you very much for joining us today.

With that, the panel's time is up.

As a reminder to the committee members, we'll be hearing from the three cabinet ministers related to this portfolio for main and supplementary estimates on Friday. Also, as another reminder, please get your witness lists in by April 1 for the next study, following the housing study, which will be on the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], so by April 1, please.

Thank you, again, everyone. We'll see you on Friday.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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