



Identifying the Foundations: Cultural Perspectives and Solutions for Indigenous Housing in Calgary

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INTRODUCTION

The city of Calgary, Alberta, is the largest urban hub accessible to seven First Nations Communities in Treaty 7 territory, Alberta Métis members, and Inuit migrating from the Nunangat, yet it has limited access to distinctions-based Indigenous affordable housing. Previous sustainable housing frameworks that address Indigenous housing for the city of Calgary have not been viewed from the perspective of the Indigenous stakeholders and community members. Additionally, the urbanization of Indigenous cultures has influenced a pan-Indigenous approach to developing the concept of Indigenous specific housing. As a result, community stakeholders identified the need to understand the needs of Indigenous tenants, how to create culturally-informed Indigenous housing, and how to improve housing stability for Indigenous community members living in Calgary.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project team used three methods in order to understand the relationship between solutions for increased sustainability and affordable housing in Calgary, Alberta.

1. An international **literature review and environmental scan** of Indigenous housing solutions in settler-colonial settings (Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand) was conducted to understand the dynamic relationship between cultural perspectives and housing policies, and how the two can be used to support the development of concepts towards a localized perspective.
2. A housing provider **survey** was conducted to explore a present current-state analysis of housing for Indigenous peoples while identifying strengths, gaps and limitations to inform recommendations for a desired future state of housing.
3. **Focus groups of frontline staff and individuals of lived experience** contributed to recommendations conceptualized through an Indigenous lens and led from an Indigenous paradigm.

KEY FINDINGS

The following key findings emerged from the research, and informed the later stages of the work in an iterative manner:

1. **The environmental scan revealed** that successful models included:
 - a. Improving access to ceremonial spaces
 - b. Integrating community members in order to dispel myths related to neighbourhood NIMBYism (“Not In My Backyard”, or exclusionary actions on behalf of settler community members),
 - c. Examining options that increase access to kin relationships, and
 - d. Identifying strategies that prevent unnecessary evictions.

2. Building on the environmental scan, **the survey revealed** the following recommendations that addressed increasing community integration and reducing evictions:
 - a. Establish specific targets for Indigenous tenancy by housing providers, and allocate a percentage of housing units specifically to Indigenous tenants.
 - b. Include collaboration with developers and housing managers of Indigenous specific housing projects to increase a diverse and culturally informed Indigenous housing stock.
 - c. Build stronger awareness amongst housing provider staff and landlords of the unique needs and challenges faced by Indigenous clients to support housing stability. For example, negotiation around rental fees during times of crisis, the role of ceremony or smudging, and the structure of extended family relations are all currently points of tension between clients and housing providers/landlords that contribute to evictions.
 - d. Provide Indigenous client support and education on their tenant rights, basic housing maintenance, and community resources.
3. Building on the previous work, **the focus groups revealed** the importance of client autonomy as a vital factor in increasing personal agency among Indigenous community members and advancing the values that define Indigenous culture. A wide variety of services and programs is needed, allowing clients to choose what and when they need support. Housing programs would benefit from incorporating resources which support the diversity of Indigenous needs and prevent eviction and homelessness. Finally, funding strategies should incorporate local perspectives as well as national ones, in order to address the unique needs of each community.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the completion of the research, the project research team included the following recommendations for urban Indigenous housing:

Individual	Service Provider	Municipal
<p>Supporting Reserve to Urban Migration for First Nations community members, and rural/ remote migration for Métis and Inuit community members – Addressing the resource needs of Indigenous peoples transitioning into the urban centre from rural and remote regions prepares and prevents gaps that may lead to barriers in securing and retaining housing. This includes supporting knowledge transfer about individual rights and expectations when accessing rental units.</p>		
	<p>Developing Culturally relevant Hiring and Assessment Methods – Revisioning standard assessments to incorporate culturally relevant approaches would include communication channels to ensure that Indigenous community members are reached with hiring opportunities. Welcoming ceremonies lead by Elders and Knowledge Keepers are essential to ensure that Indigenous employees are respectfully welcomed into service organizations. Lifelong learning opportunities are essential to ensure retention of Indigenous employees.</p>	<p>Increasing relational capacity – Housing should provide a space where meaningful connection and cultural freedom are accessible and enhance the lives of Indigenous peoples.</p>
	<p>Affordable and safe housing must be seen as a guiding principle in the development of housing design, programs and support services – Mapping out a community capacity pathway within the context of housing design between Indigenous and non-Indigenous architects, developers, and community members that includes wrap-around support mechanisms for resources and programs.</p>	<p>Identifying, supporting and creating a community network of supports to enhance intercultural community relational capacity (between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members) – Contributing resources towards collective and community connections which provides opportunities to learn, share and mentor.</p>
	<p>Implementing cultural security – Housing as a collective human right can be fortified through the process of cultural security, guiding organizational operations to ensure that interactions do not diminish, demean or disempower individuals on the basis of any real or perceived differences.</p>	
	<p>Supporting the hiring and retention of Indigenous frontline workers – Enhancing operational practices and policies reflect cultural perspectives into hiring and retaining Indigenous employees.</p>	
	<p>Anticolonial, antiracism training/professional development framework – Professional development for settler workers needs to move beyond the surface level acts of reconciliation and standardized accreditation policies to support more intentional approaches towards addressing anticolonial and antiracist belief systems.</p>	

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HOUSING SECTOR

- Invest in **culturally-informed transitional housing models** to support urban migration as a preventative measure, assisting the integration of migrating Indigenous populations into urban environments. This is a paradigm shift from the model of transitional housing that is built on low-barrier housing, or shelter for the homeless.
- **Create a separate housing indicator** that responds to the local definition of affordable and safe housing to support tracking the changes of housing needs over time.
- **Support cultural security** by acknowledging the diversity of cultural needs and offering appropriate and distinct support, as well as relational capacity, as guiding design factors.

Fast Facts

- While Calgary is the largest urban centre to the seven (7) largest of Alberta's 48 First Nation communities within the Treaty 7 area, there are **less than 300** units allocated specifically for Indigenous peoples in the city of Calgary.
- According to the 2016 Census, whereas just under 10% of Calgary's population experiences core housing need, the corresponding figure for Indigenous households is nearly 17% (see Table 1).

Table 1: Indigenous Peoples In Core Housing Need, Calgary
Data: 2016 Census

	Number of people	Number of people living in core housing need	Percentage of households living in core housing need
Total population	1,335,095	130,290	9.8
Indigenous persons	39,405	6,605	16.8
Status Indian persons	13,225	3,260	24.7
Non-status Indian persons	5,820	975	16.8
Métis persons	21,845	2,555	11.7
Inuit persons	455	45	9.9
Non-Indigenous persons	1,295,695	123,690	9.6

Source: CMHC. (2019). Core housing need characteristics by population and gender. Retrieved from CMHC website: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca>

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Cultural security

Understood as a philosophy of that guides organizational operations to ensure cultural differences are regarded with respect and that individuals “are treated with regard to their unique cultural needs and differences. It assumes the right to difference and calls for interactions that do not diminish, demean or disempower individuals on the basis of any perceived or actual difference”.

Distinctions-based approach

Acknowledges the differences of the three federally recognized Indigenous groupings in Canada: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. A distinctions-based approach was intended to remedy the previous “pan-Aboriginal” or “one size fits all” approach to Indigenous policy and decision making.¹

Indigenous

Used primarily throughout the full report and refers widely to the original peoples of North America and their descendants, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Where *Aboriginal* is used, it reflects the term as used in the Constitution of Canada.

Inuit Nunangat

A Canadian Inuit term that includes land, water, and ice. There are four Inuit regions in Canada: the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut.²

NIMBYism

An acronym for “Not In My Backyard”, and refers to the phenomenon in which residents of a neighbourhood designate a new development (e.g. shelter, affordable housing, group home) or change in occupancy of an existing development as inappropriate or unwanted for their local area.³

Off-reserve

Refers to a person’s usual place of residence being in a census subdivision (CSD) that is defined as ‘off reserve’ (Statistics Canada, 2017c). While often conflated with urbanism, off-reserve residence includes rural and remote areas. In this research insight, we use “off-reserve” to refer to First Nations living in a census subdivision. Indigenous people identifying as either Inuit or Métis are not included in this definition.

Relational capacity

Understood here as the ability to relate in ways that foster trust, safety, and respect. Increasing relational capacity can be achieved through processes that deliberately connect interlocking practices, approaches and theoretical models into a framework that supports a system’s wide approach for housing design.

Transitional housing

Intended to offer a supportive living environment for its residents, including offering them the experience, tools, knowledge and opportunities for social and skill development to become more independent. It is considered an intermediate step between emergency shelter and supportive housing, and has limits on how long an individual or family can stay. Stays are typically between three months and three years (NHS Glossary of Common Terms⁴).

¹ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/SR/COVID-19/IndigenousCSOs/CANADA_NationalAssociation_of_Friendship_Centres_NAFC.pdf

² See <https://www.itk.ca/about-canadian-inuit/>

³ See <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/affordable-housing/nimby-not-my-backyard>.

⁴ See <https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/files/pdf/glossary/nhs-glossary-en.pdf>

FULL RESEARCH REPORT

Identifying the Foundations: Cultural Perspectives and Solutions for Indigenous Housing in Calgary, 2021

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/publications/nhs/research_and_planning_fund_program/identifying-the-foundations-final.pdf

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CMHC's Indigenous Housing Research

The Government of Canada is committed to reconciliation and renewed relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership.

Working in collaboration with government and Indigenous partners, CMHC is committed to advancing research to support the goals of the National Housing Strategy and inform improvements to Indigenous housing outcomes in Canada.

CMHC supports research on priorities identified by Indigenous organizations and communities.

Where possible, this research is led by Indigenous organizations, advised by an Indigenous steering committee, or conducted by an Indigenous consultant, respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and priorities that emerge as a result of an Indigenous research process.

CMHC embraces the principles that govern Indigenous data and research in Canada, and articulated by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governing bodies such as the First Nations principles of OCAP®.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Off-Reserve Indigenous Housing Needs and Challenges in Canada Literature Review (Phase I) (2021)

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_6/phase-1-full-report.pdf

Off-Reserve Indigenous Housing Needs and Challenges in Canada Quantitative Analysis (Phase II) 2021

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_6/phase-2-full-report.pdf

Ganohonyohk (giving thanks): understanding prosperity from the perspectives of urban Indigenous Friendship Centre communities in Ontario (2020)

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/housing_organizations2/final-report---ganohonyohk.pdf

National urban, rural & northern Indigenous housing & homelessness: a case for support and conceptual model (2021)

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Urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing (2021)

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Results from the 2016 census: housing, income and residential dissimilarity among Indigenous people in Canadian cities (2019)

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/housing_organizations/statistics_canada/00018-eng.pdf

Urban, rural & northern indigenous housing: the next step (2019)

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/housing_organizations/20190802urnindigenoushousingfinalreportaug262019.pdf

Household characteristics data tables: Aboriginal housing (2011-2021)

https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic/Listing?item_ID=%7b458EA1E7-C69D-43F1-96DF-059FF0AE854F%7d

Indigenous wellness indicators: including urban Indigenous wellness indicators in the healthy city strategy (2020)

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/housing_organizations2/2018-62-indigenous-wellness-indicators_heggie.pdf

Indigenous people in urban areas: vulnerabilities to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 (2020)

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/housing_organizations2/00023-eng.pdf

