



## Development of a Sustainable, Affordable and Culturally Appropriate Housing Model

### Introduction

The goal of the research project was to develop a sustainable, affordable, accessible and culturally appropriate (SAACA) housing model for Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, transgender and gender-diverse+ (WG2STGD+) people. The project looks at the Indigenous housing and housing for those in great needs which is a priority area of action for the National Housing Strategy (NHS). This project identifies successful housing features and/or models for SAACA housing in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities through intensive research on approaches to housing design and technology across various regions and communities in Canada.

### Project Overview

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) conducted a literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan and national online survey in Canada to develop a preliminary SAACA housing model. The literature review focuses on understanding the barriers faced by each community in accessing, developing and maintaining adequate housing in urban and rural areas, reserves and remote areas across Canada. It also identifies the differences among subgroups of Indigenous WG2STGD+ people and housing needs based on geography within Canada, given the vastly different climates, ground conditions, traditional and cultural housing. The cross-jurisdictional scan analyzes regional housing initiatives and best practices for Indigenous WG2STGD+ people's housing solutions. The national online survey collects the perceptions and suggestions of WG2STGD+ people on SAACA housing. Finally, with the help of architects, NWAC created a SAACA housing model preliminary design that includes key features and metrics identified through the literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan and national online survey.

# Key Findings

The study shows that First Nations, Métis and Inuit WG2STGD+ people have distinct housing needs. The proposed model of SAACA housing and its various features aim to respond to these needs.

## Sustainable Housing

Indigenous communities will have social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits by incorporating sustainable features and design. A few key points are the following:

- Use of or have solar energy, a garden and green spaces (including composting systems), recycling, thermal in-ground heating, energy-saving appliances, rainwater catchment systems, sustainable materials, high-quality windows, heating and plumbing.
- Use of local materials such as lumber, gravel, or stone as they provide economic opportunities to the communities and were most likely used in traditional housing design.

## Affordable Housing

Affordability is a main concern for many Indigenous peoples across urban, rural and remote areas. Especially in the northern territories where housing prices are significantly higher. Indigenous WG2STGD+ people identified the need for the following:

- Greater access to rent subsidies
- Affordable utility costs
- Rent-g geared-to-income programs
- Financial literacy training

## Accessible Housing

Accessible design for Indigenous WG2STGD+ people is not only about physical accessibility, but also includes cultural and spiritual accessibility. The recommendation for each aspect is as follows:

- There is need to address discrimination, racism, sexism and homophobia when accessing shelters and transitional housing across urban, rural and remote locations.

### Physical accessibility

- Incorporate wide hallways, doorways, hearing and visual aids near entrances, lower counter heights, higher toilets, walk-in showers with grab bars and non-slip flooring.
- Provide access to transportation services to people living in rural and remote areas like those living in urban areas.

### Cultural and spiritual accessibility

- Provide access to spaces for gatherings or events and ceremonies.
- Ensure design responds to the various abilities of the residents, particularly Elders as traditional Indigenous homes are inclusive of multi-generational families.
- Recognize that urban areas require culturally appropriate support services such as mental health services, emergency shelters and community gathering spaces.

## Culturally Appropriate Housing

Culturally appropriate housing moves beyond physical structure by incorporating cultural factors and local region in designing the house. The design needs to consider the following:

- Multigenerational living spaces which move beyond the nuclear family to include Elders, grandchildren and/or extended family members.
- Designated cultural places like a storage area for hunting/game food preparation, spiritual room for gatherings, ceremony and crafts, and outdoor spaces that include a fire pit and round seating, gardens and saunas or sweat lodges.
- Appropriate ventilation for smudging in designated cultural places for holding ceremonies.
- Indigenous design and décor elements, such as regional art, carved doorways and cabinets, Indigenous plants and medicines and circular seating areas, enhance the cultural relevancy of the home.

# Housing Model Preliminary Design

The following features were considered for the Housing Model Preliminary Design (see table 1 and figure 1). Refer to the full report for complete details on housing plans and design.

Table 1: Features implemented in the SAACA Housing Model Preliminary Design. For more recommendations refer to appendix B of the full report.

Sustainable Features	Affordable Features	Accessible Features	Culturally Appropriate Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solar panels on the roof</li> <li>• Rain collectors</li> <li>• Greenhouse leading to the rear yard</li> <li>• Sustainable materials for exterior</li> <li>• Rigid insulation for high-quality envelope control</li> <li>• Wood stove</li> <li>• Electrical heating</li> <li>• High-quality windows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total area of 936.8 sq. ft.</li> <li>• Internal climate-controlled living space of 750 sq. ft.</li> <li>• Sections of the building were prefabricated</li> <li>• Exceeding recommended minimum insulation requirements to reduce ongoing heating and cooling costs</li> <li>• Adequate ventilation to remove moisture from the house to prevent mould</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ramp with a guardrail</li> <li>• Widened entryways or doorways</li> <li>• Interior spaces are wheelchair accessible</li> <li>• Open floor plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodates the needs of larger families and multi-generational living</li> <li>• Windows on all sides and skylights for natural light</li> <li>• Entrance closet for storage</li> <li>• A central gathering area</li> <li>• A free-standing round wood stove with a dining table around it</li> <li>• Open kitchen concept</li> <li>• Exterior attached storage shed</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Isometric view of the proposed SAACA housing model design



## Further Research Opportunities

The next steps would be to refine and build the Housing Model Preliminary Design, test it with users and replicate the model.

## Full Report

The Native Women’s Association of Canada – FINAL REPORT PREPARED FOR PROJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE, AFFORDABLE, AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HOUSING MODEL-STAGE 1 (2023)

[https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sf/project/archive/research\\_6/developmentsustainableaffordableculturallyappropriatehousingmodel-stage1-20230608-anm.pdf](https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sf/project/archive/research_6/developmentsustainableaffordableculturallyappropriatehousingmodel-stage1-20230608-anm.pdf)



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