



HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE: TRANSITION TO FIRST NATIONS CARE, CONTROL & MANAGEMENT OF HOUSING & FEDERAL DEEP DIVE ON HOUSING

OVERVIEW - 10-YEAR NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS HOUSING AND RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Chiefs-in-Assembly in December 2018 approved Resolution 57/2018, *National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy*, (the Strategy).

The Strategy was developed jointly by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Canada. The AFN, guided by the Chiefs Committee on Housing and Infrastructure, led its development.

The Strategy is one of several key steps in a multi-year process to ensure First Nations care, control, and management of housing and infrastructure.

The process leading to First Nations control of housing and infrastructure has the remaining key milestones.

Milestone	Date & Status
1. Analysis of data collected on housing needs to support future Federal Budget requests.	AFN & First Nations Information Governance Centre partnering to analyse the data collected and report the real housing needs of First Nations..

Milestone	Date & Status
2. Co-Develop with Canada an AFN-led Implementation Plan for the Strategy.	2019, currently in development.
3. Regional & First Nations readiness.	First Nations and regions are at different stages of readiness.
4. Memorandum to Cabinet authorizing transformative change to First Nations control	Originally expected in late 2018, now expected late 2019 or early 2020.
5. Discussion/negotiations to create new, First Nations controlled housing regimes and authorities at the First Nations, sub-regional or regional levels.	To start when First Nations/Regions are ready; e.g. BC region started discussion with Canada in 2018.
6. Federal Government's sole role becomes to provide stable, predictable, sufficient and long-term funding to First Nations and to their housing & infrastructure authorities and entities.	New Federal funding-only role starts when legal agreements are signed and is expected in the coming years.

NEXT STEPS

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND A MEMORANDUM TO CABINET

The current focus is finalizing an implementation plan for the Strategy in late 2019 and include short, medium and long-term activities and expected outcomes. The Strategy, its implementation plan, the results of the national housing data gathering exercise and a costing analysis are the key ingredients informing a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) authorizing transformative change to First Nations control of housing. Most regions have completed their data collection and efforts are underway to assist the regions that have experienced delays in the data gathering exercise

It is expected that the MC will significantly transform the Federal Government's First Nations housing policy and authorize the transition to First Nations control of housing and infrastructure. First Nations or their regional organizations can start discussions with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) toward First Nations control of housing by contacting ISC's **Housing Service Transfer Initiative** (contact Roxanne Gravelle at Roxanne.gravelle@canada.ca). The 4th National Housing and Related Infrastructure Forum and two smaller "Think Tank" sessions are being organized to help maintain the momentum toward transformative change in housing. The AFN is also exploring the purpose, structure and services that could be provided to First Nations through a National First Nations Policy and Research Centre. The research is paying particular attention to ensure its structure and services do not undermine the goals of regions for developing their own housing support entities.

FEDERAL DEEP DIVE ON FIRST NATIONS HOUSING ON RESERVES REPORT, JULY 2019

On August 19, 2019 the Federal Government provided the AFN a copy of its July 11, 2019, nine-page report entitled "Deep Dive on First Nations Housing on Reserves" and met with AFN staff to discuss the report.

The process' scope was to examine the government's internal operations in relation to First Nations housing on-reserves and "...to complement the co-developed work that is underway, to increase First Nations care, control and management of their housing."

The Deep Dive team included representatives from the Privy Council Office (PCO), ISC and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The team held meetings with federal officials from CMHC and ISC regional offices, with representatives of the AFN, with the First Nation Housing and Infrastructure Council of British Columbia, housing experts and managers, and health experts. First Nations communities in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec were also visited.

The report "...presents key challenges and recommendations for the Government of Canada in the near and medium term to help improve housing and related health and social outcomes and for federal departments to help prepare for program delivery by First Nations."

The report notes four key challenges:

1. **A lack of clear objectives/targets and roles;** "Without a shared and well-defined objective, federal programs and

partners can sometimes be disjointed,”
“Lack of clarity on overall objectives and how to measure success remains throughout the system...”

2. **Coordination gaps;** “There was support for a streamlined approach, with fewer “hoops” to jump through, and better alignment with local community needs, geographic realities and housing construction cycles... The link between health and housing efforts in communities also face coordination challenges;”
3. **Capacity for Housing Management;** “...(T)he role of the Housing Manager was highlighted as critical to accessing existing and new federal programs, successful execution of housing investments, good governance and ongoing management of the housing portfolio. ...Many people stressed the importance of ensuring communities have (housing managers), as communities understand their needs best.”
4. **Availability, flexibility, and predictability of funding;** “...direct government funding has not kept up – ISC ongoing annual funding for housing has not increased for most communities since 1996 despite rising housing costs and growing populations. Increases in funding have come through short term injections...that funding levels per unit were often insufficient, many communities still feel they have little control over the type and nature of units to be built...a shortage of capital from all sources limits communities’ ability to build sufficient housing stock... The time between budget approvals and funding flowing to communities after being approved can mean a community is

asked to build within a few months before the year end.”

There are seven recommendations and 33 objectives; the **recommendations** are “Near-term actions can improve service delivery and outcomes, while additional funding streams and long-term transformation will be required to close the gap.”;

1. Clarify shared objectives and publicly report on progress;
2. Improve horizontal coordination within the federal government and improve communications with First Nations;
3. Expand support for governance capacity, including housing managers;
4. Increase predictability and flexibility of funding, and review funding levels to align with housing objectives;
5. Review the National Directive on Shelter Allowance;
6. Strategically use data to support outcomes, build better evidence base and support First Nation’s development of their own information base;
7. Incorporate additional findings, including promoting best practices and innovations.

Next Steps: ISC and CMHC are developing an action plan to implement the recommendations. Government staff indicated that AFN and First Nations input will be sought on the implementation phase.

Highlights & Critique: First Nations are cautioned not to have high expectations with respect to this report. It is not clear where funds will come from to implement the recommendations and objectives that have an associated cost. They are good recommendations but many unknowns. First

Nations housing will be increasingly seen through a health lens but there is no guarantee it will improve service delivery or result in better housing. There is no new funding attached, although the report recommends “additional funding streams”.

There could be greater ISC-CMHC coordination. Although its focus is internal to government, it could result in more First Nations housing managers in the short or medium term. The language used often portrays the various problems as emanating from, or being the responsibility of, the First Nations despite the lack of federal funding is most often to blame. It is positive that the PCO representative agreed to be part of the team. The team reports to the Deputy Ministers Task Force on Reconciliation, which will receive the follow-up action plans being developed by ISC and CMHC. The Report will be discussed with regional ISC and CMHC executives.

DENE NATION PURSUES CONTROL OF HOUSING

The Dene Nation is taking steps to gain control over its members’ housing. Housing for First Nations in the North West Territories (NWT) is provided very differently than in the south. Currently, housing support programs are delivered by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWTHC). The NWTHC programs help all residents regardless of identity or status. The Dene Nation lacks technical housing expertise to assist its communities and those communities have no dedicated housing support staff. Nevertheless, representatives of the Dene Nation’s five regions met in late March 2019 to start developing their housing plan. The AFN is providing on-going assistance to the Dene Nation to find the resources to help meet their members’ housing goals.