



HOUSING UNIT

What has the Housing Unit worked on over the last quarter?

Over the last quarter, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Housing Unit continued to work towards two activities to enhance federal transparency. The first is further development of performance measures to standardize assessments of Federal Government transparency with First Nations. A second draft of performance measures will be presented for comment to Regional First Nations Housing Technicians (RFNHTs) in September 2020 (date TBD) as a follow-up to the first draft the RFNHTs reviewed in a meeting in April 2020.

Secondly, securing a commitment to have an AFN representative receive clearance to participate in drafting the Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) is expected in late 2020 or early 2021; this representative will propose transformative change in the federal policy on First Nations housing. Unfortunately, there has been no progress on both matters since April 2020, due to work resources diverted to COVID-19 related activities. The AFN Housing Unit continues to push for government transparency.

Under the leadership of the National Chief Perry Bellegarde and AFN portfolio holder, Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart, the 10-Year National First Nations' Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy (the Strategy) was adopted by Chiefs-in-Assembly in 2018. Since then, a draft implementation plan has been under development and will provide a path towards the realization of First Nation's care and control of housing and related infrastructure. Cost estimates will be supported by data related to First Nations housing and related infrastructure needs. This important stage of the Strategy provides the evidence to obtain the resources and sustainable investments required from the Federal Government. Once completed, it is anticipated that the Implementation Plan, supported by the housing and related infrastructure needs data and associated costing will inform and be attached to the Memorandum to Cabinet in late 2020 or early 2021, with meaningful co-drafting by First Nations representatives.

With the Strategy in place and the Implementation Plan near completion, many regional First Nations organizations across Canada are already moving towards the goal of self-determination; this is being accomplished by working towards the transfer of housing and related infrastructure from the federal government to First Nations. A number of First Nations are in early discussions with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) on framing these new systems.

Moving forward, the Sector is working towards the creation of a First Nations housing policy and research centre, identified as a priority goal in the Strategy, and actionable early in the Implementation Plan. A housing policy and research centre would function as a research centre and archive for housing information, tools, and best practices as well as innovative approaches to housing in First Nations. A feasibility analysis that will seek views from the AFN's regions is expected to be completed late in fall 2020.

*The AFN is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada.
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Are there recent current events or government action affecting the Housing Unit or its priorities?

Recent events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have emphasized the housing and infrastructure crisis that exists in First Nations. Calls urging the Federal Government to promptly invest significantly in First Nations housing and infrastructure, and advance First Nation's priorities in self-determination, must be ramped up. Immediate federal investments supporting elements of the Strategy are undeniably necessary now.

The Strategy provides the ways and means for First Nations self-determination in housing and related infrastructure and to ensure the health, safety and well-being of their members and citizens. First Nations need to be part of the process in planning for their infrastructure, to "Build Back Better," and make our communities more resilient and sustainable for seven generations and beyond.

What is your Sector planning for the future?

The AFN Housing Unit is currently planning to facilitate the convening of a high-level Canada-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs (CIRNA) officials meeting with senior Dene Nation representatives to advance the Dene Nation's goal to control their housing. The unique way in which federal social housing supports are delivered in Denendeh, the Northwest Territories, creates a challenge to transfer control of housing, which is, possibly, greater than that experienced by most First Nations south of the sixtieth parallel. ISC has indicated that the transfer of control initiative is open to the Dene Nation. An additional challenge is determining to what extent the Dene Nation communities and members have been receiving an unequal share of federal housing resources relative to their southern counterparts. Equity of treatment is one of many Dene Nation housing issues. The AFN's support activities are subject to the prior approval by the Dene Nation.

The AFN will continue to build on the momentum of advocating for immediate investments considering the COVID-19 pandemic. The Housing, Infrastructure, Water and Emergency Services Sector (HIWES) will support the Chiefs Committee on Housing and Infrastructure in their advocacy role to obtain the investments required to meet the needs and aspirations of First Nations in their housing and related infrastructure. Another key feature of the Strategy is to enable First Nations to provide housing services to their members who live away from their communities. The AFN will conduct additional outreach and gather input from Indigenous housing providers in urban and rural locations to further develop positive and strong working relationships.

Upcoming Events

- **Fall 2020** – Developing estimates of the full cost of implementing the Strategy
- **Fall 2020** – Think-tank Session First Nations Housing Managers & Urban Indigenous Housing Providers
- **Fall 2020** – Co-drafting of the Memorandum to Cabinet

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