What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

There is an urgent need to address homelessness for First Nations peoples both on and off-reserve. Prior to December 2019, the AFN had no mandate to advocate for First Nations homelessness although it had undertaken work on various related determinants, including mental health, addictions, labour market outcomes, employment, housing strategies, poverty reduction, and income assistance.

At the 2019 Special Chiefs Assembly, First Nations-in-Assembly passed Resolution 79/2019, titled “Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve.” This resolution mandates that the AFN develop a national First Nations homelessness strategy, which aims to improve the delivery of federal government programs as well as the related social and fiscal mechanisms to address homelessness for First Nations peoples. It advocates for a comprehensive, multi-partner approach to reducing, preventing, and ultimately eradicating First Nations homelessness with the goal of transitioning First Nations housing and infrastructure to First Nations management, control, and care.

How has the AFN’s recent advocacy affected this area?

In 2018, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) announced Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy, a federal homelessness prevention and reduction program that funds urban, Indigenous, rural and remote communities as they address local homelessness needs. In its First Nations distinctions-based funding stream, Reaching Home has committed $6.6 million for 2020-2021 and $9 million for each year afterwards until 2028 towards meeting the unique needs of First Nations experiencing homelessness on and off-reserve.

The AFN, in collaboration with ESDC, has secured funding to lead the work required to address its homelessness mandate as described in Resolution 79/2019. In October 2020, the AFN and ESDC agreed to establish a joint technical working group to determine priorities for Reaching Home’s First Nations distinctions-based funding stream and undertake the co-development of an approach to allocating this funding to address First Nations homelessness across Canada. The parties drafted a national Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve, for consideration by Chiefs in Assembly.

Where do we hope to go in the future?

This project is being realized through three phases: comprehensive research, an engagement strategy, and the development of a national Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve. In November 2020, the AFN issued a Request for Proposals for research services.
including a systematic literature review, environmental scan, and systems mapping of existing programs and services to identify opportunities to better meet the needs of First Nations peoples experiencing homelessness on and off-reserve. The AFN is planning to hold engagements at the local, regional, and national levels in the new-year to seek input from First Nations, service providers, and those directly affected by homelessness both on and off-reserve. Research and engagement findings will be used to inform the draft national Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve for consideration by Chiefs in Assembly.