

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Urban and Rural Homelessness Policy Statement

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

Ending Homelessness for Indigenous Peoples

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Urban and Rural Homelessness Policy Statement

Policy Statement

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit¹ people living in urban and rural areas must have fair and representative access to a culturally appropriate continuum of housing services with the goal of eliminating and preventing homelessness among Indigenous people. Indigenous people includes, but is not limited to, people in high-risk environments such as women and children escaping violence, single women, single men, LGBTTQ² people, youth, youth transitioning out of institutional care, families with children, and people experiencing mental health and addictions. All are all demographics that are overrepresented and are currently experiencing or at high risk of homelessness.

Preamble

Urban and rural First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) people represent a very high proportion of people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. On any one night, 6.97 percent of the urban FNMI population in Canada is homeless in comparison to the national average of 0.78 percent. The urban FNMI homeless population accounts for 29 percent of the overall homeless population in Canada; 20,358 are FNMI of the total 70,200 Canadian urban homeless populations. Belanger et al, reports that 1 in 15 FNMI people in urban centers are homeless compared to 1 in 128 for the general population which means that urban FNMI people are eight (8) times more likely to experience homelessness.³

Ending homelessness requires investment in physical infrastructure as well as corresponding investments in social infrastructure. In order to eliminate homelessness for FNMI people living in urban and rural areas, both housing services and supportive services must be provided in a culturally appropriate manner.

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS), whose Board is comprised of Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centers (OFIFC), Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), and the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), has critical expertise in designing and delivering culturally appropriate services. Individually, these three Board organizations have critical expertise in providing culturally appropriate supportive and transitional services at a community-based level. OAHS works with Board organizations and their members to collaborate and implement community-driven housing and homelessness solutions. To date, these organizations have been able to make some initial progress without adequate funding; however only when policy and substantial investments in housing and supports are designed and delivered by the urban and rural FNMI community, will there be sustainable and widespread reductions in homelessness experienced by FNMI people. In order to achieve this, programs must now be devolved to FNMI urban and rural organizations; and when services are delivered through mainstream channels, various levels of government (including Service Managers and LHINS) must seek active and meaningful partnerships with FNMI urban and rural organizations.

¹ OAHS and its board recognize the diversity of the Indigenous people and acknowledge that some may refer to themselves differently in their own language. Throughout this policy statement the terms "Indigenous", "Aboriginal" and "First Nation, Métis and Inuit" are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this policy these terms refer to all First Nation, Métis and Inuit people living in non-reserve rural and urban communities in the province.

² LGBTTQ refers to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, questioning, and queer.

³ Belanger, Y. Awosoga, O, Weasel Head, G. (2013). Homelessness, Urban Aboriginal People, and the Need for a National Enumeration. Aboriginal policy studies. Vol 2, no 2, 2013, pp 4-33

“Racism and discrimination by landlords and mainstream service providers impede urban Aboriginal people’s access to housing supports, while also limiting tangential services such as food support, mental health and addictions and employment supports.⁴”

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) outlines Indigenous rights around the world and, although not legally binding, sets international standards. Article 23 states that: “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions.”

All three levels of government have a role to play in ending urban Indigenous homelessness. Specifically, the Government of Canada has provided new direction on repairing Canada’s relationship with FNMI people, the Province of Ontario has a goal of ending chronic homelessness in 10 years, and Municipal Governments and Service Managers (including Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMS) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABS)) who individually have a legal obligation to develop Housing and Homelessness Plans that consider and address the needs of FNMI people in their municipalities.

We call on all levels of Government to meet and implement these commitments in a timely and expeditious manner. This requires making fair and substantial investments in culturally appropriate housing and related supportive and transitional services that reflect the high proportion of need. OAHS, in partnership with OFIFC, MNO, and ONWA who can provide the intensive supportive and transitional services needed to sustain housing improvements, should be considered key partners in supporting the end of chronic homelessness for FNMI people living in urban and rural areas of Ontario.

Gaps That Need to be Closed

The Federal Government’s prior and narrow focus on Housing First has not provided wide-ranging and meaningful solutions for Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in urban and rural areas. While more affordable housing investments are absolutely needed, holding up Housing First as ‘the’ solution is misguided at best. There is no single solution. Because of intergenerational trauma and socio-economic barriers, there must be solutions and supports available at multiple levels to ensure individuals receive the solutions needed for their particular situation. There must be investments across the housing continuum starting with both homelessness and emergency housing and supportive and transitional housing. “The development of new housing stock, specifically transitional and supportive housing, must be considered in addition to maintaining existing social and affordable housing stock.⁵”

There are significant gaps in both mainstream and underfunded Indigenous led housing services, the effects of which are evident in poor outcomes for FNMI people. “Aboriginal homelessness in major urban areas is reported to range from 20 to 50 percent of the total homeless population, while other reports acknowledge that the range may be much wider from 11 to 96 percent.⁶”

⁴ Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, “Response to Ontario’s Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update,” July 2015, p 9.

⁵ Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, “Response to Ontario’s Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update,” July 2015, p 5.

⁶ Patrick, C. (2014). *Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review*. The homeless hub report series. Paper #6.

FNMI people in every demographic are significantly overrepresented in the homeless population and this evidence is consistent from sources gathered by both mainstream and FNMI organizations. Indigenous women and children escaping violence, single women, single men, LGBTTQ people, youth, youth transitioning out of institutional care, families with children, and people experiencing mental health and addictions are all demographics that are overrepresented and are currently experiencing or at high risk of homelessness. The intergenerational trauma caused by centuries of mal, misinformed, and misdirected policy has the negative affects continuing to be front and centre.

Considering the government's direction to move towards evidence-based policies and programing, the existing research gap must be addressed for FNMI homelessness and housing issues. This includes research and data gathering regarding hidden homelessness, those at high risk of homelessness, rural homelessness, and other cultural factors that are important. As per "A Place to Call Home; Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2015" the Expert Panel called on, as one of the "four priorities, to prevent, reduce, and end... Aboriginal homelessness."

Considering that housing and homelessness supports are administered at a local or regional level, it is critical that data gathered is local in nature. The need for Service Managers to conduct local enumeration of the homeless population was recognized in Ontario's Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy Update. The update also recognized that Service Managers and housing providers require access to better data.⁸ The need for a more evidence-based approach to housing and homelessness was also recognized by the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness.⁹

"Aboriginal people experiencing the pervasive phenomenon of hidden homelessness are a diverse group of males, females, youth, single parent families, Elders and increasingly, families. The reasons for housing distress are wide ranging, however, all suffer from overwhelming poverty and the lack of adequate short and long-term emergency/temporary shelter opportunities.¹⁰"

According to the Ontario Urban and Rural First Nations, Métis and Inuit Housing Policy Framework, "Research demonstrates that FNMI people living outside of a reserve in urban and rural communities continue to experience high levels of homelessness, core housing need, family instability, violence, children placed in care, disability, mental illness, addictions, unemployment, low educational attainment and poverty.¹¹"

What OAHS is Currently Doing

While OAHS' Mission is to provide safe and affordable housing for urban and rural Aboriginal people in Ontario, and we have a proven track record in that regard, much more needs to be done to specifically address homelessness. One of our strategic goals is to address gaps and ensure responsible integration of services within the culturally appropriate housing continuum. There are currently significant service gaps with respect to homelessness and emergency housing and services as well as for supportive and transitional housing and services.

Within our current tenant selection practices, OAHS prioritizes those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless; however, with only 1800 units and a low annual turnover rate of approximately ten percent, this unfortunately means that very few new people are provided with rental assistance each year.

⁸ Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. (2016). *Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update*.

⁹ Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness. (2015). *A Place to Call Home: Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness*.

¹⁰ Distasio, J. Mulligan, S. Sylvestre, G. (2005). *Home is Where the Heart is and Right Now that is Nowhere: An Examination of Hidden Homelessness Among Aboriginal People's in Prairie Cities*. Institute of Urban Studies.

¹¹ OFIFC, ONWA, MNO. (2013). *Ontario Urban & Rural First Nations, Metis & Inuit Housing Policy Framework*.

Through capital funding programs supported by the Investment in Affordable Housing, our Independent Proposal Review Committee and our Board of Directors have been able to support developments that also provide supportive and transitional services. While these are significant life-changing opportunities for the people served by these developments, the number of units provided are too few and supportive and transitional services, if any, are piecemeal.

For example, OAHS has funded Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter Native Women to provide shelter for women and children experiencing homelessness and/or escaping situations of violence. In Kenora, OAHS provided capital to fund just seven (7) units for women and children escaping violence. These are successful examples but more impactful investments must be made allowing for other at-risk demographics including single men and youth.

Much more needs to be done and we need our government partners to collectively assist not simply with new funding but with changes to policies and programs.

Immediate Opportunities for OAHS Contributions

OAHS has a number of opportunities to support developments and funding allocations to work as a partner in reducing homelessness for Indigenous Peoples in urban and rural areas. These investments are planned with scalability in mind as on their own they are insufficient in making meaningful reductions in homelessness from a provincial perspective. These opportunities can however be leveraged with commensurate physical and social infrastructure investments to create impactful results by reimagining these models across the entire province.

In Sioux Lookout, we are developing a partnership with the Kenora District Social Services Administration Board to develop 10 to 20 supportive and transitional homes for predominantly First Nations men who are chronically homeless in Sioux Lookout. Other partners who have also indicated strong interest include the Northwest Local Health Integration Network and the Municipality of Sioux Lookout. As early stage capital development activities start to materialize, we will look for additional FNMI service organizations for the supportive service delivery component.

In Thunder Bay, appropriate land has been identified and preliminary discussions have begun to develop supportive and transitional homes to help women escaping from sex trafficking. This model is being developed with the objective of becoming a wise practice for all urban and rural areas in Ontario.

In Hamilton, OAHS is working to preserve an eight (8) unit Men's Shelter and a 24-unit Elder's/Senior's building by working with the City of Hamilton and an interim Board of Directors of Urban Native Homes Inc. We can work with local urban Indigenous service providers as well as current and potential funders to determine how to best transition supportive services to FNMI organization(s) who have intensive delivery expertise.

Call to Action for the Federal and Provincial Governments

The federal and provincial governments have announced expanded commitments to housing related infrastructure. We call on both levels of Government to meet their commitment to repairing relationships with Indigenous Peoples including urban communities and organizations. Fair and substantial investments must be made in culturally appropriate housing and related supportive and transitional services that reflects the high proportion of need among Indigenous People living in urban and rural areas.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of the entire housing continuum and related services, it is time to end disparity in funding allocations that has resulted in fewer investments in crisis intervention and homelessness supports such as food banks, emergency shelters, violence against women shelters, and transitional supports. Considering that Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in homelessness populations, this means that a significantly

higher proportion of existing and announced program funding is needed for homelessness and transition supports by engaging urban and rural Indigenous organizations and communities.

Specific Indigenous Housing Funding

Despite the urban Indigenous population representing 2.8% of the population and forecasted to quickly exceed 3.6% of the general population, there is only 1.26% of specific community housing. Over 4,100 new units would have to be added today just to meet a current pro-rate share of housing; this despite a much faster growing population and despite a population in much greater need. Funding allocations need to move in a direction that will first work to eliminate relative needs gaps. Current funding allocations provide for only 30 new units annually; there is clearly a significant gap based on evidence-based approach.

In order to end chronic homelessness for FNMI people in urban and rural areas, the following is needed:

- There must be a “needs-based” (i.e. evidenced-based) approach to allocating funding. Budget allocation formulas should be developed in a collaborative manner and reviewed annually to ensure allocations reflect changes in community experiences. Allocations should not simply be population-based or pro-rata without taking into account the chronic need and overrepresentation of FNMI who have unacceptably high levels of homelessness and unsuitable housing;
- Budget allocations should reflect an aspiration to close the gap between the documented poor housing and abhorrent homelessness conditions for urban and rural FNMI people compared to the general population;
- Deeper budget allocations will need to be made in higher risk areas, such as homelessness and supportive/transitional capital and operating funding, to reflect FNMI people that are part of a higher-risk population; and
- Specific, Indigenous budget allocations must result in programs that are designed and delivered by community-based organizations who have demonstrated the ability to successfully deliver in a culturally appropriate manner and achieve desired outcomes.

Appendix A: OAHS Response to Housing & Homelessness Announcements

Federal 2016 Budget Housing & Homelessness Announcements	OAHS Response
<p>Investment in Affordable Housing Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$504.4 million to double the Investment in Affordable Housing over the next 2 years (plus a potential Provincial match) • \$200.7 million to increase Affordable Housing for seniors over the next 2 years • \$89.9 million for supporting shelters for Victims of Violence <p>Also, \$85.7 million in Additional Investments to Support the Construction of Affordable Rental Housing over the next 2 years through CMHC's Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund</p>	<p>Although the majority of OAHS programs are needs-based, OAHS continually reports the disparity between program demand and provincial commitments. Many waitlisted applicants are at risk and experience homelessness.</p> <p>With the federal announcement, <i>OAHS calls the province to not only commit to match the federal investment, but commit to the FNMI people and provide an allocation that exceeds past percentage rates and that will be reflective of evidence-based need.</i></p>
<p>\$573.9 million to support energy and water efficiency retrofits and renovations to existing social housing</p>	<p>Provincially, RNH and UNH housing units see very little new capital; what is provided is insufficient to reliably meet government housing standards over the long-term. All units deteriorate and without immediate investment, may be lost to disrepair placing some tenants in homeless situations. OAHS currently has 1,540 RNH units and 148 UNH units that are quickly nearing subsidy expiration placing thousands of families at risk.</p> <p><i>OAHS calls on the federal government to honour its commitment to the FNMI people and ensure an adequate allocation to preserve RNH & UNH housing; this includes specific consultation within a National Housing Strategy.</i></p>
<p>\$111.8 million to tackle homelessness through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy</p> <p><i>*Note that the on-Reserve commitment is an additional \$739 million over and above what is currently funded.</i></p>	<p>The Expert Panel on Homelessness specifically identified FNMI homelessness as a target priority population. While the HPS funding is welcome, funds must be made available for crisis intervention and supports for people at risk or experience homelessness.</p> <p><i>OAHS calls on the federal government to honour its commitment to the FNMI people and ensure an adequate allocation to address FNMI homelessness including single men and youth.</i></p>

Ontario 2016 Budget Housing & Homelessness Announcements	OAHS Response
Provincial portable subsidy of \$17 million for 3 years	<p>FNMI women face violence at a higher rate than non-indigenous women. In response to this, OAHS has implemented a special priority policy to fast track FNMI women experience violence when applying for housing. However, wait times can still be lengthy and services are not provided in all geographic areas, which place these women at risk.</p> <p><i>OAHS calls on the province to provide a specific allocation for portable subsidies for FNMI women escaping violence administered by FNMI organizations.</i></p>
<p>\$100 million in operating funding for housing allowances and support services to assist up to 4,000 families and individuals in new supportive housing over the next three years.</p> <p>Construction of up to 1,500 new supportive housing units</p>	<p>OAHS works closely with FNMI housing providers to develop plans for supportive and transitional housing; however, most fall short of approval due to lack of operating and supportive funding. Supportive services are needed for many who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness to enable them to succeed and remain in adequate housing.</p> <p><i>OAHS calls on the province to provide a specific allocation for supportive services, housing allowances and capital for FNMI supportive housing administered by FNMI organizations.</i></p>
\$294 million in funding for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)	<p>CHPI is available to Service Managers to leverage existing programs to prevent homelessness. Homelessness is a pressing issue for FNMI people in Ontario. OAHS has yet to see a CHPI allocation specific to FNMI homelessness prevention.</p> <p><i>OAHS calls on the province to provide a specific allocation for CHPI for FNMI people administer by FNMI organizations. OAHS also calls on the Municipal Service Managers to work with FNMI organizations to provide culturally appropriate services.</i></p>
\$2.5 million over three years to create an Innovation, Evidence, and Capacity Building Fund to support research, evaluation and capacity building initiatives	<p>Research, evaluation mechanism and capacity have all been pressing issues facing the FNMI communities. The lack of research on FNMI homelessness and housing need continues to perpetuate misguided developments and government investments. The lack of community capacity to develop housing also inhibits FNMI communities from developing affordable housing.</p> <p><i>OAHS calls on the province to provide a specific allocation for Innovation, Evidence, and Capacity Building FNMI people administer by FNMI organizations.</i></p>