



**National Housing Collaborative
Indigenous Sounding – August 26, 2016
Hosted by the National Housing Collaborative**

Attended by:

Warren Isbister-Bear (United Way Saskatoon); **Crystal Laborero** (Laborero Consulting); **Marc Maracle** (Gignul Non Profit Housing Corporation); **Jeff Morrison** (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association); **Ted Norris** (Norris Consultants); **Sharon Redsky** (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre); **David Silva** (Aboriginal Housing Management Association); **Louis Sorin** (End Homelessness Winnipeg); **Patrick Stewart** (Lu'ma Native Housing Society); **Marcel Swain** (Lu'ma Native Housing Society); **Lynn Warburton** (Aboriginal Housing Management Association); **Larry Wucherer** (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata).

Key messages

- A national housing strategy must include Indigenous voices in order to respond to the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples and avoid unintended negative consequences, such as discrimination.
- The Homelessness Partnering Strategy requires more data on Aboriginal homelessness in order to capture the complex environments of Indigenous communities.
- The response to the expiry of operating agreements should include an Indigenous component informed by the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation report.

Summary

The meeting began with introductions and an overview the NHC's work and process to date. After a presentation of the NHC's policy development areas—direct assistance to tenants, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, attracting capital to new and existing supplies, and social housing at the end of operating agreements—the group discussed the NHC's priorities from an Indigenous perspective.

There was consensus among participants that Indigenous communities must play a role in the design of any programs with Indigenous clients, to respond to the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples. Some participants cautioned that direct assistance to tenants might actually undermine the Indigenous housing market and amplify racism in the form of discrimination.

One participant emphasized that Indigenous housing must include other social supports, such as fostering cultural and social networks. They cited the Lu'ma Native Housing Society in Vancouver as a good example of a housing support system that offers a range of social supports. Another added that it is necessary that Indigenous social housing



providers have the resources and freedom to develop their own social supports based on the needs of their communities.

Participants agreed that a Housing First program should be an option for Indigenous communities but should not be made mandatory. A number of participants stressed that there is no single approach that will work across the country. The group was unanimous in the view that a homelessness strategy must have the flexibility to adapt to Indigenous needs and must emphasize 'upstream thinking' in order to break the cycles of trauma and homelessness.

A number of participants highlighted the negative consequences that can arise when there is no Indigenous lens applied to administrative rules and procedures. One participant noted in their community participation in Sweat Lodges is not recognized or funded as a component of Housing First. The participant added that incorporating recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report presents an opportunity to educate HPS administrators about the needs of Indigenous peoples.

Another participant brought up the need for a homelessness strategy to capture the complex social environments of Indigenous communities. For example, a homelessness strategy must look at trauma, the role of Aboriginal governments and housing for vulnerable peoples. They suggested that a social housing setting that provides a range of social supports is best, but incentives are needed to create these environments. In response, another participant emphasized the need for better data collection on Aboriginal homelessness to inform a strategy that captures social complexities.

There was some debate about how to form a strategy for the end of operating agreements. Some participants agreed that a new strategy must be created from scratch that reflects the complexities of the Indigenous landscape. Others suggested that it's best to build off of the strategy already in existence. One participant argued the greatest improvements in outcomes for Indigenous peoples would be achieved through re-capitalizing Aboriginal housing providers.

Participants agreed that the response to expiring operating agreements must have an Indigenous component to address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous housing providers. One participant explained that more funds are needed to maintain the existing stock and bring them up-to-code. Another stated Indigenous social housing providers have not been able to 'get into greening initiatives' because of a lack of funds. Still another participant suggested that increased funds for Indigenous housing could come from a blend of social, public and private sources.

In a closing plenary, participants emphasized the importance to set timeliness for a conversation surrounding rural and urban Indigenous housing needs. The group expressed enthusiasm for the NHC's work and reiterated that the national housing strategy must



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have a mechanism to include the Indigenous voice and lens. One participant suggested that the NHC consider the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) report. Another participant agreed and suggested that the NHC look at an interdepartmental model to pilot partnership projects with Indigenous communities.