



**National Aboriginal Housing Association
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**SUBMISSION TO
THE UNITED NATIONS' SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR:
ABORIGINAL HOUSING IN CANADA**

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BACKGROUND:

In the 1950's, more and more Native/Indian/Aboriginal persons began moving to urban and non-reserve rural areas across Canada. Cultural, social, linguistic and economic differences, along with sheer racism, resulted in the majority of the Aboriginal peoples ending up in the worst housing in these communities.

After prolonged insistence by the Native Council of Canada and other Native organizations, Canada (Central) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) finally established the Urban Native Housing (UNH) Program and the Rural and Native Housing Program, the latter being a subsidized home ownership program open to non-Native as well as Native persons.

Under the UNH, Native (Aboriginal) housing delivery corporations borrowed money from commercial lenders to purchase houses to rent to Aboriginal peoples in urban centres. CMHC provided subsidies to help the corporations repay their housing loans.

From the beginning of the programs until 1993, the 110 Urban Native Housing corporations across Canada acquired approximately 11,000 units, while the RNH acquired about 9,000 units

In 1993, Canada, through CMHC, ended assistance, stating that beginning in 1994, they would not provide subsidies for any new social housing projects; they would only continue to pay down the existing mortgages.

It was at this time that the National Aboriginal Housing Association (NAHA) was incorporated. NAHA's primary objective initially was to urge the federal government to change its collective mind about terminating new subsidies.

However, in 1995, the decision was taken that beginning in 1996, Canada would transfer administration of their non-reserve and other social housing programs to the provinces and territories.

We contend that Canada has fiduciary responsibility to and historically-based obligations to deal directly with the Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Accordingly, NAHA began to struggle against the download to the provinces, insisting that the UNH program be exempted. This has been to no avail, so far. It is interesting to note, however, that another national housing organization, made up of non-Native membership, was in fact exempted, with NAHA being told that the other organization serves a "special clientele".

Nevertheless, NAHA continues to serve as an advocate on behalf of urban Aboriginal housing, at the same time, speaking against homelessness. Our mission: to work toward building safe and healthy Aboriginal communities by supporting Aboriginal housing corporations to achieve standards of excellence in the management and delivery of quality affordable housing and counseling support services to Aboriginal tenants and potential homeowners.



ABORIGINAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS WORST IN CANADA:

Study after study confirms that Aboriginal peoples occupy the worst housing in Canada, and for the same reasons as when the UNH program began years ago. A study that NAHA completed in 2004 shows the following:

Non-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Need

2001 Census:

- total Aboriginal population in Canada just under 1 million persons;
- 320,000 Aboriginal households;
- 71% of Aboriginal population lives off-reserve;
- almost three-quarters of those off-reserve live in urban areas.
- 48% are renters.

Comparative Need - non-Reserve Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations:

- Among Non-Aboriginal households there is a 50-50 split of families and non-family households (predominantly single persons). 71% of Aboriginal households are for families.
- 16.5% of dwellings rented by Aboriginals need major repair, vis-à-vis 9.0% for Non-Aboriginal.
- 37% of Aboriginals spend more than the norm of 30% for their rent while 15% (1 in every 6) experience a severe rent burden, paying greater than 50% of income for shelter.
- Although smaller, 20% of non-family Aboriginal households spend greater than 50% (vs. 13% among Aboriginal families).
- At a national level, the average household income of Aboriginal households is 87% that of Non-Aboriginal households.

Other studies confirm these findings, and also confirm that Aboriginal homelessness is highly disproportionate in relation to the number of Aboriginal peoples, compared to the general population. NAHA has proposed that a National Aboriginal Housing Strategy (Policy) be put in place to help meet the need. An outline of the proposed Strategy is attached to this document.

In addition, the **Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Report**, released in 1996, made the following recommendations specifically with regard to Aboriginal Peoples living in non-Reserve communities, to quote from Volume 3, Chapter 4:

“5.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

There is clearly a need for subsidized housing for Aboriginal people living in non-reserve communities. Whatever differences may exist about details, the Commission found broad agreement among leaders, experts, and community representatives that CMHC programs directed to Aboriginal people who do not live on-reserve need to be restored, with appropriate modifications for greater effectiveness and to stimulate individual self-reliance.

Over the past decade, Aboriginal people have made significant progress in developing the institutional capacity to address housing problems in non-reserve communities. The Commission is concerned that the federal government, having helped to create the institutional base for housing programs, is now undermining that base with the elimination of key CMHC programs. We understand that the federal government's 1994-95 program review was based on the principle of reducing program activities that are not core functions of the federal government. Many programs, in addition to CMHC's social housing programs, have been affected.

However, the Commission believes that the federal government's withdrawal from this area is unrealistic and at odds with one of its responsibilities to Aboriginal people. Governments have a duty to ensure that Aboriginal people have the means to afford their own housing and, failing that, to supplement the resources Aboriginal people can supply. A major catch-up effort requires collaboration by all parties. In this constrained fiscal environment, the federal government cannot assume that its withdrawal from CMHC programming in non-reserve communities will mean that provinces will take over. If anything, the federal withdrawal creates a vacuum and loss of the critical mass of resources needed to leverage other resources, private sector and Aboriginal, necessary for a catch-up effort.”



Further, “The Commission recommends that

3.4.12

The government of Canada and the governments of the provinces and territories undertake to meet fully, in co-operation with Aboriginal people and within 10 years, the need for adequate housing of Aboriginal people not living on reserves.

3.4.13

Aboriginal people not living on reserves make every effort to marshal more resources for housing in a variety of ways, through contributions in kind, use of local materials, and effective housing organizations.

3.4.14

The government of Canada engage the provincial and territorial governments in a strategy to meet the housing needs of Aboriginal people living in non-reserve communities by

- reinstating and increasing funding for new social housing and mortgage subsidies under the Aboriginal off-reserve programs of CMHC;
- providing greater autonomy and flexibility to Aboriginal organizations delivering the program in rural areas and to urban social housing corporations; and
- providing rental subsidies as a cost-effective option where rental markets exist.”

Elsewhere in the Report, the Commission recommends that there be Aboriginal Control of Aboriginal Programs.

Ten years after the release of the Report, minimal action has been taken. Over the years since the cap was placed on new social housing subsidies, Aboriginal housing conditions have continued to worsen and homelessness in Canada has grown significantly among all populations, but especially among the Aboriginal populations.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION RELATING TO HOUSING:

In 2001, a Bill (C-416) Respecting Rights to Housing was proposed, then died on the floor. Section 12 of the proposed Bill made specific reference to Aboriginal housing:

- “**12.** (1) The Minister shall, within 180 days after the coming into force of this Act, convene a conference of the ministers of the Crown for each province responsible for housing and representatives of municipalities **and the aboriginal communities.**
- (2) The conference convened pursuant to subsection (1) shall
- (a) develop standards and objectives for the national housing strategy described in section 8, and programs to carry it out;
 - (b) set targets for the commencement of the programs;
 - (c) recommend a time by which an additional one percent of the annual expenditures of the federal and all provincial and municipal governments during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002 are to be assigned to national housing programs throughout Canada; and
 - (d) develop the principles of an agreement between the federal and all provincial governments and representatives of the municipalities and aboriginal communities for the development and delivery of the programs.”

A subsequent revival in the form of Bill C-382, which contained a similar section, has likewise died on the floor.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

Immediate and urgent action is needed at once in effort to help Aboriginal peoples in Canada to be able to enjoy the same level of shelter as that enjoyed by Canadians who make up the mainstream population.

We respectfully request that the United Nations bring to the attention of Canada the following recommendations pertaining to Aboriginal Housing, as presented by the National Aboriginal Housing Association:

NAHA recommends that Canada:

1. develop a ten-year (10 year) strategic housing plan that has within it Aboriginal elements and components;
2. recognize that the Aboriginal peoples constitute distinct peoples and cultures in Canada;
3. revive and revitalize Aboriginal-specific housing programs at a the National (Canada-wide) level;
4. revive and pass legislation pertaining to human rights to housing, ensuring there is specific reference to the Aboriginal right to housing;
5. require that any monies provided to provinces and/or territories for Aboriginal housing be spent for that purpose;
6. recognize the Aboriginal right to govern our own affairs and to ensure administration of programs intended to serve Aboriginal peoples are directed and operated by Aboriginal persons and Aboriginal personnel;
7. ensure sufficient and on-going funding to enable Aboriginal housing delivery organizations to meet the housing requirements of Aboriginal peoples in all areas of Canada;
8. work with Aboriginal peoples through their (Aboriginal) organizations to develop, implement and fund a National Aboriginal Housing Policy

Submitted By:

Charles W. Hill
Executive Director



FOUNDATION FOR A NATIONAL NON-RESERVE ABORIGINAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Guiding Principles for a New National non-Reserve Housing Strategy.

Fiduciary Responsibility, Self-Determination & the Need to Consult

- ensure an Aboriginal component in any federal unilateral or bilateral housing program;
- provide for self-determination and self-governance;
- Consult with the Aboriginal community (Aboriginal Housing Corporations)

Cultural Sensitivity and Well-Being

- guidelines must facilitate incorporation of culturally appropriate and sensitive management
- respect differing First Nation, Metis & Inuit needs.

Access to Adequate Resources

- provide adequate capital assistance to non-reserve Aboriginal communities;
- base affordability on the principle of paying not more than 30% of household income

Developing a National Aboriginal Housing Strategy

The high incidence of housing in need of major repair is unacceptable; Continuing high levels of homelessness is unacceptable; a rent burden of 30% or greater is unacceptable. NAHA/ANHA requests the federal government convene a national roundtable among federal/provincial, territorial officials, with NAHA/ANHA, First Nation, Metis and Inuit national representatives to establish a base for a National Aboriginal Housing Strategy.

An Agenda for Action:

NAHA/ANHA recommends an agenda for action, including the development of a National Aboriginal Housing Strategy, to address the serious housing conditions of Canada's non-reserve Aboriginal population. The agenda requires the co-operation of all levels of government and the Aboriginal community.

1. Establish Framework for the National Aboriginal Housing Policy
2. Fix Existing Programs
3. Establish A Consultative Framework With Aboriginal Housing Providers
4. Protect the Existing Portfolio
5. Recognize Aboriginal Housing as the Cornerstone of Sustainable Communities