

# NATIONAL ABORIGINAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

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“I am extremely dismayed that there was no reference to new money to help address the poor housing conditions endured by the Aboriginal peoples across Canada in today’s federal budget,” said David Seymour, President of the National Aboriginal Housing Association.

The figures from studies commissioned by the federal government itself confirm what NAHA has been saying ever since new social housing programs were capped by CMHC in 1993: Aboriginal housing is the worst in Canada, and that Aboriginal peoples make up a greatly disproportionate number among the homeless. The 2001 census shows 28% of Aboriginals living in non-reserve area are in core housing need.

He acknowledges that under Bill C-48 in April, 2006, funds were earmarked for urban Aboriginal housing, and in September, the federal government announced the transfer of these funds in trust to the provinces. The provinces were to use this money for housing for Aboriginal peoples in urban and other non-reserve areas. To date, little if any of these funds have been used to build or acquire homes. The first year of a three-year timeframe will pass without a single unit being built or purchased.

Except for BC, most provinces simply have not taken up the challenge of consulting with Aboriginal peoples to determine program design, delivery frameworks or comprehensive Aboriginal housing plans which would make these funds available to urban Aboriginal housing corporations.

Seymour strongly urges the federal government to re-think its current approach to Aboriginal housing and work in partnership with NAHA and its partners to put in place the non-reserve National Urban Aboriginal Housing Strategy developed by the member corporations of NAHA.

Administration and delivery of affordable housing programs must be turned over to Aboriginal housing corporations. Seymour said that the 110 urban native housing corporations have more than 30 years of experience in the administration of rural and urban housing programs and can deliver. A transfer of administration would immediately remove the barriers that arise because of cultural and racial differences.

“Regardless of the delivery mechanism, though, the fact remains that there is a very great need for additional funding to help Aboriginal peoples obtain safe, affordable housing in our cities,” Seymour said. He adds, “If the government really wants to help non reserve Aboriginal families, it must accept that good housing among urban Aboriginal peoples is a major issue that must be dealt with.”

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