

A Summary of the First Report on
“POVERTY, HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS: ISSUES AND OPTIONS”
by the Subcommittee on Cities of the
Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Chair: The Honourable Art Eggleton, P.C.

The committee was authorized to examine and report on current social issues pertaining to Canada's largest cities, particularly in the areas of poverty, housing and homelessness, social infrastructure, social cohesion, immigrant settlement, crime, transportation and the role of the largest cities in Canada's economic development.

This first report sets the stage for further discussion and debate to come. The committee, from the start, points out that over the past century, there has been great movement of Canada's population from rural areas to the cities. In 1901, statistics show that 37 percent of Canada's populations lived in cities, but today, Statistics Canada figures show that more than 80 percent of all Canadians live in the cities. Therefore, the committee's focus on poverty through the lens of the cities is a natural approach to understanding the social issues in Canada.

In 1970, a Senate Special Committee, under the chairmanship of Senator David A. Croll, published the report *“Poverty in Canada”* (The Croll Report). The current Committee, hearing from over 20 presentations revealed that:

“...it rapidly became apparent that both the phenomena and the understanding of poverty, housing and homelessness have become more complex over the 38 years since the tabling of the Croll Report. Furthermore, it became disturbingly clear that poverty, housing and homelessness are as present and as grave a challenge today as they were when Senator Croll rose in the Senate Chamber to table the Special Committee's Report.”

The first report released identifies the seven main issues or problems with assistance for low-income Canadians and provides 103 options or potential solutions to those problems. After reviewing the Income support system issue and the labour force participation and poverty issue, the committee turned to the third issue: “too many Canadians do not have access to adequate and affordable housing.”

In the published report (pages 38 to 60), the Senate Committee sets out the facts and the framework for an approach to housing matters. The committee accepts the concept that housing is often “the anchor needed for disadvantaged Canadians to gain access to other supports and services” They reproduce in Figure 4, the “Central Role of Housing in Social Policy” diagram from the Tom Carter and Chesya study *“Housing Is Good Social Policy” (CPRN Research Report) Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2004*). This is a concept we understood a before we even started in the Urban Native Housing program.

They review the facts on affordability and the changes over time. They look at the Household Financial Gap to home ownership before turning to the supply of housing.

The options presented in the report show that the committee heard The National Aboriginal Housing Association as we spoke of the need for Aboriginal housing, namely:

- to ensure that the existing programs must become sustainable after the Mortgages have been paid off by developing long term subsidy programs;
- to ensure the existing programs of homelessness, RRAP and other short term solutions become long term programs;
- to increase the supply of new housing for Aboriginal peoples;
- to ensure there are targeted Aboriginal housing programs;
- to develop a national Aboriginal housing strategy in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations and housing providers; and,
- to look at providing assistance to Aboriginal people to get into homeownership.

The committee reprinted the Ryan Walker, "Social Housing and the Role of Aboriginal Organizations in Canadian Cities", (*IRPP Choices*, Vol. 14, No. 4, May 2008) table of percentages of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal figures on the proportion of households paying more than 30 of incoming for housing in selected cities. Out of the eight cities looked at, only in Toronto and Quebec City are the Aboriginal people anywhere near being equally represented among those in need.

Over the next several months, the Committee will be travelling across Canada to hear the reactions of Canadians and their provincial and municipal governments. While we have said what we can in the time we had, we encourage people to read the full report and get on the speakers list when the committee comes to your town.

The committee likely visit the following places:

Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa-Gatineau, Montréal, Ville de Québec, Saint John, Halifax, Charlottetown, and St. John's.

There are other identified issues that very much concern us.

Issue 4: The Federal Government is not organized internally to meet the challenges of poverty, housing and homelessness, is one that we can contribute to by way of discussion.

Issue 5: Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments are not organized collectively to deliver a coordinated response to poverty, housing and homelessness; this is an issue that needs our input, as we are in a position to ensure proper delivery of the Aboriginal Housing funding.

Issue 6 - Cities must be partners in poverty reduction. NAHA has not addressed the Committee's concern outlined in their report. Therefore, we need to do more work in this area concerning the role of cities in Aboriginal housing issues.

Issue 7: Programs and activities need to be better designed; this was a call to action for the federal government to take a greater role in leadership towards the reduction of poverty in Canada. We need to support this call for the federal government to take a leadership role.

This analysis was prepared by Past President David Seymour, who in fact made the initial NAHA presentation to the Senate Committee in November, 2008.