



**National Aboriginal Housing Association
Association Nationale d'Habitation Autochtone**

Suite 102, 396 MacLaren Street
OTTAWA ON K2P 0M8

Tel: 613-236-0288 info@aboriginalhousing.org www.aboriginalhousing.org Fax: 613-232-1977

**PRESENTATION TO THE
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
WITH A FOCUS ON HOUSING FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2011

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning. We are pleased to speak on behalf of the National Aboriginal Housing Association (NAHA). We had opportunity to address another Senate Committee chaired by Senator Art Eggleton, at which time we presented a report on housing among Aboriginal peoples in urban areas. We feel it is essential to present a recap of the report, as the same bad housing condition persists.

The report, "*A Time for Action: A National Plan to Address Aboriginal Housing*", based on figures contained in the 2006 Census, shows that almost 75% of the Aboriginal population live in non-reserve areas, with more than 50% living in larger urban centres. Of these:

- 20.4% of Aboriginal people are in core housing need, compared to 12.4% of other Canadians;
- 27.5% of core need Aboriginal households are substandard, compared to 15% in the general population;
- 23% of Aboriginal people live in crowded dwellings, compared to 14% of other Canadians;

The report shows that Aboriginal income is 20% below the national income level and that Aboriginal citizens are under-represented among home owners by 20% less than the national rate.

NAHA's National Action Plan proposes the following priorities and targets to reach parity in terms of housing:

- Create 1,000 new households annually (new, used & rental);
- Reduce Aboriginal core housing need to the 12.5% Canadian average by creating 3,000 dwellings annually;
- Renovate & upgrade 1,000 dwellings annually;
- Reduce Aboriginal homelessness by creating 1,000 supportive housing units annually;
- Increase urban Aboriginal home-ownership to 68%, comparable to other Canadians, by providing assistance to purchase 4,000 units annually

To implement this Action Plan, NAHA calls on the federal government to:

- a) accept the fiduciary responsibility for Aboriginal People, regardless of whether they live on or off reserve and regardless of ancestry (First Nations, Métis or Inuit).
- b) extend and make permanent the off-reserve Aboriginal Housing Trust.
 - Initially, fund the Trust at \$100 M with a graduating scale to reach \$386M by the end of year five.
 - Appoint a board of Aboriginal Trustees expertise and history in assisted and affordable housing to direct the allocation of funds across regions.
- c) introduce legislation to establish a national Aboriginal housing policy

BACKGROUND:

Native women today face many issues stemming from the circumstances and events of the colonial history of Canada and the imposition of a patriarchal system on the formerly egalitarian indigenous societies.

Like aboriginal men, Aboriginal women are concerned with the many effects of colonization on their nations, communities, families and individuals. Reeling from the loss of their land throughout the 19th century, of their traditional livelihood and self-sufficiency, from the overpowering social, economic and political marginalization, the racial stereotyping, discrimination, and the loss of culture, language and often pride, the Aboriginal people of Canada entered into a period of abject poverty and powerlessness. A lack of education, employment, skills, opportunities and income plagues many aboriginal communities, both urban and rural, and injures women and their children. Aboriginal women express the need to resume self-determination, acquire and develop resources and generate opportunities to improve their lives and the chances of their children.

Native women face unique problems among women stemming from stereotypes of them perpetuated by European men since the earliest contacts. The image of the Indian princess gave way to that of the promiscuous "squaw" which renders indigenous women vulnerable to violence and mistreatment, and vindicates their violators.

High rates of domestic violence afflict native women throughout North America. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (1990) cites findings that 1 in 3 aboriginal women suffers abuse at the hands of her partner.

Early observations and oral history indicate that this widespread violence accompanied the colonization of North America. The removal of natives from their land, their placement on reserves and the loss of the traditional male roles of hunter-provider and protector have caused role conflicts, frustration and anger which often finds its outlet in violence against women by their husbands. The victimization of aboriginal women is then reflected in the high rates and serious nature of crimes for which native women are incarcerated.

Higher rates of trouble with the law is a concern of all aboriginal women, and is traced not only to the cycle of violence but also to the poverty and deprivation that the majority of aboriginal people face in Canada. Simple failure to pay fines may account for many incarcerations, and the lack of resources and few choices often results in no recourse for native women.

Mobility characterizes native women more often than men and is noticeable in small northern communities. More young native women migrate to urban centres than do men. This may be attributable as much to the paucity of opportunities for advancement and safety on reserves and in rural areas as to the perceived abundance of opportunities, particularly education, in urban centres. Poverty, single parenthood, unemployment and poor housing continue to affect native women in Canada. *

*(*extracted from The Canadian Encyclopedia; Author – Miriam McNab; Stats Canada Site)*

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Of the 799,005 people who reported Aboriginal origin in the 1996 Census of Canada, 408,104, or 51.1%, were women. Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population.

The 2006 Census indicates that 1,172,790 persons were identified as Aboriginal; if the same percentage is applied, there are almost 600,000 women living in Canada.

In a study by the National Aboriginal Housing Association (NAHA), based on the 2006 Census and released in 2009, findings show that some 75% of all Aboriginal persons live in urban or other non-reserve areas.

These figures suggest that some 450,000 Aboriginal women live in non-reserve areas today.

According to information forwarded to us from one of our member organizations, women and girls are more likely to experience certain types of serious violence and assault:

- on average, 178 females were killed every year between 1994 and 2008;
- in 2008, there were 146 female victims of homicide in Canada. Of these, 45 were victims of spousal homicide; and
- young women are particularly vulnerable. Between 1997 and 2006, young women (aged 15 to 24) were killed at a rate nearly three times higher than for all female victims of spousal homicide. During the same period, the rate of sexual assault for girls (under age 18) by family members was four times higher than for boys.

- Some groups of women in Canada are particularly vulnerable to violence:
 - the spousal homicide rate for Aboriginal women is more than eight times that for non-Aboriginal women;
 - immigrant women may be more vulnerable to family violence due to, among other things, economic dependence, language barriers, and lack of access to resources; and
 - senior women are twice as likely as senior men to be victims of violent crime perpetrated by a family member

SOME SALIENT ISSUES:

1. We have found that when people, particularly women, have no place to live that is affordable, they may have to work the street to get enough to afford a place. This kind of work is subject to violence among the workers. If we had more, affordable, housing, then we would have less violence women in the sex trade.
2. In the case of people with issues, mental problems, social problems etc. a stable home has proven in valuable to treatment. We believe in the hierarchy of need, viz., food, clothing and shelter. We have found that few have time in a world of pain to think of healing until they get safe and affordable housing. With housing comes the opportunity to get treatment and be protected.
3. It is observed that when a family has safe, decent and affordable housing, students do better. The opposite is also true; when safe, decent and affordable housing is not available, this in high levels of stress and leads to pressure which causes problems in the family. To reduce this pressure or stress we need to build more affordable housing
4. Safe, affordable housing requires community support, which raises the need for cultural affinity in housing. Many of the multiplex buildings have a community room to allow for community support for women and families to get the help they need. If Canada is to become a better place, we need to care for each of us more and a good way to do that is to facilitate community internal action or local support. Many of the housing providers have protocol agreements that allow for cross support to housing tenants or they have developed them on their own. If the government wants to support solution they should support more holistic housing approaches to create housing first and then treatment and support prevention programs.

In closing, we want to offer the words of the Executive Director of Nishnawbe Homes in Toronto:

“... housing is pivotal for all of us to start addressing the issue of violence against women. Without a home, women are helpless to take their rightful place in society. Without a home, women are hopelessly trying to keep families together, provide shelter, and fulfill their inherent obligation to take care of their own corner of the world. Women are the heart of each home. Home is a nurturing place where children learn to be responsible adults. Home is a place where you return to recoup your strength, regain your purpose in life and develop a sense of self. Home is where you go when you need to heal, whether from personal demons or those inflicted by society. Home is where you are accepted regardless of your race, colour or creed. Without the stability that a home provides, society is left wandering and floundering to cobble together a superficial facsimile of home.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Specifically with regard to housing for Aboriginal women in urban areas, we recommend:

- Additional financial resources to help local urban Aboriginal housing providers acquire additional housing units;
- Provide resources to enable Aboriginal organizations to establish and operate increased numbers of shelters operating in a culturally sensitive atmosphere;
- Enable the establishment and operation of more second stage housing for those in transition from imprisonment;
- Recognize that the most benefit for Aboriginal women can be achieved via service provided by Aboriginal women;
- Use an holistic approach and sensitivity to enable Aboriginal women to retain and maintain custody of their children; and
- Provide resources for training in life skills, pre-employment and employment, and general counselling to help Aboriginal become established and regain control over their lives.

Submitted by: Jim Lanigan
Treasurer

Taiowisakarere Charles Hill
Executive Director