

**DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
ON-RESERVE BC FIRST NATIONS HOUSING ACTION PLAN**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is important to address the disparity in housing conditions between First Nations and other British Columbians. It is directly linked with a number of other social and economic disparities – the poor housing conditions faced by many First Nations in BC negatively affects their development, health, education, employment and other social conditions. The reasons for this disparity are numerous. First Nations, the federal government, the provincial government, and housing service providers are all working diligently to address this disparity, but the situation is beyond the ability of any of these organizations alone to resolve.

To achieve positive change in housing and related infrastructure, BC First Nations political organizations (the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs), the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada signed a tripartite *First Nations Housing Memorandum of Understanding* (MoU) in May 2008. This MoU establishes a framework for ongoing discussions and the development of both on and off-reserve housing action plans.

The province has undertaken a focused engagement process with Aboriginal organizations and individuals, which will guide future work in developing ways to provide safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing to Aboriginal people living off-reserve. While much has been learned from this and other engagements, this discussion paper is intended to focus on the development of an on-reserve housing action plan. This paper uses the framework provided in the MoU, specifically the four areas of: Governance, Relationships and Accountability; Financial Management; Capacity Development; and Comprehensive Approach to Housing. Under each of these headings, a number of potential action items are identified. These potential action items have been drawn from the MoU, direction from the off-reserve engagement sessions, a number of past housing forum reports, and housing research studies and policy reports. It is essentially a large menu of items that requires further assessment and prioritization, based on needs, ease of implementation, and available resources.

This paper will be used as a discussion tool by First Nations at the February 2009 province-wide First Nations Housing Forum. Input and direction from this Forum will help to inform the development of the BC First Nations on-reserve Housing Action Plan.

In the implementation of these action plans, the Parties will continue to coordinate their efforts, in the spirit of the MoU, to achieve the common goal of improving the housing conditions of First Nations people in BC.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND

THE CHALLENGE

First Nations housing in BC is inadequate for the population's needs; it is important to address the disparity in housing conditions between First Nations and other British Columbians. Furthermore, this housing gap is directly linked with a number of other social and economic disparities; poor housing negatively affects the development, health, education, employment and other social conditions of individuals and communities.

A number of studies have catalogued the issues with housing and related infrastructure for First Nations, including:

- The First Nations population continues to grow at a rate faster than the general population (and BC has the second largest First Nations population in Canada), and these demographic trends are placing pressure on existing housing stock;
- 13% of First Nations on-reserve live in a crowded home¹;
- In BC, 30% of First Nations people on-reserve live in a home requiring major repairs²;
- Aboriginal people are overrepresented among BC's homeless population; and
- Challenges exist with respect to tenant life skills, upkeep and maintenance, financial responsibilities and education which create tenant-management problems.

While this provides some context, the availability of reliable and consistent data regarding Aboriginal housing and related infrastructure both on- and off-reserve is also an ongoing challenge. Please see the report, *Comprehensive Needs and Capacity Assessment of Aboriginal Housing in BC* for further information on the current picture of Aboriginal housing in BC at: <http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/pubs.htm>.

Housing and related infrastructure challenges are often further complicated by a lack of coordination. On-reserve, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) provide program support for housing and related infrastructure. First Nations governments also develop, administer and manage on-reserve housing and infrastructure programs. Off-reserve, housing support is provided by CMHC and the Government of British Columbia for Canadians in need including the broader Aboriginal population (First Nations, Métis and Inuit). Owing to differences of respective responsibilities and authorities, there are completely different legislative and financial environments on and off-reserve (i.e. many of the regulatory, policy, and administrative instruments and standards in place off-reserve do not apply to or exist on-reserve). Further, the lack of coordination between governments and between housing service providers can create fragmentation, duplication, and gaps in programs and services for BC First Nations, particularly given that there is considerable movement of First Nations people to and from reserve for health services, employment opportunities and housing.

¹ BC 2006 Census Aboriginal Peoples Quick Facts

² BC 2006 Census Aboriginal Peoples Quick Facts

THE FIRST NATIONS HOUSING MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Given the state of First Nations housing in British Columbia, and the need for collaboration to overcome jurisdictional barriers, a “First Nations Housing Memorandum of Understanding” (“MoU”) was signed by First Nations political organizations (the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs), the Government of Canada (as represented by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-status Indians, and by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development), and the Government of British Columbia (as represented by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation on behalf of the Minister Responsible for Housing). The MoU is available at www.fns.bc.ca.

The purpose of this MoU is to:

- a. Acknowledge that working in partnership is necessary to overcome barriers and to address the housing gap between First Nations people and other British Columbians;
- b. Commit to exploring innovative approaches to improve housing and infrastructure for First Nations, individuals and families, including housing programs currently in place, and;
- c. Set out an initial framework for the collaborative development of interlinked on and off-reserve housing strategies.

The Parties agreed to collaborate on specific action items in four key areas: Governance, Relationships and Accountability; Financial Management; Capacity Development; and Comprehensive Approach to Housing.

To support and monitor the work under the MoU, a technical committee was struck to oversee the implementation of the MoU. The Parties have also agreed to meet annually to discuss any issues related to the implementation of the MOU. A joint data management working group will also be struck to identify the data and information necessary to improve housing and to monitor and report on housing status for First Nations communities, families and individuals in British Columbia.

PART TWO: PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

Since signing the MoU, the Parties have moved forward on their mutual commitments to develop complementary and integrated on and off-reserve housing action plans. This is being achieved through regular coordination meetings of the Parties, joint data assessment and development, and the sharing of key documents and drafts for review and comment.

The Province is committed to closing the housing gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in British Columbia. As part of this commitment, the Province in collaboration with other provincial ministries and federal departments, and with First Nations and Aboriginal partners, including the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Aboriginal Housing Management Association, Métis Nation BC, United Native Nations, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres and other Aboriginal housing providers has undertaken a focused engagement process with Aboriginal groups. The information gathered through this process will be used to guide future work in developing ways to provide safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing to British Columbia's Aboriginal people living off-reserve including linkages to on-reserve.

This discussion paper is intended to focus the engagement process on the development of an on-reserve housing action plan. This paper uses the framework provided in the *First Nations Housing Memorandum of Understanding*, in particular, the four areas of: Governance, Relationships and Accountability; Financial Management; Capacity Development; and Comprehensive Approach to Housing. Under each of these headings, a number of potential action items are identified. These potential action items have been drawn from the *First Nations Housing Memorandum of Understanding*, direction from the off-reserve engagement sessions, a number of past housing forum reports, and housing research studies and policy reports. It is essentially a large menu of items that requires further assessment and prioritization, based on needs, ease of implementation, and available resources. This paper will be used as a discussion tool by First Nations at the February 2009 province-wide First Nations Housing Forum. Input and direction from this Forum will help inform the development of the BC First Nations on-reserve Housing Action Plan.

The ongoing committed and collaborative implementation of interlinked on and off reserve strategies will move the Parties towards fulfilling the objectives set out in the MOU.

GOVERNANCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Parties agree to meaningful engagement of First Nations in the design, development and decision making concerning the provision of housing and infrastructure, in accordance with the parties' needs to control their own policy and decision making processes.

Potential Action Items for Consideration:

1. Explore opportunities to improve coordination among housing agencies and better align housing with the needs of First Nations individuals and families living on and off-reserve, such as through:
 - a. identifying administrative efficiencies for program delivery within and between housing agencies;
 - b. Improving the coordination of the delivery of housing program management and establishing data sharing agreements and mechanisms;
 - c. establishing clear roles, responsibilities and mechanisms for working together; and,
 - d. establishing forums for ongoing dialogue and information-sharing.
2. Establish a process for complementary policy and program planning as well as the assessment/evaluation and monitoring of outcomes.
3. Explore the establishment of structures and processes that support governance of housing both on and off-reserve, including engaging with First Nations on the following concepts:
 - a. A province-wide BC First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Council or Committee to work with the federal government to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of interlinked off-reserve initiatives, and foster effective collaboration and relationships;
 - b. First Nations structures and processes that will improve the planning, delivery, financing and administration of housing programs and services (i.e. First Nations Housing Authority, regional structures, etc.); and,
 - c. A dialogue forum, composed of housing experts and organizations with an interest in Aboriginal/First Nation housing, for ongoing advice and dialogue related to the implementation of interlinked on and off reserve housing strategies.
4. Support First Nations to:
 - a. Examine their housing plans and policies and revise and/or implement as needed (including rental payments or user charges);
 - b. Identify trained skill needs and develop a long-term training plan in order to fill housing management and housing-related positions with certified or trained members of the community;
 - c. Work together and share their knowledge and experiences in best practices on housing plans, policies and housing management; and,
 - d. Work with First Nations, professional organizations and service providers in order to help develop skills locally.
5. Support First Nations, through providing training, resources, tools and templates, to develop and enforce housing bylaws and procedures, including in the following areas:
 - a. Housing policy (including building codes);
 - b. Job descriptions and roles and responsibilities documents;
 - c. Management approaches;
 - d. Renovation policy (criteria and standards);
 - e. Enforcement policy;
 - f. Housing insurance;

- g. Portfolio management;
 - h. Tenant/homeowner and Band responsibilities; and,
 - i. Long-term maintenance management plans and checklists.
6. Conduct a collaborative examination of key housing policies and programs, for the purpose of improving operations related to:
- a. Additions to reserve policy and procedure;
 - b. INAC and CMHC reporting requirements and processes;
 - c. INAC Practical Guide to Housing;
 - d. Freeze list policy;
 - e. Land survey system;
 - f. Renovation and building guidelines; and,
 - g. Housing inspections; and
 - h. First Nations' policies, programs and initiatives.

Key Questions:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?

2. How might First Nations and governments work in a more coordinated way to improve housing and related infrastructure for First Nations on and off-reserve?

3. Please provide feedback on the potential structures and processes described in action item #3 above.

4. Please see action item #4 above. Are there any other tools and resources that would benefit your community?

5. Please see action item # 5 above. Are there any other policies and programs that need to be examined? Do any of these not require renewal?

6. Does your community have successful practices in housing plans, housing management, capacity development and skills training plans or other practices that can be shared with other communities?

7. Other comments:

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The Parties agree to work together to improve the financial management of housing and infrastructure for First Nations communities, individuals and families on and off-reserve. The Parties also agree to explore possibilities to continue identifying efficiencies in government funding processes for housing and infrastructure and for assisting First Nations to conduct effective planning for housing development.

Potential Action Items for Consideration:

1. Explore the merits of the recommendations from the comprehensive study on rental arrears in First Nations communities, with the goal of promoting financial sustainability, when completed. The study looks at the nature and scope of rental arrears and the impact of rental arrears on First Nations governance and administration.
2. Establish networks for bulk purchasing of building materials, appliances, and other required supplies to reduce costs for First Nations.
3. Explore new and alternative financing arrangements and mechanisms, and build upon existing First Nations financial lending programs (i.e. revolving loans, First Nations Market Housing Fund), that provide credit and security for housing, promote alternative home ownership and equity building, and enable First Nations communities, individuals and families to access competitive financing.
4. Explore ways to streamline and create efficiencies in government funding processes for housing and related infrastructure, with the goal of assisting First Nations communities to conduct efficient housing and infrastructure planning and development.

Discussion Questions:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?

2. What are your ideas for alternative and/or innovative funding sources and mechanisms?

3. Identify any funding policy barriers or challenges your community faces.

4. How can First Nations work together to resolve financial management challenges and create opportunities for more efficient development of housing and related infrastructure projects?

5. What support tools or mechanisms could assist housing and related infrastructure financial management?

6. How can First Nations and government ensure timely expenditure (by March 31, 2010 and 2011) and economic benefits from the federal Economic Action Plan 2009?

7. Other comments:

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The Parties agree to work together to support capacity development related to housing and infrastructure including building maintenance and standards, training and employment associated with housing construction and management.

Potential Action Items for Consideration:

1. Create and make better use of existing resource materials, including workshop and training programs, for homeowners and renters, such as:
 - a. Roles, responsibilities and rights of homeowners and renters;
 - b. Maintenance guides and maintenance certification; and,
 - c. Addressing mould.
2. Establish and/or support training programs for First Nations housing committees and housing program managers, and assist First Nations to explore the concept of formal, province-wide standards and training (materials and curricula) for First Nations housing managers.
3. Working with housing agencies, training institutions, and others, create tools, templates, and best practices for First Nations housing managers, such as:
 - a. Best practices in housing management, programming and enforcement;
 - b. Comprehensive community planning;
 - c. Building codes;
 - d. Housing and occupancy standards;
 - e. Rental responsibility agreements;
 - f. Communications strategy;
 - g. Maintenance;
 - h. Inspection;
 - i. A roster of approved, qualified, and culturally-sensitive contractors;
 - j. Calendar and best practices for housing construction and developments; and,
 - k. Financing.
4. Develop support and information-sharing networks/structures for First Nations housing professionals, including an online repository for all tools and templates, information on training opportunities, research publications, and other materials.
5. Develop baseline information for the existing housing stock, housing need, best practices in housing, and First Nations capacity in housing.
6. Work with other organizations to create and/or identify training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for First Nations in planning, management, maintenance, inspection, and construction.
7. Identify strategies to support retention of skilled housing-related workers (including managers and tradespeople) within First Nations communities.

Discussion Questions:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?

2. What additional tools or training could be provided to improve housing management and development?

3. What are the priorities for capacity building (tenants, managers, trades)?

4. Other comments:

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO HOUSING

The Parties agree to work together to develop a comprehensive approach to housing and explore opportunities to address issues along the full range of the housing continuum for First Nations communities, individuals and families both on and off-reserve. The Parties agree to explore opportunities to improve community infrastructure including utilizing alternative construction designs (e.g. “green” designs; environmentally appropriate designs).

Potential Action Items for Consideration:

1. Continue to support the construction of new on-reserve housing units to address the shortage of housing on-reserve, overcrowding, and the quality of the housing stock.
2. Identify, evaluate, and pilot/implement market-based housing projects.
3. Develop a BC-specific approach to implement the National Strategy to Address Mould in First Nations communities.
4. Work with other First Nations organizations and government departments to support long-term comprehensive community planning processes, with the goal of improving living conditions for First Nations in BC.
5. Explore ways to increase cultural appropriateness and sustainability of social and market-based housing for First Nations communities, individuals and families, such as housing units to accommodate larger, traditional families, special needs, and other community-specific needs.
6. Work with other First Nations organizations to support telecommunications and high speed Internet connectivity infrastructure in First Nations communities.
7. Explore and make information available on innovative, cost-effective and alternative housing techniques and materials, such as geothermal heating and energy efficiency that will reduce long-term costs and increase long-term durability of homes.
8. Increase collaboration and coordination with respect to innovative and alternative housing techniques and materials for First Nations housing on-reserve.
9. Identify measures to improve infrastructure on-reserve, such as water, wastewater, roads, and fire protection.
10. Explore housing monitoring and maintenance regimes to increase durability.

Discussion Questions:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?

2. Where on the housing continuum do your community’s housing needs lie (i.e. homelessness, overcrowding, social housing, rental market housing, private market housing, etc.)?

3. How can the cultural appropriateness of housing on-reserve be increased?

4. What are some new approaches or different construction methods or technologies that should be further explored and/or implemented?

5. How can First Nations prepare to best utilize federal Economic Action Plan 2009 allocations?

6. What capacities are needed to ensure timely completion of projects by March 31, 2011?

7. Other comments:

PART THREE: IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASURING SUCCESS

The Parties responsible for implementing the on-reserve First Nations Housing Action Plan are INAC, CMHC, the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. Based on direction from First Nations leaders, the three First Nations organizations may establish and/or delegate responsibility for the implementation of this Plan to a First Nations Housing Council, Committee, or other entity.

The Parties, in accordance with the MoU, will meet annually to review progress on the implementation of the *Memorandum* and the on and off-reserve Action Plans, and to discuss any implementation issues.

The Technical Committee established under the MoU will meet regularly to chart a course for ongoing coordination and collaboration relating to the implementation of the MoU and the on and off-reserve Action Plans. This will include liaising with, and assigning work to, existing housing committees, organizations, and agencies, and establishing new working groups as necessary.

A communications strategy will be implemented to ensure that First Nations are aware of the progress and initiatives resulting from the MoU and action plans. This strategy will include mechanisms for First Nations to provide ongoing feedback and direction with respect to the implementation of the MoU and Action Plan.

The joint data management committee established under the MoU, and which reports to the Technical Committee, is responsible for establishing data sharing agreements and mechanisms, identifying ways to improve data, and reporting.

The committee will develop a set of key progress indicators in implementing the MoU and action plans, and establish mechanisms for tracking progress on those indicators (i.e. First Nations housing conditions, needs, supply, and capacity development). Subject to each Party's respective approval process, the committee will develop public reports outlining its findings.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the most effective mechanisms for involving First Nations communities in the process (i.e. provincial forums, regional forums, working groups, etc.)?

2. What are the most effective processes for reporting to and communicating with First Nations (i.e. provincial or regional forums, websites, email, newsletter, etc.)?

3. How would we define success (i.e. what are the key, measurable results)?

4. Does your community collect data on housing that could be shared at a broader level?

5. Other comments:

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Governance, Relationships, and Accountability

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?
2. How might First Nations and governments work in a more coordinated way to improve housing and infrastructure for First Nations on and off-reserve?
3. Please provide feedback on the potential structures and processes described in action item #3 above.
4. Please see action item #4 above. Are there any other tools and resources that would benefit your community?
5. Please see action item # 5 above. Are there any other policies and programs that need to be examined? Do any of these not require renewal?
6. Does your community have successful practices in housing plans, housing management, capacity development and skills training plans or other practices that can be shared with other communities?

Financial Management:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?
2. What are your ideas for alternative and/or innovative funding sources and mechanisms?
3. Identify any funding policy barriers or challenges your community faces.
4. How can First Nations work together to resolve financial management challenges and create opportunities for more efficient development of housing and related infrastructure projects?
5. What support tools or mechanisms could assist housing and infrastructure financial management?

Capacity Development:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?
2. What additional tools or training could be provided to improve housing management and development?
3. What are the priorities for capacity building (tenants, managers, trades)?

Comprehensive Approach to Housing:

1. What, if any, changes would you recommend to the goal?
2. Where on the housing continuum do your community's housing needs lie (i.e. homelessness, overcrowding, social housing, rental market housing, private market housing, etc.)?
3. How can the cultural appropriateness of housing on-reserve be increased?
4. What are some new approaches or different construction methods or technologies that should be further explored and/or implemented?

Implementation and Measuring Success:

1. What are the most effective mechanisms for involving First Nations communities in the process (i.e. provincial forums, regional forums, working groups, etc.)?
2. What are the most effective processes for reporting to and communicating with First Nations (i.e. provincial or regional forums, websites, email, newsletter, etc.)?
3. How would we define success (i.e. what are the key, measurable results)?
4. Does your community collect data on housing that could be shared at a broader level?