



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY
OF FIRST NATIONS



WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE 2023 HOUSING FORUM





TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	Acknowledgements
6	Introduction
8	Presentations, Panels, and Breakout Sessions
8	2.1 First Nations-Led Affordable Urban Housing Initiatives
9	2.2 Concurrent Dialogues: Housing Insecurity and the Climate Crisis
9	2.3 A First Nations-Led Housing Authority: Service Delivery
10	2.4 Empowering BC's First Nations Housing Managers: The Role of the BCFNHMA
10	2.5 Collaborative Funding Strategies with Federal and Provincial Partners
14	2.6 A First Nations-Led Housing Authority: Governance
14	2.7 Addressing Homelessness: Upholding the Human Right to Housing
15	2.8 Enhancing Housing Solutions Through Collaboration and Inclusivity
15	2.9 Bridging Perspectives: Urban and Rural Youth Perspectives on the Housing Crisis
16	2.10 Navigating the Transfer of Authority: A Community-Centric Approach
17	2.11 Advancing Climate Resilience in First Nations Housing
17	2.12 Culturally Informed Housing Policy: A Path to Reconciliation
18	2.13 Enacting the UN Declaration for Housing Rights: A Leadership Dialogue
20	Recurring Themes
20	3.1 Homelessness and Human Rights
20	3.2 UN Declaration and Housing
20	3.3 Governance
20	3.4 Climate Change and Resilience
21	3.5 Housing and Culture
21	3.6 Partnerships and Funding
22	Engagement Outcomes
22	4.1 Environmental Adaptation
22	4.2 Self-Governance and Land Management
22	4.3 Collaboration and Funding Challenges
23	4.4 Remote Community Support
23	4.5 Youth and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Migration
23	4.6 Practical Support & Immediate Needs
23	4.7 First Nations Land Use Planning
24	Recommendations and Next Steps





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) extends its gratitude to Lheidli T'enneh First Nation for allowing BCAFN to host the Housing Forum in their traditional territories. BCAFN also thanks the participants, panelists and presenters both in-person and online who attended the BCAFN Housing Forum.

PANELISTS AND PRESENTERS:

- Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BCAFN
- Harlan Schilling, Deputy Chief, Daylu Dena Council
- Micheal Sadler, CEO, First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Council (FNHIC)
- Simon Yu, Mayor of Prince George
- Chairperson Khelsilem, Squamish Nation
- Vanessa West, Chief of Staff, BCAFN
- Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing, British Columbia
- Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate
- Chief Priscilla Mueller, Saik'uz First Nation
- Chief Dan Manuel, Upper Nicola Band
- Patrick Michell, Kanaka Bar Indian Band
- Andrea Reimer, Consultant, Tawâw Strategies
- Chief Arnold Lampreau, Shackan Indian Band
- Lory Oberst, Director, BC First Nation Housing Managers Association (BCFNHMA)
- Sharon McKay, Program Manager, FNHIC
- Matthew George, Senior Policy Advisor, Infrastructure, AFN
- Deanna Bhandar, Specialist, Indigenous and Northern Housing Solutions, CMHC
- Jessica Gordon, Senior Director, Housing and Infrastructure Service Reform Directorate, ISC
- Mary Gerges, Executive Director, Reconciliation and Equity Strategies, BC Housing
- Averil Lamont, Director, Community Infrastructure, BC Region, ISC
- Dr. Joe Hermer, University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC)
- Maia McKinley, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Federal Housing Advocate
- Matthew Norris, President, Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA)
- Katisha Paul, Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) Youth Representative
- Ashley Ball, Daylu Dena Council
- Niki Lindstrom, Director of Research and Analytics, FNHIC
- Nicola Prokop, Policy Analyst, Technical Safety BC



GRAPHIC RECORDER

Elena Sterritt, Gisghaast Recording

REPORTING DESIGN AND EDITING

Resonant Strategic

EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY

Darrin Rigo, D. Rigo Photography
Jonathan French, Director, Stance Media

FACILITATION AND NOTETAKING TEAM

Kyle Alec, Facilitation; Resonant Strategic; Grace Longson, Raincoast Ventures



events.bcafn.ca



1. INTRODUCTION

First Nations communities face complex and disproportionate housing related challenges deeply rooted in historical and persistent colonization, systemic barriers, and inadequate funding. The BCAFN Housing Forum brought together leaders, experts, and community representatives to address the complex issues surrounding First Nations housing and homelessness.

This report summarizes the rich tapestry of presentations, panels and dialogues that guided discussions over two days, spanning a wide range of topics from housing insecurity and the climate crisis to for-First Nations, by-First Nations governance structures and collaborative initiatives. At the forefront of these dialogues were pressing issues of First Nations housing insecurity and homelessness, both on and off-reserve, and the detrimental impacts of the climate emergency and housing insecurity.

The discussions highlighted a critical disparity in funding allocation. In British Columbia, over 20% of Indigenous households, in both urban and rural areas, face core housing needs. The groundbreaking Closing the Infrastructure Gap Report from the AFN estimates necessary expenditures of \$349.2 billion, including \$135 billion for housing over the next seven years, emphasizing the significant investments required for equitable access to housing and infrastructure for First Nations communities.

Forum discussions underscored the vital need to rigorously uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) across all levels of government in Canada. Throughout the forum, various Chiefs, leaders, and experts engaged in meaningful dialogue, highlighting key challenges and community-led solutions while offering recommendations for progress at the community, regional, and national levels.

Following the recent adoption of the UN Declaration by the provincial and federal governments, there is an urgent call for collaborative action between all levels of governments and First Nations to actualize our inherent right to adequate, culturally appropriate, and climate-resilient housing. By integrating the voices and perspectives of First Nations rights holders in British Columbia into the conversation, we can formulate a unified approach to policy and legislative reforms that are firmly rooted in the principles of the UN Declaration.

This report is a testament to our collective commitment to creating thriving, culturally rich, and resilient First Nations communities by overcoming obstacles and building a foundation for sustainable and fair housing solutions.



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS





2. PRESENTATIONS, PANELS, AND BREAKOUT SESSIONS

The BCAFN Housing Forum featured presentations, guest speakers, and panel discussions to encourage participants to consider the potential of First Nations-led housing initiatives. This section provides an overview of the presentations, panels, and key takeaways.

2.1 FIRST NATIONS-LED AFFORDABLE URBAN HOUSING INITIATIVES

Keynote Address: Chairperson Khelsilem, Squamish Nation

Chairperson Khelsilem of Squamish Nation provided an insightful overview of their housing development projects and the valuable lessons learned. Housing emerges as the number one concern for the Nation, addressed through a series of initiatives spanning market and non-market areas of *Skw̓x̓wú7mesh* territories. The Squamish Nation Council is committed to fulfilling the housing needs of its community by creating equitable and affordable homes and facilitating the return of its people.

The Squamish Nation's approach to housing is comprehensive, employing various strategies both on and off reserve to meet the diverse needs of its members. A notable endeavour is the *Señákw* Housing Project, which is the largest First Nations Economic Development project to date and recognized for being Canada's extensive net-zero carbon development. This ambitious project aims to build 6,100 homes, generating an estimated revenue of \$24-26 billion over a 99-year lease period. Of these homes, 1,200 will be dedicated to affordable housing, offered at a 25% discount off market rates, with an additional 300 homes reserved for Squamish Nation members. This initiative not only aims to create a welcoming community for both Squamish and non-Squamish residents, but it also underpins the Nation's goals of housing provision and economic sustainability, enabling the pursuit of future initiatives.

Further initiatives by Squamish Nation include the H̓lyam housing project, spearheaded by a non-profit organization committed to building affordable housing for Squamish community members. This initiative extends beyond construction, offering programs designed to alleviate financial barriers to housing security, including rent and mortgage assistance. Additionally, the collaborative partnerships between Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations through the MST Development Corporation are instrumental in advancing housing projects on privately held lands.

Chairperson Khelsilem attributes Squamish Nation's success in advancing its various projects to good governance and business principles in decision-making. The long-term goal of creating affordable housing is made possible by working together as a Nation with various partnerships to support Squamish membership.



2.2 CONCURRENT DIALOGUES: HOUSING INSECURITY AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Facilitated Panel: Facilitator: Kyle Alec, BCAFN Youth Representative, Penticton Indian Band. Panelists: Patrick Michell, Kanaka Bar Indian Band; Andrea Reimer, Consultant, Tawâw Strategies; and Chief Arnold Lampreau, Shackan Indian Band.

The breakout session provided a platform for delegates to discuss the impacts of climate emergencies on First Nations communities across British Columbia. Chief Arnold Lampreau and Former Chief Patrick Michell shared their harrowing experiences with the wildfires that devastated their communities in 2021, underscoring the recurring nature of such climate events and their increasing impact on vulnerable communities. These discussions brought to the forefront the critical need for immediate action to mitigate climate change effects, especially on communities facing these challenges at disproportionate rates.

The dialogue also explored the nexus between climate change and housing insecurity, where delegates shared successful initiatives and strategies aimed at addressing these intertwined issues. The conversation highlighted the urgent need for enhanced funding and better regulatory frameworks to equip First Nation communities in their fight against the dual threats of climate change and housing insecurity. The session concluded with a call for community-based solutions and the empowerment of local leadership to create a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

2.3 A FIRST NATIONS-LED HOUSING AUTHORITY: SERVICE DELIVERY

Presentation: Sharon McKay, Program Manager, First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Council

Sharon McKay presented a comprehensive overview of FNHIC's service delivery model, underscored by the organization's commitment to core First Nations' values. These include centering Indigenous worldviews, adopting a seven-generation approach, and maintaining flexibility, all of which steer the organization's efforts to improve First Nations housing across British Columbia.

FNHIC's main programs are designed to bolster capacity through adaptive and educational services, catering to the varied needs of communities. McKay highlighted the Asset Management Program, which provides extensive support for inspections, planning, funding, budgeting, procurement, and securing contractors, among other services. Furthermore, the discussion covered the FNHIC's program to streamline communication and build relationships across BC through their Regional Service Hubs. This initiative offers a range of services, including proposal writing support, help with constructing funding packages, support for band Housing Managers, liaising with partners such as Fortis BC and BC Hydro, and enhancing off-reserve opportunities.

McKay also emphasized the FNHIC's objective to deeply understand the unique needs of different Nations in order to deliver meaningful and effective assistance. This approach reflects the FNHIC's dedication to providing tailored solutions that respect and integrate Indigenous perspectives and needs in the realm of housing and infrastructure.



2.4 EMPOWERING BC'S FIRST NATIONS HOUSING MANAGERS: THE ROLE OF THE BCFNHMA

Presentation: Lory Oberst, Director, BC First Nation Housing Managers Association (BCFNHMA)

The FNHC acknowledges a critical need to bridge a gap in supporting First Nations communities' housing managers, particularly in British Columbia. Despite the presence of the National Aboriginal Housing Association, its resources have been predominantly focused on the eastern regions, leaving a void for those in BC with distinct community needs. The BCFNHMA launched in mid-November 2023. The BCFNHMA aims to furnish housing professionals with essential resources, educational opportunities, and a supportive community network.

In the challenging field of housing management, fostering connections and mutual support is imperative for sustaining and advancing community well-being. Membership to the BCHMA is complementary to any interested First Nation, providing an array of resources tailored to common challenges faced by housing managers, alongside professional support. It organizes monthly Zoom meetings to facilitate professional networking and offers mentorship opportunities essential for navigating the complexities of community housing. The BCFNHMA is particularly helpful for new housing managers seeking guidance, community engagement, access to resources, and the latest updates in the field.

In addition, Lory Oberst introduced the Hawk Solutions App, an innovative tool designed to enhance communication between bands and their community members. Housing professionals can use the app to bridge common communication gaps and provide community alerts, updates, resources, policies, maintenance checklists, and much more. The BCFNHMA is dedicated to nurturing a supportive environment where housing professionals can connect, learn, and grow in their roles and thereby serve their community.

2.5 COLLABORATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES WITH FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL PARTNERS

Facilitated Panel: Facilitator: Kyle Alec, BCAFN Youth Representative, Penticton Indian Band. Presenter: Matthew George, Senior Policy Advisor, Infrastructure, AFN. Panelists: Deanna Bhandar, Specialist, Indigenous and Northern Housing Solutions, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; Averil Lamont, Director, Community Infrastructure, BC Region, ISC; Jessica Gordon, Senior Director, Housing and Infrastructure Service Reform Directorate, ISC; and Mary Gerges, Executive Director, Reconciliation and Equity Strategies, BC Housing.

Matthew George, Senior Policy Advisor at AFN, introduced the AFN's *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030* Report. This ground-breaking report offers the first comprehensive assessment of the infrastructure gap, estimating necessary expenditures of \$349.2 billion over seven years, including \$135 billion for housing, \$67 billion for year-round road access, and \$1 billion to address the education gap. The report emphasizes the significant investments needed for First Nations equitable access to housing and infrastructure from provincial and federal governments.

Deanna Bhandar from CMHC shared progress on funding and the corporation's commitment to reconciliation. CMHC's journey includes forming an Indigenous Relations team, enhancing staff education, and crafting a Reconciliation Action Plan. Funding improvements have been made to legacy programs such as Section 95, which supports new construction, renovations, emergency repairs, and youth internship programs.

Jessica Gordon discussed ISC's \$2.4 billion On-Reserve Housing Program, which aims to empower First Nations in service design and delivery. Averil Lamont shared ISC's strategies for bridging the infrastructure gap and meeting housing needs, spotlighting initiatives aimed at enhancing capacity, governance, and community-driven development.

Mary Gerges from BC Housing discussed how their efforts align with UN Declaration principles, detailing investments through the \$3.3 billion Community Housing Fund and the Indigenous Housing Fund, which allocate \$550 million over ten years. The panel underscored the importance of a collaborative and comprehensive approach to closing the infrastructure and housing gaps, with a focus on community-led development, governance, and engagement.







BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS





2.6 A FIRST NATIONS-LED HOUSING AUTHORITY: GOVERNANCE

Facilitated Breakout Session: Michael Sadler, CEO, FNHIC

In this breakout session, Michael Sadler, CEO of FNHIC spearheaded a discussion on the pivotal role of First Nations-led governance for housing in BC. Sadler illuminated the historical governance models of Indigenous peoples, notably drawing on the Iroquois Confederacy's significant influence on the formulation of the US Constitution. This historical perspective set the stage for a contemporary dialogue on the transition of housing governance and services to the FNHIC.

The FNHIC's approach is deeply rooted in the development of community relationships and the prioritization of community-driven management as foundational steps before any governance transfer. Sadler shared the imperative principle of community-driven governance mechanisms in order for First Nations-led housing service and program delivery to thrive in BC. Sadler explained that the core aim of FNHIC's proposed governance framework is to create avenues for First Nations to articulate the terms of this management transfer to ensure it aligns with community needs and aspirations. The session generated a vibrant discussion on establishing the pillars for a First Nations-led governance shift, emphasizing the importance of transparency, equitable decision-making, and the integration of cultural values to enhance housing initiatives.

Furthermore, the dialogue underscored the necessity of adopting a governance model that is both adaptable and sensitive to First Nations perspectives, while also capable of meeting the modern demands of business operations and emergency response scenarios.

2.7 ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS: UPHOLDING THE HUMAN RIGHT TO HOUSING

Facilitated Breakout Session: Dr. Joe Hermer, University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC); and Maia McKinley, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Federal Housing Advocate.

This session, led by Dr. Joe Hermer from the University of Toronto Scarborough and Maia McKinley, Office of the Federal Housing advocate, focused on the acute housing crisis, with a particular lens on Prince George, BC. The discussion shed light on the legal recognition of the Moccasin Flats encampment as a protected space, underscoring the BCAFN's stance that housing is an inherent human right. The BCAFN released two reports that reveal the discriminatory practices perpetuated by Bylaw officers and the RCMP in their interactions with encampment residents.

Joe Hermer presented his research on the Prince George Safe Streets Bylaw, emphasizing its disproportionate impact on Indigenous Peoples and the contentious enforcement practices employed. Concerns were raised about amendments to the bylaw that intensified the powers of officers, including the seizure of personal belongings.

Maia McKinley discussed the National Housing Strategy Act and the upcoming review panels, which will pay special attention to gender-diverse individuals and Indigenous Peoples. McKinley emphasized that the advocate's forthcoming report would tackle systemic barriers, advocating for a human rights-based and participatory approach to support individuals experiencing homelessness.

The dialogue also brought to the forefront community-driven initiatives aimed at supporting encampment residents, such as tiny-home projects and healing fires, acknowledging the complex web of systemic issues—from inadequate reserve housing to historical injustices like the Sixties Scoop—that contribute to the current state of homelessness. The session highlighted the crucial role of community connections and compassion in addressing the homelessness crisis, reaffirming the necessity for comprehensive and empathetic approaches in ensuring that the right to housing is upheld for all.



2.8 ENHANCING HOUSING SOLUTIONS THROUGH COLLABORATION AND INCLUSIVITY

Keynote Address: Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing

In his keynote address, Minister Kahlon articulated the province’s concerted efforts toward addressing housing challenges, with a keen focus on collaboration and inclusivity. Highlighting the province’s engagement with Indigenous organizations and developers to form meaningful partnerships, Minister Kahlon outlined recent investments aimed at increasing shelter beds and creating affordable homes, showcasing a holistic approach to housing.

Minister Kahlon reiterated the commitment to the principle of “Nothing about us without us,” underlining efforts to integrate Indigenous voices in the decision-making process. He acknowledged existing challenges, such as the absence of housing insurance for on-reserve First Nations, and pledged to collaborate with other ministries to identify viable solutions.

The government’s resolve to tackle the homelessness crisis, especially among Indigenous peoples, was evident in the address. Legislative measures aimed at delivering more homes, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and prioritizing affordable housing over temporary shelter solutions were emphasized. The significance of wraparound support services was recognized as crucial for enabling individuals to regain stability and independence, despite the exacerbated challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Minister Kahlon also highlighted initiatives targeting support for youth aging out of care and stressed the importance of collaboration with colleagues across different sectors to broaden housing opportunities. Concerns regarding legislation on encampments and engagement with rights holders were addressed, underlining the necessity for proper stakeholder engagement, including First Nations, to ensure that legislative actions are aligned with the UN Declaration.

2.9 BRIDGING PERSPECTIVES: URBAN AND RURAL YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

Facilitator: Kyle Alec, BCAFN Youth Representative, Penticton Indian Band.

Panelists: Matthew Norris, President, UNYA; Katisha Paul, UBCIC Youth Representative; Ashley Ball, Daylu Dena Council.

This panel discussion brought together voices from First Nations youth across urban and rural communities to explore the housing and homelessness challenges they face. Matthew Norris



introduced the Urban Indigenous Youth Education Project in Vancouver as a pioneering example of a multidimensional model designed to support youth. This innovative housing project plans to incorporate an Indigenous post-secondary institution alongside dedicated housing, childcare facilities, cultural spaces, and a holistic approach to wellness, aiming to address the multifaceted challenges encountered by First Nation youth, such as financial instability, displacement, and racial discrimination.

The panelists stressed the importance of holistic programs that not only provide shelter but also offer life skills education, celebrate cultural diversity and foster connections and mentorship opportunities. Such comprehensive support is crucial for empowering youth to participate actively in societal change. The discussions led to recommendations for increased government funding, enhanced communication strategies, and the recognition of housing as a fundamental human right. The panel also highlighted the bureaucratic hurdles stemming from the jurisdictional complexity between provincial and federal levels, which often impede funding security.

A key theme of the dialogue was the essential role of inclusivity and technology in effectively engaging youth. There's a pressing need for creating inclusive environments and platforms where youth can freely express their opinions and contribute to solutions. Housing is more than shelter; it is envisioned as a cultural haven that promotes healing, language preservation, and reconnection with heritage.

The session concluded with a strong message on the urgency to cater to the unique needs of First Nations youth by fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and innovative approaches. These strategies are vital in addressing the housing crisis, with an emphasis on developing solutions that are not only practical but also culturally informed and youth centric.

2.10 NAVIGATING THE TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY: A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC APPROACH

Facilitated Discussion: Michael Sadler, CEO, FNHIC; Jessica Gordon, Senior Director, Housing and Infrastructure Service Reform Directorate, ISC

This facilitated discussion, led by Michael Sadler and Jessica Gordon, centered on the intricate process of transferring authority in housing and infrastructure services to First Nations in BC. The dialogue was anchored in UN Declaration principles and emphasized a collaborative, opt-in approach that prioritizes community-led processes, stable funding, and enhanced asset management.

Facilitator Sadler highlighted the challenges in engagement and the critical need for adapting the system to meet the unique needs of First Nations. Issues such as representation, the intricacies of the transfer process, the provision of reserve housing insurance, and the hurdles in infrastructure funding were key points of concern among delegates. The session underscored the vital role of infrastructure in supporting community development and sought clarity on reconciling legal and economic governance, the status of existing contracts, and how funding can be accessed through the FNHIC.

A pivotal aspect of the discussion was the consideration of a pilot project proposed by FNHIC, aimed at identifying and addressing issues prior to the full transfer of authority. This proactive

approach is intended to ensure that the transfer is informed by practical experience and tailored to the specific circumstances of First Nations communities.

The discussion provided a nuanced exploration of the ongoing efforts to transfer authority in housing and infrastructure services to First Nations in BC. It illuminated the various challenges, potential solutions, and reaffirmed a commitment to a transfer process that is responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of First Nations communities.

2.11 ADVANCING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN FIRST NATIONS HOUSING

Panel: Patrick Michell, Kanaka Bar Indian Band; Niki Lindstrom, Director of Research and Analytics, FNHC; Nicola Prokop, Technical Safety BC.

This session delved into the intersection of climate change, housing, and community resilience, with a spotlight on the Kanaka Bar Indian Band's proactive approaches to climate change preparedness. Patrick Michell, the band's former Chief, highlighted the urgent imperative for communities to be equipped for climate-related challenges, referencing recent catastrophic wildfires. He shared insights into the community's adoption of fire-resistant housing strategies and called for a housing-centric policy agenda, alongside increased government support to address these urgent concerns.

The discussion broadened to include the key components of building a resilient vision, including the accessibility of climate risk data and the implementation of educational initiatives. Nicola Prokop introduced a partnership project with Technical Safety BC aimed at enhancing climate resilience in rural and remote communities. The project is designed to empower communities through various forms of engagement like research, training, and the development of community-driven climate solutions.

A recurring theme throughout the session was the significance of partnership and collective action in confronting the challenges posed by climate change. The panelists emphasized the vital role of community-led strategies in building resilience, highlighting the need for cohesive efforts to ensure the sustainability and safety of housing in First Nations communities against the backdrop of a rapidly changing climate.

2.12 CULTURALLY INFORMED HOUSING POLICY: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION

Remarks: Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate.

In her remarks, Marie-Josée Houle, Canada's Federal Housing Advocate, spotlighted the historical inadequacies of housing policies in recognizing the cultural, social, and environmental connections that people have with the land, water and their communities. Houle emphasized the fundamental human right to adequate housing, stressing the duty of governments to ensure the safety, security, and dignity of all people.

Houle drew attention to the recent forced relocations of encampments, illustrating these actions as manifestations of housing inequity and rights violations.. She noted that Indigenous individuals are disproportionately represented in BC's homeless population, a disparity rooted in generational





traumas and experiences. The advocate emphasized the National Housing Strategy Act's legal framework as a means to hold governments accountable for their housing obligations.

Her remarks highlighted the significance of recognizing First Nations' jurisdiction and the need for a cultural understanding and meaningful participation in housing policy development. Houle advocated for collaboration with the BCACFN to forge a new vision for housing that honours culture, land, family, and community. This vision prioritizes Indigenous peoples' rights and aligns with the principles of the UN Declaration, reinforcing the commitment to culturally informed housing solutions as a step towards reconciliation.

2.13 ENACTING THE UN DECLARATION FOR HOUSING RIGHTS: A LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE

Chiefs and Leaders Plenary Facilitated Panel: Dr. Joe Hermer, University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC); Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BCACFN; Chief Dan Manuel, Upper Nicola Band; Chief Priscilla Mueller, Saik'uz First Nation.

The concluding panel discussion focused on the practical implementation of the UN Declaration, with a particular emphasis on the human right to housing within First Nations communities in British Columbia. The dialogue underscored the multifaceted challenges of Indigenous housing, homelessness, climate change, and the need for culturally appropriate solutions amidst the ongoing housing crisis in Canada.

Adequate funding was highlighted as a critical requirement to address the escalating challenges of climate resiliency, the associated costs, and the delivery of services in remote areas. Regional Chief Terry Teegee emphasized the imperative for provincial and federal governments to adhere to and enact their legislation, including bills C-41 and C-15, in alignment with UN Declaration principles. This legal alignment is viewed as a foundational step towards unifying efforts under legal frameworks that respect First Nations rights, including the fundamental right to housing.

Chief Dan Manuel spoke on the significance of First Nations reclaiming law and sovereignty over their territories, drawing a direct connection between land rights and housing solutions. Although the UN Declaration is seen as a positive step, there is a recognized need for further actions to address the ongoing effects of colonization on housing.

The housing challenges faced by First Nations are complex, encompassing aspects such as governance, climate resilience, and the need for wrap-around programming, funding, and resources that cater to both rural and First Nations populations in BC. Chief Priscilla Mueller advocated for grassroots initiatives, emphasizing the importance of community-led efforts in identifying and implementing housing solutions.

This session illuminated the critical role of leadership and collaboration in addressing First Nations housing challenges within the UN Declaration framework, emphasizing a unified call to action for recognizing and fulfilling housing rights, ensuring climate resilience, and upholding cultural values across First Nations communities' diverse needs.

HOUSING FORUM 2023



BCAFN: HOUSING FORUM

OPENING IN A
GOOD WAY

by community for community
PAVING THE WAY

OUR HEART IS OUR HOME

WE ARE THE SOLUTION

Our youth are ready



PUTTING POWER BACK INTO OUR
People



Housing is a preventative measure

- it's a human right
- building houses for our unique requirements
- it's an issue of well-being



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Support climate action
we cannot stop climate change but we can mitigate

SAFE • AFFORDABLE

funding

- tiny homes
- long term
- sustainable
- natural disasters
- indigenous lead
- housing plans

URBAN and RURAL
YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

- Inclusive ; Safe spaces
- Youth need to be included in decision making
- Indigenous led & designed
- One heart One mind



holistic lens to housing... it's beyond just four walls

CLIMATE CHANGE

the wolves of climate change

- heat
- rain
- wind
- cold

CLOSING the GAPS

- Culturally Relevant
- Off Reserve Access
- Engagement
- Governance
- Capacity Building
- Training Opportunities



"we dont assert rights and title - we implement"
- Patrick Michell

BCAFN HOUSING FORUM OCTOBER 25th / 26th 2023

GISHAAST RECORDING
ELENA STERRIT

Elena Sterrit,
Ghisghaast Recording



3. RECURRING THEMES

This section distills critical themes from the summit’s discussions, highlighting key insights into First Nations housing challenges and solutions. It captures the essence of cultural, legal, and environmental considerations essential for addressing First Nations’ housing needs in BC, underscoring the importance of a holistic and rights-based approach.

3.1 HOMELESSNESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

For First Nations, the right to housing is intricately connected to broader Indigenous rights to self-determination. Historical injustices, such as forced relocations, residential schools, and land dispossession, alongside issues in child welfare, have significantly impacted First Nations’ housing conditions. Recognizing housing as a human right for First Nations means acknowledging their unique cultural, social, and historical contexts. It requires a commitment to cultural appropriateness, self-determination, land rights, community development, government accountability, holistic well-being, and cultural safety, all critical for securing First Nations’ rights, title and interests as well as advancing reconciliation.

3.2 UN DECLARATION AND HOUSING

The UN Declaration acknowledges the right of Indigenous peoples to safe and adequate housing, emphasizing the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in housing initiatives. This entails the inclusive involvement of First Nation communities in the planning, development, and implementation of housing projects. Housing is essential to First Nations’ self-determination, allowing them to shape policies, design, and manage resources related to housing, with respect to First Nations’ governance and decision-making processes. The principles underpinning FPIC—self-determination, cultural rights, land rights, non-discrimination, remedies for violations, and impact assessments—are crucial for a rights-based approach to First Nations housing in BC.

3.3 GOVERNANCE

Effective governance and collaboration are pivotal in tackling homelessness, requiring the concerted effort of governments, non-governmental organizations, and communities. Such collaboration across sectors can foster comprehensive and enduring solutions. Community-based solutions, recognizing communities’ capacity to identify and address the root causes of homelessness, range from housing-first models to supportive services, underlining the importance of local engagement in devising effective strategies.

3.4 CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCE

The intersection of climate change and homelessness demands urgent attention, as extreme weather events increasingly displace First Nations individuals and compound homelessness issues. Building community resilience is essential for mitigating the impacts of climate change on homelessness and developing sustainable solutions.



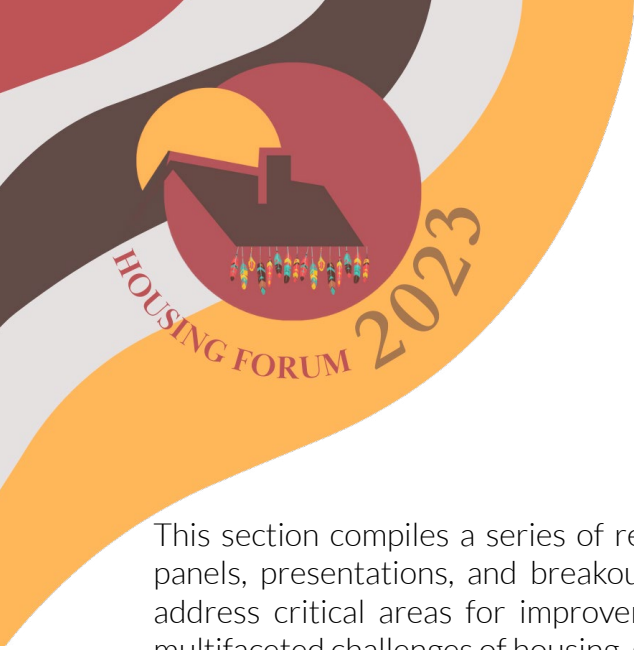
3.5 HOUSING AND CULTURE

Housing for First Nations peoples is more than mere shelter, emerging as a vital space for cultural living and reconnection. Housing is a platform that supports the practice of traditions, ceremonies, and language, reinforcing a relational worldview aligned with First Nations' values. Housing design and construction should mirror cultural practices and traditions, ensuring cultural appropriateness and sustainability. Adaptable to evolving community needs, housing for First Nations embodies cultural living, reconnection, and environmental harmony, serving as a powerful instrument for cultural preservation and community empowerment.

3.6 PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING

A key theme from the summit is the importance of partnerships and sustainable funding in supporting First Nations' housing initiatives. Collaborations across government, First Nations organizations, the private sector, and nonprofits are vital for pooling resources and expertise to tackle housing challenges. Sustainable funding models are crucial for the development and maintenance of affordable, culturally appropriate, and climate-resilient housing. The discussions highlighted that effective partnerships and reliable funding are fundamental to empowering First Nations with the autonomy to design and implement housing solutions that align with cultural values and community needs, promoting overall community well-being.





4. ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

This section compiles a series of recommendations derived from the insights shared during the panels, presentations, and breakout sessions throughout the summit. These recommendations address critical areas for improvement and action, offering a strategic roadmap to tackle the multifaceted challenges of housing, governance, and environmental adaptation facing First Nations communities.

4.1 ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION

Climate change significantly impacts housing stability, especially in rural and remote First Nations communities. Proactive measures, such as the adoption of climate-resilient building materials and targeted funding for climate adaptation, are essential. Concerns about rising water levels and the potential for innovative materials like hemp blocks for infrastructure update were discussed, highlighting the need for adaptable housing solutions in response to climate change.

4.2 SELF-GOVERNANCE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

The discussions emphasized cautious optimism regarding the transfer of authority from the ISC to the First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Council (FNHIC), stressing the importance of avoiding past mistakes and ensuring adequate funding, resources, and governance structures. However, it is crucial to reframe the language surrounding this transfer. Acknowledging the feedback received, it is recommended that the term “authority” be reconsidered, as it carries colonial connotations. A shift towards framing it as a “transfer of responsibility” aligns more with BC First Nations worldviews, respecting their inherent self-determination and jurisdiction on housing. This approach will ensure BC First Nations retain their autonomy and only delegate responsibility to FNHIC, mitigating any perceptions of colonial paternalism. Additionally, the urgent need for land for reserve expansions to accommodate growing populations was highlighted as a critical issue for community development.

4.3 COLLABORATION AND FUNDING CHALLENGES

The necessity for improved collaboration between governments and First Nations organizations to support both urban and remote communities was underscored. Overcoming bureaucratic silos and fostering strong, respectful partnerships are crucial for addressing housing challenges effectively. There is a recognized bureaucratic failure to recognize and address the failures of the Indian Act, and to acknowledge its impact on First Nations experiencing homelessness, both on and off-reserve. It is crucial for ISC and other related federal and provincial ministries to take a proactive and collaborative approach and be at the forefront of collaborative efforts at the federal and provincial levels. First Nations also emphasized that First Nations and FNHIC cannot inherit the flawed program and service delivery model of ISC in order to address the housing and infrastructure gap, and that ISC must be open to completely reforming and financing a sustainable housing service and program delivery model.

4.4 REMOTE COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Remote communities face unique housing challenges, including higher costs and socio-economic impacts stemming from colonialism. Innovative funding models and collaborative efforts are needed to address these challenges, alongside support for securing contracts, labour, and community skill-building, particularly for the youth. FNHIC, with its baseline mandates and supporting Band Council Resolutions from 58 BC First Nations, is well-positioned to take a leading role in addressing these challenges by leveraging its strategic position. Communities can turn to FNHIC for information to make informed decisions, bridging the gap as a For Indigenous By Indigenous service organization.

4.5 YOUTH AND 2SLGBTQQIA+ MIGRATION

The migration of youth and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals to urban centres for support and safety was discussed, emphasizing the need for targeted programs to provide necessary support and capacity-building for these vulnerable groups. There is a need to leverage FNHIC's strategic position to fill existing gaps in support, information, and decision-making for culturally safe, on and off-reserve housing and homelessness programs.

4.6 PRACTICAL SUPPORT & IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The summit highlighted a demand for proposal writing support and a simplification of the application processes to help communities access funding opportunities more effectively. FNHIC, as an organization on the ground, with its regional hubs across BC, can provide necessary support and capacity-building for communities looking to access housing and homelessness related funds. The need for emergency shelters was also identified as an immediate requirement to offer security and dignity to houseless individuals.

4.7 FIRST NATIONS LAND USE PLANNING

The call for increased national research funding in First Nations land use planning, led by First Nations scholars, addresses a gap in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing. This recommendation underlines the importance of culturally informed engagement and the need for First Nations leadership in community development and planning.





5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The BCAFN Housing Forum underscored the profound housing crisis facing First Nations in BC and across Canada, marking a critical juncture in the collective journey towards equitable, sustainable, and culturally informed housing solutions. The discussions throughout the forum have illuminated the extensive gap in housing and infrastructure that exists between First Nations communities and the broader Canadian populace, highlighting the necessity for substantial investment and long-term, sustainable planning to bridge this disproportionate divide.

Central to the forum's discourse was the recognition of **housing as a fundamental human right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** (UN Declaration), with a resounding call for action to address the escalating issue of homelessness among First Nations communities through collaborative and adaptive frameworks. The full implementation of the UN Declaration provides a critical framework for ensuring that **housing initiatives are sufficient, culturally appropriate, and resilient to the impacts of climate change.**

There are 204 First Nations in British Columbia with diverse and unique housing needs. Some First Nations have the capacity and governance structures in place to take on their own housing service delivery. Other communities have varying levels of capacity to undertake this as they navigate nation re-building and require external support that meets their unique needs. What was evident amongst participants is the need for a **by-First Nations-for-First Nations approach to housing program and service delivery in BC.** The current status quo is not meeting the diverse needs of most First Nations and there must be a complete reform in housing service and program delivery. First Nations must be supported by all levels of government through inter-ministerial collaboration towards advancing a path that is rooted in **free, prior, and informed consent, and is sustainably funded for the long-term.** This requires an intersectional funding approach from the Federal and Provincial governments to ensure that First Nations have the **adequate and sustainable resources that provide housing solutions to meet the needs of all First Nations in BC, on and off reserve, so that no individual or community is left behind.**

At the federal level, there is needed dialogue and inter-ministerial coordination with Indigenous Service Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Canada, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. At the provincial level, the Ministry of Housing, BC Housing and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation must further collaborate, communicate and with their provincial and federal counterparts to support First Nations in addressing the housing and homelessness crises head on, which disproportionately impacts Indigenous people in Canada. A holistic and unified approach from all levels of government, grounded in upholding the UN Declaration, is needed to address the interconnected housing and homelessness crises for First Nations in BC.



In 2017, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) organizations, comprised of BCAFN, the First Nations Summit (FNS) and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), each passed mirrored resolutions (BCAFN Resolution #18/2017, FNS Resolution #0618.04, and UBCIC Resolution 2018-11) to mandate the creation of a First Nations-led Housing and Infrastructure organization. Through this mandate, the First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Council (FNHIC) was created to work with Rights and Titleholders to design and develop a First Nations housing system that better meets the needs of First Nations in British Columbia. More recently, FNHIC and Canada signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019, which the FNLC representative organizations signed as witnesses to, in support of “establish[ing] a collaborative relationship between [FNHIC and Canada] that will lead to the development of a First Nation Institution that will be responsible for delivering Housing and Infrastructure Services for First Nations in British Columbia.”

Given the clear need for culturally appropriate and uniquely tailored housing service and program delivery reform in BC, **FNHIC is positioned to support First Nations’ unique housing needs, through a community-driven approach that fosters strong accountability and governance mechanisms.** We heard many First Nations take issue with colonial usage of the term “housing authority”. Participants echoed that **First Nations organizations are not rights and title holders and cannot make decisions on behalf of any First Nation without their free, prior, and informed consent;** a framework FNHIC has acknowledged must drive their organization. Furthermore, FNHIC has obtained over 50 Band Council Resolutions in support of their program, service and technical expertise, demonstrating community-driven need for a by-First Nations-for-First Nations approach to housing program and service delivery in BC.

The journey ahead is undoubtedly complex and requires sustained effort, innovation, and collaboration. The BCAFN Housing Forum laid a foundation of knowledge, mutual understanding, and shared purpose that will guide BCAFN in taking the next steps for advocacy. Clear mandates driven by the Chiefs-in-Assembly are needed to advance the calls to action generated by participants throughout the BCAFN Housing Forum. BCAFN will present a resolution at the 20th Annual Special Chiefs Assembly, seeking support for the critical next steps to address the housing and homelessness crises for First Nations in BC. By continuing to engage in open dialogue, sharing best practices, and championing the principles of justice, equity, and human rights, we can work towards achieving a future where the inherent right to housing for First Nations communities is fully realized, contributing to the broader goals of reconciliation and equity in Canada.





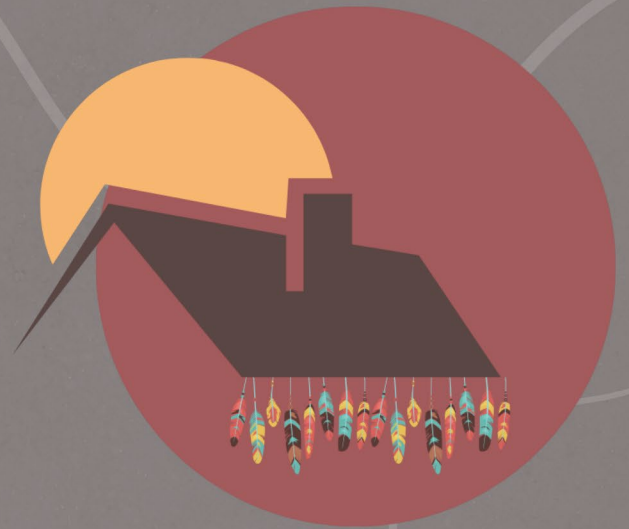


BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS





BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



HOUSING FORUM 2023