

Developing an Aboriginal Strategy on Housing.



Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network

Developing an Aboriginal Strategy on Housing.

Aboriginal Peoples, (meaning) Inuit, Métis and First Nation.

The Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network (AVOHN) project is bringing forward a Strategy / Recommendations to the cross-sector housing organizations together with the City of Red Deer to focus on decreasing the level and severity of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people and to address the systemic barriers that continue to make Aboriginal people vulnerable with an eye to long lasting social change.

AVOHN works with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Agencies, along with members of the Aboriginal housing community and stakeholders in the creation of a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it.

Memorandum of Understanding:

Urban Aboriginal Voices Society, Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network, Red Deer Native Friendship Society and Métis Urban Housing working with the City of Red Deer share in the vision to work toward ending homelessness for Aboriginal people by creating a strong collaborative community that embraces its diversity improves well-being while maintaining a good quality of life in a good way.

Urban Aboriginal Voices Society exists to act as the voice for Aboriginal people that works collaboratively and cooperatively with government and other organizations such as Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network, Red Deer Native Friendship Society and Métis Urban Housing on issues with regards to housing for Aboriginal people, within the City of Red Deer that are unable to obtain a home, facing homelessness or are homeless at this point in time. AVOHN will become the name of the Housing Domain with UAVS as of 1 April 2018.

Short Term Strategy, short term are easier and least expensive.

Racism, the unwritten barrier:

How to Eliminate the Stereotype.

Racism is a touchy subject for many of us. Most people have experienced it, talked about it, or at least thought about it. However, people often feel powerless when it comes to reducing racism. Luckily, there are many things you can do to help reduce racism in your personal life and in your community.

2018 and on-going:

Develop and maintain a campaign to eradicate racism in the City of Red Deer. Maintaining racist perceptions in the community is costly to all. To remove the persistent racist impressions of the Aboriginal people is to remove many barriers to their success.

Cultural Education and Teaching programs:

Provide a variety of Aboriginal cultural and history knowledge programs. Available to community, Landlord's, Rental Management companies, colleges, employment training services and non-Aboriginal agencies. Sessions are developed in a series of levels focusing on general history, traditions and protocols, legal issues, cultural and Métis specific knowledge. The benefit to changing the perception of Aboriginal people in the City of Red Deer cannot be understated. It would be reducing the fear of renting homes and apartments to Aboriginal people.

A few solutions:

*Speak up if you see racism in action.
Support and attend events that celebrate different cultures.
Organize a vigil or protest.
Celebrate differences instead of being colorblind.
Acknowledge differences among communities.
Refuse to support any business or organization that permits racism.
Maintain a positive cultural identity.*

Efforts should also be directed to educate educators and school systems of the damage racism has on the community in accelerating the costs of addictions, suicide, social dysfunction, unemployment and homelessness.

Invitations to the general Red Deer public of open house of Aboriginal agencies, would be another strategy to enable the public to meet the services and know more about the goals and needs of the Aboriginal population in Red Deer and what services the agencies provide in the community.

Develop an Aboriginal Entry Point to Access Housing:

The current single-entry housing model needs to be redesigned to include an Aboriginal entry point housed with Aboriginal organizations and services. While the current system has made efforts to indigenize, it remains a system difficult to navigate for many Aboriginal people - therefore their needs are not being met. Successful Aboriginal agency structures are supported by elders and staff aware of the history endured by Aboriginal people that have faced and lived the traumas of the Reservation period, the Sixties Scoop and Residential school.

Aboriginal people are struggling to improve their lives while re-discovering their traditional values after years of oppression.

Non-Aboriginal Canadians are becoming more aware of the injustices that have and are occurring to Aboriginal peoples as well as the richness of Aboriginal cultures. Non-Aboriginal people can further support the healing process by continuing to learn about the experience of Aboriginal people in order to promote mutual understanding and respect.

Intermediate Goals 2020 on-going Rent Banks:

Prevention of Homelessness, Rent Banks have been developed to lend money to Aboriginal tenants to help prevent evictions and possible homelessness resulting from those gaps. They're typically funded by governments and philanthropic organizations and are almost always interest-free.

There are no Rent Banks in Alberta, however there is no legal constraint to this type of development. Therefore, it may be possible to develop a rent bank in Red Deer as a means to prevent increasing numbers of homelessness. This option is only available if a person can demonstrate that they normally have a paycheck.

The operational terms for these banks are unique. A renter pays the money back when they return to work with little or no interest.

Rent Banks have no hidden strings and can also help keep people out of the clutches of loan sharks. Many people earning low incomes nonetheless make just a little too much to qualify for social assistance. Some turn to payday loan companies that charge high interest rates for quick cash. It's a path that can quickly lead to bankruptcy and homelessness.

Rental Issue:

Alberta Government policies permit percentage increases to rental units which causes rental costs for units to move out of reach of the most in need of affordable housing.

Current affordable housing can quickly become unaffordable within a few years or for the next generation of renters. Provincial law allows landlords to increase rent two per cent annually with no cap on rent increases.

Rental Cap or increased Subsidies for people living on fixed incomes?

Funding:

Ensure Aboriginal Representation at All Levels of Decision Making, any project with Aboriginal people must include Aboriginal people in the decision making. Improve Collaboration, there are multiple local opportunities that have not been tapped into. Knowing which funders are likely to give in the future starts with understanding why your current funders give.

Explore Funding Opportunities that encourage us to think outside of the box. Focus on developing a long-term funding strategy. Understand who your key funding decision makers are and what motivates them. List specific organizations that may serve as potential funding strategy role models. Big individual donors, foundations, government agencies.

Refine and Adapt Municipal Policies:

Municipalities usually contributed land for housing projects but internal departments need to work together and improve their communication to minimize barriers for Aboriginal non-profit organizations. Alberta's non-market housing system. The programs can involve operational support or capital funding for new construction or renovations of non-market housing units.

What type of Support's are needed and issues?

On site supports for people to learn how to keep house, cook/clean up, pay bills.

Learning differences from Reserve to Urban lifestyle. Not having support to assist in going through all the paperwork & steps to achieve housing.

- Mind-set.*
- Poor budgeting.*
- No identification, No references.*
- More Community support workers.*
- Home visits.*

Build more low-income houses:

Waiting lists are too long; there are not enough low income homes in the community.

- Housing units in different areas of town.*
- Keep rent levels / damage deposits affordable!*
- Drinking & drug problems.*
- Never lived on my own.*
- Lack of personal responsibility.*
- Financial issues & the lack of financial know-how.*
- Unable to get employment or training for employment due to not having a fixed address.*

Moving forward:

When Aboriginal people have access to education, the higher the education and training, the faster the gap between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples disappears. Assurances and commitments by the participants and for their children in home to pursue education and continued support. To enable and support educational funding to ensure success would be part of building a strong community.

Indigenous Housing Ombudsperson / Advocate / Housing Liaison:

The Housing Ombudsman Service looks at complaints about registered providers of social housing, for example housing associations, and other landlords, managers and agents. The service is free, independent and impartial. The Ombudsman can also look at complaints about the handling of housing issues by local councils.

Build and maintain housing partnerships with landlords, property management companies, and housing programs in the community that will enhance and strengthen housing resources available to survivors

Provide support services for participants working on overcoming their housing barriers and connect participants with appropriate information, referrals, co-advocacy, emotional support and safety planning.

Connect participants to resources that supports their goals for economic stability, including employment support and financial empowerment.

Maintain regular communication, consultation, Investigate complaints of anti-social behaviour.

Long Term Goals 2022 and On-Going

CMHC Policy Changes:

There are two CMHC policies that are creating extreme barriers to accessing and/or retaining housing for Aboriginal peoples and their families.

The first CMHC policy, that creates barriers to services in providing housing is regarding to there ridged regulation of requiring Aboriginal people to provide specific identification, which often is unattainable this alone, may cause homelessness.

**Unit's may be available but cannot be provided due to this policy.*

Possible solution: Affidavits of Identification that are notarized by a lawyer. This ID does not replace government-issued ID but is intended to help people access basic services while replacing their proper ID.

The second CMHC policy that causes homelessness is regarding requiring eviction if other family or extended members stay in the units whose name(s) are not on the lease. This policy requires staff to remove families if other family members not on the lease are staying in the unit. This is contrary to the foundational social and cultural values Aboriginal people live by.

Moving forward, is there a way to change and is CMHC willing to look at these issues and make provision's to it's current Policy?

The Indigenous Housing Ombudsperson/Advocate/ Housing Liaison person can work with CMHC on looking at changing this Policy.

Mapping strategy

On-Going:

Mapping current housing and low rent options. Offer incentives to the population to register illegal basements suites and to register rooms for rent.

Incentives: Low interest home improvement loans to build new spaces into current homes.

Mapping all new resources available and develop a set of goals, such as 10 new spaces per year of apartments and 10 more rooming spaces and 10 more Elder's spaces.

-Keeping track of housing stock, is there growth?

-Older Home Restoration Purchases.

The Government of Canada provides funding to the Government of Alberta to design and deliver a range of non-market housing programs in Alberta. The programs can involve operational support or capital funding for new construction or renovations of non-market housing units.

Alberta municipalities can be funders and/or owners of non-market housing depending on the approach used in each community. Many municipalities have a requisition partnership with a housing management body that operates a lodge housing facility in the local or nearby community. In addition, many municipalities choose to own or directly fund other types of non-market housing in the community in order to respond to resident needs.

Alberta Housing Act:

The purpose of the Alberta Housing Act is to enable the efficient provision of a basic level of housing accommodation for persons who because of financial, social, or other circumstances require assistance to obtain or maintain housing accommodation. The Act allows for the establishment of housing management bodies and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation and includes the following regulations:

Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation Loan:

- Housing Accommodation Tenancies*
- Loan Insurance*
- Lodge Assistance Program*
- Management Body Operation and Administration*
- Rent Supplement*
- Social Housing Accommodation*

Aboriginal peoples are finally being offered opportunities out of poverty. Non-Aboriginal Canadians can support this process by linking with others who are working to support Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal reconciliation, lending financial or other forms of support to Aboriginal organizations, lobbying the government for Aboriginal self-government, or advocating for greater funding for specific programs related to inequality and Aboriginal peoples.

We would like to thank the Government of Canada, City of Red Deer, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Agencies, along with members of the Aboriginal housing community (working group), for their help and participation in this project. AVOHN will be continuing and providing updates on the housing strategy to ensure progressive outcomes are met. Features of housing successes, introductions of success stories about house clients and their success stories.

*Thank you.
Dwight Mandrusiak
AVOHN Coordinator.*