

**Nishnawbe Aski Nation
response to the
First Nations
National Housing and
Infrastructure Strategy**

September 2018



+ **together**
design lab

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the 2014 declaration of a Collective Housing Emergency by Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Chiefs, and the 2018 reassertion of this emergency, NAN is in the process of creating the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy. Many of NAN's values and principles, foundational to the creation of the Housing Strategy, have direct relevance in the creation of a First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy. This position paper explores a complete housing system change with the aim of achieving individual and community wellness.

The ongoing First Nations housing crisis has developed out of decades of imposed intervention. Massive housing shortfalls exist and homes that have been built are often inappropriate and inadequate for the climate, geography and culture in which they are developed. Standardized housing metrics identify crisis but are not tailored to the specific issues, values and goals of the diversity of First Nations across NAN territory. A broadened definition of housing is required, shifting towards an occupant focus for First Nation people both on- and off-reserve.

To create an alternative housing system, control of both design and implementation of programs and policies must reside with First Nations. The National Strategy must recognize and support the interconnected nature of housing with community infrastructure allowing for a more thoughtful approach to community building.

The recommendations made throughout this report address how a First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy could create an occupant-focused, community-led housing system. The objective of these recommendations, and the currently under development Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy, is to develop housing and community infrastructure supportive of individual and community wellness. To achieve this goal recommendations have been made for changes to governance structures, planning processes, funding mechanisms, community participation and community infrastructure development with a recognition that capacity development initiatives are critical in a period of transition to locally controlled housing institutions.

Together these recommendations demonstrate a system in which local values and goals determine objectives, control spending, innovate design and create community solutions developed through appropriate governance.

The First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy must move beyond creating minimally acceptable housing and community infrastructure. Housing as a universal human right must support individual and community well-being, allowing First Nations, with government partnership, to develop institutions capable of delivering appropriate, safe and healthy homes to all community members on- and off-reserve.

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), known as Grand Council Treaty No. 9 until 1983, was established in 1973. It represents the legitimate, socioeconomic, and political aspirations of its First Nation members of Northern Ontario to all levels of government in order to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social, and economic independence. In 1977, Grand Council Treaty No. 9 made a public declaration of the rights and principles of Nishnawbe Aski.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation's objectives are:

- Implement advocacy and policy directives from NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly
- Advocate to improve the quality of life for the people in areas of education, lands and resources, health, governance, and justice
- Improve the awareness and sustainability of traditions, culture, and language of the people through unity and nationhood
- Develop and implement policies which reflect the aspirations and betterment of the people
- Develop strong partnerships with other organizations

Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nations within northern Ontario with the total population (on and off reserve) of approximately 45,000 people. These communities are grouped by Tribal Council (Windigo First Nations Council, Wabun Tribal Council, Shibogama First Nations Council, Mushkegowuk Council, Matawa First Nations, Keewaytinook Okimakanak, and Independent First Nations Alliance) according to region. Six of the 49 communities are not affiliated with a specific Tribal Council.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation encompasses James Bay Treaty No. 9 and Ontario's portion of Treaty No.5 and has a total land-mass covering two-thirds of the province of Ontario spanning 210,000 square miles. The people traditionally speak four languages: OjiCree in the west, Ojibway in the central-south area, and Cree and Algonquin in the east.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation continues to work to improve the quality of life for the Nishnawbe Aski territory. Through existing partnerships and agreements with Treaty partners, governments of Canada and Ontario, NAN continues to advocate on behalf of the communities it represents for self-determination with functioning self-government.

THE NAN DECLARATION OF RIGHTS AND PRINCIPLES FROM 1977 INCLUDES:

- 1. the right to self-government.**
- 2. the right to receive compensation for our exploited natural resources.**
- 3. the right to receive compensation for the destruction and abrogation of our hunting and fishing rights.**
- 4. the right to re-negotiate our treaty.**
- 5. the right to negotiate with the elected governments of your society through appropriate levels of representation.**
- 6. the right to approach the judicial, governmental and business institutions of your society in our quest for self-determination and local control.**
- 7. the right of our elected chiefs to deal with your society's elected cabinets on an equal basis.**
- 8. the right to approach other world nations to further the aims of the Cree and Ojibway nations of Treaty #9.**
- 9. the right to use every necessary alternative to further the cause of our people.**
- 10. the right to use all that the creator has given us to help all of mankind.**

PROJECT PARTNER – TOGETHER DESIGN LAB

Together Design Lab at Ryerson University takes a collaborative approach to investigating and creating innovative solutions to housing issues with marginalized communities in Canada. Together Design Lab relies on an immersive model of partnership bringing an interdisciplinary team of collaborators together with communities to understand the meaning of housing in shaping lived experience. Recognizing the cultural, gendered and classed implications of dominant housing systems, this model of partnership looks to reimagine home environments through the values, goals and aspirations of their occupants. Housing issues and solutions are not limited to discussions of basic shelter provision but are understood as central unit of analysis of personal and community well-being.

Together Design Lab is led by Dr. Shelagh McCartney, a licensed architect and urbanist whose expertise in design and development focuses on urbanization and housing, with a strong community development focus. McCartney's research has shown that urban design, planning and architecture are byproducts of complex territorial networks and cultural history. Her interdisciplinary approach, undertaken in partnership with communities, is often situated within contested territories of marginalization from— Canada's Near-North to the global South— that are experiencing rapid change.



NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION QUICK FACTS*

29,805

People

6,276

Housing Stock

4.8

Average people per
household - NAN

2.4

Average people per
household - Canada

49%

In need of major repair
- NAN

7%

In need of major repair
- Canada

*Based on Census 2016 data and NAN Infrastructure Summit Report



CONTEXT



As the representative of 49 First Nations in northern Ontario, NAN recognizes the unique challenges that accompany housing in northern and remote First Nations. Many First Nations within the Territory lack basic infrastructure taken for granted throughout Canada, including: access to clean drinking water, a reliable electrical grid, modern telecommunications networks and transportation grids. Without this infrastructure, the development of sustainable food systems, access to healthcare and education and other basic services are more difficult. Accessing both the materials and training required for the development of housing systems comes at a significantly higher cost in northern and remote First Nations. This context, and the accompanying disproportional levels of need and inequitable social and economic outcomes, must be recognized and addressed as interconnected with housing.

DISCUSSION

In 2014 the Chiefs of Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) declared a Collective Housing Emergency. Together, the Chiefs described the similar situations their First Nations were facing: deplorable conditions, shortages, limited housing lifespans, overcrowding, extreme mould growth and others. This collective call to action looked to bring to the attention of governments the urgent need for change in this critical determinant of health and well-being. In the spring of 2018 the need for housing was restated, noting that government programs were not addressing existing or future housing need and that conditions had not improved since the 2014 declaration of the housing emergency. In this Resolution, NAN Chiefs determined they would develop a Housing Strategy to outline the specific and unique needs of their First Nations to be used to generate a path forward to creating better, more appropriate and adequate housing on- and off-reserve. Many of the principles which will underpin the NAN Housing Strategy, currently under development, are presented here.

The First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy (herein referred to as the National Strategy) currently under co-development by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Indigenous Services Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) working group and other partners presents an opportunity to support the work already undertaken by First Nations. The creation and implementation of a National Strategy for over 600 First Nations will need to consider the diversity of experiences and aspirations. It is important to allow First Nations to determine their own pace for change and to define what positive change and innovation is sought within their own nations.

Building adequate and appropriate homes within NAN requires moving beyond the existing narrow definition of housing: homes are not only physical shelter but a central social and psychological space in the lives of their occupants. Homes are the symbolic centre of the lives of their occupants. In order to meet occupants' needs housing must be a reflection of the lifestyle and values of their occupants, contributing to community well-being. The success of a network of homes relies on a set of assets¹ beyond their doors: public services such as health and education, cultural activity spaces and lands shape occupant experience of home and are critical elements of a housing system.

The housing crisis currently being experienced disproportionately by First Nation people in Canada is not new. Enforced community settlement, permanent residence in Western, suburban-style communities, and extreme underfunding has never allowed for appropriate or adequate housing.^{2,3} Early government interventions saw land cleared and leveled to be populated by plywood housing;

too small, dangerously fragile, often without heating and designed as a temporary solution.⁴ Since the 1950s, various ad-hoc, temporary programs and policies have offered new solutions meant to improve housing outcomes without large enough financial commitments or relationships with the First Nations they impacted.

Beyond limited funding, these ad-hoc programs were ultimately unsuccessfully because of their limited conceptualization of housing need. While building additional houses is needed, it alone does not solve the housing crisis. Existing and historical measures of housing have been limited to a standardized national approach— first measuring access to hard infrastructure such as electricity and water and later moving towards measures of affordability, crowding and need for repair— which has proven inappropriate⁵ on-reserve and insufficient in encompassing the full role of housing in occupant life. Programs designed to meet this limited definition have focused on efficiency, looking to deliver a maximum number of minimally acceptable units; units which have proven to be inappropriate and inadequate for the climatic, geographic and cultural needs of their occupants.

For alignment between homes and occupants to exist, housing systems must be responsive to local values. Ending decades of housing inequity in NAN First Nations requires a systemic change which centres occupants' values and experiences. A total shift from government control to self-governance allows for local determinations of goals and metrics, facilitating a planning process that addresses unique community needs and develops a network of homes supportive of community well-being. For this process to be feasible, a period of transition to build greater capacity in housing systems must be supported by all partners. In addition, resources must be made available, using a variety of models, to fully implement community-developed housing systems. Using a broadened definition of home, shifting towards an occupant focus and recognizing that self-governance best addresses the unique needs of each First Nation represents a new pathway for creating equitable housing for First Nation people both on- and off-reserve.

This position paper is structured into six issue areas— Governance and Planning, Funding Structures, Inclusive Housing Systems, Design and Materials, Capacity Development and Training, and Infrastructure— exploring the related housing issues, potential solutions with recommendations and a case study to demonstrate how the ideas presented are possible in action. The paper ends with a conclusion and summary of the 20 recommendations.

GOVERNANCE + PLANNING

First Nations self-determination of local housing systems— from community planning and housing design, to governance— is essential to achieving lasting change. The National Strategy must recognize and support First Nations' independence. First Nations have the right, as stated in the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to create, maintain and strengthen their own housing institutions with the ensured support of government partners⁶— a right which is not currently being fulfilled.

Inherent in self-determination is active community involvement throughout all stages of housing program design and delivery. To date, the process of creating a First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy has not improved on past processes, continuing a top-down approach. NAN leaders and members have not been sufficiently engaged in the National Strategy development despite the direct impact it will have in their communities.

While the 1996 On-Reserve Housing Policy mandated the creation of community housing plans, mechanisms were not created to allow for a complete planning process or long-term support.^{7,8} Housing is an important part of an integrated planning process— along with economic development, land use and community infrastructure— which should represent the values, goals and aspirations of community members. Creating such plans requires increasing design, finance and governance literacy to all community members to ensure that participation is not limited to a few experts. Government and industry must partner and provide mechanisms to aid with the implementation of community-developed plans.

Local-level control of housing will allow decision-making to be led by First Nations and guided by their unique values and goals. Beyond community leaders and housing professionals a commitment must be made to involve all community members in the design and governance of their homes. Increasing capacity across the community will allow for a diversity of experiences to be represented in First Nation institutions and better solve local problems. Strong local governance will allow for local data to be collected, improving understanding of local issues and enabling programs to be designed for targeted success.

Community-based governance, management, design and planning are only possible with local institutions. Leaders, housing managers and community members must be able to measure housing and determine local need based on their own priorities. An occupant-based approach to housing will allow leaders to track whether housing plans are impacting community wellness. Moving from standardized to targeted housing systems shifts program focus from efficiency to personal well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shift control of housing and infrastructure program design and decision making to localized authorities
- Support capacity development and training of local housing managers and develop a peer-support network to maximize potential success
- Support localized authorities in developing occupant-focused community housing and infrastructure plans

MUSHKEGOWUK COUNCIL REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

The Mushkegowuk Council has developed a Regional Housing Strategy to meet the demand for housing across all seven member First Nations. The Regional Strategy approaches housing through the elements of the land, the people, the environment, the economy and good governance to organize planning for sustainable and prosperous communities. Planning occurs at the regional and local levels and promotes collaboration and partnership across First Nations, government and other stakeholders. The Regional Strategy is comprised of short, medium and long-term goals over a twenty-year period, providing an opportunity to evaluate and review progress and adjust planning measures.

An ongoing project of the Regional Strategy is the creation of a regional and local Housing Authorities to coordinate and implement housing policy and programs and oversee the construction of housing on- and off-reserve. The regional approach to housing allows Mushkegowuk to support all community members. The Strategy provides an example of innovative, regional governance agreements that create flexibility and nuance to provide and respond to the diverse needs of First Nations living in a vast territory.

- Coordinated regional and local strategies allow for more efficient and responsive planning
- The Strategy addresses not only the need for more housing units but improving the housing system through training and job creation at all points of housing development

NIBINAMIK FIRST NATION HOUSING POLICY

The Nibinamik First Nation Housing Policy was created through a collaborative, community-led process centring shared values and priorities. The policy was developed over a series of meetings and workshops, attended by over 100 community members of all ages, to ensure the knowledge and experience of community members would help to guide future decision-making on housing. Through the process a formalized Housing Committee was created- Wakahegun 241- with the purpose and functions of the committee being established by community members. Through the experience and knowledge of community members, not an outside consultant, the Policy and Committee were formed.

In order to support the process of self-governance and creation of community-led policy time, resources and support for dedicated community champions are required. Important policy and governing systems cannot be transformed overnight. Nibinamik's policy was developed over a year with several in-depth workshops and meetings. This required local champions to support the project and resources to support the creation of workshop content, local facilitators and translators. The Policy gained wide support because of meaningful and informative community engagement that provided community members space to share and learn from each other and build consensus. Importantly, the Policy uniquely reflected Nibinamik's values and priorities in housing, guiding the community's housing program towards self-determined goals and aspirations.

- The Housing Policy project was initiated by community members to support self-governance and to connect community values with how housing is managed, ensuring fairness in decision making
- Community-led housing policy development requires time and resources to ensure engagement is meaningful, accessible and comprehensive



FUNDING STRUCTURES

Critical to the success of localized First Nations housing institutions are new and adequate funding streams capable of ending the existing shortfall and enabling future planning. Within NAN the number of homes built annually is losing pace to need and forcing members away from their communities and into urban centres.⁹ Existing housing stock is also deteriorating rapidly, with housing life expectancies far below national standards^{10,11}, as renovations and repairs are under-resourced. As has been noted for decades the cost of housing in northern, rural and remote communities is substantially higher and this gap continues to increase.^{12,13}

Government support, offered through both Indigenous Services Canada (ISC and predecessor agencies) as well as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, relies primarily on annual funding applications, tied to government fiscal-year deadlines, which creates instability and does not account for long-range community planning. Moving towards multi-year community planning-based funding models can create predictability and efficiency. Eliminating the constant process of program identification, application writing, follow-ups and reporting to multiple agencies would reduce the burden on already overworked Band staff. Multi-year funding also allows for more effective planning and community participation in the housing design process. Materials can more easily be procured using the most cost-effective freight option when single-year timelines are removed; 30 NAN communities rely on the limited winter road season to reduce costs. When project timelines do not align with this varying season NAN communities are disproportionately impacted. Creating predictability and transparency in funding, while reducing the administrative burden on First Nations, is a simple step towards the creation of successful and sustainable First Nations housing systems.

Regular investment has not grown to meet the demands of this growing backlog, and as such Nishnawbe Aski Nation members face increasingly worse outcomes which led to the declaration of a collective housing emergency in 2014.

In addition to providing predictable funding, a National Strategy must also ensure adequate funding to address existing and future needs. Commitments to the improvement of well-being of First Nation people must include a commitment to the creation of equitable housing. In 2015 it was estimated that anywhere from 40,000 to 85,000 new houses were needed nationally to meet existing need¹⁴; a need which continues to grow as houses rapidly deteriorate and on-reserve populations continue to rapidly increase (the on-reserve population is the youngest and fastest growing in the country).^{15,16} Regular investment has not grown to meet the demands of this growing backlog¹⁷, and as such NAN members face increasingly worse outcomes which led to the declaration of a collective housing emergency in 2014. While Budget 2016 *On Reserve Housing: Immediate Needs Fund* provided a much-needed injection of capital funding, it built only 331 units in Ontario (the province with the largest population of First Nations in Canada), funding only 10 percent of received applications.

Special attention needs to be given to funding formulae as they apply to northern and remote First Nations. Allocation per home— based on the provincially calculated Maximum Unit Price— considers remoteness but the calculation underestimates the cost gap. Maximum Unit Price must be re-evaluated to determine whether larger initial investments— on appropriate building materials or systems better suited to local geographies and climates— may result in longer lifespans and reduced operations and maintenance costs. Maximum Unit Price— which provides the lowest possible, or below market, rates— deters innovation, forces the use of low-quality materials and leaves First Nations with sizable shortfalls on projects. Maximum Unit Price and geographic multipliers need to be adjusted to reflect current market costs and must be updated regularly to ensure that further discrimination is not faced by northern and remote First Nations.

Existing funding mechanisms are limited only to the construction phase of housing projects. Shifting to a more complete definition of housing would also impact funding mechanisms. Extending existing models with opportunities to include a complete design phase and post-occupancy evaluation as well as including the cost of critical community infrastructure and the areas surrounding the house would contribute to the creation of more livable communities. In addition, housing funding should no longer be separated from infrastructure funding through the artificial divisions of minor and major capital to allow for more flexibility and accuracy in the phasing of community-developed plans.

In summary, NAN maintains that funding for housing has been inadequate given rising costs and growing need. Funding mechanisms deter community self-determination by limiting planning to single-year cycles. Inadequate Maximum Unit Price calculations and remoteness multipliers continue a cycle of building low-quality, inappropriate housing which further marginalize northern and remote communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use a multi-year funding model to create predictability to support local planning and eliminate unnecessary deadlines and administrative burdens on First Nations
- Reassess Maximum Unit Price and geographic multipliers to fairly represent the true cost of housing in northern and remote communities
- Ensure funding models support all stages of the building process including: design, procurement, management, materials, labour, maintenance and evaluation
- Consider combining minor and major capital programming to support integrated housing and infrastructure planning

INCLUSIVE HOUSING SYSTEMS

The ongoing housing crisis experienced by members across Nishnawbe Aski Nation is felt disproportionately across demographic groups. Women, youth, seniors, LGBTQ2S and people with disabilities, among others, have differing experiences of housing need, requiring dedicated resources and strategies to create appropriate housing solutions. A lack of housing options and gaps in community infrastructure have led to displacement, especially for young people and seniors, disrupting important relationships.¹⁸ The prevalence of three- and four-bedroom units, re-enforced by longstanding funding programs, does not provide options for young people and young families. Seniors without housing options or proper support care are forced outside of their communities, disconnecting them from family and land, reminiscent of experiences of residential schools.¹⁹ An inclusive housing system creates housing options for people at all life stages.

The growing housing shortfall further contributes to homelessness on- and off-reserve. Indigenous homelessness has been described as multidimensional, accounting for “individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities”.²⁰ The existing approach to housing, delivering minimally acceptable services, limits the ability of community members to access appropriate housing for their needs and force them into situations which break the above-mentioned relationships. Every NAN community member must be able to access safe and secure housing in their home community. Delivering a diversity of housing options to meet the unique needs of all community members will require new, more flexible programs.

Every NAN community member must be able to access safe and secure housing in their home community.



Emergency and supportive housing in communities is required to prevent displacement and to create safe and healthy housing options. Individuals seeking safe housing options should have the option of remaining in their communities, close to their established support networks. Women and the LGBTQ2S community are especially at risk due to inadequate and unstable housing,^{21,22} pushing them into precarious situations, increasing their risk of violence and homelessness.^{23,24} LGBTQ2S and youth experiencing homelessness “report high rates of mental health issues and suicidality”.²⁵ Individual and community wellness can only be achieved when appropriate housing options are made available to NAN’s most marginalized populations.

Moving beyond a definition of housing as shelter and recognizing its role as a determinant of health, the National Strategy must address the needs of those most vulnerable

The National Strategy must seek to understand and address everyone’s housing needs. Moving beyond a definition of housing as shelter and recognizing its role as a determinant of health, the National Strategy must address the needs of those most vulnerable to unsafe housing, displacement or homelessness. An inclusive National Strategy promotes community well-being by preventing disruptions in critical relationships and allowing for communities to provide healthy homes for all members. To accomplish this, investment should be made at the local and regional level into accessible units, care units, emergency units and a diversity of housing options to match the specific needs of community members across their life stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that a range of housing solutions are supported meeting the unique needs of diverse demographic groups across regions and both on- and off-reserve
- Support the development of a continuum of housing both on- and off-reserve targeted to reduce and eliminate homelessness
- Treat housing as a social determinant of health, affecting the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of people

EABAMETOONG FIRST NATION HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Eabametoong First Nation Housing Needs Assessment moves beyond measuring housing as physical shelter to an occupant-focused assessment recognizing the important physical, social, and cultural role housing has for the well-being of individuals and the community. Rooted in local knowledge and experience, the assessment was developed around a unique set of community created metrics that sought to measure housing need as well as record community strengths and solutions.

The needs assessment, along with associated workshops and discussions, was used to collect high-quality and relevant local data to support the creation of local solutions and action plans. Community members of all ages were engaged through the process on housing conditions, design and future community growth. Surveys typically utilized for housing needs assessments focus on heads of households which provide limited perspectives and feedback. Eabametoong expanded the survey to all community members and created a range of questions to allow for in-depth feedback across various housing topics. By building inclusion into the process and rooting the assessment in locally created metrics, Eabametoong First Nation is able to better understand and meet the needs of all community members.

- The shift from minimally acceptable standards of housing to a focus on occupants can better address the complex role housing has on individual and community well-being
- Community created metrics can fill local knowledge gaps and inform current and future planning projects



OSHKAATISAK COUNCIL, NAN ALL YOUNG PEOPLE'S COUNCIL, STATEMENT ON HOUSING

"Housing is a priority. Every family needs to have their own space to create memories."

The Oshkaatisak Council have reflected on their experiences of housing to share their priorities and goals for the future of housing in NAN First Nations. The Council recognizes that physical and mental health and child and family well-being are all interconnected with housing. Many families experience intergenerational trauma owing to the effects of colonialism and the residential school system. People do not always feel safe in their homes but housing options are limited and inadequate. This leaves people with few if any options to seek safe accommodation. Available houses are crowded which exacerbates feelings of unsafety and, if you want to leave, there is nowhere to go without any emergency housing or shelters.

"There is no capacity to heal. A place should be a home where people feel safe from other people. Housing should create a feeling of security too."

The prevalence of suicide is tragic and impacts many families. Returning to a home where a loved one has taken their life makes day to day life a recurring nightmare. Without emergency housing the only option is adding families to already crowded homes and building on existing physical, social and spiritual health strains.

Inclusive and alternative models of housing are required. As an example of a population unable, or struggling, to obtain housing are those youth who age out of the foster care system. Whether they are looking for a house of their own in their home community, or are looking to return to their community after having been removed they face high risks of homelessness and further marginalization.

In addition to needing more, and more inclusive housing, Oshkaatisak Council believes that housing should be of higher quality and better suited to the changing climate. Training and capacity development programs which supported the development of a skilled labour force would create better homes. The impacts of low-quality materials and increased risk of fire were shared as lived experience by members of the Council.

"Younger people are struggling. Suicide happens in their own homes. It is traumatic for people to remain in their houses."

Reliance on diesel fuel and wood stoves is unsustainable and adds to fire risks. Additionally, materials, designs and infrastructure which meet the specific needs of the north are required. Climate change will shorten the winter road season and make the transportation of housing materials more costly. In order to not pass the existing housing crisis onto the next generation of youth new solutions are needed which create better trained workers, use higher quality materials, reduce the risk of fire and recognize the challenges of a changing climate.

In order to create this change, First Nations should not be forced to compete against one another. Programs often favour First Nations with greater administrative capacity which can lead to those communities with greatest need being skipped over. In addition, programs which require matching funds can also further marginalize certain First Nations. Funding and governance mechanisms should seek to create equity rather than dividing First Nations against each other.

“What happens to the housing now will impact the youth of tomorrow and I can only hope that they won’t be in a housing crisis too.”



Solutions

- Invest in better quality materials for construction and renovations
- Train young people to build and maintain housing and infrastructure
- Increase investment in maintenance and renovation of existing housing
- Review funding mechanisms, create equity between First Nations
- Increase housing and include funding for more emergency housing and shelters
- Improve basic infrastructure such as waterlines and sewage as well as hydro and eliminate reliance on diesel and generator power

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION WOMEN'S COUNCIL STATEMENT ON HOUSING

Decent and affordable housing is utmost to the health and well-being of Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities. Moreover, enough decent and affordable housing, including alternative housing opportunities, ensures choice, and increases safety for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

- Nishnawbe Aski Nation Women's Council

We have known for a very long time that Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities do not have enough housing and this often means that homes are overcrowded. In some homes there are not even enough beds for everyone and people take turns sleeping in shifts. We know that this way of living hurts the physical and mental health of our people. We also know that living this way forces some people into situations of having to deal with violence, addictions and mental health issues, whether it be their own struggles or someone else's. These circumstances do not affect just the people existing in these homes -the entire community suffers.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation's Women's Council prioritizes the needs of people with special needs, the elderly, youth and women.

When we care for our loved ones who experience special needs, and our elderly, we look to our traditional ways of honouring those who come with unique gifts and those who have cared for us. We need housing in our communities that is accessible so we may be able to care for our loved ones in our homes. Our elderly also wish to live independently in their homes. Simple things like entry way ramps and wheelchair accessible bathrooms will help our grandparents enjoy their homes for as long as possible. And we need to create alternative housing for the elderly and people with special needs who require more support in their day to day lives, and want to remain in their communities.

We have particular concern for our women and girls who are remaining in unstable or violent homes, and abusive relationships for the simple fact that there are not enough homes, and there are not enough homes that are affordable. Also, in Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities, there is not enough alternative housing like shelters or transitional housing for women and girls who are trying to escape unsafe living situations. Because of this, our women and girls are at greater risk to experience sexual violence and exploitation, at times pressured to exchange sexual acts for a place to lay their head at night.



As a Council we are calling for: increased safety for women and girls by creating housing options that include emergency and transitional housing in communities, though we acknowledge that options to pursue safer accommodation outside of the community should also be supported; that adequate housing is created for Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities, that as one measure, provides enough bedrooms for the size of the household; and that more accessible housing infrastructure is created for our community members who experience special needs or are elderly so that they may remain in their homes and communities.

NAN HEALTH POSITION STATEMENT ON HOUSING & HEALTH

Health Policy & Advocacy

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) has known for some time that Health and Housing are deeply connected. "Evidence indicates that health differences among Canadians result primarily from experiences of qualitatively different environments associated with the social determinants of health".¹ This largely includes housing, that in First Nation communities, has long been described as a crisis by the NAN Chief's in Assembly. Please see Resolution 18/18 NAN Housing Strategy.

The Assembly of First Nations Fact Sheet for On-Reserve Housing in 2013 describes some of the challenges as "Appalling conditions, overcrowding, mold contamination, and lack of basic amenities..."² In 2017, at the NAN Health summit in Timmins, NAN community members and health representatives reported the following:

- The availability of clean air in residential homes in NAN First Nations is no longer solely a housing issue but is a significant health concern
- Lack of adequate sewer and water systems and overcrowded substandard housing is impacting the health of First Nations
- Overcrowding, mold contamination, space and land requirements including inadequate infrastructure, and inadequate funding are all conditions that lead to high rates of chronic illness, communicable diseases, premature death, high rates of suicide, and in general numerous issues dealing with health and safety
- Constant exposure to poor air quality results in respiratory issues and poor health outcomes that include: asthma, chronic coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath, bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Overcrowding results in increased social and health problems such as family tension and family violence

There is anecdotal evidence that the deleterious effects of overcrowding can impact the mental health and well-being of individuals, families and overall community mental wellness. NAN Health Policy & Advocacy will

continue to work closely with NAN Communities, Health Transformation, Infrastructure and Housing, and our many partners to advocate and work toward holistic health in NAN.

Health Transformation

Health transformation is bringing back accountability, responsibility and resource allocation to our communities. It will change the current colonial system to a new system based on the needs and priorities of the NAN communities, including working in partnership on housing issues to address the needs of the community.

NAN health transformation is moving NAN First Nations ahead in a new direction by:

- Co-creating with ALL partners in health, not solely Health Canada/Indigenous Services Canada
- Changing from a crisis-response system to an outcome-based, wellness system
- Increasing and redistributing resources towards communities
- Creating a system that is directly accountable to the people it serves

Health transformation cannot be fully realized until the current housing conditions and related social determinants of health issues in the NAN territory are acted upon. Self-Determination moving forward will be key in addressing these challenges.

At the NAN Health Summit in Timmins Ontario, Ovide Mercredi stated the following in his Key Note Address:

“First Nations must be the leaders of the change with support from the governments. The work will not be done in Ottawa, Toronto or Thunder Bay but in the community by the community”³

Ovide Mercredi , Health Transformation Lead & Negotiator &
James Cutfeet, Director, Health Policy & Advocacy

SHIUX LOOKOUT FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AUTHORITY STATEMENT ON HOUSING AND HEALTH

Housing is a key determinant of health and wellbeing. There is a large body of evidence that indicates that the housing environment affects physical health, mental health, and social wellbeing¹, including the social functioning of families and communities and connectedness to culture.^{2,3} A healthy home is one where people feel safe, comfortable and connected to the community.

Evidence of how housing impacts health:

- Poor housing conditions have been shown to be associated with chronic illnesses, poor nutrition, mental illnesses and an increased risk in the spread of infectious and respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza.⁴
- Overcrowding results in an increased transmission of infectious diseases, sleep deprivation, and a rapid deterioration of the housing structure.⁵
- Children living in crowded homes are more likely to experience adverse psychological effects including stress, anxiety, depression and also have lower levels of development and educational success.^{6,7}
- Poor construction of housing and housing units in poor repair conditions (plumbing, electricity, drinking water, fire prevention, inadequate wastewater disposal systems) can lead to pest infestations, sewage backup into bathtubs and sinks, injuries as well as skin diseases from a lack of clean water.⁸ Further to this, inadequate ventilation and insulation in homes can contribute to dampness or extremes of indoor temperature which can encourage mold and dust mites.⁹ This can provoke the onset of respiratory illnesses and allergies, especially in children as well as increasing the risk of adverse health effects.^{10,11}
- Lack of affordable housing can result in homelessness, contributing to poor health conditions such as nutritional disorders, addictions, respiratory diseases, and mental illness.¹² The homeless are at an increased risk of suffering from health problems and premature death.¹³

Health outcomes among Sioux Lookout area First Nations that are likely impacted by housing conditions:

- Higher rate of hospital admissions among youth aged 11-20 for mental health reasons as well as higher rate of suicide
- Higher rate of hospital admissions among children aged 1-10 than the Ontario average, with respiratory illness accounting for the largest number of admissions
- Skin conditions among children aged 6-10 are the number one reason they are brought to the Nursing Station for medical care
- High rate of community associated methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (among skin swabs sent from nursing stations to Meno Ya Win health centre for analysis, greater than 50% that grow the bacteria staphylococcus are resistant to certain antibiotics)
- High rate of substance use among pregnant woman (35.6% of pregnancies among women from Sioux Lookout area First Nations using opioids while pregnant)

**Dr. Terri Farrell, Medical Director
Dr. Natalie Bocking, Public Health Physician**



**Sioux Lookout
First Nations
Health Authority**

DESIGN + MATERIALS

In moving beyond a standardized model of housing delivery, opportunities can emerge for innovation. Decades of intervention in housing systems have caused many First Nations within NAN territory to have near identical housing, a model based on Canadian suburbs. This model is reliant on inadequate materials and has led to the dramatically reduced lifespans for newly built homes seen today due to the inappropriateness for the local climate and geography. Short timeframes and limited funding mean community members are rarely given the opportunity to participate in a design process, instead having choices limited to a few available standard designs. As a result, community design and layout have been undertaken with little community input in the siting and arrangement of houses. Community, or occupant, engagement in a design process should be seen as a critical and required part of housing development. This would create opportunity for design to respond to local values, needs, and preferred household makeups rather than conforming to Western ideas of home and family. Expanding the possibilities of design and materials through a localized approach, and using existing local knowledge would provide the opportunity to stimulate innovation in northern housing systems by creating distinct housing designs.

Design needs to be recognized as a critical element of the housing development process. In removing NAN members from the design process, houses have been created which are inappropriate for the

Design is meant to be the process through which the needs of the user are matched to their built form and environment. However, throughout NAN territory houses are imported and developed based on a set of cultural norms found in southern non-First Nation communities.

family structures and lifestyles of occupants. Design is meant to be the process through which the needs of the user are matched to their built form and environment. However, throughout NAN territory houses are imported and developed based on a set of cultural norms found in non-First Nation communities. Generations of this practice have, in many cases, removed a once robust design lexicon and stopped the process of imagining new, appropriate forms of housing and neighbourhood layouts. A National Strategy should not look to define new prototypes of First Nations or northern housing,

rehashing a colonial process of imposed intervention, but instead encourage diversity in form and the power of innovation from widespread member inclusion in the design process. Design cannot be standardized as what is new or innovative may change from place to place, First Nation to First Nation.

An example of possible local adaptation within NAN is the use of local logs and sawmills. Historically, many First Nations operated mills and used the experience of local builders to wholly control their housing systems. Changes to building codes made this path more challenging and pushed First Nations towards the current housing system, however, alternatives are possible. Research and development of opportunities for the use of logs and other local materials could stimulate a network of innovation, as well as create opportunities for economic development, across Canada by finding sustainable and resilient solutions more appropriate for local contexts. Recognizing the uniqueness of northern First Nations allows for the creation of distinct standards designed and implemented specifically to suit the climatic, geographic and cultural needs of the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create meaningful pathways for community involvement in the design and planning process by including training and engagement in funding models
- Support the creation of community-led housing designs to meet the climatic, geographic and cultural needs of each First Nation
- Develop a specialized building code for northern First Nations



MUSKRAT DAM FIRST NATION DESIGN CHARRETTE

In 2011 and 2012 Muskrat Dam First Nation worked with community members through a design charrette to develop the ideal remote northern home in partnership with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Independent First Nations Alliance. The collaborative process led to the formal design of the “square house” and the construction of five new housing units. The partnerships allowed Muskrat Dam First Nation members to provide input and implement changes to support their needs and preferences as well as consider alternative construction methods. The process and successful construction of this new, innovative design demonstrate how community member inclusion and iterative engagement in the process can meaningfully shape environments to improve well-being.

- A standard, conventional housing model will not meet the needs of all occupants. Solutions for better and appropriate housing exist at the local level
- Engagement is successful when it is iterative and begins at the start of the design process, allowing for incremental input and change to the design and opportunities for feedback



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT + TRAINING

In developing locally controlled systems, capacity development across all aspects of housing is required for there to be success. Community self-assessments can identify existing and needed capacity to create and implement local institutions, with training and development integrated into housing plans. Training of housing managers and staff in the community should include areas such as construction, renovation, maintenance, management, engagement and governance while also creating opportunities for professional development through designations and degrees. Developing local capacity helps to ensure local expertise guides community housing programs. A National Strategy should support sustainable and long-term community change through the development of a scholarship program, investing in First Nation people as leaders in the fields of housing and infrastructure.

Delivery of training must also meet the unique needs of NAN community members. Where possible, in community hands-on training should be prioritized, allowing community members to stay with their families and continue to contribute to their community as they learn. Institutional partnerships should be developed which can ensure that training is being designed and delivered using best practices to ensure student success. While training and job creation are an important element of community wellness, and the creation of a sustainable housing system, success relies on tailored programming and ability to reach all interested parties.

Senate hearings in 2015 outlined a distrust from First Nations, including those within NAN, of the quality of outside labour.²⁶ Leaders shared that they believed their communities received the lowest quality materials and low-quality work which would not be accepted in other jurisdictions. A commitment to training would allow First Nations to no longer face these risks by having greater capacity, skills, and lexicon to demand higher quality work.

In addition to professional training, education for community members will help to ensure that members feel safe and informed within their homes. As new technologies are introduced into housing, community members must be informed on the maintenance needs. Empowering community members within their homes will help to create pride and feelings of control. Training of this nature is only possible through investments in local housing professionals and commitments to hands-on learning programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support capacity development and training in the transition to local control across all aspects of the housing system including: management, construction, maintenance, renovation, finance and other aspects of housing
- Create in-community experiential education programs
- Establish a scholarship program with pathways towards further education in housing related fields including: architecture, engineering, design and planning

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION'S AMBER'S FIRE SAFETY PROGRAM

Launched in May 2016 in memory of Amber Strang, the Amber's Fire Safety Campaign was developed to enhance fire prevention through education and community empowerment in all NAN First Nations. Campaign goals include increasing fire safety awareness and education from the classroom to supporting certification in wood burning systems and developing a comprehensive plan for fire protection with communities. NAN has coordinated training for Wood Energy Technology Transfer to promote safe and effective use of wood-burning systems and assist community members to become certified inspectors and installers. The Campaign is also focused on risk assessments, appraisal and inventory of each of the 49 communities' equipment, water and infrastructure in order to support each community's plan for fire protection.

The Amber's Fire Safety Campaign was developed through partnerships, creating educational tools and material tailored for NAN communities. Fire safety is an issue affecting all communities where substandard housing and overcrowding increase the risk and devastation of house fires. The Campaign intersects with housing system management through education, prevention measures and capacity training. By working with each community, solutions that meet the distinct needs can be efficiently created and implemented.

- Investing in capacity at the local level has large impacts for the safety and well-being of community members
- Tools, materials, and training must be tailored to the local context to be effective and to meet distinct needs

INFRASTRUCTURE

Housing is not just shelter but forms part of a community connected through a network of assets. The 2017 NAN Infrastructure Summit committed to a definition of community infrastructure which focused on meeting socio-economic needs and achieving well-being. While housing plays a critical role in both of these, it must act in conjunction with wider community infrastructure plans. The existing compartmentalization of major- and minor-infrastructure projects contradicts the comprehensive planning process. Solving the existing housing crisis within NAN requires a commitment to the development of other community assets; houses must exist within healthy, complete communities.

The Canadian National Housing Strategy emphasizes creating livable communities²⁷ yet take for granted the long history of public and private investment and development of community infrastructure such as schools, recreation facilities, public spaces and other local services in non-First Nation communities. The National Strategy must address existing gaps including the development of improved schools, healthcare facilities and community centres. Beyond these physical structures, investment must be made in shared community spaces within which cultural identity can be expressed and relationships forged. Traditional, communal cooking spaces, are an example of a community space to be considered in the creation of healthy communities within NAN territory.

The National Strategy must address existent gaps including the development of improved schools, healthcare facilities and community centres.

Recognizing the interconnected nature of housing and community allows for a more thoughtful approach to community expansion. While many existing subdivisions were created through widespread clear cutting and leveling, future development should be sensitive to the landscape within which communities exist, nurturing relationships between land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities.²⁸

The impacts of climate change are felt disproportionately by northern First Nations; more sustainable energy sources in housing and wider community infrastructure will contribute to the creation of more resilient communities. In addition to new energy sources, investments in modern wood heating technology can increase safety while reducing costs. The National Strategy should recognize the importance of technological advancements in creating sustainable, healthy homes both through innovative research and investment in future development and the retrofitting of existing homes.

Community-developed strategies for housing development must include all necessary infrastructure. In creating equity in housing, NAN First Nations must also be able to access equitable healthcare, education and community services in an environment which is supportive of their cultural identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate housing and community infrastructure planning to create livable communities. Community infrastructure includes: community, cultural, health, resource, sports and recreation and economic assets that support the safe and efficient delivery of community services, programs, activities and interests
- Ensure housing investment is met with required hard and soft infrastructure investments
- Create sustainable and resilient communities through the protection and integration of natural features
- Develop improved education, health and social services in support of community well-being

COMPREHENSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN FOR NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

Infrastructure is a crucial portfolio for First Nations communities across northern Ontario, with many struggling with inadequate housing, lack of clean drinking water, seasonal road access and energy challenges. Building and maintaining infrastructure over an area approximately two thirds of the province requires collaboration, innovative solutions and major investments. The Comprehensive Infrastructure Plan for NAN was developed with input from First Nations, leadership and technicians during a summit in March 2017, convened to establish common visions for sustainable communities.

The Infrastructure Plan focuses on housing, water, transportation and energy, setting out action plans to address each issue. The interconnected nature of infrastructure with housing is also true between communities. The state of shared, connective infrastructure (e.g. winter roads, energy networks) is intertwined with the state of community housing. Providing expertise and planning at the regional level improves coordination, reduces duplication of tasks and takes advantage of efficiencies at different planning scales.

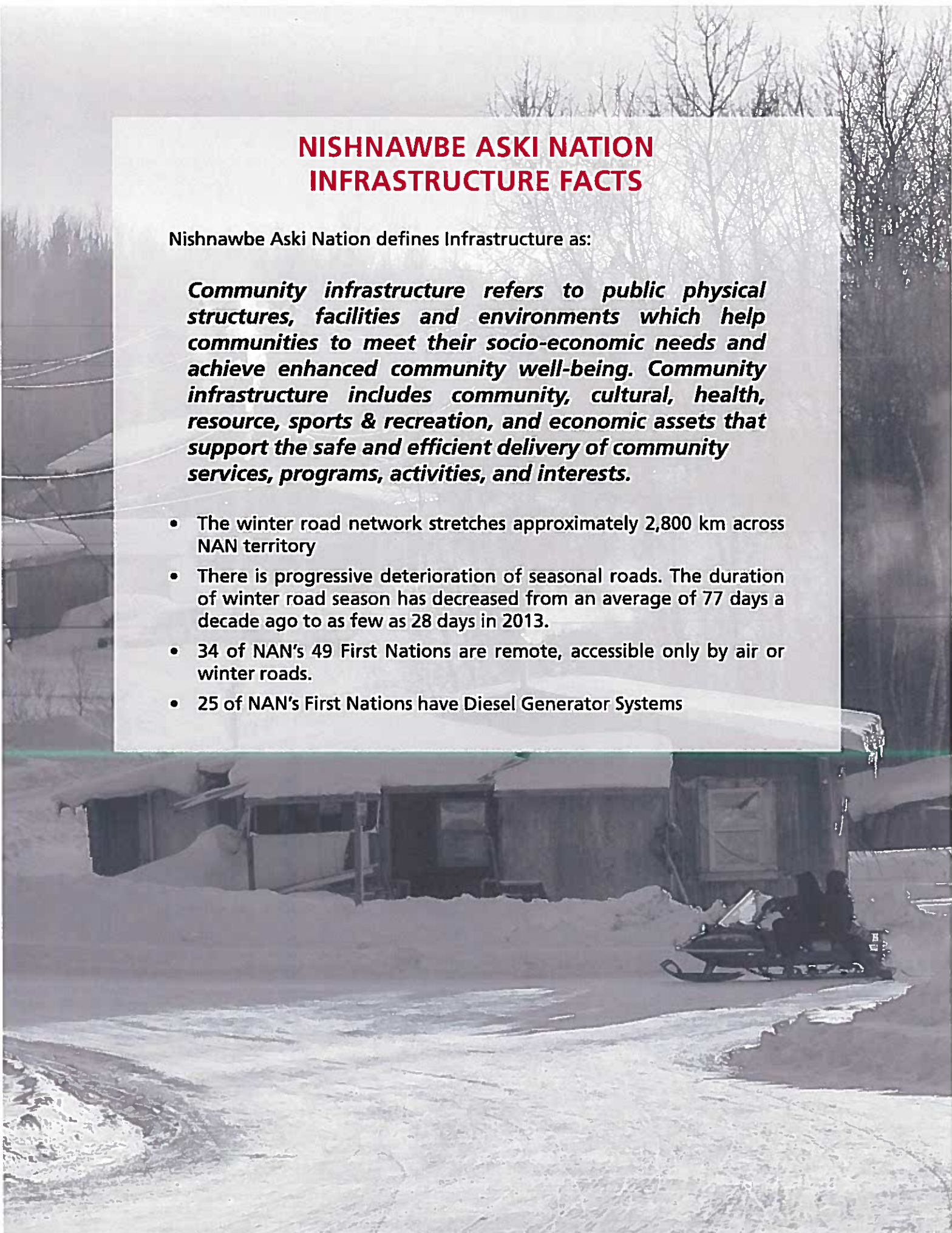
- Regional planning promotes efficiency by sharing resources and expertise, avoiding unnecessary duplication and taking advantage of clusters
- Regional and local planning can best address the unique and distinct issues faced within the region through local expertise and knowledge, creating sustainable and appropriate solutions

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION INFRASTRUCTURE FACTS

Nishnawbe Aski Nation defines Infrastructure as:

Community infrastructure refers to public physical structures, facilities and environments which help communities to meet their socio-economic needs and achieve enhanced community well-being. Community infrastructure includes community, cultural, health, resource, sports & recreation, and economic assets that support the safe and efficient delivery of community services, programs, activities, and interests.

- The winter road network stretches approximately 2,800 km across NAN territory
- There is progressive deterioration of seasonal roads. The duration of winter road season has decreased from an average of 77 days a decade ago to as few as 28 days in 2013.
- 34 of NAN's 49 First Nations are remote, accessible only by air or winter roads.
- 25 of NAN's First Nations have Diesel Generator Systems



CONCLUSION

The recommendations made throughout this report address how a First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy could create a more occupant-focused, community-led housing system. The objective of these recommendations, and of the currently under development Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy, is to develop housing and community infrastructure supportive of individual and community wellness. To achieve this goal, recommendations have been made for a change of governance structures, planning processes, funding mechanisms, community participation and community infrastructure development with a recognition that capacity development initiatives are critical in a transition to local control of housing institutions.

Local control is critical to achieving individual and community wellness because it supports and recognizes the rights of First Nations to self-determination and increases the capacity for responsiveness to on-the-ground issues. Shifting towards First Nations' control of design and implementation of policy and programs creates the flexibility required across such a diverse climatic, geographic and cultural landscape. First Nations would be able to determine their own priorities which address the specific values and needs of their members, collect high-quality data, develop local housing plans, design appropriate homes and communities, evaluate change with local metrics and innovate with local materials.

The recommendations made throughout represent a complete change to the current system. Recommendations from across sections should be seen as interconnected in looking to create housing equity for NAN First Nations— not trying to recreate a Canadian housing system, but instead one representative of the distinct cultures within NAN territory. A First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy presents an opportunity to break colonial cycles of intervention in First Nation housing and instead allow First Nations to develop appropriate, safe and healthy homes for their members. The National Strategy is an opportunity to recognize the experiences, values, and goals of First Nations across Canada by creating flexibility which allows local and regional authorities to plan and implement their varied and distinct community solutions for housing and infrastructure.

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION FIRST NATIONS NATIONAL HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation First Nations National Housing and Infrastructure Strategy recommendations address how a National Strategy can create an occupant focused, community-led housing system. The objective of these recommendations, and the currently under development Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy, is to develop housing and community infrastructure supportive of individual and community wellness.

1. Shift control of housing and infrastructure program design and decision making to localized authorities
2. Support capacity development and training of local housing managers and develop a peer-support network to maximize potential success
3. Support localized authorities in developing occupant-focused community housing and infrastructure plans
4. Use a multi-year funding model to create predictability to support local planning and eliminate unnecessary deadlines and administrative burdens on First Nations
5. Reassess Maximum Unit Price and geographic multipliers to fairly represent the true cost of housing in northern and remote communities
6. Ensure funding models support all stages of the building process including: design, procurement, management, materials, labour, maintenance and evaluation
7. Consider combining minor and major capital programming to support integrated housing and infrastructure planning
8. Ensure that a range of housing solutions are supported meeting the unique needs of diverse demographic groups across regions and both on- and off-reserve
9. Support the development of a continuum of housing both on- and off-reserve targeted to reduce and eliminate homelessness
10. Treat housing as a social determinant of health, affecting the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of people

11. Create meaningful pathways for community involvement in the design and planning process by including training and engagement in funding models
12. Support the creation of community-led housing designs to meet the climatic, geographic and cultural needs of each First Nation
13. Develop a specialized building code for northern First Nations
14. Support capacity development and training in the transition to local control across all aspects of the housing system including: management, construction, maintenance, renovation, finance and other aspects of housing
15. Create in-community experiential education programs
16. Establish a scholarship program with pathways towards further education in housing related fields including: architecture, engineering, design and planning
17. Integrate housing and community infrastructure planning to create livable communities. Community infrastructure includes: community, cultural, health, resource, sports and recreation and economic assets that support the safe and efficient delivery of community services, programs, activities and interests.
18. Ensure housing investment is met with required hard and soft infrastructure investments
19. Create sustainable and resilient communities through the protection and integration of natural features
20. Develop improved education, health and social services in support of community well-being



Nishnawbe Aski Nation

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+ **together**
design lab

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