



Assembly of First Nations

# National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan

*Draft for Discussion*





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Draft for Discussion

Draft Version 2 6-10-2023

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## Background and Introduction

### Vision Statement

First Nations control and deliver holistic and culturally safe supports and services so their citizens can access safe and supportive housing no matter where they live.

### Introduction

In 2018, First Nations-in-Assembly approved the 10 Year National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy which outlines a vision for responsive innovative housing governance systems that support First Nations transition to care, control and management of housing and related infrastructure.

In December, 2019, First Nations-in-Assembly passed Resolution 79/2019: *Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve*. This resolution represented the first time that the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) received a specific and targeted mandate to work with the federal government and other partners to work to address homelessness as it impacts First Nations citizens living both within and away from their communities. This mandate supports the vision of the First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy and First Nations' assertion that they have the right and jurisdiction to care for their citizens no matter where they live.

In line with the vision of First Nations care, control and management of housing and related infrastructure, this Action Plan aims to address First Nations homelessness through distinct, First Nations-led and controlled approaches. First Nations have distinct experiences with homelessness due to the difficult living and housing conditions in First Nations communities, migration between First Nations communities and urban centres, and ongoing impacts of colonialism. First Nations are uniquely overrepresented in the unhoused population and have distinct inherent and treaty rights.

While there has been a concerted effort to focus on Indigenous homelessness more broadly in homelessness policy and program delivery, a more specific approach is necessary in addressing homelessness for First Nations that responds to the unique ways in which First Nations experience homelessness. This Action Plan aims to support a First Nations-controlled approach to addressing homelessness by advocating for distinct funding and resources First Nations to develop and administer services, in support of First Nations exercising increased care and control of their own housing and social service systems.

To accomplish this, the Action Plan contains goals based on priorities expressed by First Nations, service providers and other partners during engagement, and as supported by research, and puts forward recommendations for the federal government, provincial/territorial governments, and service providers. The implementation of these recommendations is imperative to support First Nations in delivering the necessary services and supports to their citizens, and addressing significant and urgent unmet needs. The plan also proposes First Nations-led actions, which provide a road map of the necessary steps in achieving the vision of holistic housing, supports and services for First Nations citizens no matter where they live.



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### Terminology

During engagement sessions, some participants identified concerns with using the term “homeless” when describing individuals, as it has the potential to be dehumanizing, stigmatizing, or misleading. Many First Nations people experiencing homelessness continue to live on their traditional territories and homelands, and may recognize their home communities as their homes no matter where they are currently living. Many people experiencing homelessness also find a sense of community and belonging within their social networks on the streets.

This Action Plan continues to use the term “homelessness” when describing the state or condition of being without housing, as well as the associated structural factors. When describing individuals or groups of individuals, terms such as “unhoused” or “people experiencing homelessness” will be used to better align with what was heard during engagement. This language may continue to evolve as the AFN’s work and advocacy to address First Nations homelessness moves forward, and is not intended to detract from any individual person’s right to use the language that they feel most appropriately describes their own situation.

While Resolution 79/2019 specifically directs the AFN to develop an Action Plan for First Nations homelessness on- and off-reserve, many First Nations have land bases that are not designated as reserve lands under the Indian Act, particularly in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. This Action Plan uses terms like “on-community” or “within First Nations communities” rather than “on-reserve” where possible to be inclusive of these communities. An exception is when referring to the policy implications of separate jurisdictions on and off-reserve.

### On/Off Community

Homelessness is often understood as an issue which primarily impacts First Nations people living off-reserve or away from their home communities. As hidden homelessness is more prevalent within First Nations communities and is often much more difficult to measure and identify, understanding the extent of homelessness within First Nations communities a key step in ensuring First Nations have the resources they require to address homelessness impacting their citizens both within and away from their communities.

Many First Nations communities have inadequate housing and community infrastructure, and don’t have access to dedicated funding for essential social services such as shelters or transitional housing. These challenges are compounded where the remoteness of First Nations communities makes accessing housing or social services more difficult, forcing First Nations citizens to leave their communities while potentially facing a lack of access to reliable transportation, precarious living situations, and inadequate supports outside of their communities.

While many First Nations provide some supports and services for their unhoused citizens, there has historically been a lack of dedicated funding for this purpose. First Nations have both the right and responsibility to care for and provide services to their citizens no matter where they live. This includes exercising jurisdiction over housing and social services, both within and outside of First Nations communities, along with adequate funding being made available for First Nations to support their citizens experiencing homelessness.





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### Indigenous, Inherent, and Treaty Rights to Housing

For First Nations, the right to housing is enshrined in Treaties, and upheld by First Nations' inherent rights. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) also affirms that First Nations have the right to exercise jurisdiction and control over housing and social programs:

**Article 21:** Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security

**Article 23:** Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions

As the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* received Royal Assent in 2021, the federal government has reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the UN Declaration and must work directly with First Nations to ensure the right to adequate housing is upheld.

Canada also has a constitutionally recognized fiduciary obligation to First Nations. Any First Nations person experiencing homelessness on their own traditional lands and territories represents a failure on behalf of Canada to meet this obligation.

### Housing as a Human Right

In 2019, parliament passed the *National Housing Strategy Act*. The Act affirms that it is a human right to have access to adequate housing, and that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities. Under the National Housing Strategy, *Reaching Home* – Canada's Homelessness Strategy replaced the former Homelessness Partnering Strategy as the federal homelessness program.

The launch of *Reaching Home* included a distinctions-based funding envelope to be invested on homelessness priorities so the program could better meet the specific needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. However, *Reaching Home* was designed without First Nations input, and First Nations were not directly involved in determining the funding envelope which is minimal relative to the significant needs, and overrepresentation of First Nations in the unhoused population.

### MMIWG2S+ Calls to Justice

There is a significant connection between homelessness and the ongoing crisis of Missing and Women Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit+ people (MMIWG2S+). The social conditions associated with homelessness and housing insecurity put First Nations women, girls, as well as Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (2SLGBTQIA+) people at significantly greater risk of violence.



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In 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its final report, which outlined 231 calls for justice directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industry, and all Canadians. Three that specifically address homelessness are:

**4.7** We call upon all governments to support the establishment and long-term sustainable funding of Indigenous-led low-barrier shelters, safe spaces, transition homes, second-stage housing, and services for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who are homeless, near homeless, dealing with food insecurity, or in poverty, and who are fleeing violence or have been subjected to sexualized violence and exploitation. All governments must ensure that shelters, transitional housing, second-stage housing, and services are appropriate to cultural needs, and available wherever Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people reside.

**18.24** We call upon all governments to address homelessness, poverty, and other socioeconomic barriers to equitable and substantive rights for 2SLGBTQQIA people.

**18.25** We call upon all governments to build safe spaces for people who need help and who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, which includes access to safe, dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA shelters and housing, dedicated beds in shelters for trans and non-binary individuals, and 2SLGBTQQIA-specific support services for 2SLGBTQQIA individuals in housing and shelter spaces.



## Statistics and Context

While specific data on the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness is limited, what data does exist shows that First Nations people are dramatically overrepresented in the unhoused population across Canada<sup>1</sup>.



### 9,191

Existing data indicates that 9,191 First Nations individuals are experiencing homelessness on any given night. This is likely a low estimate given the limitations in existing data, and the lack of data on homelessness within First Nations communities.



### 28%

First Nations people accounted for 28% of the unhoused population in 44 communities that reported specifically on the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness, but comprised 2% of the overall population in those same communities on average.



### 1 in 38

1 in 38 First Nations individuals face homelessness each night—a rate 23 times higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

<sup>1</sup> Assembly of First Nations. (2021). Environmental Scan Related to First Nations Homelessness. <https://afn.ca/community-services/housing-and-homelessness/>.





## Causes of First Nations Homelessness

First Nations homelessness is a direct consequence of colonial practices and policies that displaced and dispossessed First Nations from their traditional territories, governance systems, histories, languages, and worldviews. The impacts of colonialism, the Indian Residential Schools System, and genocide have had direct and intergenerational impacts resulting in poor health and social outcomes that lead to an increased risk of homelessness.

### Displacement and Migration

Historically, Canada's racist assimilation policies also played a large part in driving First Nations citizens away from their home communities. For example, the policy of enfranchisement which was made compulsory by the *Indian Act* until 1961 played a large role in driving First Nations citizens away from their home communities. The migration of First Nations citizens away from their home communities to urban centres without adequate supports is a significant driver of First Nations homelessness. While First Nations citizens are no longer explicitly forced to leave their home communities as a matter of policy, significant gaps in housing, infrastructure and social services still compel many to leave their home communities.

### The Housing and Infrastructure Gap

One of the most significant factors driving First Nations homelessness both on- and off-community is the housing crisis and infrastructure gap within First Nations communities. Chronic housing shortages and overcrowding are pervasive across First Nations communities, with waiting lists for housing extending between three to ten years or more, which directly contributes to chronic overcrowding and hidden homelessness, as well as other negative health and social outcomes.

### Underfunded Social Services and Jurisdictional Challenges

While health, education and certain social services are normally a provincial responsibility, the federal government is responsible for funding these services on-reserve, and has severely neglected and underfunded them for decades. This has contributed significantly to poverty and social disfunction within First Nations communities, as well as to First Nations people leaving their communities to access services elsewhere. The differences in jurisdiction and administrative responsibility on- and off-reserve also make it especially difficult for First Nations people access services due to overlapping layers of bureaucracy.

### CFS Involvement

The Child and Family Services (CFS) system in Canada has had a devastating effect on Indigenous children, families, and communities. Indigenous children represent 53.8% of children and youth in care throughout Canada but account for only 7.7% of the overall child population<sup>2</sup>.

While data is lacking on the number of First Nations youth involved in the CFS system who eventually experience homelessness, what data does exist shows a strong correlation between CFS involvement and homelessness. For example, in 2016, a pan-Canadian study on young people experiencing homelessness found that 58% of the youth

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2023). *Reducing the number of indigenous children in care*. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>





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surveyed had current or past CFS involvement<sup>3</sup>. Youth aging out of the child welfare system are especially vulnerable given a lack of supports available for youth involved in the CFS system once they reach the age of majority.

Given the dramatic overrepresentation of First Nations children and youth in the CFS system, it is likely that First Nations youth are driven to homelessness by way of CFS involvement at an even higher rate. In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the CFS systems on First Nations reserves and in the Yukon had been chronically underfunded for decades, which amounted to systemic racial discrimination. As a result, the First Nations CFS system is currently undergoing significant long-term reform, which includes funding to support First Nations youth aging out of the CFS system, and for housing on reserves.

### Other Factors

Other structural factors that contribute to First Nations experiences of homelessness include barriers to accessing education and employment, pervasive and systemic racism in societal institutions, over-policing, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. High rent prices and housing shortages are a significant barrier to accessing housing in high-cost urban centres, as well as in the north. Discrimination and systemic racism are also prevalent, as First Nations individuals frequently experience unfair treatment from landlords, rental boards, and agencies. These issues are compounded by lack of funding for addictions and mental health supports which lead to significant barriers to accessing services, particularly for people with complex needs.

## Definitions

As this Action Plan sets out recommendations and strategies for addressing First Nations homelessness, a First Nations-specific definition of homelessness is important to understanding what conditions and experiences are included in the scope of the Action plan.

### Mainstream Canadian Definition of Homelessness

The Canadian definition of homelessness, developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness in 2012, describes four categories of homelessness<sup>4</sup>:

1. **Unsheltered:** living on the streets in places that are unsuitable for human habitation.
2. **Emergency sheltered:** living in overnight shelters intended for crises or those escaping violence.
3. **Provisionally accommodated:** individuals with temporary accommodation or accommodation that lacks tenancy or security.
4. **At risk of homelessness:** encompasses those who are not homeless but are in a precarious housing or economic situation.

<sup>3</sup> Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Kidd, S., & Schwan, K. (2016). Without a home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/YouthWithoutHome>

<sup>4</sup> Gaetz, S., Barr, C., Friesen, A., Harris, B., Pauly, B., Pearce, B., Turner, A., & Marsolais, A. (2012). Canadian definition of homelessness. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>



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### Indigenous Definition of Homelessness

Jesse Thistle, a Métis-Cree author and historian, has developed a definition of Indigenous homelessness that has been widely adopted and cited<sup>5</sup>. Thistle's definition frames Indigenous homelessness as a breakdown of healthy relationships with self, family, community, land, water, place, animals, culture, and language resulting from colonial disruptions. It emphasizes a holistic concept of "home" and contrasts with standard definitions of homelessness, which focus on housing as a physical structure.

### First Nations Definitions of Homelessness

While Jesse Thistle's pan-Indigenous definition of homelessness is commonly referenced, to-date, there has not been a First Nations-specific definition of homelessness that has gained widespread currency. Many aspects of Jesse Thistle's definition align with feedback received during AFN engagement, which suggested that a definition of First Nations homelessness includes more than just the physical elements associated with a lack of adequate housing. There were also some shortcomings identified with this definition, including a lack of attention to the impacts of gender-based violence, 2SLGBTQIA+ realities, and the factors causing First Nations people to leave their communities.

First Nations definitions of homelessness encompass distinct understandings of home, which include networks of responsibilities and connections. First Nations understandings of homelessness also include spiritual, cultural and practical dimensions that recognize homelessness is more than just the loss of a home, and are responsive to the impacts of systemic racism and colonialism.

First Nations homelessness is a direct result of displacement, dispossession, and economic exclusion by historical and current colonial processes that have prevented First Nations people from accessing economic prosperity, resulting in the loss of land and resources, and a fractured sense of individual and community well-being.

For First Nations people, different forms of homelessness exist concurrently. These are commonly categorized as 'visible' and 'hidden' homelessness. The prevalence of hidden homelessness within First Nations communities is an essential distinction of First Nations homelessness.

**Visible homelessness** refers to those who are unsheltered or who reside in emergency shelters. This form of homelessness is often easier to identify, see and track with formal systems.

**Hidden homelessness** is a broad category that may include extreme overcrowding, unfit housing, and insecure housing. It also includes couch surfing, and other forms of temporary accommodation.

Hidden Homelessness has been identified as the most pervasive homelessness on-reserve and within First Nations communities, resulting in significant knowledge gaps on the extent of First Nations homelessness nationwide.

This Action Plan recognizes and responds to the different forms of homelessness that impact First Nations people, while also recognizing that each First Nation retains the right to use their own definitions of homelessness according to their distinct needs, priorities, and worldviews.

<sup>5</sup> Thistle, J. (2017). *Definition of indigenous homelessness in Canada*. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>



## Objectives



### 1. First Nations Jurisdiction

To fulfill its vision in conjunction with the First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy, this Action Plan aims to support the development of a housing and homelessness system that is administered and governed by First Nations, including housing and social services for at-risk or unhoused First Nations people. This includes supporting First Nations planning, design, governance, management, and delivery of a holistic and sustainable continuum of culturally safe services and supports to citizens living both in and away from First Nations communities.

First Nations have the right to exercise jurisdiction over the governance, funding, and delivery of housing and social services for their citizens no matter where they live. Funding for homelessness service delivery is not currently administered through processes that respect First Nations jurisdiction. First Nations have the right to provide services to all their citizens, and the federal government has a fiduciary obligation to ensure that adequate funding is available for First Nations to develop and provide these services, which includes establishing the necessary governance structures and administration.





## 2. Prevention

A significant body of research and anecdotal evidence indicates that addressing the housing shortage and closing the infrastructure gap is essential to addressing homelessness for First Nations. Many First Nations people would remain in their home communities if safe, secure housing, adequate social and health services, and opportunities for upward mobility were available. An essential component of addressing and preventing homelessness for First Nations is closing the housing and infrastructure gap within First Nations communities.

Providing direct supports such as income assistance, rent or food supplements is seen as one of the most effective ways to prevent homelessness. A preventative approach to addressing First Nations homelessness involves the ongoing development of a First Nations social safety net - a holistic network of supports developed, controlled, and delivered by First Nations.

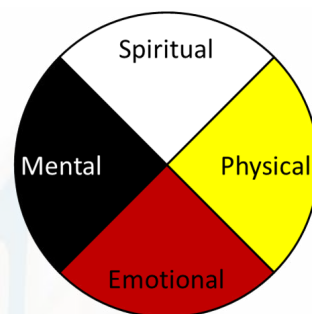


## 3. Holistic and Culturally Safe Services

This Action Plan advocates for a holistic approach to addressing the complex and multifaceted issues facing unhoused First Nations people. One of the models that supports this is the concept of wrap-around service delivery, referring to a holistic approach that recognizes that some individuals face multiple barriers to accessing and maintaining housing, and aims to provide a program of supports based on the needs of the individual rather than the availability of services.

Cultural Safety is a term used to describe health and social services that are provided in an environment free from racism and discrimination. For First Nations, it also means having access to Elders, traditional foods, land-based healing, and cultural programming when accessing services. First Nations homelessness is the direct result of colonial oppression and dispossession of resources, and programs and services for unhoused First Nations people need to recognize this and actively address it. This begins with having services that are designed and delivered directly by First Nations for the benefit of their citizens.

This approach is particularly relevant for First Nations people experiencing homelessness, who often face compounding barriers due to the impacts of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, underfunded health and social services, and the disproportionate impact of the child welfare system. For First Nations, a holistic approach to service delivery acknowledges the importance of community and cultural connections to support individuals' mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being.



For many First Nations cultures, a holistic understanding of well-being is encompassed by the medicine wheel, which uses a circle containing the four cardinal directions to demonstrate the interconnectedness of each aspect of individual wellness, and the importance of keeping these in balance and harmony.



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### 4. Service Navigation

Due to the way in which the federal government funds and administers health and social programs for First Nations people living on-reserve, navigating the service landscape can be especially complex for First Nations people, especially those moving between jurisdictions on and off-reserve. Dedicated resources are required to help First Nations access available programs, housing options, services, and related resources, along with providing support for citizens moving to urban centres.



### 5. Partnerships

Recognizing that there are many service providers, including Indigenous organizations, currently providing services to First Nations citizens off-community, the Action Plan seeks to support partnerships between First Nations, all levels of government and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations involved in addressing First Nations homelessness. It also recognizes that each First Nation has the right to determine how funding to support their citizens is administered.

First Nations have the right to provide essential services to their citizens both within and away from their communities. Currently, First Nations do not receive sufficient federal funding to provide adequate housing and essential services within their communities, a reality that has contributed significantly to First Nations homelessness. A lack of funding has also prevented many First Nations from delivering services off-community, even though many First Nations assert that their citizens are their responsibility no matter where they live.

To help address these gaps, many Indigenous-led organizations including Friendship Centres, urban Indigenous housing providers and Indigenous homelessness organizations have stepped in to provide services to First Nations citizens alongside other Indigenous people. This Action Plan aims to support partnerships between First Nations and off-community service providers, recognizing that it is ultimately up to each First Nation whether they wish to partner with other organizations or provide services themselves, and that First Nations ultimately have the right to access dedicated funding to control and deliver their own programs and services.



### 6. Specific Needs

To address homelessness for First Nations, specific attention needs to be paid to groups with specific needs and experiences. This includes First Nations youth, Elders, people dealing with addictions or in recovery, people transitioning from correctional facilities, women fleeing violence, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, single parent families, and Veterans.

As specific data on First Nations homelessness is lacking across the board, more research is needed to understand the distinct experiences and service needs of these populations, and to ensure that programs and services are responsive to the diverse needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness.



## 7. Data Sovereignty

While there is some data on First Nations homelessness collected through point-in-time counts and other methods, it is not currently collected consistently or in a way that respects the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP®)<sup>6</sup>. OCAP® asserts that First Nations have the right to control over data collection processes in their communities, and to control how this information can be stored, interpreted, used, or shared.

Because most coordinated efforts to collect data on homelessness exclude homelessness within First Nations communities, there are significant gaps in data on First Nations homelessness across the country. This Action Plan aims to support a First Nations-led and controlled approach to collecting First Nations homelessness data, recognizing that collecting this data is essential to First Nations in accessing funding, designing supports and services, and conducting advocacy.

## First Nations-Led Actions

The actions outlined below are intended to identify the steps required for First Nations, in collaboration with First Nations regional organizations and the AFN, to achieve the vision of First Nations control and delivery of holistic and culturally safe supports and services so their citizens can access safe and supportive housing no matter where they live.

### 1. Research and Data

- 1.1. Develop and implement tools and methods to monitor, collect and interpret First Nations homelessness data within a framework that respects First Nations data and the principles of OCAP®.
- 1.2. Identify resources and develop tools to collect data on the extent of homelessness on-reserve and within First Nations communities in a manner that reflects First Nations cultural contexts, definitions and understandings of homelessness, and the prevalence of hidden homelessness on-community.
- 1.3. Conduct research to better understand how the lack of adequate housing on-reserve and within First Nations communities impacts homelessness both on and off-community. Bring forward recommendations to ensure strategies addressing the housing crisis on-community include social supports and services to assist unhoused First Nations citizens with accessing and retaining housing.
- 1.4. Conduct research to determine the rates at which of First Nations citizens leave their home communities, and the impacts of migration on homelessness.
- 1.5. Work with the federal government and *Reaching Home* designated communities to support the development of data sharing frameworks and agreements to ensure Point-in-Time Count and other homelessness data is shared with First Nations, and that First Nations can contribute to the collection of this data, in line with the First Nations Principles of OCAP®.

<sup>6</sup> OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). For more information, please visit <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>





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- 1.6. Work with the federal government, *Reaching Home* designated communities, and other partners to ensure that all homelessness data collection includes appropriate First Nations and Indigenous definitions of homelessness that reflect First Nations social and cultural contexts.
- 1.7. Work with the federal government and *Reaching Home* designated communities to ensure point-in-time counts and other homelessness data collection efforts are responsive to First Nations' needs and align with the First Nations Principles of OCAP®. Explore legislative and policy options to ensure governments and service providers share relevant information with First Nations.
- 1.8. Work with the federal government to identify dedicated resources for First Nations-led homelessness data collection initiatives.
- 1.9. Conduct research and engagement, in collaboration with the First Nations Information Governance Centre and other partners, to explore options for an integrated data system that is compliant with the First Nations Principles of OCAP® and provincial health information legislation to allow First Nations and service providers to safely share crucial medical history, service needs and other relevant personal data.
- 1.10. Conduct research to better understand the distinct experiences and service needs of First Nations women, Elders, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, Veterans, and youth experiencing homelessness.

## 2. Urban/Off-Community

- 2.1. Develop and conduct advocacy campaigns in support of First Nations citizens experiencing homelessness, including advocacy messages and letters denouncing bylaws or policing efforts which unfairly target unhoused people.
- 2.2. Advocate for dedicated funding for First Nations to deliver supports and services for their citizens off-community.
- 2.3. Advocate for the federal government to fulfill its commitments to close the infrastructure gap for First Nations communities by 2030 to ensure First Nations citizens have the option to remain in their communities and access safe and adequate housing.
- 2.4. Work with the federal government and other partners to identify investments needed for services and supports aimed at addressing and preventing homelessness for First Nations both within and away from their home communities.
- 2.5. Conduct research and engagement to identify the impacts of jurisdictional gaps in homelessness services and funding models, such as provincial programs not being available on-reserve or federal funding which cannot be used off-reserve.
- 2.6. Conduct research on models for First Nations to deliver services off-community, including using urban reserves as service delivery hubs, purchasing property in urban centres, acquiring land through land trusts, or through partnerships with service providers.



### 3. Culturally Safe Services

- 3.1. Conduct research, engagement, and advocacy around First Nations-led approaches to decolonized harm reduction services aimed at creating safe environments for people dealing with addictions.
- 3.2. Call on all levels of government to declare First Nations homelessness an emergency, in support of immediately mobilizing resources and funding to address the most urgent needs in collaboration with First Nations
- 3.3. Conduct research and engagement on best practices to delivery culturally safe supports and services, including First Nations-led Housing First programs, elder in-residence programs, land-based healing and kinship care. Establish networks to ensure all First Nations have access to information about successful approaches and advocate for dedicated resources to implement them.
- 3.4. Conduct multimedia advocacy campaigns aimed at challenging stereotypes about First Nations homelessness, advocating for policy changes and challenging unjust bylaws that target unhoused First Nations citizens.

### 4. Service Navigation

- 4.1. Engage with service providers and community members to determine how First Nations can effectively support their citizens in navigating and accessing existing services.
- 4.2. Work with the federal government to identify resources to allow First Nations and First Nations organizations to hire dedicated housing and social service navigators and outreach workers.
- 4.3. Conduct research and engagement to identify models and promising practices for First Nations to support their citizens in navigating and accessing services, such as a dedicated community liaison position.
- 4.4. Develop toolkits and social service inventories to support First Nations in helping their citizens access services.

### 5. Partnerships and Accountability

- 5.1. Work with service providers and all levels of government to support the development of partnerships to ensure that First Nations are fully involved in the design and delivery of programs and services.
- 5.2. Advocate for dedicated resources for First Nations to support their unhoused citizens no matter where they live through advocacy and outreach.
- 5.3. Advocate for dedicate resources for First Nations to engage in partnerships with municipal and provincial governments, service providers and other key partners to co-develop and deliver homelessness programs and while building capacity to take on greater levels of control over homelessness programs. Advocate for formal agreements requiring service providers to work directly with local First Nations, including roles and responsibilities for information sharing and accountability.



- 5.4. Conduct research and engagement to identify models for interdepartmental committees at the community level to provide holistic supports to citizens. Identify best and promising practices, such as the Hub model or community mapping, and advocate for the necessary resources for interested First Nations to implement them.

## 6. Direct Supports

- 6.1. Conduct research on how gaps in services such as the federal On-Reserve Income Assistance programs, as well as provincial and territorial income supports programs contribute to First Nations experiences of homelessness. Advocate for these programs to be updated and reformed to address these gaps.
- 6.2. Work with the federal government to identify resources for discretionary funding to implement First Nations-controlled support programs, including rent or food supplements, transportation, and other essentials to support citizens at risk of homelessness.
- 6.3. Identify resources for First Nations to provide education to citizens experiencing homelessness, aging out of the child welfare system, or exiting the critical justice system on job skills, financial literacy, home maintenance and other essential life skills.

## 7. Specific Needs

- 7.1. Conduct research on how the overrepresentation of First Nations children and youth in the child welfare system impacts First Nations experiences with homelessness.
- 7.2. Conduct research and engagement to identify how post-majority support services for First Nations youth aging out of the child welfare system can be improved to prevent homelessness.
- 7.3. Conduct research and engagement on the experiences and supports needed to assist First Nations people transitioning from the criminal justice system in accessing and retaining housing.
- 7.4. Conduct engagement on the overrepresentation of First Nations 2SLGBTQIA+ and gender diverse people in the unhoused population, particularly among youth. Work to identify how First Nations can better support their 2SLGBTQIA+ citizens through advocacy, outreach, and culturally safe supports and services.
- 7.5. Conduct advocacy campaigns in support of the First Nations 2SLGBTQIA+ community to combat discrimination, and to help ensure First Nations communities are safe places for all citizens to return to.
- 7.6. Conduct research and engagement to identify the distinct service needs of First Nations women, Veterans, Elders and youth experiencing homelessness and advocate for dedicated resources for First Nations to develop and deliver these services.





## 8. Governance and Administration

- 8.1. Conduct research and engagement to identify the resource, governance, and capacity needs for First Nations to administer and provide homelessness services.
- 8.2. Work with the federal government to jointly identify resources for First Nations to develop administrative and governance capacity to directly administer homelessness programs should they wish to do so.
- 8.3. Conduct engagement on processes to support the transfer of federal, provincial and territorial homelessness programs and funding into the direct care and control of First Nations.
- 8.4. Engage with Dene Nation and Yukon First Nations to ensure their distinct needs, governance models and approaches to jurisdiction and service delivery are reflected in these processes.
- 8.5. Identify resources to support the development of a national First Nations homelessness network to allow First Nations to share information around service delivery models, funding opportunities and other relevant information.
- 8.6. Support the development of regional or local First Nations homelessness strategies and action plans, and advocate for their resourcing and implementation.

## 9. Funding

- 9.1. Advocate for urgent and immediate funding for First Nations to provide urgent support to their unhoused citizens on an immediate basis. Work with the federal government to ensure this funding is rolled out on a rapid timeframe with minimal reporting requirements to ensure First Nations can support those facing the most urgent needs without delay.
- 9.2. Advocate for long term, sustainable and needs-based funding for First Nations to develop programs, services, and initiatives to support their unhoused citizens through long-term, holistic planning processes without the need to rely on sporadic short-term project funding or own source revenue.
- 9.3. Advocate for new and existing funding to be flexible enough to allow for the delivery of culturally appropriate services and supports, which may involve activities and cultural practices that are not considered eligible within current funding frameworks.



## Supporting Recommendations

The following recommendations are essential steps for the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, and service providers to implement jointly with First Nations to address First Nations homelessness and support First Nations care and control over their own housing and social services in alignment with the UN Declaration.

	Federal	Provincial/ Territorial	Service Providers
Recommendation:			
Jurisdiction			
1. Work with the AFN and First Nations to explore options and seek authorities supporting the transfer control of federal, provincial, and territorial funding and program delivery for First Nations homelessness directly to First Nations.	✓	✓	
2. Work with First Nations to co-develop all federal, provincial, and territorial homelessness strategies and programs, and provide dedicated resources for First Nations through all such strategies and programs. Work with First Nations to determine how these resources will be allocated	✓	✓	
3. Work with First Nations to evaluate the federal <i>Reaching Home</i> program and how it currently responds to First Nations' needs. This should include looking at First Nations-specific funding, as well as other streams which also serve First Nations citizens. Engage First Nations in a co-development process aimed at understanding the actual needs of First Nations as determined by First Nations, and jointly determining funding envelopes.	✓		
4. Work with First Nations to evaluate regional governance structures under <i>Reaching Home</i> and require them to meaningfully involve First Nations in a manner consistent with First Nations rights and jurisdiction. Require <i>Reaching Home</i> Community Advisory Boards to develop partnerships and agreements to be accountable to the First Nations on whose traditional territories they operate. Work with First Nations to co-develop First Nations-led Community Advisory Boards or other governance structures under <i>Reaching Home</i> .	✓		✓
5. Work with First Nations to develop agreements, revise policies and create structures to ensure First Nations are meaningfully represented on boards, advisory committees and governance structures of service delivery organizations. Develop mechanisms that ensure organizations have tangible ways of demonstrating accountability to the First Nations whose citizens they serve, while supporting First Nations in building capacity to take on greater control over the design and delivery of homelessness programs	✓	✓	✓
6. Ensure <i>Reaching Home</i> Community Advisory Boards and other governance structures fully and meaningfully involve First Nations youth, Elders and people with lived experience in collaboration with local First Nations			✓
7. Work with First Nations to jointly evaluate existing programs and services to ensure they are culturally safe and aligned with the needs of local First Nations. Directly involve First Nations in the design and delivery of services and provide opportunities for clients to connect with their home communities and leadership.			✓
8. Work with First Nations to plan and implement initiatives to transfer land to First Nations, including the development of urban reserves. Work with municipalities and the private sector to ensure First Nations have access to the land and resources required to provide housing and social services to their citizens wherever they live.	✓	✓	



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	Federal	Provincial/ Territorial	Service Providers
<b>Recommendation:</b>			
<b>Funding</b>			
11. Fully implement the existing federal commitment to closing the infrastructure gap within First Nations communities by 2030, which includes housing, as a key measure towards addressing and preventing homelessness, as well as ensuring First Nations have the infrastructure required to deliver homelessness services including shelters and supportive housing. Allocate the full amount of funding jointly identified by the AFN and Indigenous Services Canada as needed to close the infrastructure gap, including housing, without further delay.	✓		
12. Immediately establish and allocate dedicated funding to allow First Nations to respond to urgent needs and crisis situations facing their unhoused citizens. This process should build on lessons learned from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Rapid Housing Initiative, ensuring First Nations are not forced to compete with large agencies or not-for-profits for available funding.	✓		
13. Work with First Nations through meaningful co-development processes to provide dedicated funding for First Nations proportionate to First Nations' needs through <i>Reaching Home</i> and other homelessness programs. Ensure the amount of funding for First Nations within all programs is at minimum proportionate to the representation First Nations citizens in the unhoused population, which the AFN estimates to be at least 28% based on available data.	✓	✓	
14. Provide dedicated, adequate, and sustained funding for First Nations to develop and strengthen local and regional administrative capacity to develop and deliver homelessness programs and services.	✓	✓	
15. Work with First Nations and First Nations regional organizations to establish long-term, multi-year agreements to ensure First Nations can build capacity to address homelessness, retain staff and respond to community needs in the long-term without the need to rely on sporadic, short-term funding.	✓		
16. Implement an evidence-based approach that routinely adjusts funding formulas to respond directly to First Nations community needs as determined by First Nations, and that is responsive to the overrepresentation of First Nations in homelessness data. Work with First Nations to jointly identify the cost of ending First Nations homelessness and ensure funding meets the needs so First Nations are not forced to compete over inadequate funding.	✓		
<b>Prevention</b>			
17. Work with First Nations and other partners to develop strong and consistently enforced policies to combat racism and discrimination in the delivery of health and social services. Develop and implement mandatory anti-racism training, as well as training on Indigenous histories and contemporary issues for policy makers, as well as frontline service delivery staff. Work to ensure provincial housing dispute resolution mechanisms, such as landlord and tenant boards, are equipped to recognize the distinct needs of First Nations, and address racism within the housing market	✓	✓	✓
18. Work with First Nations and other partners to develop and implement education and training for decision makers, housing workers, social workers, frontline service providers, police, and landlords on First Nations issues and perspectives, and trauma-informed service delivery.		✓	✓
19. Work with First Nations to conduct a comprehensive review of federal, provincial, and territorial social assistance programs, including income supports and programs which offer assistance for adults with disabilities. Ensure that social assistance rates are aligned with the cost of living in the regions, areas, and communities where they are offered, and that they keep pace with inflation. Where provincial and territorial programs are not offered on-reserve, work with First Nations and the federal government to determine whether these programs can be made available on-reserve.	✓	✓	✓





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	Federal	Provincial/ Territorial	Service Providers
<b>Recommendation:</b>			
<b>Prevention</b>			
20. Ensure all social services, including health and CFS, are delivered in a holistic and culturally safe manner and that First Nations are directly and meaningfully involved in the design and delivery of these services.	✓	✓	✓
<b>Cultural Safety and Holistic Services</b>			
21. Provide supports and services to First Nations people experiencing homelessness that are holistic, culturally appropriate and aimed at improving their physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being. Directly and meaningfully involve First Nations in the design and delivery of these services.			✓
22. Evaluate existing programs and services to ensure housing, supports, and services are designed and delivered in a way that meets applicable standards of accessibility, including federal and provincial/territorial accessibility legislation, as well as First Nations accessibility standards once these are developed. Ensure all communications meet relevant accessibility standards.	✓	✓	✓
23. Work with First Nations, the federal government, and other partners to fund, co-develop and deliver services such as shelters for First Nations individuals with specific needs, particularly women fleeing domestic violence, LGBTQ2SIA+ people, Veterans, and youth.	✓	✓	✓
24. Work with First Nations to ensure services are delivered in a culturally safe environment. This includes taking proactive steps to address racism and discrimination in service delivery, as well as other measures such as integrating cultural values, trauma-informed care, Elder-in-residence programs, and land-based healing.	✓	✓	✓
25. Work with First Nations and other partners to redesign existing service delivery approaches such as Housing First, Harm Reduction, and Coordinated Access to ensure they are flexible, and adaptable to local First Nations needs and contexts. Involve local First Nations in the co-development of service delivery approaches, models, and assessment tools.	✓	✓	✓
<b>Partnerships</b>			
26. Work with First Nations to develop partnerships enabling single-window access points or portals for programs and funding, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and making it easier for First Nations to access funding and deliver services.	✓	✓	✓
27. Work with First Nations to identify and advocate for the repeal of municipal bylaws or enforcement efforts that unfairly target unhoused First Nations citizens as a condition of provincial funding transfers		✓	✓
<b>Data Sovereignty</b>			
28. Work with First Nations to evaluate existing federal, provincial and territorial homelessness data collection strategies, including Nationally Coordinated Point-in-Time Counts, as well as data collection systems such as the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), to ensure to ensure they include mechanisms for collecting specific, disaggregated data on First Nations homelessness they are compliant with the First Nations Principles of OCAP®.	✓	✓	✓
29. Work with First Nations and regional First Nations organizations such as regional First Nations Information Governance Centre offices to develop data sharing agreements to ensure First Nations have access to homelessness data that includes data collected on their citizens, in line with the First Nations principles of OCAP®.	✓	✓	✓



## The Path Forward

To support the implementation of the First Nations-led actions listed above, the following actions will be led by the AFN to ensure a cohesive, coordinated approach to addressing First Nations homelessness at the national level while working to ensure First Nations have the resources to develop and deliver their own homelessness programs and services:

1. Seek resources to establish a National First Nations homelessness committee consisting of regional representatives to oversee and monitor the implementation of this Action Plan.
2. Develop an implementation plan laying out timelines and detailed steps to accomplish the actions laid out in this Action Plan with steps to implement both immediate and long-term actions.
3. Develop an advocacy plan including targeted messaging to support First Nations accessing resources required to implement the actions laid out in this Action Plan, and to seek accountability from the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, and service providers in implementing the recommendations they are implicated in.
4. Develop an updated and renewed National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan in 2028 or earlier, in alignment with the renewal of the federal National Housing Strategy and the First Nations National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy.

The AFN would like to acknowledge the voices of everyone who participated in the engagement sessions, surveys and other activities leading to the development of this Action Plan, particularly those with lived experience with homelessness. These contributions have shaped all aspects of the Action Plan and will continue to guide its implementation.

*It is deeply troubling to feel like you do not have a home on your own land. This was the place where our ancestors practiced their spirituality, defended their land, hunted, and sang songs to the Creator. Those cultural practices are directly tied to the land. Our community members are home.*

-engagement participant



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