NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

FINAL REPORT

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Submitted to the Assembly of First Nations

Submitted by:
Archipel Research and Consulting Inc.

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GLOSSARY

The collection of definitions below is specific to this report and the context shared by the participants that joined the virtual engagements. Unless specifically sourced, these definitions are not representative of standard and official definitions.

Addition to Reserves:
An Addition to Reserve is a parcel of land added to the existing reserve land of a First Nation or that creates a new reserve. Land can be added adjacent to the existing reserve land (contiguous) or separated from the existing reserve land (non-contiguous). An Addition to Reserve can be added in rural or urban settings (ISC, 2019)

Community Worker:
Term used for anyone who works for an organization besides a First Nation, Tribal Council, or band government. This included workers in First Nations homeless services, expert advisors to First Nations leadership, Executive directors of organizations, policy analysts, municipal representatives, health care providers, directors of funding organizations, First Nations entrepreneurs and other homeless service providers.

Distinct Funding Stream:
Funding that is designated for specific groups or for specific reasons. This is not specifically related to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis status, but can be. In the context of this report participants expressed an interest in place-based distinct funding (i.e., urban, rural, remote)

Distinctions-Based Funding:
Distinctions-Based Funding refers to funding that is allocated based on the three federally recognized Indigenous groups in Canada: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. This approach is taken to ensure that the unique needs, circumstances and right to self-determination of each group is recognized with respect to Indigenous policy and funding.

Family Reunification:
In the context of homelessness service delivery, Family reunification refers to the reuniting of children with their homeless or precariously housed parents. (The Homeless Hub, n.d.)

Indigenous Approach to Mental Health:
An Indigenous approach to mental health refers to a comprehensive understanding of mental health, where mental wellness is valued equally alongside physical, emotional, spiritual, and economic wellbeing. For First Nations, whole health is achieved through “First Nations cultural

knowledge, approaches, languages, and ways of knowing." (Assembly of First Nations et al., 1)

Indigenous-Led:
In the context of this report, Indigenous-led means any program designed and delivered by organizations that are operated by Indigenous peoples. This can mean by First Nations bands, or any organization that is Indigenous owned/operated.

Land Back:
Land Back began as a meme by Indigenous meme-artist, Arnell Tailfeathers, and has since grown into a nation-wide grassroots movement demanding jurisdiction over, access to and the return of Indigenous lands to the original caretakers/stewards. As the Yellowhead Institute points out, "Land Back, is a nod to the wave of emerging artists and members finding new ways to communicate old demands." (Yellowhead Institute, 2019, 6)

Living on the Land:
Living on the land is a term that describes relying on the land for subsistence purposes. This includes obtaining food, shelter, heating, and clothing, without the use of services like plumbing or electricity.

On-Reserve/In-community:
First Nations people who live on-reserve lands. Also includes those who live on community lands that may not be designated as reserve lands but as Settlement Lands or Lands Set Aside.

Off-Reserve/Off-community:
First Nations people who live off-reserve lands or off community lands designated as Settlement Lands or Lands Set Aside

While "on-and-off reserve" is used in the AFN's Resolution 79/2019, titled "Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve," further feedback from communities has indicated that the terms "on reserve" and "off reserve" may not be inclusive of First Nations land-bases in Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Where relevant, this report will use the terms "on community" and "off community" instead of "on-and-off reserve." However, "on-and-off reserve" were frequently used by participants and have not been changed in quotations.

Renoviction:
Renoviction is a term used to describe ending a tenancy to renovate a rental unit. (Province of British Columbia, 2021)

Section 95:

Section 95 refers to the section of the National Housing Act devoted to On-Reserve Non-Profit Rental Housing Program. This program has been impactful as it is one of the only funding sources for on-reserve housing, yet it also poses several substantial challenges. These challenges include and are not limited to lack of consideration of band membership, access to local qualified contractors, modesty criteria restricting quality of materials used, lack of available infrastructure and costs associated with creating it, and several other capacity related circumstances uniquely experienced by reserve communities. (CMHC, n.d.)

Trauma-Informed Care:
Trauma-informed services consider an understanding of trauma in all aspects of service delivery and place priority on trauma survivors' safety, choice, and control, creating a culture of non-violence, learning, and collaboration. (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2014)

Wrap-around Services:
A holistic approach that provides or makes available all the services that a person might need (such as mental health, addictions, etc.). In the case of homelessness, wrap-around services are provided so as to stabilize and house a homeless person.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is estimated that on any given night 9,191 First Nations people are experiencing homelessness across Canada, a number that is likely undercounted based on available data (AFN 2021, 1). First Nations people are also vastly overrepresented within the homeless population in Canada: for example, 68% of homeless shelter users in the Prairies are Indigenous, while they represent only 10.4% of the population in that region (AFN 2021, 1). Across Canada, First Nations leadership, technicians, and other community support workers identify that addressing the multiple factors that influence and create homelessness is an immediate need. In 2019, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) passed Resolution 79/2019, titled "Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve." This resolution directed the AFN to develop a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan, which will aim to improve the delivery of federal government programs as well as the related social and fiscal mechanisms to address First Nations homelessness, in alignment with the Ten Year National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy[1]. The goal of the National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan is to reduce, prevent, and ultimately eliminate First Nations homelessness in alignment with the transition of First Nations housing and infrastructure to First Nations management, control, and care.

As an important step in undertaking this work, the AFN partnered with Archipel Research and Consulting Inc. (Archipel), to conduct 15 regional engagement sessions between January and April 2022. The 15 engagements focused on the following regions and topics: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northern Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Southern Ontario, Yukon, Prince Edward Island, Intersectional experiences (English), Intersectional Experiences (French), and a national engagement.[2] The engagements focused on gathering the voices of First Nations leadership and staff, technicians, and program managers working in homelessness. 126 participants joined these 15 engagement sessions.

The project employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured focus groups that emphasized understanding and exploring the experiences of the participants. This design prioritizes Indigenous research methodologies and consensus-based decision making. These methods highlight the importance of dialogic, iterative, and storied approaches to research. Etuaptmumk (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012), a Mi'kmaq methodology and framework known as Two-Eyed Seeing, was essential in the methodologies of this project. Two-Eyed Seeing involves employing Indigenous ways of learning and knowing and combining it with the

[1] The strategy can be found here 10 Year First Nations National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy
[2] The Dene Nation in the Northwest Territories chose to hold their own regional engagement session.

Eurocentric scientific approach and using both together to develop a more fulsome understanding of the questions at hand. Engaging in Two-Eyed Seeing is a hybrid approach that allows researchers to combine the values of both Indigenous worldviews and Eurocentric academic principles.

Through these engagement sessions, key themes relating to addressing First Nations homelessness emerged. These themes have been divided into seven subthemes, each explored briefly below:

1. Defining First Nations Homelessness

Definitions and understanding of First Nations homelessness were varied among participants but centered around the idea that First Nations homelessness is often hard to immediately see. Participants frequently shared that in their communities, homelessness was oftentimes invisible. Instead of stereotypical images of people sleeping on the street, homelessness in First Nations communities is something that happens behind closed doors. Participants explained that First Nation people are overrepresented in the homeless population and that much of First Nation homelessness stems from historic and ongoing traumas related to colonization. Some participants also explained that the term "homeless" was inaccurate and hurtful, and a term like "unhoused" would be better.

2. Needs, Considerations, and Challenges to Reducing Homelessness

Focus group participants expressed that in order to help reduce homelessness, there is a need for Indigenous-led programs; an increase in land and building resources on communities; and holistic wrap-around support. On-community, many First Nations face a lack of housing infrastructure, along with limited land to build houses on. Homeless individuals need to be met where they are at by providing wrap-around supports that create long term success.

3. Role of First Nations in Supporting Homeless Members

Participants repeatedly raised concerns about substandard housing conditions on First Nations. Much of the housing stock in First Nations communities is outdated and small, and, in some cases, posing a risk to health and safety of occupants. Participants wanted to see First Nations take an active role in building and maintaining housing stock by training their membership to do so. They also wanted to see First Nations advocate for them on the provincial and federal level and undertake more relationship building.

4. Role of Governments in Reducing Homelessness

Participants highlighted the lack of access to funding as a barrier to addressing homelessness in First Nations communities. First Nations members and advocates called for less restrictive funding requirements, which would enable communities to decide how to allocate funds.

Participants also expressed the need for immediate funding to address the homelessness crisis with urgency.

5. Role of Partnerships in Addressing Homelessness

The largest role of partnerships that surfaced in discussions was the ability to address issues faced by First Nations members living off-community. Partnerships can aid by ensuring that First Nations can be supported by a variety of different organization when off-community. Participants also highlighted how an improved relationship between First Nations, federal and provincial governments, and different charitable funding organizations would make developing wrap-around supports and obtaining funding easier for First Nations.

6. Needs of Community Members with Diverse Identities

Participants articulated a need to understand homelessness as a family issue, as opposed to simply an individual experience. There is also a distinct need for Indigenous-specific shelters for women and gender diverse people and men-specific supports and programming, especially for men who are single fathers. More training and advocacy are also needed to build understanding and empathy to combat the stigma associated with homelessness. Finally, it was articulated many times that there needs to be flexibility in programming and supports in order to "meet people where they are" and tailor care to the specific needs of individuals.

7. Considerations for a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan

Across all the conversations held, topics that should be considered in the Action Plan included three main points:

- The importance of wrap-around supports for First Nations people.
- The need for better and more cohesive funding mechanisms for First Nations and First Nations organizations.
- The need to support existing initiatives taken on by First Nations.

This report also identifies 20 key areas for advocacy to consider for AFN's National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan. These areas for advocacy encompass both short- and long-term steps that can be taken by the federal and provincial governments, service providers, First Nations, businesses, and the AFN to address First Nations homelessness. They are:

1. Funding
    a. Implement specific funding streams for on-community and off-community (urban areas). This includes First Nations specific funding in urban areas as well as reserves.
    b. Provide more funding for First Nations so that they can better meet the needs of their members regarding housing and homelessness.

c. Increase funding for Indigenous run programs and First Nations distinctions-based initiatives so that First Nations can allocate funding based on community priorities and needs.
d. Develop cohesive and harmonized funding mechanisms between, municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal governments.
e. Ensure federal funding can be used flexibly in response to community priorities with minimal restrictions.
f. Develop or implement more flexible funding structures.

2. Land
    a. Reduce the time it takes for land claim processes to be completed.
    b. Reduce the time it takes for First Nations to expand reserve lands, including in urban and rural areas.
    c. Improve and expedite the Additions to Reserve process, especially in urban settings.

3. Services
    a. Increase funding for all homelessness support services including wrap-around services; mental health services; land-based healing services; and/or Elder supports.
    b. Develop accessible services that are flexible to mobile lifestyles; potentially mobile services.
    c. Support wrap-around service delivery across Canada.
    d. Include First Nations that have first-hand knowledge of what it means to be homeless in the development of services and funding criteria.
    e. Seek resources to provide courses and workshops in home care and maintenance for members to maintain the quality of homes.
    f. Conduct more research into First Nations homelessness, both on and off community, to obtain an accurate understanding of who is most affected by it.

4. Infrastructure
    a. Implement timely processes for First Nations to develop necessary infrastructure for housing such as water and sewage lines.
    b. Advocate for infrastructure sharing agreements with regional governments such as counties and municipalities.

    c. Support the development of knowledge and skill transfer for the development of infrastructure within First Nations communities; this could include skills based in construction, maintenance, and administration.

5. Business
    a. Support First Nations communities in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) models for environmentally and socially conscious and responsible businesses.

From the conversations held with First Nations leadership, technicians, and other community support workers across the country, it is clear that First Nations communities face a mountain of obstacles when it comes to supporting their community members. It has also become evident that this is not a new challenge for First Nations communities. First Nations have dealt and continue to deal with colonialism, chronic underfunding, racism, and economic exclusion for decades. First Nations communities are persevering and taking action for their members despite these challenges. It is with great responsibility that governments and organizations must act to address and support First Nations across Canada because every First Nations and Indigenous person within Canada is the embodiment of survival and perseverance against the odds.

INTRODUCTION

This report was developed by Archipel Research and Consulting Inc (Archipel) in response to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Resolution 79/2019, titled "Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve." This resolution directed the AFN to develop a draft National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan in alignment with the Ten Year National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy. The Action Plan will aim to improve the delivery of federal government programs, as well as the related social and fiscal mechanisms, to address First Nations homelessness. The AFN is also working with the federal government to provide recommendations for the First Nations distinctions-based funding stream of *Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy* that will support programs and services addressing First Nations homelessness. The outcomes and recommendations of an Action Plan will be informed by these engagements centering First Nations' needs, priorities, and realities. The goal is to reduce, prevent, and ultimately eliminate First Nations homelessness in alignment with the transition of First Nations housing and infrastructure to First Nations management, control, and care.

To do this, Archipel and the AFN held 15 engagement sessions between January and April 2022. This report shares the findings from these nationwide engagement sessions with First Nations leadership and staff, technicians, and program managers working in homelessness. Data was collected in a way that adheres to the First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP). Archipel and the AFN assert and support the principles of OCAP®.[3]

The objective of the engagement process was to explore and discuss the following:

- A First Nations definition of homelessness informed by First Nations experiences;
- Objectives for a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan;
- Resources or partnerships required to eliminate First Nations homelessness; and
- Ways to support First Nations in developing their own homelessness strategies and initiatives.

Through these engagement sessions, key themes relating to addressing First Nations homelessness emerged. These themes have been divided into seven subthemes:

1. Defining First Nations homelessness;
2. Needs, considerations, and challenges to reducing homelessness;
3. Role of First Nations in supporting homeless members;

[3] More information on the Principles of OCAP can be found here: https://fnigc.ca/

4. Role of governments in reducing homelessness;
5. Role of partnerships in addressing homelessness;
6. Needs of community members with diverse identities; and
7. Considerations for a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan.

This report is organized into sections outlining research methodology, key findings, conclusions, and recommended areas for advocacy.

METHODOLOGY

The project employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured focus groups that placed emphasis on understanding and exploring the experiences of the participants. This design prioritizes Indigenous research methodologies, which highlight the importance of dialogic, iterative, and storied approaches to research. Margaret Kovach's (2021) insights on Indigenous methodologies were vital to this project because they encouraged researchers and participants to develop and co-create knowledge through collaboration and dialogue. This method is part of a larger Indigenous research paradigm that centres reciprocity, responsibility to community, and activism. Research was also guided by the principle of Etuaptmumk (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012), a Mi'kmaq methodology and framework known as Two-Eyed Seeing, which involves employing Indigenous ways of learning and knowing and combining it with the Eurocentric scientific approach and using both together in order to develop a more fulsome understanding of the questions at hand. Engaging in Two-Eyed Seeing is a hybrid approach that allows researchers to combine the values of both Indigenous worldviews and Eurocentric academic principles.

For this project, Archipel and the AFN held 15 engagement sessions between January and April 2022. These nationwide engagement sessions focused on gathering the voices of First Nations leadership and staff, technicians, and program managers working in homelessness. The production of the focus groups was grounded in a "kitchen table talk" style meeting. This style encourages participants to join in a relaxed environment where they are welcome to engage in artistic practices or enjoy a meal while also in discussion. All engagements with participants were undertaken virtually over Zoom.

Participation in all aspects of the project was completely voluntary and subsequent reporting on the focus groups is anonymous. Participants could end their participation at any time and were advised that there were no requirements to directly answer questions – any or all questions could remain unanswered, and participants were encouraged to share any information they felt was relevant to the study. Once the focus groups were completed, participants were provided with a copy of the session notes for their verification and approval, and generally made only minor corrections.

Recruitment

The AFN led recruitment for the engagement sessions. This was done by distributing session information to regional AFN representatives, the AFN's all-chiefs email distribution list and the AFN's general email distribution list. This engagement process aimed to reach three main recruitment groups: (a) First Nations leadership and staff, (b) technicians, and (c) program managers. Most, but not all, participants worked directly in the field of homelessness services.

Part of the goal of ensuring that First Nations leadership and technicians were the primary target groups for the engagement sessions was to have guidance from First Nations political representatives to ensure that AFN's Action Plan allows First Nations to access resources to develop their own strategies and programming related to homelessness, and to access dedicated funding. Professional and employment information was collected from participants to understand the number of leaders, technicians, and other community workers with whom we spoke. Participant are categorized as follows:

i. Leadership: Represent participants that work directly for a First Nation in a leadership role, such as Chief or councillors.
ii. Technicians: Represent participants that work directly for a First Nation but not in a leadership role, such as program delivery, housing management, housing project officers, lands officers, etc.
iii. Community worker: Represents participants that work directly on homelessness issues for First Nations and Indigenous populations but are not directly working for a First Nation. This included workers in First Nations homeless services, expert advisors to First Nations leadership, Executive directors of organizations, policy analysts, municipal representatives, health care providers, directors of funding organizations, First Nations entrepreneurs and other homeless service providers. This category also includes participants that didn't specify their employment information.

In all, we spoke with 124 participants, with 22% (27) identifying as First Nations leadership, 17% (21) identifying as technicians working on community, and 61% (77) identifying as having other employment related to homelessness off-community.

The breakdown of these sessions was based regionally, with the addition of one national session and two sessions (French/English) for those with diverse identities. There was a total of 126 participants in these 15 engagement sessions. The following provides a breakdown of the sessions and their participant numbers:

Session	Number of Participants
Alberta	9
British Columbia	5
Intersectional English	1
Intersectional French	1
Manitoba	8
New Brunswick	10
Newfoundland and Labrador	1
Northern Ontario	15

Nova Scotia	5
Quebec	45
Saskatchewan	4
Southern Ontario	8
Yukon	1
PEI	0
National	13
Total	126

Analysis Protocol

The analysis and preparation of this report are based on Indigenous-specific research methodologies rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemologies) and ways of being (ontologies). The analysis methodology we used to identify the themes included a combination of inductive and deductive coding strategies to best describe and organize the responses of participants regionally. The themes are based on conceptual codes that emerged from the participants' explicit statements and responses to the focus group discussion, as well as other codes rooted in Indigenous ways of being, and existing research on First Nations homelessness. Throughout this coding process, both explicit and implicit dimensions of the participants' personal and community narratives and experiences were captured. The Archipel team for this project comprised of primarily Indigenous researchers and facilitators, the themes were developed through consensus-based decision making of the team. The themes were compiled, analyzed, and explored for each of the 15 focus groups, then synthesized into this report.

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited to the information shared by the participating individuals. The results should be viewed as a partial representation of the full range of perspectives on programs that address First Nations homelessness. Participants did not have to answer any question they declined and could leave the focus groups at any time. Thus, the findings within this study are limited to what participants were able and willing to share. In an effort to protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, the specific names of individuals and organizations were redacted.

The challenge of participation is also a common issue across research projects. In almost all focus groups, registration numbers were much higher than the number of participants who attended. Participants also shared that those who work in the homelessness and housing sector

are often overworked and do not have the time to attend a three-hour engagement session, which could have prevented registrants from attending their focus group or from registering for a focus group altogether. AFN also conducted an online survey that remained open throughout the period during which these sessions were taking place, which may have mitigated this limitation, and reached more people.

KEY FINDINGS

Defining First Nations Homelessness

Invisible Homelessness

Homelessness in First Nations communities is an immense and complex issue. There is no single solution to the housing crisis in First Nations communities and, similarly, there is no single definition of First Nations homelessness. Definitions and understandings of First Nations homelessness were varied among participants but centered around the idea that First Nations homelessness is often hard to see and quantify. Participants frequently shared that in their communities, homelessness is oftentimes invisible, where homeless individuals rely on family or extended family for support. Often it is younger generations that are growing out of their living circumstances that may rely on family. Instead of stereotypical images of people sleeping on the street, homelessness in First Nations communities is something that happens behind closed doors. For many First Nation people, homelessness means couch surfing between different family members' or friends' houses, sometimes on or off community:

> There's a lot of couch surfing and then there's the other side where you may have a youth [who] is growing up and they're in their late teens or early twenties and they want to get out of that environment and go to a new environment, but they can't because there's no housing available. They're not typically seen as a priority because they technically do have a place to live. But a lot of people don't consider that homelessness because they have a place to live but in some instances the environments that they're in they don't want to be in for whatever reason, right? Sometimes it could be toxic. (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "I hear some great ideas from smaller homes for elders, for some other folks. But we need some shelter space. That's what the real demand for [us]. The demographic of [people] who we're seeing homes is startling, quite frankly, it's quite scary. It is the young people 17,18, 19, 20 years old, not because they're addicts. They're not even been using drugs long enough to be called an addict. Because of a social dysfunction in their home or overcrowding, or things of this nature. 'Time to grow up and move on.' Well, where are they going to go? To town? Where they're going to be even worse off than where they are now? Or to their aunties or uncles? This is the system we're playing with in [our community]. Where family welcome them in when they the outgrow [their homes] or they are overcrowded." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

Similarly, participants also identified a key component of First Nations homelessness as being overcrowded homes. Participants explained that oftentimes too many people were forced to live in too small of a house. Issues of overcrowding and substandard housing will be subsequently explored in this report. Participants further noted that since First Nations homelessness was so

often invisible it leads to the underreporting of First Nations homelessness. Finally, several participants noted that First Nation people were disproportionately overrepresented amongst the homeless population, particularly in urban settings, in Canada.

Living on the Land

Living on the land was a theme that was repeatedly raised by participants. Participants shared stories of community members who had been shunned by their communities. Participants explained that this had occurred because of the actions of the person, such as their involvement in drug dealing, or it had happened because of prejudice and discrimination, such as being a member of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. In any case, participants felt that homelessness sometimes looked like community members who were forced to live on the land, in substandard housing conditions, and without access to basic services like plumbing and electricity.

In some cases, First Nations individuals have chosen to live on the land, oftentimes in an effort to reconnect with their culture. One participant shared a story where someone living on the land was denied access to services by a provincial government because living on the land was not seen as a valid form of housing. This individual had recently been released from prison and was trying to reconnect with their culture, land, and traditions by living on the land. They faced significant hardships in trying to access support as they were seen as homeless by their provincial government and, thus, ineligible for some housing and income supports. These anecdotes point to the need to understand First Nations homelessness from a decolonial standpoint that acknowledges the reasons why some people may choose to live the way they do.

Addressing the Legacy of Colonization

Participants shared what they felt were the root causes of First Nations homelessness. The colonial policies of the Government of Canada have resulted in disconnection from land and community support that are essential to solving the homelessness crisis. As participants stated:

> "We have to make the federal government accountable for what they did to us. In the 60s Indian affairs shut down our school and told the community we had to leave or send kids to residential school, or they go into foster care. In the 60s the government made us move, we all lost our homes." (Leadership, British Columbia)
>
> "Homelessness as it relates to Indigenous people also is connected to a disconnection of the land and language." (Community Worker, Alberta)
>
> "Homelessness can mean disconnection to land – being away from family, community and land." (Community Worker, National)
>
> "Indigenous homelessness is not defined as a lack of structure or habitation. Rather, it is fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include individual families and communities isolated from their relationships to

> land, water, place, family, Kin, each other, animals, culture, language, and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or loss of relationships." (Community Worker, Southern Ontario)

For participants, the current characteristics of First Nations homelessness are a direct result of intentional displacement, dispossession, and economic exclusion by historical and current colonial mechanisms. Participants expressed that these are mechanisms that subverted intergenerational prosperity through land theft, and fractured intergenerational well-being through the residential school system.

Alternative Terms to "Homeless"

Finally, some participants took issue with the term "homeless." Participants felt that the term "homeless" was dehumanizing because it implies that an individual without a permanent place to live does not have a home. Many participants felt that the idea of "homelessness" was incongruent with Indigenous ways of being and knowing: "I think of my Kokum, her door was always open, so everyone always had a home" (Community Worker, Alberta). Simply put, "homelessness is not a concept we have inherently" (Community Worker, New Brunswick).

For First Nation people, their home is their traditional territories. They have a home on their land and a place within their communities, even if they do not a have a roof over their head. As participants noted:

> The Nuu-Chah-Nulth never refer to homelessness, all of our people have these lands, people who are not on traditional territories are those living away from home. (Community Worker, British Columbia)

> Within our own concepts, homelessness does not always exist outright. We want to keep our doors unlocked. We want to help each other; it is the way of life we need to reconnect to. (Leadership, New Brunswick)

As such, the term "unhoused" was suggested as an alternative. Given the previously discussed issues concerning couch surfing and overcrowded homes, terms like "housing insecurity" and "precariously housed" were also recommended as alternatives to "homeless." "Houseless" and "sleeping rough" were also terms suggested by participants. As this project is in direct response to AFN's Resolution 79/2019, titled "Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve," this report will continue to use the term "homeless."

In summary, there is no single definition of First Nations homelessness. It is often an invisible issue, with those affected hidden in overcrowded homes, surfing on couches of relatives, and underreported. First Nations homelessness may also look like people living on the land, either by choice or not. These people often lack basic services such as plumbing and electricity or are further denied services because they do not have an address. Moreover, "homelessness" as a term

is not necessarily congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing. Although First Nations individuals may experience housing insecurity, they may still have a home in their territory, community, or Kokum's (Grandmother's) home.

Defining First Nations Homelessness
• No single definition of First Nations homelessness • Homelessness can be invisible: a lot of couch surfing and overcrowded homes • Underreporting of homelessness due to invisibility • First Nation people are overrepresented in the homeless population, particularly in urban settings • Leads to a lot of people living off the land without basic services (plumbing and electricity) • Some people live off the land as a choice to reconnect to culture but are denied services because they are seen as homeless even if it is a choice • Many issues with First Nations homelessness stem from traumas from historic and ongoing colonization • The term "homeless" is incongruent with Indigenous ways of knowing since everyone has a home on territory, in community, or in their Kokum's (Grandmother's) home • Preference for terms such as "housing insecurity" instead of "homelessness"

Needs, Considerations, and Challenges to Reducing Homelessness

The needs of First Nations must be understood in two contexts on-community and off-community needs; supports for on-reserve and in urban areas. This section will outline the needs, considerations, and challenges for reducing and eliminating homelessness in two sections, those on-community and those off-community.

On-Community

Homelessness and houselessness is a growing concern in First Nations communities across Turtle Island; often characterised by knowledge gaps and a lack of communication between communities struggling with the same issues. Many participants expressed that they came to the session to learn from each other about how to best support their members:

> "I'm here because we have a high population of homeless people, in [our] small community. Along with addiction and things like that. Which, I think sometimes go hand and hand. I'm here to get input from our people, hear what you guys have to say and talk about solutions. I'm all about problems but let's come up with solutions."
> (Technician, Northern Ontario)

The reality of some First Nations is that due to the way reserves were created, many communities are isolated from each other, urban hubs, and services. There is a need to develop stronger connections between First Nations to foster knowledge sharing and capacity

development. The engagement sessions for this research offered an opportunity for building connections between First Nations that had not before existed, but continued relationship building would be instrumental for First Nations leadership and technicians addressing homelessness for their members.

Government Funding for on-Community Housing

In almost all the engagement sessions funding support arose as a key point obstructing the creation of homes on-community. The lack of government funding for homes for First Nations hinders the ability of First Nations to provide safe and secure housing for their members.

> "Based on my experience the underlying issue here is funding, not enough money from the feds to build these homes. The funding available is limited. Lack of housing is a contributor to our social conditions. Alcohol abuse. Elders and children are at risk in multigenerational homes where alcohol is abused. Dilapidated conditions due to the amount of people living in the home. Our contractors use cheap materials which wear down, these all contribute to housing insecurity." (Technician, Alberta)

> "We haven't had a new home on our land in maybe 20 years. It's a very sensitive topic. 600 people on the waiting list to get a house based on a points system. If you are married and have kids, you would be higher up on the list. A lot of people are in crowded homes, so they leave, to make a better way for their families. The rent prices are so high that it drives those who left back to the reserve. A single person's welfare funding is $260 – not enough to live on for a month." (Technician, Alberta)

> "First Nations to get capital, [It's] next to impossible. We've had communities that haven't built a house in 10 years because they haven't got the capital, or they don't have the lot development and the site preparation for that. That's millions of dollars and when so much INAC [ISC] money has gone into water systems; expansion hasn't always been a priority. The funding roles through Canada Mortgage and Housing and banks it's not always helpful. One issue that we have raised, [is that] our communities have got to the point to be looking at potentially third-party landlords for in communities for specific groups; there's a housing problem for community members coming into First Nations, especially their remote communities, there's nowhere to stay. So, there's a whole housing spectrum of need. And ultimately capital is probably the biggest challenge to get." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "Indian Affairs [ISC] looks at it as two different things, housing and infrastructure. My argument with senior management was 'Well you build a house, can you build a lane to it, wires too it, pipes to it?' Funding policies need to be changed. Talking about that capital program, that seriously needs to be change, because 1993-94 when they cut back to 2%, growth, that really hurt a lot of First Nations across this country. And they've never gone back to originally where we were." (Leadership, New Brunswick)

The above quotes point to a challenge with multiple layers including chronic underfunding for housing development, land with limited infrastructure to build upon, overcrowding of existing homes, compiled by existing housing that is run down.

Land on Communities

As highlighted above many First Nations face a lack of housing and limited infrastructure. Even when a First Nation has funding for housing, it may be limited by the available land to build upon; with the limits of a reserve creating a growth boundary. As the quote below detail.

> "There's no land left that hasn't been built on. So, because our reserve is only granted so much land and then we have no land left to put houses, but we have way more people than we can fit on this so small piece of land." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "I think one of the major things too is a lack of resources, lack of land. And that leads to the process of communities that are able to purchase their own land. But then there's still that a seven-year process of the ATR (Additions to Reserve) process, which is another barrier, to having resources or the land to build homes to build apartments" (Community Worker, New Brunswick)

As the First Nations populations grow it is increasingly challenging to make available housing on-community. Options for land acquisition or additions to reserve can be slow and cumbersome.

Off-Community

Stigma and Awareness

Outside of community First Nations can face stigma and racism when it comes to securing housing and support. This stigma can be compounded when an individual is experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

> "It's important to consider the stigmas that follow labels can have long lasting effects on people. Current services have very cold western language 'episodically homeless, chronically homeless'" (Community Worker, British Columbia).

> "They feel like there's this stigma behind the homeless. That I'm homeless so therefore I have to be on drugs, therefore I have to be a drinker, in and out of jail, and all these things. And sometimes that's not just true." (Community Worker, Northern Ontario)

> "For people who are poor or addicted, it is going to be more difficult to help them because often time they feel inferior to other people, they feel judged on their actions. The impact is that people will have more difficulties looking for help because it is embarrassing for them to come to the health centers asking for help. Say they don't have a place to live, they can't find a place to clean themselves, they don't have clean clothes. Some of them don't like to go ask for help with their mental health because when they go

> to the center everyone who sees them walking in know what they're here for especially in small communities were everyone knows one another. They end up feeling ashamed." (Leadership, Intersectional French)

As highlighted by the quotes above stigma can impact the ability of First Nations experiencing homelessness to access services. Whether stigma comes from service providers, or it acts as a barrier to asking for support by First Nations themselves it is necessary to address. Therefore, more training and advocacy is needed to build understanding and empathy.

Across the discussions, First Nations members and advocates reflected on the increased difficulty of securing housing due to barriers resulting from racism.

> "When my son went to university, the first couple of years he was on campus, but then [he] rented on his own. He rented with one of his non-Indigenous friends, and I told them, 'Be careful, you're going to face racism.' He came back to me and said, 'I couldn't get anyone to rent to me.' So, they had to go under his non-Indigenous friend." (Community Worker, Alberta)

> "Landlords are not willing to rent to First Nation people." (Community Worker, Alberta)

> "When [landlords] see someone a little darker than them, they get that stigma, and assume all of the things that people assume about Indigenous people sadly." (Community Worker, Northern Ontario)

Due to the competitive housing market, landlords are in a position of power over tenants where landlords can choose to not rent to First Nation people, people on income assistance or families.

> "Landlords have so much power over who they decide to rent to. People on income assistance talk about how they've had to bid for a place, like [pay] extra money outside of security deposits to secure a place. The quality of the homes, they are substandard. Our low-income families are paying super high rents but there is no accountability for landlords to make sure that there is no mold in the house, things like that. That is the health and wellness of our Indigenous children." (Community Worker, English Intersectional)

Education and training should be aimed at decision makers, housing workers, social service support workers, police, and landlords. Training, for example, could include training support for service providers in proper aftercare for someone who has shared a survival story or trauma. Education and advocacy could be more readily be achieved by uplifting the leadership of individuals who have experienced homelessness or who have diverse needs, as they know best what their needs are. For example, they can operate their own services, provide input or guidance on funding allocation and strategies, or act within advisory roles for decision-makers.

To summarize, there is a need for informed, culturally relevant, community-based, trauma-informed, and Indigenous-led programming. Programming that can avoid and address stigma against First Nations people experiencing homelessness. This is especially important as First Nations people who experience housing insecurity often experience racism outside of community, notably from landlords.

Indigenous-led programs

The section above discusses the stigma First Nations people face outside of their communities. Engagement participants expressed that to help reduce stigma and barriers to accessing services, Indigenous-led programs are instrumental. Culturally safe support is not always a priority for non-Indigenous organizations. The quotes below highlight the challenge Indigenous community workers may face offering Indigenous specific support.

> "When I deal with a single mom with 5 kids, and I advocate for this family, I'm accused of favouritism because I am Indigenous. It's not looked upon like doing the role I was hired for. To deliver the kinds of services that are culturally safe and empathetic, you need an Indigenous person. It needs to be delivered, interpreted, and implemented by Indigenous staff." (Community Worker, English Intersectional)

> "Atlohsa, it's Indigenous-led, so having initiatives outside of a First Nation in an urban setting, that is an Indigenous right. I feel like all these conversations come down to the point of safety. We want to make sure that our people in a vulnerable state feel safe to receive services and to express themselves and to be able to find services without judgment. The systemic racism, that's just very fluid in our community." (Community Worker, Southern Ontario)

During one discussion a participant spoke about the success of an assistance program run by their band, which helped off-community members to acquire housing.

> "We have a band member Assistance Program. This is from our own monies, and any federally given dollars from businesses. I have paid damage deposits and the first month's rent. And just that was the only barrier to them. […] I know that we said multiple times that funding is an issue, but we kind of took it into our own hands and took some of our agricultural benefits to support those members in paying for that damage deposit. There is a cap per member, and I know that this will not work for everybody, but it might be a way for the AFN to kind of distribute dollars straight to the First Nations." (Community Worker, Alberta)

Programs off-community that offer support to First Nations people that are culturally safe and can offer services and care that reflects the unique needs of First Nations is essential to combatting stigma.

Needs, Considerations, and Challenges to Reducing Homelessness
• Need for Indigenous-led programming • Need for culturally safe and trauma-informed care for First Nations people experiencing homelessness • Lack of housing infrastructure in First Nations • Lack of land to build new housing infrastructure in First Nations • Need for federal funding to secure and maintain safe housing in First Nations • Need for education and training for off-community service providers to prevent stigma associated with First Nations homelessness

Role of First Nations in Supporting Homeless Members

Housing Supply and Waiting Lists

Focus group participants offered several areas toward which First Nations leadership and government could work to improve housing conditions for their membership, both on and off community. First, participants repeatedly raised concerns about substandard housing conditions on First Nations. Much of the housing stock in First Nations communities is too outdated and small and, in some cases, poses a risk to the health and safety of occupants. Participants outlined the challenges that First Nations face when trying to maintain the quality of housing conditions on community. Funding to build and maintain homes is extremely limited, and it can be very difficult and confusing to obtain adequate funding. Furthermore, the significant rise in the cost of building materials has also made it difficult for communities to build and maintain homes.

Many participants also saw the need to build and maintain housing stock as an important opportunity for First Nations communities. Participants expressed that it would be beneficial for First Nations to set up programs that would train community members to build and maintain homes.

> "If we can train our community members, to have these jobs to build homes, then we're creating employment as well as. It's a double-edged sword attack on homelessness." (Community Worker, Alberta)

> "We need a hybrid training program to address youth homelessness. […] Not just vocational training, but also trying building housing for adults." (Community Worker, Quebec)

The benefits of these plans would be multi-fold. This would work to improve housing stock and quality, while also providing First Nations community members with jobs skills training and employment, as well as help to keep housing and construction revenue within the community. Another participant also noted that this model would help to provide purpose, direction, and hope

to First Nations youth in their communities. Participants also suggested that First Nations offer courses and workshops in house maintenance to avoid having to do larger repairs in the future. Participants also wanted to see First Nations support their community members by providing support for those who may have difficulty with tasks like filling out forms.

Long waiting lists for housing were also raised as a significant issue for community members trying to access housing. One community worker participant noted that even when individuals in need of housing put their name on the list, there is far too long a wait and no guarantee they will ever be given housing at all.

> "We probably have about 600 people on the waiting list to try to get a house." (Community Worker, Alberta)
>
> "In terms of on reserve, I think there also needs to be investments to start to deal with the backlog and long waiting list for housing in some reserves especially." (Community Worker, Saskatchewan)
>
> "When we build to infrastructure, we're building for the immediate needs. When you have a housing list that has 16 families waiting for a home, but when you look at the growth rate that also has to be considered for any funding programs that are developed." (Leadership, Nova Scotia)
>
> "You can't even capture the numbers. Like it's huge. I live on my reserve […] we have a huge waiting list for things like houses and single units." (Community Worker, Manitoba)

The long waiting list was also seen as a deterrent for community members reaching out for help because they did not think they would receive assistance in a timely manner.

Issues surrounding the lack of housing supply, the lack of employment, and isolation from support services often leads First Nation people to leave their communities to try to find housing in urban centres. Issues that plague the housing market, like high and ever-increasing rents, low housing supply, and renovictions are felt more acutely by First Nation peoples.

Culturally Relevant Support

Many of the participants in the focus groups were staff at urban Indigenous homelessness programs who shared the impactful work that they undertake every day. In many cases, these workers are the frontline of services for urban First Nations peoples trying to access support. Being able to provide culturally relevant support to First Nations peoples outside of their communities was seen as a key factor in their ability to access and stay in safe and secure housing. In fact, many spoke of the need to have Indigenous staff in positions that interact with First Nations people. Some non-Indigenous organizations do not take a trauma-informed approach to Indigenous clients, and this makes them unequipped to deal with Indigenous

approaches to mental health. An Indigenous approach to mental health equally values physical, emotional, spiritual, economic well-being, and mental wellness. This is a barrier non-Indigenous organizations can overcome by training staff and developing policies based on trauma-informed approaches. Hiring more Indigenous staff would allow service providers to develop programming that is culturally relevant:

> "It's difficult to implement those kinds of changes into action because there is no equity when it comes to hiring Indigenous people to do those roles. It's through a westernized lens. To deliver the kinds of services that are culturally safe and empathetic, you need an Indigenous person. It needs to be delivered, interpreted, and implemented by Indigenous staff." (Community Worker, Intersectional English)

> "In Medicine Hat, the women's shelter doesn't have any Indigenous staff or trauma informed training, and the co-ed shelter is unsafe for women – we need a by Indigenous for Indigenous women's shelter" (Community Worker, National)

Support and partnership between First Nations communities and urban Indigenous homeless program staff was something that many participants wanted to see. Other participants also wanted to see support for urban First Nations people struggling with housing insecurity by seeing more facilities built for them that are accommodating of a more transient lifestyle, such as from urban to First Nation:

> "What I'd like this group to consider is, that while certainly there is a need for more low-income housing, as it is a nationwide issue. But a lot of transient folks are transient by design. They're traveling to visit different family and a lot of folks don't want to be tied down to a lease necessarily in one community. Medicine Hat will be launching a hostel system, building a new hostel property in Medicine Hat for our transient community. And that's going to be a fantastic solution for folks who maybe don't feel comfortable with the government having their names, and that want to keep moving. Building hostels for folks who are transient by choice would be another method of addressing homelessness." (Community Worker, National)

Advocacy and Relationship Building

Similarly, participants felt that there needs to be more relationship building between First Nations, homeless serving organizations, and/or governments.

> "We need to build those relationships with those with the surrounding nations to find ways to better support the fact that members who are in an urban setting because they're just they're falling through the cracks here." (Community Worker, Alberta)

> "It would be nice if there was more deliberate relationship building with First Nations communities in urban centers. Particularly in Toronto, it would be welcomed." (Technician, Southern Ontario)

> "We need to better relationships with groups and organizations that work directly with homeless people and community members who are experiencing homelessness." (Community Worker, Quebec)

They wanted to see First Nations leadership push governments for systems change at all levels of government.

> "First Nations need to hold the government accountable for coast-to-coast solutions which respect all of the diverse Indigenous communities." (Community Worker, National)

> "Negotiate with government agencies on behalf of communities for funding to be allocated for every nation across Canada as open-ended grants, where communities can decide what they need most." (Leadership, Quebec)

Participants also highlighted the need for more research to be done about homelessness in First Nations communities. Given how many participants shared that First Nations homelessness is often an invisible problem, more needs to be done to identify the issue. Participants expressed that it is difficult as a housing worker to obtain accurate data concerning the numbers and demographics of homeless people both on-community and off-community. Participants explained that it is often a difficult balance to obtain accurate data while respecting the privacy of those experiencing homelessness. Nonetheless, the underlying belief was that First Nations could not respond to the homelessness crisis without an accurate understanding of those who are affected. As participants shared:

> "There is a need to research and gather baseline data, you can't respond unless you know what is going on. Listen to the people who you are serving, keep the data up to date and report back to the community, let them know what is happening with the data." (Community Worker, British Columbia)

> "We don't have a systemic way to document homeless people in our communities. We just put them on the regular housing list with everyone requiring housing or support. We need to identify them and their needs so we can figure out the best way to be supportive. You have to respect privacy as well when you're going to gather information. To advocate within and outside as well. It's hard to argue when you don't know what the actual situation is. It creates problems if you don't know enough about the situation." (Technician, Nova Scotia)

Simply put, you cannot solve a problem that you do not know the extent of. Building trust and relationships with community members around how that data will be used is also of paramount importance. It should be noted that any research conducted in this regard needs to be done in accordance with the OCAP® principle of ownership, which establishes the need for communities to maintain control over any research conducted in their community (FNIGC, n.d.).

In conclusion, there are ongoing issues with substandard housing in First Nations due to inadequate funding for both building and maintaining housing. Waitlists for support and housing are chronic issues, which further deter people experiencing housing insecurity from seeking support. However, an opportunity herein exists to build capacity amongst community members. In order to address housing issues, skill-based training, job creation, and house maintenance, workshops could be part of a solution which further addresses many other issues in First Nations.

Urban-specific issues were also articulated by participants. There is a need for more Indigenous-specific services, culturally relevant supports, and trauma-informed care in urban areas. Partnerships between urban Indigenous organizations and communities could facilitate these improvements. Furthermore, alternatives for transient individuals need to be considered, such as Indigenous-led hostels.

Ultimately, First Nations leadership are being asked to advocate for systemic change at all levels of government: federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal. This advocacy should also focus on an increase in research to create more fulsome data on First Nations homelessness, especially community-specific research to better inform local support services.

Role of First Nations in Supporting Homeless Members
• Issues with substandard housing in First Nations • Inadequate funding to build and maintain housing • Potential capacity building opportunity for First Nations through skills-based training and job creation for First Nations members in home building and maintenance • Provide house maintenance workshops for First Nations members • Waitlists for support and housing in First Nations deters First Nations members from seeking support • Urban-specific issues: needing more Indigenous-specific services, culturally relevant supports, trauma-informed care • Partnerships needed between urban Indigenous organizations and communities • Alternatives for transient individuals such as Indigenous-led hostels • First Nations leadership to advocate for systemic change at all levels of government (federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, etc.) • Need for more research and data on First Nations homelessness, especially research in community about who is experiencing homelessness, to better inform support service workers

Role of Governments in Reducing Homelessness

Urgent Funding

Across conversations, participants highlighted the lack of access to funding as a barrier to improving the homelessness crisis. The government of Canada has departments that are responsible for providing support for the creation and maintenance of on-community housing including Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), which has a mandate of working to improve access to services for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in order to "support and empower Indigenous peoples to independently deliver services and address the socio-economic conditions in their communities" (Government of Canada 2022). A 2019 report by the United Nations to the General Assembly stated that over 25% of First Nation people living on reserves in Canada are navigating issues such as over-crowding and lack of indoor plumbing which contribute to "deplorable conditions" (United Nations General Assembly, 2019). Both a lack of funding and confining allocation criteria are barriers to addressing the numerous socio-economic factors which contribute to homelessness such as lack of access to affordable housing, lack of access to health supports, low incomes that fail to keep up with rising inflation and the disproportionate rates of discrimination faced by First Nations. For First Nations to adequately address the many barriers faced by individual community members, an abundance of resources is needed, as well as the flexibility to address needs and apply solutions which are rooted in the values and realities of each unique First Nation and situation.

During discussions, First Nations members and advocates called for less restrictive funding requirements that would enable communities to decide how to allocate funds. While the government of Canada acknowledges the urgent need of affordable housing for vulnerable people, as is the aim of their Rapid Housing Initiative through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the "red tape" associated with grants can often mean that First Nations are unable to address more dire needs such as housing due to the stipulations of the grants. Additionally, discussions highlighted the need for an efficient flow of funding in order to address the immediate needs of communities. As one participant in the discussion for Northern Ontario stated:

> "The federal government's rapid housing initiative [is] not very rapid with Canada mortgage and housing. But there have been some rapid housing initiatives that can give funding relatively quickly. One of the things of the pandemic we saw how, to be honest communities could get isolation shelters built relatively quickly. And how we could support like factory houses and stuff like that, trying to get businesses to create. Although there's issues in that but still it can be done." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the strain on already overwhelmed First Nations communities and participants expressed they needed more help from the government to address

this. The pandemic impacted the health and safety of First Nations disproportionately as participants highlighted:

> "Due to impacts of homelessness and having multiple people in small homes, we were seeing an increase in COVID numbers due to the close living arrangements. When one person contracted COVID the whole house got it. So, the spread of disease is much quicker in these tighter living spaces." (Technician, Alberta)

> "Homelessness is the lack of having a home a safe place for yourself or your family. And you know, housing insecurity is moving from couch to couch and how does it impact our communities? Well, we have overcrowding with mental health, we have addictions, we have violence, and all of those things have increased substantially due to COVID and the lack of people having a safe place to go." (Community Worker, Alberta)

First Nations members and advocates expressed the need for immediate funding to address the homelessness crisis with urgency, a crisis that has been worsened by the adverse effects of the pandemic. The highest rate of persons experiencing low-income are in on-reserve populations in Canada (Statistics Canada 2021). As participants from the Northern Ontario session highlighted, they were experiencing a state of emergency before COVID-19. The rapid rollout of emergency aid made available widely due to the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore that in crisis, the Canadian government is capable of rapidly distributing funds to individuals and communities with relatively low barriers.

> "During COVID some communities depending on the relationship with ISC did manage actually to get funding rapidly for crisis COVID response. So, it can be done relatively flexible. We may manage to get funding that could carry over from one year to the next, which used to be impossible. I think it's not impossible for government to work rapidly. Sometimes it actually is more efficient how when they do that instead of all the various accountability mechanisms they put in place. So, I think there have been precedent that it be done." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

Participants also voiced their concerns over an intentional lack of funding, citing the ongoing legacy of colonialism in Canada, with one participant stating:

> "I really believe that the lack of funding homelessness, is an intentional tactic of the government to keep us under a perpetual state of paternalism. We'll take care of you in a sentence when we talk about funding. The funding that parents should be getting to support (their children) because they're living in poverty... CFS ends up paying other people more money to take care of our children, then if they would have just given it to the family to begin with, so if I can say anything, it would be that this is not a chance or, you know, it's just how things worked out. I think this is an intentional tactic to keep us in a state." (Technician, Alberta)

Land Claims and Acquisition

Participants expressed that the process of acquiring land through land claims is far too slow, which is a barrier to creating more housing. Participants linked advocating for more expedient processes to add land to reserves to the activism surrounding the Land Back movement.

> "I think one of the major things too is a lack of resources, lack of land. And then but that that leads to the process of, you know, the communities that are able to purchase their own land. But then there's a, there's still that, you know, a seven-year process of the, the ATR process, which is another barrier, to having resources or the land to build homes to build apartments. I think that's something to consider in this too, as well as is, you know, the bureaucratic processes that really hold back our communities to making change, and really just changing timelines on how fast they can react to situations that benefit the communities." (Community Member, New Brunswick)

Additionally, once land is acquired, there are other bureaucratic barriers which First Nations must navigate in order to begin building housing.

> "I just wanted to say with the land use planning, I think that's important. We've been pushing it out at transportation tables, and they're saying, it starts with land use, I really agree with the previous speaker that talked about land use planning, and also the, you know, a lot of the subdivisions that takes the Indigenous Service Canada a long time to work with us to plan subdivisions for adequate housing and infrastructure." (Leadership, Manitoba)

The housing crisis is maintained through colonial policies that limit the ability of First Nations to adequately support members who are seeking out better housing.

> "They want control. So, they want to know what you're doing how you're doing it. And exactly when you're going to be doing it how long it's going to take him what the funding requirements are going to be for that. And if you want to spend that money, we want to see every money every dollar that's spent, and it's that control piece, there's no flexibility, there's no nothing. So rather than give funding over to a First Nation, and say you know what here's you go builds your shelter how you want to do what you like. And really that's what it should be because our communities have the capacity to take care of ourselves. We don't, we shouldn't have to have that control but that's that colonial system." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "It's time to make some steps towards actually fixing this problem. Colonialism is a big problem, that's what happened those are that that's the structural issue. But the reality is the government's not going to change that, so how do we?" (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "Homelessness is a symptom of colonialism; the rest of Canada has been getting rich on the backs of Indigenous people" (Leadership [Knowledge Keeper], National)
>
> "The lack of funding is an intentional action by the government to keep us under a paternalistic rule, and to keep us dependent." (Community Worker, Alberta)

Homelessness is a symptom of colonialism. This means that there is a need for programming that connects people to land and community, especially as housing insecurity faced by First Nations individuals is often a result of displacement, economic exclusion, and intergenerational trauma. As such, governments need to increase and provide more flexible funding, and this funding needs to be provided in a timely manner. There is urgency to this issue, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Seeing how COVID-19 supports were readily accessible throughout the pandemic, supports for First Nations homelessness should be delivered with similar urgency. Furthermore, processes to add land to reserves must be improved, and bureaucratic barriers once land is acquired must be addressed. Lastly, supports must account for the needs of First Nations individuals with diverse experiences, and must provide safe spaces for those experiencing housing insecurity, especially as many have experienced tensions and racism from landlords.

Affordable Housing and Addressing Discrimination in the Housing Market

In Canada the responsibility for housing is shared between all three levels of government. Federally, there are protections for First Nations against discrimination in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *National Housing Strategy Act.* Both the Act and the Charter contain protections for the right to non-discrimination. There are additional protections contained in provincial and territorial housing codes and tenant acts, as well as municipal ones.

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 it protects those seeking housing from discrimination based on their identity and other factors such as place of birth and family status. The Act defines adequate housing as that which,

> *"Provides secure tenure (protection from arbitrary eviction, forced relocation or harassment); is affordable (housing costs should not be a barrier to meeting other basic needs, such as food); is habitable (safe, healthy, in good repair, and with adequate space for the inhabitants and protection from the elements); provides access to basic services, including safe drinking water, sanitation, heating, lighting and emergency services; is in a location that is safe and close to employment and basic social services such as child care, education and health care; is accessible for people of all abilities, particularly those experiencing discrimination or living in vulnerable circumstances; and is culturally appropriate (respects and is appropriate for the expression of the inhabitants' cultural identity)"* (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Across discussions, discrimination when acquiring housing arose as a principal impediment to obtaining and retaining housing. Participants widely expressed the need for increased access to services that support acquiring and maintaining housing. Furthermore, participants spoke to the need for increased enforcement of existing protections against discrimination when acquiring housing.

Although there are various protections in place to safeguard First Nations against discrimination in the housing market, the lived experiences of participants highlighted the shortcomings in housing policy and their effects on First Nations.

> "I've heard a lot of single moms have landlords not rent to them because they're single mothers on income assistance and because they don't have a spouse, or they're not married." (Community Worker, Intersectional English)

> "When my son went to university, the first couple of years he was on campus, but then he went to rent on his own. He rented with one of his non-Indigenous friends, and I told them, you know, be careful, you're going to face racism. And he came back to me, and he said, I couldn't get anyone to rent to me. So, they had to go under his non-Indigenous friend. And so that's where the rent renter person is, is under his friend." (Community Worker, Alberta)

Even once a person has secured housing, tensions between landlords and tenants can create housing insecurity.

> "There is a lot of conflict between tenants and landlords. The tenants are getting removed eventually. If there were more services in place to mediate these landlord-tenant relationships, that would help." (Technician, Yukon)

Although there are mediation mechanisms in place to help remedy conflicts between tenants and landlords and laws in place to prevent unjustified evictions, First Nations can still experience difficulties in acquiring and retaining housing.

Even with the Act enshrining access to affordable housing as a human right, there are First Nations who do not have access due to the lack of affordable housing. As one participant stated,

> "A lot of people are trying to find housing, trying to find affordable housing. We need more affordable housing, and we need agencies that are more empathetic to the situation of the, [people] below the poverty [line], those social services, more and more rent money so we can find housing." (Community Worker, Saskatchewan)

As another participant stated that the high cost of rent led to housing insecurity which can cause First Nations people to have to move back to their communities.

> "Right now, rent is horrendous, so then they go back to the reserves. So, it's a revolving door." (Community Worker, Alberta)

> "We actually have right now a lot of adult children living with their parents who have homes in the community. And more so because there are no other homes. It's not a choice. It's the only place they have to live in. And we also have to look at that part of homelessness too." (Leadership, Southern Ontario)

First Nations looking for assistance in mediating disputes can utilize landlord-tenant bodies in the province or municipality where they reside or submit a case to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Ultimately, there is a need for dispute resolution mechanisms which are better equipped to address the needs of First Nations. Although there are Charter protections and protections in the *National Housing Strategy Act* against discrimination, as well as numerous provincial bodies regulating lawful interactions between those seeking housing and landlords, there is a clear gap with regards to the intent of these bodies and the experiences of First Nations. This fact necessitates improvements to the implementation of regulated landlord-tenant mechanisms that address explicit and implicit biases held by people and institutions, as they are essential to creating a housing market that is inclusive and can adequately address the needs of First Nations.

Role of Government in Reducing Homelessness
• Homelessness is a symptom of colonialism • Need for increased and more flexible government funding for First Nations • COVID-19 specific supports • Urgent need for immediate funding and a response that is as readily accessible as COVID-19 relief funds were • Need for improved and more expedient Additions to Reserve processes • Need to alleviate bureaucratic barriers once land is acquired • Need for improved landlord-tenant dispute resolution mechanisms which address institutional racism

Role of Partnerships in Addressing Homelessness

Support for Off-Community First Nations People

Participants identified the benefits of partnerships that can be built to address homelessness, as well as barriers to developing these partnerships. In this context, partnerships refer to relationships between First Nations, off-community service providers, and federal and provincial government ministries. The most prominent role of partnerships that surfaced in discussions was the ability to address issues faced by First Nations members living off-community who are unable to access culturally relevant housing and social service supports that address diverse identity factors in service delivery. One participant explained this role, saying:

> "Hopefully if a lot of these partnerships get formalized, it does provide a membership for people to move seamlessly to get access to services. People accessing services is the problem. It closes the gap for those who didn't have access to off reserve funding. We should have access to services just like everyone else." (Community Worker, Nova Scotia)

Partnerships between First Nations and off-community service providers that provide support for First Nation people experiencing homelessness help to address the gaps faced by members living away from their First Nation. These partnerships will also be able to help address gaps faced by non-status community members who may still be regarded as community members or kin but unable to access band-allocated funding and programing. These gaps are a part of the legacy of colonization that band councils may be unable to address due to outside/imposed policies (such as the Indian Act and blood quantum requirements to be an eligible band member). One participant emphasized the importance of ensuring access to non-status First Nations members, stating:

> "There are a lot of children growing up on reserve who are community members but not band members. In 10 years, that is going to be a huge issue in some of our communities. It gets to a point where it will be difficult to determine, there are a lot of new people in the communities who are Indigenous. There has to be some type of ownership or program for them. There is potential for split in citizenship. I can remember years ago heated debates about eligible beneficiaries, it was horrible at the AFN level, and at the tribal council and community levels to try to deal with that stuff. If that issue comes up again, it will be hard to deal with." (Community Worker, Nova Scotia)

Partnerships between First Nations and off-community service providers can help address the needs of non-status First Nation people that may not be eligible for band-allocated funds. This is because these partnerships allow non-status First Nation people to access support services, like homeless shelters and social services, that are not specifically allocated for members of a First Nation. While this issue may not fall directly within the purview of AFN's Homelessness Action Plan, it is included because it was a concern that was raised by multiple participants.

Wrap-Around Supports

Another role of partnerships brought up in discussions is how a relationship between federal and provincial ministries and service providers would make developing wrap-around funding easier for communities. This type of partnership would also allow for funding to be allocated on a case-by-case basis. The benefits of this type of partnership, and the wide-reaching impacts it would have, were summed up by one participant who explained the need for this relationship, saying:

> "I just wanted to say that what's happening out with multiple ministries, if you can't get housing from one if you then mix it with you know a mental or addiction or other social

needs, you can pull in different ministries from both Federal and provincial governments that they each put a little into that pot and then you partner up with foundations, and not for profits that are out there that are prepared to put money in as well" (Community Worker, Northern Ontario).

Throughout discussions, participants also addressed barriers and limitations to partnerships with other organizations. One of the greatest barriers identified is the ongoing inequity when accessing resources and funding. This inequity creates a power dynamic between First Nations communities and non-First Nations service providers and governments that makes meaningful partnerships difficult to foster. In short, many participants felt that governments and non-Indigenous service providers always had the upper hand over First Nations. The issue of inequity was further explained by one participant, saying:

> "When you're looking at the concept of partnerships, one of the challenges that we face, and it extends into all of the support services, for example, and everything else. There is an inequity. There is a significant inequity that results in a lack of capacity and resources. That results in an inability to form a true partnership. Because true partnership is individuals, organizations, or entities coming together cooperatively. What I see a lot of times are First Nations having to put their hand out for the government to come and give money and project-based funding, a lot of it, instead of having adequate resourcing in place to be able to develop partnerships." (Unspecified, Saskatchewan)

The participant felt that the lack of resources and capacity described in this quotation were as a direct result of the unequal power dynamic between First Nations and governments and non-First Nation service providers. This unequal power dynamic hindered the ability of First Nations to build meaningful relationships with governments and non-First Nation service providers.

Support for Remote Communities

Participants also addressed the barriers that remote communities face trying to engage in partnerships and how services from partners might only be accessible to members who have relocated to areas closer to urban centers. One participant noted these barriers and how the matter of relocation applies to both remote communities and communities close to urban centres, pointing to the need to develop more partnerships that benefit remote and rural areas:

> "Our community is located in the middle of a municipality. We have more resources than communities who are more remote. We do have a shelter in town, but people still like to be in their home community and with their family instead of being off reserve." (Technician, Nova Scotia)

This barrier is further compounded by the fact that there will be community members who do not want to leave their traditional territories and would rather be homeless on-community than have to access shelter and services away from home. In short, First Nations people experiencing

homelessness are forced to choose between remaining homeless on their traditional territory or leaving their families and communities to try to access support in urban areas. Therefore, a coordinated effort must be undertaken by government agencies and departments at all levels in order to holistically address the issue of First Nations homelessness. Partnerships must also be developed in rural and remote areas, as these areas are often isolated from other service providers. However, these partnerships must be inclusive of those who do not live in community or on reserve, and who are non-status through purposeful engagement between First Nations, governments, and urban and rural service providers, both First Nations and non-First Nations. Lastly, partnerships must be created with equity in mind, as there is often a power differential between First Nations and governments and non-First Nations service providers. First Nations require the resources to fully and meaningfully engage in partnerships with governments and non-First Nations service providers.

Role of Partnerships in Addressing Homelessness
• Partnerships are especially important for non-status First Nations people or First Nations members who are off-reserve or living away from their First Nation because they provide support when they may not be able to access support from the community • More coordination is required between levels of government, agencies, and departments • There is a need for governments and agencies to foster equitable partnerships with First Nations organizations • More direct partnerships between First Nations, governments, and service providers are required, particularly for those in rural and remote regions

Needs of Community Members with Diverse Identities

Understanding Homelessness as a Family Issue

Participants articulated a need to understand homelessness as a family issue as opposed to simply something experienced by an individual. For example, there is a distinct need for supports for single fathers. Participants felt that there was not sufficient funding specifically for Indigenous single fathers experiencing homelessness.

> "One group we found that experienced difficulties finding accommodations was homeless men with children. […] No one that I know of will take men with children, and so fathers are having losing their children because they don't have a proper place to stay." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "There's not a lot of services for single dads in the city. So, it seems like they're falling through the cracks because we do see single dads come through here and there's not a lot for them." (Technician, Alberta)

Single mothers are similarly vulnerable. In addition to shelter, daycare supports are especially important for people with children. Furthermore, family reunification programs and efforts also need to be included in a First Nations homelessness strategy.

> "In our women's house, we made sure from day one to negotiate, not negotiate but advocate, for from BC housing that we also had a site where there could be family reunification. Because having a house filled of women, many of them fleeing violence, I really believe that where the healing comes and where the support comes is when they can be reunited with their children." (Community Worker, British Columbia)

Parents experiencing housing insecurity are vulnerable to losing their children to child welfare services. These children are consequently vulnerable to living in precarious housing situations. "An alarming 70.5% of Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness have been involved with child protection services" (Gaetz et al, 2016). These realities need to be deeply considered and addressed in a First Nations homelessness strategy. Lastly, there needs to be an increase in elderly supports, as older generations often take in young generations who are experiencing homelessness:

> "There are so many shelters that support that give support for women and children. No one, I don't know anyways, will take men with children. So, fathers are losing their children because they don't have a proper place to stay. And whatever circumstances they got there that isn't an issue so much so that our social services group Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin has had to turn down money or applications from governments because they won't support Indigenous fathers with their children." (Community Worker, Northern Ontario)

> "Homelessness is very often linked with social context and family context and poverty. What I often witness are elderly people who are poor who will take in their children, grandchildren and even their great-grandchildren for two weeks or three months at a time." (Leadership, Intersectional French)

Gender-Specific Needs

As mentioned above, there is a distinct need for men-specific supports and programming, especially for those who are single fathers. Furthermore, there is a need for Indigenous-specific women's shelters. Although being First Nations does not limit First Nations women from seeking more broad resources aimed at women, First Nations women may not utilize the resources due to stigma, racism, or a lack of programming that is culturally relevant. Programming that uplifts and encourages women is especially important, as "many are raised to

believe we are less than" (Community Worker [Knowledge Keeper] British Columbia). Lastly, there needs to be dedicated services for the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. There is a distinct need for building safety for the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, which could equate to 2SLGBTQQIA+-specific shelters or education programs. There is a general lack of education and awareness on 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Therefore, more training and advocacy for housing workers and decision-makers on the lived-reality of 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals could alleviate misinformation, decrease stigma, and ultimately create safer environments for this community.

Meeting People Where They Are

It was articulated many times in focus groups that there needs to be flexibility in programming and supports in order to "meet people where they are" and tailor care to the specific needs of individuals. From an accessibility standpoint, this means building shelters with accessibility in mind. This could look like adaptable housing for seniors or individuals with disabilities (for example, ramps, wider doors, lower countertop height). From a harm reduction standpoint, this means creating safe spaces where people can fully disclose their situations. There should be designated houses for emergency purposes, for example, for those fleeing domestic violence. As one participant shared:

> "We need women's shelters. We need men's shelters. We need [2SLGBTQQIA+] homeless services. We need folks who are using to have safe places to go. aside from [safe consumption sites.] They need a place to sleep. We had a woman here in Edmonton who died in a garbage can because she didn't want to go to the shelter, and she lit her cigarette in the bin, and she didn't come out of that bin. My sister didn't deserve to die like that." (Alberta)

There should be wet shelters as a way to temporarily house those who are self-medicating. These harm-reduction methods can prevent deaths and raise the overall quality of life for those who are experiencing homelessness. The idea of harm reduction was discussed in several focus groups:

> "We've developed something called a dual model of housing care with the colonized harm reduction practice, and it's our way of looking at how to not only help to transition people in but really to provide a role that isn't there and support around develop not developing but strengthening their Indigenous selves again." (Community Worker, British Columbia)

> "We use a trauma-informed approach and follow harm reduction philosophy. I love that because many Indigenous people have been there already, a lot of social determinants of health have already been placed on us." (Community Worker, Manitoba)

> "Topics like harm reduction topics like mental health, what things like that will need to be considered, and how will they need to be included in an action plan to make it successful?" (Community Worker, Southern Ontario)

Participants expressed that social service workers, administrators, and decision makers need to understand the reality of individuals more deeply with diverse identities. A deeper understanding can most simply be built by speaking with individuals, with one participant stating:

> "Stop writing proposals for people that you know nothing about, you don't walk in their shoes. Just ask them. They are not handicapped to the point where they cannot say what they need. Just accepting them for who they are, they have different need, and they can tell them ourselves." (Technician, Quebec)

Lastly, language needs to be considered in housing supports. Supports may be needed in First Nations languages, or for example, for Anglophones living in Quebec. Applications and paperwork also need to be approached in an accessible manner, recognizing the education level, mother tongue, and cognitive abilities of those they aim to support.

Therefore, First Nations homelessness must also be seen through the lens of those with diverse identities. Supports for single fathers and mothers, and older generations who often take in younger family members, must be prioritized. Furthermore, supports and safe spaces that are responsive to the needs of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are needed. As such, there must be flexibility in programming, tailoring to the specific needs of individuals. Specific supports include safe spaces, operating from a harm reduction standpoint, wet shelters, and supports available in multiple languages.

Needs of Community Members with Diverse Identities
• Homelessness is a family issue • Need for supports for single fathers, single mothers, 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, and older generations • Need to consider children whose parents are experiencing housing insecurity • Flexibility in programming that is tailored to the specific needs of individuals • Need for safe spaces, work done through a harm reduction standpoint, wet shelters, and supports available in multiple languages

Considerations for a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan

Wrap-Around Supports

Across all the conversations held, the concept of wrap-around supports for First Nations peoples surfaced. At its core, wrap-around supports are a family- or person-specific plan developed and coordinated between multiple organizations. Wrap-around support utilizes the strengths of multiple different organizations to holistically support a person or family (The Homeless Hub

2021). From coast to coast, First Nations advocated that there needs to be a more holistic understanding of how to address homelessness.

> "People are facing a lot of trauma that has broken their spirit, there is a need for holistic healing." (Community Worker, National)
>
> "At least from what we're hearing all the data seems to point to more wrap-around and holistic supports for individuals, for if it's Elders or others that have other challenges. I know our Chiefs have said they were looking for a homelessness strategy that would look at that type of holistic support for individuals. It is a challenge both in an urban setting or in a rural, or in a First Nation setting." (Community Worker, Northern Ontario)
>
> "Moving forward, we need to think outside of the box, we need to think holistically. So many of these issues are interconnected and the approach that's being taken right now, clearly isn't working. This is the exact kind of input we need to change the policy to make those holistic changes." (Community Worker, Manitoba)

Holistic supports were seen as important because homelessness, and the factors that contribute to it, are complex and multifaceted. The concept of wrap-around support was not the same in every group. Facets of wrap-around supports that were discussed included:

- culturally supportive housing
- Elders in residence
- Indigenous doctors
- clinical counselors
- therapeutic gardens
- spiritual baths
- land-based healing
- support of reconnection to culture creating a sense of purpose and belonging
- relationship building in First Nations
- support of mobility of people in and away from their First Nation
- family reunification
- assistance getting birth certificate status cards
- mental health supports
- addictions support
- employment supports
- education (budgeting, establishing a life after being in institutions)
- basic life skills such as how to maintain housing and manage finances
- support to overcome language barriers

First Nations members and advocates saw that wrap-around supports were necessary to address the many different factors that can help or hinder a person on their journey to attain secure and sustainable housing. The quotations below detail this perspective:

> "Wrap around support services for individuals and their families. People struggling with other issues, you have to provide the right mix of services to support and move [them] in the right path. People keep mentioning resources and funding and it is essential, the big challenge is trying to provide people who are homeless with a transition out of homelessness to a safe place to live, and then to somewhere to live more permanently. They are trapped unless they get out of that situation and on a better path […] The housing piece is only one piece of the problem." (Community Worker, Nova Scotia)

> "We need to understand how people become homeless in the 21st century. We need to really listen to what they need and what they want. Otherwise, the interventions aren't going to work. Just building [housing] stock is not the whole solution; it's creating those social relationships. It's listening to and validating their stories… the first reaction, is 'We'll house you the way that we house ourselves.'" (Community Worker [Knowledge Keeper], Manitoba)

> "We can't just find housing for everybody and think that they're going to stay in housing, and you know we're going to prevent homelessness. I think that homelessness is always going to be there. The issue is that we need to address their current situation. So, if they need help whether it's mental health addictions whatever it is, we need to address that so that we can help them get into housing and stay in housing." (Technician, Quebec)

The need for wrap-around services speaks to a related issue of disconnection between different supports and service providers, where homeless and vulnerable people can slip through the cracks between support systems. These systems could include health care, housing, and service delivery, programs both First Nations delivered and not. One participant from the Southern Ontario discussion highlighted the gap that exists between health care providers and housing support:

> "When I have Indigenous patients experiencing homelessness come into the hospital, I can get them on every list and set up with all the resources I have available to me. I'm very lucky that I have hacks that I can refer people out to but almost 100% of the time, if there are no family members to step up, I'm discharging these patients to a shelter or to the streets. That is because there is a lack of any other option; I simply have nowhere else to refer them to. So, we just get them as well connected as we can. It's painful again and again to have patients coming in who are sick and we get them well and [then] we put them back in the same situations that brought them to us in the first place. The government has to do better. We have to do better. Our community members are dying." (Technician, Southern Ontario)

Funding Mechanisms and Structures

The disconnection between service providers, communities, and families could be symptomatic of another topic that arose consistently in the discussions with First Nations representatives: restrictive, prescriptive, and siloed funding mechanisms. Participants spoke about how certain funding mechanisms can impose unnecessary and restrictive limitations on how housing and social programs operate, both on and off-community. For example, in some cases, these funding mechanisms may restrict who can be served by a program, or the types of housing that can be built. They can also impose limitations on the scope of a project, or present jurisdictional challenges. With regards to limiting the types of people that can be served through funding, one technician stated:

> "[Here] there's women shelters and there's shelters for women and children but there's nothing for men. Because when you look at all the funding priorities it's all for, (and I mean I can understand why) [the] prevention [of] domestic violence … In our area where you're trying to access a shelter and say somebody doesn't have any place to go because they're homeless and the response I've gotten sometimes is "oh, well, we don't deal with homelessness, we deal with people fleeing violence." And I'm like but this is a shelter, but that's their funding requirements." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

The above participant went into detail about how funding restrictions can be as specific as to the types of violence a person must experience to access shelter. Highlighting an incident where an individual seeking shelter due to violence experienced while sleeping on the street was not accepted to a shelter as the violence they were experiencing was not considered domestic violence. Technicians working for their community highlighted how funding directed at specific homeless demographics or situations (women or persons fleeing domestic violence) created a support services environment where homeless individuals were turned away from shelters. Either community workers had to turn away people seeking shelter, or technicians could not find adequate services for their members due to not meeting the criteria of funders.

Further prescriptive funding can impact the types of homes that can be built within a First Nation. One community leader discussed the preference for family housing as opposed to other types of homes:

> "[Other participant] was also speaking on this where they're [prioritizing] single mothers or families. I think that is an issue especially based in our community when we talk about lack of housing. It is more geared towards family housing. Which are very important, but it kind of also sets it up that no one else is important. Not that anyone thinks that, but it just creates that overcrowding. [It] comes from the lack of small apartments for rent. What kind of homes are being funded by agencies that we can access funding through? Where are their priorities? […] So, in our community we've built quite a few new Elders'

homes. So, it's like we're addressing these concerns one by one but there's just so many of them I guess." (Leadership, Northern Ontario)

One participant highlighted how funding mechanisms define a specific scope of the way that money can be used without consultation of communities. As a result, it inherently fails to adequately support communities.

> "This [restrictive funding] comes right from the funders. I think what they like to do is they [ask] 'What is the problem? Okay, here is the problem. So then, we're going to fix [that] problem. We're going to address this problem," and they leave it at that. They don't really look, 'how about we just provide shelter for this First Nation or for these First Nations in this area?' We'll put it at this central location, and we'll provide shelter, and we'll address this homelessness. That's not what they do. I think the other piece is very colonial. They want control. They want to know what you're doing how you're doing it, and exactly when you're going to be doing it […] and if you want to spend that money, we want to see [how] every dollar that's spent. It's that control piece. There's no flexibility. So rather than give funding over to a First Nation, and say, 'Here, you build a shelter how you want' [they control everything]. But that's how it should be, because our communities have the capacity to take care of ourselves. We shouldn't have to have that control but that's that colonial system. That's the […] biggest problem." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

First Nations are working to find the funding to support their programs and members both on and off community. This can mean searching for funding wherever available. Given that under the Indian Act, funding for health and social services on First Nations reserves falls under federal jurisdiction, First Nations can be sidelined or excluded due to jurisdictional barriers, restrictive federal funding formulas, and disparities in available funding on- and off-reserve. As the below quotes detail, collaboration between different levels of government and the removal of jurisdictional barriers would be useful to address funding gaps that may exist.

> "When we asked Indigenous services ourselves, they would say no, right off the bat. So, we try going to the province, and they wouldn't even listen to us. We even tried using our local MLA, because we do vote in provincial elections, but we get no provincial support. When I was looking for a place off reserve, I can't get help from my community because either [I'm] in the wrong side of politics or band is so bad, it's so backed up in debt, you can't help anybody. Especially an individual. Collaboration would be nice from province as well, some sort of programs that they offer. For like, they have a housing program and NB housing in New Brunswick. And you pay rent based on your income, but it's difficult for First Nations to access that program because they tell us you know, 'Go back to your reserve'." (Unspecified, New Brunswick)

Another participant from Northern Ontario echoed concerns about funders failing to collaborate with each other and offer flexible funding to First Nations.

> "One of the things I would say for the Federal Government, actually two things. [One is coordination] that's the biggest thing. Often, we've been trying to get the Federal funding and sometimes get provincial funding. Trying to get all those funders aligned, and to speak with one voice and to work collaboratively together: that's probably one of the biggest issues […] And I guess [second] is flexibility to go to the bank and get external financing. CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] and other funders don't make it easy for you to get alternative financing. So, it's flexibility is probably the biggest and the ability to work together as a team. Those are 2 recommendations." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

Another limiting factor that influences the availability of resources for First Nations is the federal funding formulas that determine how funding is designated to communities. As one participant stated:

> "Another factor that plays in is, you know, current funding structures that communities are that have access to where have had access to, it's really based, you know, based on per capita, and this model has been around for, you know, a lot like I don't even know how long it's been around. So, you know, when a community is getting based on per capita, it really limits their resources to build a community, grow their community create opportunities, which then does allow them to have that own source revenue" (Community Worker, New Brunswick)

Lastly one participant highlighted their concerns with Section 95 of the National Housing Act, where it can require First Nations to offer up collateral for receiving loans to build homes with CMHC. This participant viewed Section 95 and the possible repercussions of that act as risky for First Nations.

> "One thing I don't hear is just in regard to the treaty rights, and section 95 as it pertains to funding initiatives and things like that on reserve. Having to go through loans and processes like that, First Nations reserves have never had to go through before. Then, having to jump, through those hoops as it pertains to certification in regard to infrastructure and all those pieces, right? […]
>
> I know that Section 95 is a huge issue in and of itself, and just to get affordable housing materials and supplies into the Northern communities as it is. And then not to even mention just the funding component pieces of how that's even going to work. Because a lot of reserves are having to put up collateral so that they can even receive those CMHC funding component pieces. And that puts First Nations communities at risk when you have to go through those processes, and you have loans and mortgages 25, 35 years long.

> That would be a great area for advocacy as well in regard to AFN because that's where a lot of the problems already start in regard to those treaty conversations, whether it's an inherent right" (Community Worker, Saskatchewan)

This aspect of Section 95 of the National Housing Act was highlighted just once from all of the conversations held. Although it wasn't spoken about frequently the impacts of it deserve attention and deeper understanding of how this might impact treaty rights.

First Nations leadership, technicians, and community support workers repeatedly expressed frustration with the restrictive, prescriptive, and siloed funding mechanisms that hinder their ability to support their members.

Possible Solutions

Participants spoke to the need to develop distinct funding streams for First Nations people both on community and off community, as one participant detailed:

> "One thing to recommend for the AFN is to see if they, in their lobbying […] I think there needs to be an urban Indigenous distinct housing program and strategy, but equally on reserve as well. Because we were able to get some funding from the district social services board which is obviously from the province and the municipality. First Nations don't have access to a district social services board or that type of provincial funding that we could get relatively quickly. So, I think there needs to be a distinct on reserve and a distinct off reserve pots. Because each of them has needs and I wouldn't want to see a competition between them. So, I think there needs to be distinct [funding sources]. And certainly, the flexibility and rapid [delivery]." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

Distinct funding streams were seen as a necessary path to ensure that all First Nations are supported. One of the main reasons that participants raise the need for distinct funding streams was due to the reality that First Nations are not able to apply for funding from district social service boards or provincial funding and are entirely left out of municipal funding schemes, which include services that can offer funding more rapidly than other federal programs.

Another solution suggested to address funding gaps included an allocated percentage of funding that is given to Indigenous organizations

> "We started a working relationship with our municipality, the City of Toronto, and we've developed protocols with them. We developed a relationship document called *Meeting in the Middle.*[4] So, we just have [had] a horrible working relationship in the past and very adversarial. But since we [Indigenous Organizations and City of Toronto] came together

[4] Citation in references

> and worked on in relationship, things have improved. We make sure that 20% of the homelessness funding from the city is allocated to Indigenous organizations so that we have an equitable shot of being successful in our proposals." (Community Worker, Southern Ontario)

Coordinated funding between municipalities and provinces was highlighted as a way to ensure that funding to address homelessness is offered in an equitable way.

Beyond government funding, one suggestion that was made was to involve socially and environmentally conscious companies in the realm of supporting First Nations. One recommendation that was shared was using corporate standards such as environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG). It was stated:

> "There is a dramatic shift under ESG compliance and governance now. And I think that the time is right to try to hit not only corporate Canada, but also philanthropic organizations that are there and have money to help. You look at Laurentian Bank for example, it's part of their mandate now that they're only investing in ESG compliant businesses. So, part of the ESG off course, which is sustainability and responsibility could include helping to build housing projects." (Community Worker, Northern Ontario)

First Nations leadership and technicians wanted solutions that could be sustainable and avoid creating or deepening existing dependency on government funding. Due to housing conditions or the lack of housing in First Nations communities, many community members leave to find economic opportunities elsewhere. Participants expressed a desire to develop skills within their communities to foster economic growth within communities. One participant from New Brunswick stated:

> "I think there definitely could be a few different kinds of models. If we are looking at housing as admission, there's ways we can look at doing, carpentry courses, things like that. Build up a group in our communities, train them, give them the skill sets, and then they can ultimately build these houses in the community, [that] gives them a sense of pride, a sense of identity. Something that they can drive by or walk by and be like 'Hey, I built that!' Creating that sense of pride is a big thing." (Community Worker, New Brunswick)

> "Having a trained infrastructure to tackle this within our communities by our communities, right? The reality is unemployment is a contributing factor to alcohol like houselessness and housing insecurity. If we can train our community members, to have these jobs to build homes, right, we're creating employment as well as. It's a double-edged sword attack on homelessness." (Community Worker, Alberta)

As highlighted by the quote above, participants said that it was essential to provide community members with a sense of purpose and belonging within the community.

Many community representatives highlighted the work that they have already started to address homelessness within their community. One trend that emerged from the discussions was the effort to build homes or tiny homes within communities, which has been seen as an innovative way to address housing insecurity in First Nations communities.

> "We have Section 95 units that we mainly deal with. We also have the residential homes that have been funded by ISC [Indigenous Services Canada]. We have a total of over 200 units. Homelessness is becoming quite noticeable in the community, so, one of the things that we're trying to look at is to combat homelessness in trying to get some tiny homes in a community." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "In our community we've built quite a few Elders new homes. So, it's like we're addressing these concerns one by one but there's just so many of them I guess." (Leadership, Northern Ontario)

Beyond housing infrastructure, some communities are also taking initiatives to support their community members through social programs.

> "We're trying to open our own, little center here because we don't have a friendship center anywhere near us, so we're trying to build our own through NNADAP [National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program] because aftercare is very important. I want to teach them how to cook for themselves, how to make a resume, how just be able to be independent and keep their homes when we do help them get one. So, I think more treatment, more beds, more real good counseling, and that kind of treatment having it more." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "In [community name] here we just opened this peer supported outreach program, which has allowed us to see a lot of the gaps that weren't noticed before kind of fell on the wayside because people weren't connected in that way." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

The concept of land claims or gaining land back arose as a point to be included in a First Nations homelessness action plan. Depending on the community, the ability to develop new homes is limited due to the restrictive nature of reserve land. Working with the government to expand reserve lands is lengthy and cumbersome. Further, the systems to develop infrastructure in coordination with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) hinder the ability of First Nations to provide homes for their community members. As one participant stated, "If AFN is going to push for anything, it's more land. All of the reserves I can think of need more land to build on. The second barrier is to accessing funding. Funding is huge" (Technician, Northern Ontario).

First Nations leadership and technicians want a holistic approach to address homelessness that includes wrap-around services. A First Nations Homelessness Action Plan should be based on a

holistic approach which considers mental health supports, financial supports, employment, education, connection to culture, and connection to community. The Assembly of First Nations needs to advocate for flexible, comprehensive funding mechanisms that allow First Nations to take care of their own members without restrictive and cumbersome funding requirements. This includes funding at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. Funders at all levels should coordinate their efforts to better serve First Nations. Another area that needs to be continuously advocated for is the timely and effective processes for land claims, additions to reserve, and infrastructure development. Lastly, it is important for the Assembly of First Nations to look for ways the Action Plan can work to support existing initiatives being led by First Nations, such as initiatives for tiny homes, Indigenous-led addictions programs, and other programs.

Regional Considerations

Throughout the national conversations, many similarities between regions arose, but there were some issues and themes raised which pertain to specific regions that will be highlighted here. One important geographic distinction that was raised was the challenges faced by communities that are rural and/or remote. Some participants from Northern Ontario highlighted the realities of getting resources into community to build necessary housing or repair existing houses:

> "I respect the fact that there are a lot of national issues. But for this focus group it was to be for Northern communities. This is where my focus is. I'm on a reserve. Yes, I have highway access. I am near a small town. A three-hour drive from an urban center, six-hour drive from the nearest city. So, I don't have a friendship center nearby. We're alone here, and we need to support ourselves. You don't need to be turning to outside programs for support." (Technician, Northern Ontario)

> "It's going to cost more [here] because we have to fly everything in and with the flights today it's getting more expensive. For me to go to Timmins return, it's almost $1,300. The cost of freight I'm only allowed 27 pounds, then the rest I have to pay. So, you can only imagine that nobody ever flies out of the community unless it's a medical or being a medevac'd [medically evacuated], they can get flown back in. So now I'm doing research after research trying to find who, which, where [supports] can I tap into? Is there like a social justice program or a juvenile court place you know where they get back to the community?" (Technician, Northern Ontario)

Another geographical factor that influences the ability of First Nations and support organizations to serve their members is the differences in how provincial and territorial governments fund services. For example, one participant spoke to the situation in Saskatchewan:

> "In Saskatchewan. We are a federal funder for the national housing strategy of delivery [of] Reaching Home Fund. But we don't have provincial dollars matching our federal dollar support here in Saskatchewan. We have another province in Canada I think it's

> Newfoundland or one of the maritime provinces, that also does not match the Reaching Home dollars for dollar." (Community Worker, Saskatchewan)

In Quebec, there are multiple layers of cultural identities that exist within the province, which can lead to conflict and further struggle for homeless First Nations individuals. In Quebec, it was emphasized that a sizable portion of the homeless population are Anglophone. Due to language barriers, they often struggle to receive services. One person from Quebec stated:

> "None of my clients want to come back because Quebec is very, we know ... racist. Let's just call it what it is. A lot of my clients will cross that border and go to Ontario because at least they're seen. Not many speak French, so they have that struggle here, so we utilize [services in] Ontario a lot. Again, it just boils down to that border issue. I have a client that wants to get on suboxone. Well, Quebec doesn't have that here. So, I have to go to Ontario and [they're] like well, there's that border what do we do with that border? And I said, well, technically, if we want to be technical, there's unceded territory, in New Liskeard that belongs to Timiskaming First Nation so technically you are on their land. So, do they qualify for services? Absolutely they do." (Technician, Quebec)

To summarize, participants raised a number of region-specific issues pertaining to First Nations homelessness. For example, rural and remote communities face greater challenges acquiring resources and bringing material into communities. Different provincial funding arrangements can also affect the level of funding that First Nations can access to provide funding housing supports. Lastly, linguistic challenges were identified as a specific regional issue, seen especially in Quebec where Anglophone First Nations individuals can experience issues receiving support in English.

Considerations for a First Nations Homelessness Action Plan
• The importance of wrap-around supports • Funding mechanisms can impose restrictions and limitations on service delivery, it is necessary to understand how these can impact support for homeless First Nations people • Support for existing First Nation-led initiatives • Rural and remote communities experience challenges bringing resources into community • Differences in availability of provincial and territorial funding • Language barriers, particularly in Quebec

AREAS FOR ADVOCACY

This report was developed by Archipel Research and Consulting Inc. (Archipel) in response to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Resolution 79/2019, titled "Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off-Reserve." This resolution directed the AFN to develop a draft National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan in alignment with the Ten Year National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy. The Action Plan should consider the following areas for advocacy as discussed in the 15 regionally based engagements:

1. Funding

Funding	
Audience	**Action**
Federal Government	Implement specific funding streams for on-community and off-community (urban areas). This includes First Nations specific funding in urban areas as well as reserves.
All Levels of Government	Provide more funding for First Nations so that they can better meet the needs of their members regarding housing and homelessness.
All Levels of Government	Increase funding for Indigenous run programs and First Nations distinctions-based initiatives so that First Nations can allocate funding based on community priorities and needs.
All Levels of Government	Develop cohesive and harmonized funding mechanisms between, municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal governments.
Federal Government	Ensure federal funding can be used flexibly in response to community priorities with minimal restrictions.
All Levels of Government	Develop or implement more flexible funding structures.

2. Land

Land

Audience	Action
Federal Government	Reduce the time it takes for land claim processes to be completed.
Federal Government	Reduce the time it takes for First Nations to expand reserve lands, including in urban and rural areas.
All Levels of Government	Improve and expedite the Additions to Reserve process, especially in urban settings.

3. Services

Services	
Audience	**Action**
All Levels of Government	Increase funding for all homelessness support services including wrap-around services; mental health services; land-based healing services; and/or Elder supports.
All Levels of Government	Develop accessible services that are flexible to mobile lifestyles; potentially mobile services.
All Levels of Government	Support wrap-around service delivery across Canada.
All Levels of Government and Non-Profit Organizations	Include First Nations that have first-hand knowledge of what it means to be homeless in the development of services and funding criteria.
First Nations	Seek resources to provide courses and workshops in home care and maintenance for members to maintain the quality of homes.
All Levels of Government and AFN	Conduct more research into First Nations homelessness, both on and off community, to obtain an accurate understanding of who is most affected by it.

4. Infrastructure

Infrastructure	
Audience	**Action**
Federal Government	Implement timely processes for First Nations to develop necessary infrastructure for housing such as water and sewage lines.
All Levels of Government	Advocate for infrastructure sharing agreements with regional governments such as counties and municipalities.
All Levels of Government and First Nations	Support the development of knowledge and skill transfer for the development of infrastructure within First Nations communities; this could include skills based in construction, maintenance, and administration.

5. Business

Business	
Audience	**Action**
Businesses and the Private Sector	Support First Nations communities in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) models for environmentally and socially conscious and responsible businesses.

CONCLUSION

Across Canada, First Nations leadership, technicians, and other community support workers identified that addressing the factors that influence and create homelessness is an immediate need. The engagement participants that work to address homelessness expressed the sentiment of feeling alone and separate from the rest of Canada in trying to address homelessness within their communities. First Nations leadership and technicians face many challenges that impact First Nations housing insecurity. These challenges include lack of capacity, financial limitations, and lack of or aging housing stock.

The characteristics of First Nations homelessness are changing. There is an increased number of First Nations people that are experiencing homeless. It was often raised that due to the growth of the First Nations population, the demographic of First Nations individuals experiencing homeless has been getting younger. This population growth has led to a larger number of people facing housing insecurity due to a lack of space, rather than social or personal dysfunction. Many First Nations peoples and families are on waiting lists for housing on their reserve lands or within their communities, which has a direct impact on the number of First Nations people who experience homelessness.

The importance of land as being central to building housing and, addressing homelessness was brought up repeatedly. Many participants commented on how processes for First Nations to acquire land to build on were slow and cumbersome. Once land had been acquired, it is also challenging to attain infrastructure funding from Indigenous Services Canada.

For First Nations people, the first line of support when facing housing insecurity is often family or extended family. As a result, homelessness can go unseen and lead to overcrowding in communities because of the compassion of family networks. Therefore, it is important to consider the unique role family networks have in combatting homelessness for First Nations. Participants emphasized that the current understanding of housing as a commodity does not account for First Nations values of community. First Nations want to see housing as a right rather than as a commodity in practice[5].

Although the challenges to deliver safe and adequate housing for First Nations seems daunting, many participants shared their persistence and innovative approaches to addressing homelessness within their communities. They shared anecdotes about housing initiatives that addressed the needs of specific groups within the community, such as seniors, or initiatives to build tiny homes for community members. Some participants shared how they have developed peer support groups and networks for homeless individuals. Further, First Nations organizations both in and

[5] The *National Housing Strategy Act* affirms that housing is a right.

outside of community have worked to build networks with various service providers to build wrap-around services for their members, as the hurdles that need to be overcome to address First Nations homelessness require a holistic approach.

From the conversations held with First Nations leadership, technicians, and other community support workers across the country, it is clear that First Nations face a number of obstacles when it comes to supporting their members who are experiencing homelessness. It is also evident that this is not a new challenge for First Nations. First Nations have dealt and continue to deal with colonialism, chronic underfunding, racism, and economic exclusion for decades, and these challenges are still present. First Nations are persevering and taking action to support their members despite these challenges. It is with great responsibility that the Assembly of First Nations needs to act to advocate for and support First Nations across Canada, because every First Nations person in Canada is the embodiment of survival and perseverance against the odds.

THEME OCCURRENCE

Theme	Number of Engagements Mentioned (out of 15)	Engagements Mentioned
Lack of Government Funding	11	Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, Northern Ontario, National, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Quebec
Barriers for Remote Communities	10	Northern Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, National, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario, Yukon, Quebec
Distinct Funding Streams	10	Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, Northern Ontario, National, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Quebec
Long Waiting Lists	10	Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, Manitoba, National, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Quebec
Need to Build/Maintain homes	9	Alberta, English Intersectional, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, National, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Quebec
Trauma-Informed Care	9	Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, Northern Ontario, National, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Quebec

Land Claims	9	Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, Manitoba, Norhtern Ontario, National, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario
Racism/Discrimination from Landlords	7	Southern Ontario, Alberta, Northern Ontario, National, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, English Intersectional
Wrap-Around Supports	7	Alberta, British Columbia, Northern Ontario, National, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan
Support for Off-Community	7	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan
Relationship Building	7	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, National, Southern Ontario, Quebec
Disconnection from the Land	7	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, National, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario
Covid-19	6	Alberta, British Columbia, Northern Ontario, Newfoundland, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan
Indigenous-led Programming	6	Yukon, English Intersectional, Alberta, Southern Ontario, Northern Ontario, National
Holistic Support	6	British Columbia, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, National, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan

Stigma	6	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, National, Southern Ontario
Support for Women	6	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, National, Southern Ontario
Youth	6	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, Southern Ontario, Quebec
Domestic Violence	5	Alberta, English Intersectional, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, Saskatchewan
Overcrowded Homes	5	Saskatchewan, Quebec, Alberta, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, Nova Scotia
Substandard Housing	4	English Intersectional, Northern Ontario, Southern Ontario, Manitoba
Living on the Land	4	English Intersectional, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Southern Ontario
Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC)	4	Alberta, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, New Brunswick
Eurocentric/Western Understandings of Housing	4	Alberta, British Columbia, English Intersectional, Manitoba
Displacement, Dispossession, and Economic Exclusion	4	British Columbia, English Intersectional, Manitoba, Alberta
Support for 2SLGTBQQIA+ Community	4	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Southern Ontario
Harm Reduction	4	British Columbia, Manitoba, National, Southern Ontario
Tiny Homes	3	Quebec, Northern Ontario, Manitoba
Invisible Homelessness	2	Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan

Support for Single Fathers	2	Alberta, Northern Ontario
Family Reunification	1	British Columbia
Socially and Environmentally Conscious Companies (ESGs)	1	Northern Ontario
Multigenerational Homes	1	Alberta

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Timeline for Session

Part	Tasks	Est. Time (Flexible)
Welcome and potentially wait for any late arrivals	Inform participants that you are waiting and allow them to get a drink, snack if they want. Turn on closed captioning. Inform participants that they can turn on the zoom closed captioning if they would like.	2-8 mins
Facilitator can begin session	Brief, thanks for joining this session, for Archipel and AFN, pass to Elder to open the session	1 min
Elder opens		5-10 min
Facilitator introductions	Introduce yourself in more detail and offer to notetaker to introduce themselves and their role	5 mins
Begin session	- Double check that everyone is okay with being recorded; if they haven't signed consent forms please do so. - Let participants know they are not required to answer all the questions and can leave whenever they like - Begin recording	5 mins
Session part one	Ask questions	50-60 mins
Mid-session break		15
Session part two	Ask questions	50-60 mins
Closing remarks	Facilitator and notetaker can say thanks to all the participants on behalf of Archipel and AFN for participating and giving their time	3 mins
Elder closing		5 -10 mins

Session Preamble

Hello / Bonjour / Optional regional Indigenous greeting

Greetings and thank you for coming today and agreeing to share knowledge that will inform the National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan.

My name is _____, and I'll be moderating our discussion today. Before we get into the details of today's discussion, I would like to hand the space over to Elder who will conduct an opening for us today. We would like to offer you a virtual tobacco for being with us today. We will also ensure that tobacco will be sent to you following today's discussion.

Elder does opening

We collectively thank the Elder

I would like to begin with introductions from my colleague and I.

Introduces self and colleague

In response to a mandate received from the Chiefs-in-Assembly in 2019, the AFN has been conducting research and engagement to inform the development of the National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan in alignment with the Ten Year National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy. This resolution recognizes an urgent need to address the impact of homelessness and housing insecurity on First Nations living in and away from their communities. These issues disproportionately impact First Nations due to the historic and ongoing impacts of colonialism, including underfunded housing and infrastructure as well as social services for First Nations. The goal of the National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan is to reduce, prevent, and eliminate First Nations homelessness in alignment with the transition of First Nations housing and infrastructure to First Nations management, control, and care. This Action Plan will help to inform the priorities of the First Nations distinctions-based funding stream of the federal homelessness prevention program, Reaching Home, and advocate for adequate and sustainable funding for First Nations to develop strategies and initiatives to address homelessness for their citizens.

This series of engagements is just one part of several initiatives and conversations AFN has been conducting to inform the Action Plan. Other initiatives include:

1. Research on First Nations homelessness, including a literature review, environmental scan, and a systems map of existing programs and services across Canada.
2. Discussions with service providers, advocates, and other experts working in the homelessness sector.
3. A national survey for First Nations leadership and staff, service providers, and community members. [if still running] The survey is currently in progress, and you can

access it here (https://www.afn.ca/national-first-nations-homelessness-action-plan-survey/).

4. A National First Nations Homelessness Symposium held this past June 2021.The AFN is currently working to plan further engagement opportunities going forward, including opportunities for First Nation voices to be heard and included at the community level.

At Archipel, we are proud to be working with the AFN to facilitate regional engagement sessions with First Nations leadership and staff, technicians, and First Nation program managers including housing, health, social development, and other relevant program managers. Your participation in this discussion will help inform the development of the Action Plan and ensure that it reflects the specific needs and priorities of your communities. The AFN wants to ensure the development of the Action Plan is First Nation-led and reflects of the distinct circumstances of communities across the country. Please remember this is a voluntary discussion, you are not required to answer questions you're not comfortable with, and you can leave the room at any time. If you that feel triggered or distressed and would like to speak with our Elder, you are encouraged to do so. Additionally, you can access support through www.hopeforwellness.ca, we can share their information in the chat. Is everyone okay with our discussion being recorded today? Any questions before we begin?

Questions

1. How do First Nations define homelessness and housing insecurity as it impacts their communities?
2. What will a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan need to consider and include to be successful?
3. What are important factors in addressing homelessness in your community and for members away for the community?
4. What challenges do members of your First Nation face when accessing homelessness services?
5. How can First Nations support their members experiencing homelessness whether in or away from community?
6. Does your First Nation have partnerships (within or away from the community) to address homelessness for its members?
    a. How can partnerships be developed or strengthened to reduce First Nations Homelessness?
7. What does your community need from governments to reduce homelessness? (i.e., policies, commitments, resources)
8. What is required to help address the specific needs of women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, people with disabilities, or others who may have specific experiences with homelessness related to their identity?
9. Do you have anything else you would like to share on this topic?

After the Session

The recording and closed captioning transcripts will be downloaded onto your computer. Please upload these to the AFN Homelessness SharePoint “Session Data” folder as soon as you can. Create a new folder within the “Session Data” folder for the session with the name of the region and the date (e.g., British Colombia Jan. XX). Notetakers can upload their notes for the session to the same file.

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions with an Intersectional Standpoint

1. How would you define First Nations Homelessness and housing insecurity?
    a. How would this definition change for people from diverse social back grounds (e.g., gender, age, class, sexual orientation, ability)?
2. How do different identities (e.g., gender, class, age, ability, sexual orientation) impact how First Nations experience homelessness?
3. How does social inequity and power relations impact in First Nations homelessness?
4. What barriers do First Nation people with diverse social backgrounds experience when accessing services?
5. What should be included in a National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan to make it inclusive and successful?
6. How can First Nations support their members with diverse identities experiencing homelessness, whether in or away from the community?
7. How can governments (federal, provincial, municipal, and First Nations) holistically support those with diverse identities experiencing housing insecurity?
8. Do you have anything else you would like to say before we end this session?