

ABORIGINAL HOUSING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

SUMMARY REPORT



Prepared for:

BC OFFICE OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS



MARCH 31, 2008

Prepared by:

CATHERINE PALMER & ASSOCIATES INC.

ABORIGINAL HOUSING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Background	3
Community Engagement Process	4
Format of Engagement Process	5
Limitations of Engagement Process	5
Organization of This Report	6
I. Barriers/Challenges	7
II. Potential Solutions to Closing the Housing Gap	9
Housing Need	9
Cultural Considerations	10
Homelessness	11
Home Ownership	12
Governance: Coordination, Partnerships, and Information Sharing	13
Financing Options	16
Capacity Issues	17
Action Plan	20
III. Examples of Models/Key Initiatives	21
IV. Summary and Next Steps	22
Appendix 1 – List of Invited Groups/Organizations	

Executive Summary

The Province of British Columbia, led by the Office of Housing and Construction Standards (OHCS), is currently developing a ten-year off-reserve Aboriginal Housing Action Plan aimed at closing the housing gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in British Columbia.

As part of the process to develop the Action Plan, the OHCS met with approximately 250 Aboriginal and community representatives throughout the province in a series of twelve regional workshops and focus group sessions during February and March, 2008. This report provides a summary of the key themes and possible solutions that were raised by participants during those sessions.

Important to note is that this summary report reflects the views and opinions expressed by participants throughout the engagement process and in some cases may not accurately depict existing government policies and programs.

Key Themes:

Participants at the regional workshops and focus group sessions provided input into a wide range of housing issues. For the purposes of this report, the suggestions from the participants have been summarized into 42 potential solutions to closing the housing gap.

The themes that emerged most consistently during the workshops can be summarized as follows:

1. More housing is urgently needed for Aboriginal people in B.C. In particular, more housing for Aboriginal youth and elders is required. Both the federal and provincial governments need to be more engaged in housing.
2. More resources to resolve homelessness are required.
3. More programs to encourage home ownership are needed.
4. Housing for Aboriginal people needs to be culturally appropriate.
5. The federal government needs to re-engage in social housing for Aboriginal people.
6. There needs to be more coordination and information sharing in the delivery of housing programs and services.
7. Organizations need help to develop housing – support to encourage partnerships and to develop creative financial solutions is needed. Municipalities should be encouraged to support social housing projects (i.e. donate land).

8. Programs aimed at closing the housing gap for Aboriginal people need to take into consideration the mobility patterns of First Nations people (on and off-reserve issues).
9. There is a need for Métis-specific housing in the province – housing run by and for Métis people.
10. Aboriginal tenants need education and training about a variety of issues.
11. Aboriginal organizations need access to more training and more networking opportunities. Wage parity for staff of Aboriginal organizations must be explored.
12. The Action Plan needs to consider regional interests, allow for local planning, and contain measurable outcomes.

In general, participants were positive about the provincial approach to developing the Housing Action Plan. However, a majority also said that governments need to start taking action and commit resources towards resolving the issue. Participants also clearly said that the Housing Action Plan needs to contain measurable outcomes and be resourced in order to be effective.

Introduction

The B.C. Office of Housing and Construction Standards (OHCS) is currently developing a ten-year off-reserve Aboriginal Housing Action Plan (Action Plan) that will focus on improving housing conditions for Aboriginal people living in rural and urban areas in the province.

Direction for the Action Plan flows from three key initiatives:

- (i) *Housing Matters BC: A Housing Strategy for BC*, released in 2006. The provincial housing strategy identifies Aboriginal housing as a priority issue.
- (ii) *The Transformative Change Accord (TCA)*, signed in 2005 by the First Nations Leadership Council, B.C., and Canada. The TCA commits the parties to work together to “close the social and economic gap between First Nations and other British Columbians over the next 10 years”. One of the five key areas identified in the TCA is housing.
- (iii) *The Métis Nation Relationship Accord (MNRA)*, signed in 2006 by the province and the Métis Nation B.C. The MNRA identifies housing as one of six priority areas for discussion between the parties.

The overarching goal of the Action Plan will be to improve the housing conditions of Aboriginal people in the province by developing programs and policies that address the full housing continuum – from homelessness to home ownership. Additionally, the Action Plan will identify strategies to enhance Aboriginal capacity in all areas of housing. Specifically, the Action Plan will seek to “close the gap” (as referred to in the TCA) in housing and bridge the differences in housing conditions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the province. For example, more than 28% of the Aboriginal population in B.C. is deemed to be in core housing need¹ compared to 16% of the non-Aboriginal population – the Action Plan will strive to close that gap, among others.

Background:

As part of the process to develop the Action Plan, the OHCS brought together a diverse group of Aboriginal organizations and government representatives to form a steering committee and provide strategic advice on the Action Plan. The Steering Committee includes representatives from the following organizations:

- First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC)
- Métis Nation B.C. (MNBC)
- B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centers
- Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA)
- Aboriginal Housing Committee for B.C.

¹ **Core Housing Need** is the national standard measuring housing need. Canadian households are considered to be in core housing need if they do not live in and could not access housing that is in adequate condition and of suitable size without paying more than 30% of gross household income to rent.

- United Native Nations
- B.C. Housing
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)
- B.C. Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
- Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians

In 2006, the OHCS commissioned a needs and capacity assessment of Aboriginal housing in the Province (both on and off-reserve²). The resulting report - *Aboriginal Housing in B.C. - Needs and Capacity Assessment*³ - provides an in-depth look at Aboriginal housing in B.C. and projects housing need over the next ten years. The report also provides an assessment of the existing capacity of Aboriginal organizations and communities to deliver and manage housing, and outlines a number of barriers to closing the housing gap. The assessment was based on secondary research and interviews with over 85 Aboriginal organizations and communities and was guided by the Steering Committee.

The OHCS synthesized the key findings of the Needs and Capacity Assessment report into a document entitled *Developing an Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Action Plan for B.C. – A Discussion Paper to Support Community Engagement*⁴ (the Discussion Paper). The Discussion Paper was written to stimulate discussion about key questions related to Aboriginal housing and was used as a springboard for community engagement meetings.

Community Engagement Process:

In February and March 2008, the OHCS sponsored a community engagement process that included a total of twelve regional and focus group sessions. Every Aboriginal housing society in the Province, as well as every Friendship Center, every First Nation community, Métis Nation chartered communities, and Aboriginal political organizations were invited to attend the sessions. Several umbrella organizations – such as the Union of B.C. Municipalities and the United Aboriginal Youth Collective – were also invited to send representatives to the meetings (see Appendix 1 for a complete list of invitees).

In total, approximately 250 people participated in the engagement process, which included seven regional workshops, four focus group sessions, and one session with the Métis Nation B.C. The following table provides a list of locations and dates for the community engagement process:

Session	Date
Fort St. John Regional Session	February 12, 2008
Prince George Regional Session	February 13, 2008
Penticton Regional Session	February 15, 2008

² While the province is responsible for housing off-reserve only, the assessment also covers on-reserve housing conditions due to the inextricable link between the two and the need for improved coordination between the jurisdictions.

³ <http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/AboriginalHousinginBCNov2007.pdf>

⁴ http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/Final_Discussion_Paper_Aboriginal_Housing_Action_Plan.pdf

Session	Date
Nanaimo Regional Session	February 18, 2008
Kamloops Regional Session	February 29, 2008
Vancouver Regional Session	March 3, 2008
Terrace Regional Session	March 7, 2008
On/Off Reserve Coordination Focus Group	February 27, 2008
Metis Nation BC Session	February 28, 2008
Homelessness Focus Group, Vancouver	March 3, 2008
Capacity Focus Group, Vancouver	March 12, 2008
Youth and Elders Focus Group, Vancouver	March 28, 2008

Format of Engagement Sessions:

The primary goal of the community engagement process was to develop potential solutions to the housing needs and challenges identified in the Needs and Capacity Assessment and other research. In order to stimulate solutions-based discussions, participants were sent the Discussion Paper in advance and were asked to consider the questions outlined in that document. Overall, participants were asked to consider two key questions:

- (i) What housing programs and services could be considered as solutions to closing the housing gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?
- (ii) What initiatives could be considered to enhance the capacity of Aboriginal organizations in all areas of housing?

Discussions at the regional workshops touched on a variety of topics and were more general than the focus group sessions which were – by design – strongly geared towards specific topics.

Limitations of Engagement Process:

Although all efforts were made to ensure the engagement process was inclusive, some groups were less able to participate in the meetings. In particular, there was limited representation from rural or remote communities or from Aboriginal people with disabilities. There were also no meetings held in the Kootenays, so the specific concerns of that region of the province were not captured in any detail. However, all Aboriginal organizations with an interest in housing and every First Nation were also invited to provide written submissions to the OHCS in the event they were unable to attend a session.

Not all of the interests, issues, and potential solutions were mentioned or agreed to by all participants at every meeting. There were differing opinions on some subjects, and the level of importance placed on each issue varied from session to session. It is also important to note that this summary report reflects the views and opinions expressed by participants throughout the engagement process and in some cases may not accurately depict existing government policies and programs.

Finally, participants at every session stressed the need for on-going dialogue and local involvement in development of the Action Plan. The list of issues and potential solutions outlined in this report should therefore not be considered as an exhaustive list of input from Aboriginal governments, communities, organizations and tenants.

Organization of Report:

This report provides a summary of the comments and solutions proposed by participants during the community engagement process. The content of this report is based on the individual meeting summaries that were provided to participants after each session as well as the written submissions that were sent to the OHCS during the process. Every attempt has been made to capture all of the key comments and principles put forward by participants during the process.

The report is submitted to OHCS, the Steering Committee, and workshop participants by Catherine Palmer & Associates Inc. The project team that organized and facilitated the engagement sessions and wrote this report is comprised of: Catherine Palmer, Michael Izen, Roger Leclerc, and Cheryl Brooks. The report is organized as follows:

- Part I provides an overview of the key barriers/challenges that were raised during the engagement process.
- Part II summarizes proposed solutions to closing the housing gap.
- Part III provides a list of models and initiatives that participants put forward for consideration.
- Part IV provides overall conclusions and next steps.

I. Barriers/Challenges

Twenty barriers to closing the housing gap in Aboriginal housing are outlined in the Needs and Capacity Assessment. These barriers are further synthesized into eight challenges as outlined in the Discussion Paper:

1. Coordination Challenges (i.e. need for more coordination between and within governments; need for more coordination among Aboriginal organizations).
2. Financial Challenges (i.e. costs and complexity of planning; need for more money; need for more serviceable, affordable land).
3. Administrative Challenges (i.e. need for flexibility to modify housing).
4. Capacity Challenges (i.e. capacity and education of tenants; training and other staffing issues).
5. Cultural Challenges (i.e. need for more culturally specific services; need for more awareness of services for Métis people).
6. Income Challenges (i.e. low income levels; insufficient credit; need for programs to encourage home ownership).
7. Information Challenges (i.e. inconsistent waitlist information).
8. Homelessness Challenges (i.e. disproportionate percentage of Aboriginal homeless people).

Virtually every challenge outlined in the Discussion Paper was raised during the engagement process. Participants talked specifically about the following challenges in detail:

1. Land: Participants said that difficulty accessing affordable, serviceable land is one of the main barriers preventing organizations and communities from building more housing.
2. Government Funding: A common issue raised by participants was the need for consistent funding for Aboriginal housing programs. In particular, participants talked about how the federal government ended its urban and rural native housing programs in 1993, and said that this has created a gap in housing and increased the number of Aboriginal homeless people.
3. Poverty: Participants said that most Aboriginal people – particularly youth and elders – have difficulty paying market rent for housing in most regions of the province. Some participants noted that low income levels will negatively impact the ability of housing societies to operate once operating agreements expire.
4. Discrimination and Racism: Many participants described discrimination and racism against Aboriginal people as being a significant barrier to housing. Several participants

said they have often been unable to rent an apartment due to discrimination. This is seen to be a particular issue for Aboriginal youth. Several participants also noted that the urban Aboriginal population is often concentrated in poor, run-down neighbourhoods.

Participants also expressed concern about Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) attitudes that make it difficult to build social housing or homeless facilities.

5. Bureaucracy: Several participants said that the bureaucracy associated with obtaining housing – particularly social housing and home ownership programs – is discouraging for Aboriginal people and often prevents them from accessing housing.
6. Tenant Knowledge: A number of participants said insufficient knowledge around issues such as the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) and legal rights of tenants results in many Aboriginal people getting “taken advantage of” by landlords – either through losing money from security deposits, having to live in substandard housing conditions, or getting evicted with insufficient cause. This is particularly true for youth and elders.
7. Governance: Many participants said that Aboriginal people need to be empowered to build, maintain, and manage their own housing. A number of participants said that the current system does not provide for adequate accountability measures back to Aboriginal governments.
8. Government and/or Housing Provider Policies: Many participants said that government policies do not adequately reflect the concerns of Aboriginal people. Métis participants specifically said that most Métis people do not access current housing programs and services available to Aboriginal people because there is a perception that most programs and policies are aimed at First Nations, and that Métis people are not eligible.
9. Mobility of First Nations People: Several participants said that the frequent movement of people from on-reserve to off-reserve often results in First Nations people “falling through the cracks” so that they are not able to access services in either place.
10. Capacity Issues: Several participants said there is a need for more skills and training – particularly in the development of new projects is a huge barrier to building more housing. This comment came from existing housing societies as well as organizations and communities interested in becoming involved in the delivery of housing.
11. Disproportionate Number of Aboriginal Homeless People: Homelessness was discussed at length during the engagement process. Participants said Aboriginal homeless people have unique needs and that Aboriginal organizations should have more funding to address those needs.
12. Barriers to Home Ownership: Participants at every workshop said that home ownership is virtually unattainable for the majority of Aboriginal people living off-reserve.

II. Potential Solutions to Closing the Housing Gap

The following list outlines issues that participants raised during the engagement process. For the purposes of this report, those issues have been framed as potential solutions to closing the housing gap. In total, there are 42 potential solutions.

For ease of review, the potential solutions have been broken into the following sub-categories:

- Housing Need
- Cultural Considerations
- Homelessness
- Home Ownership
- Governance: Coordination, Information-Sharing, and Partnerships
- Financing Options
- Capacity Issues
- Action Plan

Housing Need:

1) More housing units for Aboriginal people living off-reserve. Participants at every session said that more housing of virtually every type is urgently needed throughout the province. In addition to housing units generally for Aboriginal people, participants talked about specific needs in the following areas:

- ⇒ Affordable and culturally appropriate elder housing.
- ⇒ Housing for single people without children.
- ⇒ Student housing, particularly in urban centers such as Vancouver, Prince George, Kamloops, Nanaimo, and Victoria. Many participants talked about the value of developing partnerships with post-secondary institutions.
- ⇒ Transitional housing for youth with addictions or mental illness, and for youth who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- ⇒ Housing for youth recently released from jail.
- ⇒ Housing for youth that are “aging out” of foster care.

The need for more youth housing was equally stressed by First Nation participants (living both on and off-reserve), urban Aboriginal representatives, and Métis participants (the Métis Youth Council lists student housing as one of its top four priorities).

2) Re-engage the federal government in social housing. Participants at every session said that housing need has increased since the federal government ended its native

housing programs in 1993. Although most participants were aware of the one-time \$50.9 million Aboriginal housing fund that was administered by the Province through funding provided by the federal government's Aboriginal Housing Trust in 2006, participants said this money was not adequate to fully address the demand for housing.

In Vancouver, one housing society said that it would take approximately 70 to 80 years to house everyone on its waiting list, and similar sentiments were expressed throughout the province. Participants strongly urged the Province to start lobbying the federal government to re-enter the social housing field.

- 3) **Develop medical-stay facilities.** Several participants mentioned that there is a need for more medical-stay facilities for Aboriginal people and stressed that more complexes are urgently needed. This is particularly true for people who need to travel to larger urban centres from rural areas or First Nations communities.
- 4) **Utilize existing housing units in a creative way.** Housing societies that participated in the regional workshops said that they were too often tied down by their operating agreements and were unable to creatively adapt their existing units to the needs of their clients.

Many participants said that in the future, housing should be built to accommodate varying circumstances of growing or shrinking families (i.e. moveable walls to add or remove extra bedrooms). Participants also said that housing needs to be adaptable to meet the needs of disabled people and elders who require supports.

Cultural Considerations:

- 5) **Build more culturally sensitive housing.** Participants at virtually every meeting stressed the importance of developing culturally sensitive housing for Aboriginal people. Culturally sensitive housing included the following features identified by participants:
 - ⇒ Housing that is designed to accommodate extended families. Many participants said that Aboriginal people often live in overcrowded housing because of the need for more accommodation for extended families. In particular, it was noted that elders are reluctant to move into traditional forms of housing because it doesn't provide room for extended families to stay or visit.
 - ⇒ Housing that allows tenants to practice their traditions, such as burning wood, smudging, sweats, etc. Many participants said that elders are often uncomfortable in traditional seniors' housing because those complexes do not allow them to practice their traditions, such as cooking and eating certain foods.
 - ⇒ Common rooms and gathering places within complexes large enough to encourage community-living aspects. Participants said the space allocated for community rooms are often too small – some housing societies said they have had to raise money on their own to increase the space of the common areas.

Participants also said that land management laws need to be more flexible to allow for certain cultural variations (i.e. log buildings, sweats, or other design features that may not be allowed under certain zoning bylaws).

Finally, some participants said that housing budgets need to include some resources to cover cultural activities such as gifting to elders or chiefs.

- 6) **Ensure that Aboriginal housing is inclusive of all Aboriginal people.** A number of participants said that housing allocated for Aboriginal people needs to be more inclusive of all Aboriginal groups. A number of Métis participants said that government needs to review its contracts with housing societies to ensure that the language is inclusive of all Aboriginal people, rather than targeting only First Nations people.
- 7) **Develop Métis-specific housing.** A number of participants said that Métis-specific housing is urgently required – in particular, Métis housing that is accountable to the Métis Nation. Métis participants strongly stressed the fact that Métis culture is unique and different from First Nations culture, and that Métis people do not necessarily connect with services provided to Aboriginal people.

Homelessness:

- 8) **Develop more housing and services for Aboriginal homeless people.** Homelessness was a major issue that was discussed in-depth at every session during the engagement process. A range of solutions to alleviate homelessness were suggested by participants, including:

- ⇒ More Aboriginal-specific transitional housing for people recovering from abuse, addictions, mental illness, etc. Participants said that there are not enough options for Aboriginal people who need to live in an environment where there are some supports (i.e. lifeskills, employment counseling, training, help with transportation, etc) but who are beyond the emergency shelter stage. Many participants also said that transitional housing is particularly needed in smaller rural areas.
- ⇒ More housing for people recently released from jail. Several participants talked about the need to re-integrate people recently released from jail (typically young, single Aboriginal men) back into society through supportive housing programs.
- ⇒ More safe houses. Some participants said that some Aboriginal people do not feel safe in accessing safe houses. To provide a safer environment, participants said that housing needs to be free from the threat of violence, and be alcohol and drug free.
- ⇒ Emergency and low-barrier or wet shelters. Participants in virtually every workshop said that existing shelters were typically over-crowded and not meeting the needs of Aboriginal homeless people. One problem frequently mentioned was that many existing shelters will not house people with mental health issues or addiction problems, and they are either left on the street or end up in jail.

- ⇒ More emergency housing for families. A number of participants said there is a need for more emergency shelters for families, not just single people. A few participants pointed out that most shelters do not allow children to stay with their family beyond the age of fourteen, and said that this is a significant problem for Aboriginal people.
- ⇒ More detox facilities, particularly outside of the Lower Mainland.
- ⇒ Programs that recognize movement of people to and from reserves. Many participants said that it is not uncommon for people to become homeless as soon as they move off-reserve. Participants said that there needs to be some transition services to help people who become homeless once they leave their reserve. Some suggested developing a system to keep track of people once they leave the reserve. Others suggested developing a repatriation process to bring homeless people back to their reserve.

9) A national government policy to end homelessness needs to be developed.

Participants said that government needs to make a commitment to end homelessness – not just study it or provide temporary solutions. Participants suggested that adequate resources and strategic planning are required to resolve the issue.

10) More outreach workers are needed to help homeless people. Participants at virtually every workshop said that there needs to be more Aboriginal homeless outreach workers.

11) Provide long-term funding for housing programs. Participants stressed that government needs to provide consistent, long-term funding for projects (rather than year-to-year, project-based funds).

12) Engage Aboriginal people to help resolve homelessness. While participants were uniformly clear that there have been enough studies about Aboriginal homelessness, many also said that it would be helpful to try to determine some of the root causes of Aboriginal homelessness and to develop consistent homeless counts every year (done by the same people, in the same way, and including Aboriginal representatives).

Home Ownership:

13) Develop programs to encourage home ownership. One of the major issues that was raised by participants was the need to move people through the housing system – from homelessness to transitional housing, on to social housing, and ultimately to home ownership. Some housing society participants spoke about the generations of families who live in social housing units and the cycle of dependence that is the result.

Participants suggested a range of solutions to encourage home ownership, including:

- ⇒ Providing training to Aboriginal people about what is required to purchase a home – these programs could be developed in partnership with education and lending institutions.
- ⇒ Provide information about what is required to get a mortgage to people at a young age – home ownership information could be added to lifeskills curriculum provided to students in school.
- ⇒ Develop options for co-ownership or group purchase.
- ⇒ Provide opportunities to contribute sweat equity into new homes (i.e. volunteer to renovate housing).
- ⇒ Develop partnerships between lending institutions, Aboriginal housing societies and government to assist social housing tenants who may have the ability to purchase a home but not necessarily the cash for a down payment.
- ⇒ Allow for third-party financing and rent-purchase agreements – this could include an option to purchase social housing units.
- ⇒ Enable housing societies to use their own equity to provide second mortgages for long-term tenants who would be able to succeed with a mortgage. One participant said that government could encourage home ownership by modifying the operating agreements of housing societies so that they could provide second mortgages.
- ⇒ Research a former CMHC program that encouraged home ownership in the early 1980s – this program included allowing for a 25-year mortgage.
- ⇒ Establish an off-reserve home ownership coordinator to help potential home owners go through some of the red tape associated with purchasing a home. Participants suggested that regions of the province could be assigned a coordinator who could travel around and assist people with issues such as establishing credit ratings and accessing mortgage opportunities.

The issue of home ownership was raised as a major issue by virtually every participant, and was also listed in the top four priorities of the Métis Nation Youth Council.

Governance: Coordination, Information-Sharing, and Partnerships:

- 14) Increase coordination among provincial agencies.** Participants said that government agencies need to work more cooperatively to integrate services (i.e. health, education, income assistance and housing).
- 15) Encourage coordination between federal and provincial governments.** Many participants expressed concern about the limited coordination between federal and provincial governments, and said that there needs to be more collaboration between

agencies such as BC Housing, CMHC, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Health and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

16) Improve communication and coordination about on and off-reserve issues. A common theme was the need for a more seamless delivery of housing services for people that move on and off-reserve. Suggestions about how to address this issue included the following (note: some of the suggestions conflict with each other, others are complementary):

- ⇒ The Province (i.e. BC Housing) should work with Aboriginal housing societies to promote coordination with First Nation communities.
- ⇒ The federal government – most likely INAC – should assume financial responsibility for First Nations people who move off-reserve.
- ⇒ First Nations communities should share the cost of housing their members who move off-reserve.
- ⇒ Any federal housing dollars that First Nations communities do not use up in a given year should be reallocated to build housing off-reserve, rather than returning the funding to Treasury Board⁵.
- ⇒ Create a position for an off-reserve housing officer to help tenants who have recently moved off-reserve.
- ⇒ Resolve treaties and build an economic land base on-reserve that enables people to stay on-reserve.

Many participants said that First Nation communities should partner with other Aboriginal organizations to build housing off-reserve. Participants also said that on-reserve housing staff should receive training and education about housing services off-reserve so that they can share that information with their members. Similarly, participants said that off-reserve housing providers should be educated about on-reserve policies and procedures so that there is more opportunity to coordinate and leverage dollars.

⁵ Please note that unspent federal housing allocations are transferred to other CMHC regions of the Country and not returned to Treasury Board as general revenue.

It should be noted that one of the focus groups topics was on the need for improved coordination and integration between on and off-reserve housing.

17) Improve coordination and cooperation between Aboriginal organizations. One of the most consistent points raised by participants was that Aboriginal organizations need to work more cooperatively together in delivering programs and services. A number of participants also said that there needs to be more information sharing via emails and the internet about such things as upcoming conferences, workshops, and housing resources.

18) Improve relationships between Aboriginal organizations and municipalities.

Participants at virtually every session talked about the challenges that they have encountered working with municipalities – most specifically, challenges around zoning by-laws and NIMBY. Participants said that education of municipalities would improve relationships with Aboriginal people and increase potential partnerships. Other ideas on how to work with municipalities include:

- ⇒ Encourage municipalities to donate land or other in-kind contributions for social housing.
- ⇒ Enable municipalities to provide Aboriginal housing societies with tax breaks when building new units.
- ⇒ Donate development costs to a trust fund for social housing.
- ⇒ Transfer density bonuses not used by one development to other properties for social housing.
- ⇒ Require that any new developments contain some component of social housing (this will prevent the development of ghettos and discourage the NIMBY attitude).
- ⇒ Encourage municipalities to support homelessness initiatives.

19) Establish a center where Aboriginal people can obtain consistent, standardized information about housing. Several participants said there is a need for consistent, standardized information available to Aboriginal people about housing programs and services and a one-stop shopping information center. Some participants referred to this idea as a housing registry that could either be managed locally or by an organization such as BC Housing or the Aboriginal Housing Management Association. Others suggested that a local agency, such as a Friendship Center, could be empowered to disseminate information about housing policies and potential services.

Some participants suggested establishing a web page or Facebook to encourage information sharing.

20) Improve awareness of Aboriginal issues with property management companies.

Some participants said that one way to address some of the discrimination issues that Aboriginal tenants face would be to create partnerships between Aboriginal organizations and property management companies. Aboriginal awareness training could be offered through the partnership, and the two parties could also work together to develop an agreed-upon set of criteria for housing tenants. Participants also said that education of the larger community is needed, particularly to municipalities and neighbourhood organizations, to prevent potential opposition to Aboriginal housing developments.

21) Encourage partnerships. Many participants said that public-private partnerships should be encouraged, as well as partnerships with the business community. A few participants said that Aboriginal organizations can have difficulty attracting private partners and suggested that government should work with Aboriginal organizations to stick-handle private partnership opportunities.

22) Appoint a public official to act as an advocate or ombudsman for Aboriginal people. A number of participants said that there is a need for a public official – such as an ombudsman – to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal tenants and homeowners. The ombudsman or advocate could help individuals work through the bureaucratic process to obtain adequate housing, help Aboriginal organizations put forward ideas to government for issues such as creative financing (i.e. allowing housing societies to provide tenants with a second mortgage), and encourage organizations and communities to work together.

A few participants also suggested that an Aboriginal housing authority should be established to provide services to Aboriginal people (such as granting mortgages, building housing, managing government funds, training, dispute resolution, and advocacy). Some participants suggested that regional Aboriginal housing authorities should be established to cover both on and off-reserve housing (i.e. similar to the way the Ktunaxa Nation provides regional services for children and families both on and off-reserve). Others suggested that one housing authority should be established for off-reserve housing and another for on-reserve housing. A few participants said that the Province should commission a feasibility study for developing some form of Aboriginal housing authority.

Financing Options:

23) Reduce the percentage of income that a person in social housing is required to pay for rent. Some participants said that the Province should consider reducing the percentage of income that a person is required to pay on rent to 20 per cent.

24) Revise and expand the rental assistance program. A number of participants said that there are two key problems with the existing rental assistance program: even with a rental subsidy, many people cannot find affordable places to live in areas such as Vancouver and Prince George; and, the program does not apply to people on Income

Assistance. Expanding the program to cover higher rents and making it applicable to people on Income Assistance would make the program more useful.

25) Encourage land donations for social housing projects. In addition to encouraging municipalities to donate land for housing projects, some participants said that the Province should also donate available Crown or other land for Aboriginal housing projects. A few participants said that the Federal Surplus Real Estate Property Program should be considered as a potential source of land. The Métis Nation in particular said that they have no ability to purchase land and that the Province should consider donating land for Métis housing projects. In general, participants stressed the importance of owning – rather than leasing – the land used for housing projects because ownership leads to equity, which provides more independence and flexibility.

26) Develop creative solutions for building housing. Participants put forward a number of creative ideas for building housing in a more cost effective way. These include:

⇒ Work with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity to build homes for Aboriginal people.

⇒ Develop multi-use housing to make best use of available land and to improve the economic viability of projects (i.e. have a commercial space on the lower level of buildings and rental units on upper levels). Some participants suggested that CMHC's Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, which can provide assistance to convert non-residential properties into affordable self-contained rental housing units or bed-units, could potentially be used for social housing projects. (Note: This program is not Aboriginal-specific, and one participant said that if all of the money for the program is not used up in one year, the remaining money should be targeted for Aboriginal housing.)

⇒ Convert decommissioned schools or other sites into Aboriginal housing projects.

Capacity Issues:

27) More government support is needed to improve the capacity and knowledge of Aboriginal organizations about existing programs and policies. Many participants said that there is insufficient knowledge within Aboriginal organizations and communities about available government programs, as well as limited understanding about the criteria to access those programs. Participants said more government support is needed to assist organizations in accessing available funding.

This issue was raised generally by participants but also specifically by the Métis Nation, which said it has very little understanding about existing housing programs and provincial policies.

28) Housing societies need at least one full-time person on staff to raise money and submit funding proposals. A few participants said that housing societies need to have

one full-time person on staff responsible solely for raising money and submitting proposals. Without such a position, participants indicated organizations do not have enough capacity to develop more housing, particularly in an era where there is no ongoing government support for Aboriginal-specific housing.

29) Training on how to submit funding proposals. Many participants talked about the complexities of writing proposals and said that workshops that outline the components required to make a bid successful would be helpful. Participants said that Aboriginal organizations need more assistance with how to project costs (such as maintenance and staffing costs) and how to quantify in-kind contributions (such as land donations). This is particularly true for organizations who are new to the housing field and who have never submitted a bid before, although even experienced housing societies spoke about being constantly rejected on proposals (one society said it has submitted about 28 proposals in the past few years and had been turned down for every one).

Participants also said that last-minute proposal calls are challenging because the majority of organizations simply do not have the knowledge or capacity required to respond in a short timeframe.

30) Aboriginal organizations need more training opportunities. Participants said that there is a wide variety of training needs for Aboriginal organizations. These include:

- Mentoring programs (including “train the trainer” programs)
- Communications (knowledge and skills in the workplace)
- Tenant relations
- Property management
- Real estate training
- Local government training (particularly planning and zoning processes)
- How to form a development corporation
- Problem-solving skills
- Self-care and stress-management skills
- Inspection services (especially because it can be difficult to find qualified inspectors and contractors)
- Business management training
- Advocacy training for staff (to assist tenants with issues such as the Residential Tenancy Act, income assistance, etc)
- Legal training (i.e. how to form a development corporation)

31) Partnerships with educational institutions need to be developed to deliver training. Although a number of participants stressed that training courses for Aboriginal organizations need to be developed with input from the Aboriginal community, participants also said that partnerships with educational institutions should be developed to deliver the training.

32) Mandatory training for board of directors is needed. Some participants suggested that the Province should develop a mandatory training kit for board members.

- 33) More mentoring and networking opportunities are needed.** A number of participants talked about the value of peer-learning and networking in building capacity. One participant mentioned a training program that CMHC used to deliver across the country on an annual basis on topics that were tailored to meet the needs of the local community. A few participants said that AHMA or a similar organization could play a role in re-instituting a similar type of training program.
- 34) More Tenant Relations Officers are required.** A majority of participants said that more Tenant Relations Officers (TRO's) are required. Participants recommended that the TRO program be expanded beyond the urban native housing program originally funded by CMHC.
- 35) Wage parity is needed in Aboriginal organizations.** Many participants spoke of the fact that Aboriginal organizations often lose employees to non-aboriginal or government organizations because of wage parity issues, and said that salaries and benefits need to be improved.
- Some participants also suggested that there should be some form of wage replacement or honorarium for board members who work with Aboriginal organizations.
- 36) Housing societies need help developing succession plans.** Many participants spoke about the need to start succession planning to accommodate staff that will be retiring over the next 10-15 years. Participants said that more training and mentoring of younger staff is needed to ensure success of organizations.
- 37) Policies of the Residential Tenancy Branch need to be examined.** A number of participants expressed feeling as though the provincial Residential Tenancy Act is biased towards landlords and that some form of education targeted to landlords about their tenants would be helpful. Several participants also said that penalties should be instituted to prevent abuse of tenants.
- 38) Aboriginal-owned businesses need to be encouraged, and services for Aboriginal people should be provided by Aboriginal people whenever possible.** A number of participants said that Aboriginal people often feel uncomfortable walking into an office to fill out application forms, and said that having Aboriginal employees assist them can sometimes ease their discomfort. Participants also said that joint ventures and Aboriginal owned businesses should be promoted by government and Aboriginal organizations.
- 39) Aboriginal tenants need training on tenant expectations and responsibilities.** A majority of participants said that Aboriginal tenants (particularly youth) need to have access to information/training about a number of topics, including:
- Basic education about costs and consequences of actions.
 - Lifeskills.
 - Programs that can lead to private market rentals or home ownership.

- Budgeting skills (Note: A few participants did make the point that often the problem is not a need for budgeting skills, but simply a need for money – i.e. living on \$250/month is difficult, whether you budget or not).
- Basic maintenance (i.e. how to operate a furnace).
- Information about the Residential Tenancy Act and basic tenant rights.
- Understanding government policies and regulations.
- Developing environmentally-sensitive housing.

A few participants raised the point that First Nations communities often provide training to their members on basic lifeskills and home maintenance, and said that there should be more coordination of those training opportunities.

Action Plan:

- 40) The Action Plan should be regionally based.** Many participants said that the Action Plan – or at least some component of it – should be regionally focused and community driven. Participants said strongly that the Action Plan needs to ensure community buy-in and that solutions are regionally and culturally appropriate. Some participants identified the need for government funding to support regional planning and coordination.
- 41) The Action Plan must have measurable goals and objectives.** Several participants said that real action is needed – not just words. Participants said that the Action Plan should have goals that are measurable, and not just contain over-arching, broad principles.
- 42) The Action Plan needs to be a living document.** A few participants said that the ten-year Action Plan should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it stays up-to-date and current.

III. Examples of Models/Key Initiatives

In addition to the proposed solutions, several participants suggested some initiatives that the Province should consider exploring when it develops the Action Plan. The following is a list of the examples that participants put forward:

- 1) The Province of Manitoba – Aboriginal housing model.
- 2) The Province of Ontario’s education program for students – includes information on housing.
- 3) The Cowichan Band – model for partnerships in housing.
- 4) The City of Edmonton – work program for homeless people.
- 5) The City of Kelowna – In From The Cold program for homeless people.
- 6) The City of Portland – homelessness program.
- 7) The Courtenay Mayor’s Task Force – homelessness.
- 8) ShelterNet BC – best practices models for homelessness.
- 9) Extreme Weather Shelter in Vancouver – partnerships in homelessness.
- 10) Province of New Brunswick – home ownership program.
- 11) The Doig River First Nation – home ownership program.
- 12) VanCity Credit Union – home ownership program.
- 13) Social Enterprise Program in Kamloops – partnerships in housing.
- 14) City of Dawson Creek – coordination and partnerships.
- 15) United States Rapid Re-Housing Policy – provides outreach workers and organizations with something similar to rent supplements, but goes beyond that policy because it grants parties the opportunity to negotiate leases in the private market on behalf of the family.
- 16) Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) – model for coordination.
- 17) Province of Quebec – provision of services such as childcare.
- 18) Lu’ma Patient Lodge.

IV. Summary and Next Steps

Housing is a priority issue for Aboriginal people in B.C. Aboriginal people who participated in the engagement process said that more housing is needed in virtually every region of the province for all segments of the population -- single people, families, students, elders, homeless people, First Nations people moving off-reserve, Métis people, and people with special needs.

Participants said that more supports for Aboriginal organizations and communities are needed to build capacity, and stressed that more coordination among and between government and Aboriginal organizations is required, as well as improved accountability measures to Aboriginal governments.

A majority of participants expressed cautious optimism about the provincial commitment to develop an Off-Reserve Housing Action Plan. Participants were clear that adequate resources need to be attached to the Action Plan in order for it to be effective, and said that Aboriginal governments and communities need to be engaged in the development and implementation of the Action Plan.

Next Steps:

Throughout the late spring and summer/fall of 2008, the OHCS will develop key recommendations – based on the findings of the community engagement process and previous research – regarding the Action Plan, and present those recommendations to government. The OHCS will work closely with the Steering Committee to develop the recommendations and the initial framework for the Action Plan.

The OHCS will then further refine the elements of the Action Plan and work within government to obtain approval and potential resources for the ten-year Action Plan. The Action Plan will be submitted for final approval in late 2008/early 2009.

Appendix 1 – List of Invited Groups and Organizations

The following table provides a list of the Aboriginal organizations that were invited to attend a regional and/or focus group session. In addition, every First Nation in the province was invited to participate in the engagement process.

Conayt Housing Authority
Kamloops Native Housing
Interior Indian Friendship Society
Lillooet Friendship Centre Society
Conayt Friendship Society
All Nations Trust Company
BC Housing - Interior Region
Salmon Arm Métis Assoc.
North Local - Invermere
Two Rivers Métis Society
City of Kamloops
District of Invermere
Merritt District Métis Association
City of Cranbrook
Interior Métis Child and Family Services
White Buffalo Aboriginal Health and Resource Society
Vancouver Native Housing Society
Lu'ma Native Housing Society
British Columbia Native Housing Corporation
Mission Native Housing Society (aka To-o Housing Society)
KeKinow Native Housing Society
Synala Housing Cooperative
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of BC
Métis Family Services
Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association
Urban Native Youth Association
Aboriginal Homelessness Committee c/o Lu'ma Native Housing Society
BC Housing - Vancouver Coastal Region
BC Housing - Fraser Region
Nova Métis Heritage Association
North Fraser Metis Assoc
Waceyá Métis Society
Fraser Valley Metis Association
Chilliwack Métis Association
Vancouver Métis Cultural Society
City of Vancouver Housing Centre
City of Vancouver Social Planning
City of Surrey

City of New Westminster
Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat
Metro Vancouver Policy and Planning
Pacific Association of First Nations Women (PAFNW)
Vancouver Native Health Centre
Fraser Health Authority
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
First Nations Chiefs' Health Committee
Powell Place Shelter
Dawson Creek Native Housing Society
Fort St. John Native Housing Society
Awassis Home Society
Fort St. John Friendship Society
Tansi Friendship Centre Society
Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society
Nawican Friendship Centre
New Caledonia Métis Assoc
Fort St. John Métis Society
Moccasin Flat's Métis Society
Northern Rockies Métis Society
North East Métis Association
Red River Metis Society
Kelly Lake Métis Society
City of Fort St. John
North Central LGMA
Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
Victoria Native Friendship Centre
Port Alberni Friendship Center
Hiiye'yu Lelum (House of Friendship) Society
Wachiay Friendship Centre Society
M'akola Group of Societies
North Island Métis Nation
Mid-Island Métis Nation
Métis Nation of Greater Victoria
Cowichan Valley Metis Assoc.
Alberni Clayqout Métis Assoc.
MIKI'SIW Métis Assoc
FPInnovations Forintek
City of Victoria
City of Nanaimo
City of Duncan
BC Housing - Vancouver Island Region
Vancouver Island Health Authority
Campbell River
Courtney
Salvation Army (New Hope Centre) Shelter

Island Crisis Care Society
Okanagan Métis & Aboriginal Housing Society
Vernon Native Housing Society
Aqanttanam Housing Society
Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
OoknaKane Friendship Centre
First Nations Friendship Centre
BC Native Women's Society
Kekuli Centre (youth housing)
BC Housing - Interior Region
City of Kelowna
Boundary Local Métis Assoc
Kelowna Métis Assoc
Vernon District Métis Assoc.
Métis Heritage and Cultural Council
Kootenay Region Office, Métis
South Local - Trail, Métis
West Local - Nelson Métis
Central Local - Cranbrook, Métis
East Local - Elk Valley, Métis
City of Penticton
Interior Health
District of Invermere
City of Cranbrook
City of Vernon
Prince George Métis Housing Society
Waskahikan Management Society
BC Native Housing Corporation
United Aboriginal Housing Society
Prince George Native Friendship Centre
Quesnel Tillicum Society, Native Friendship Centre
Cariboo Friendship Society
Aboriginal Business Development Centre
Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association
Elizabeth Fry Housing Society
City of Prince George
BC Housing - Northern Region: Prince George Area Office
Three Valley Métis Society
Prince George Métis Community Association
North Cariboo Métis Association
Cariboo Chilcotin Métis Association
Carrier Sekani Family Services
Central Interior Native Health Society
Northern Health Authority
North Central LGMA

Carrier Sekani Tribal Council
Muks-Kum-Ol Housing Society
Kermode Friendship Society
Friendship House Association of Prince Rupert
TRICORP
North Coast Community Assets
North West BC Métis Association
Northwest Métis Association
BC Housing - Northern Region: Prince Rupert Area Office
City of Terrace
City of Prince Rupert
Ksan House Society
Houston Friendship Centre
Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre
Tri-River Métis Association
First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC)
BC Assembly of First Nations
First Nations Summit Society
Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC)
Métis Nation BC (MNBC)
United Native Nations Society (UNNS)
BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
Provincial Aboriginal Youth Council
BC United Métis Nation Youth Circle
UNN Youth Governance
First Nations Youth Caucus
Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective (UAYC)
ShelterNet BC
B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses
BC NonProfit Housing Society
Union of BC Municipalities
B.C. Elders Communication Center Society
BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society
AHMA - Aboriginal Housing Management Association