

SUMMARY REPORT

Urban Indigenous Housing in BC: Municipal response
through housing policies and plans

2020
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PURPOSE

This report presents key findings from a four month study exploring if and how municipalities in BC currently acknowledge or address urban Indigenous housing needs in municipal plans and strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, due to factors such as systemic discrimination in laws and policies, resource allocation, and racism from private landlords, Indigenous peoples are the most likely to live in poor housing conditions [1]. In Canada, Indigenous people (status and non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) are consistently over-represented in populations experiencing homelessness or precarious housing [2] and are more likely to rent rather than own their home [3]. The risk of homelessness in urban centres is heightened due to a myriad of factors stemming from colonial policies [4] and in BC, 78% of Indigenous people reside off-reserve and 60% of this population live in urban settings [5]. While there is extensive literature regarding the state of Indigenous housing on-reserve and an increasing body of research examining urban Indigenous housing experiences [6], an analysis of municipalities' response to urban Indigenous housing needs in BC remains elusive. For the purposes of this study, urban Indigenous housing needs are the housing needs of individuals who identify as Indigenous and live within a municipality's jurisdictional boundary as opposed to reserve lands adjacent or within city limits.

Canada legislated the right to housing with the *National Housing Strategy Act, 2019*. This right goes beyond the basic need for shelter — adequate housing has been interpreted to require a standard of legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy [7]. For Indigenous peoples, their right to housing is positioned in relation to their inherent rights, as supported by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In particular, Indigenous rights to self-determination, lands, resources, and territories, and equal enjoyment of economic and social rights, such as housing. BC has recognized these rights in the recent *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2019*, which can be seen as a framework for reconciliation.

Urban Indigenous housing has a history of jurisdictional ambiguity, resulting in a patchwork of governmental responses with significant gaps. AHMA, the umbrella organization for Indigenous non-profit housing providers in BC, supports and advocates on behalf of urban Indigenous housing providers, working in partnership with federal, provincial, and municipal governments to meet the housing needs of urban Indigenous peoples throughout BC. AHMA's mission is to lead and advance housing rights for all Indigenous people living in BC. Municipalities are not without power to uphold these rights and the Union of BC Municipalities recognizes that “local government collaboration with First Nations and other Indigenous organizations represent an important opportunity for addressing issues of joint interest, including addressing housing needs faced by rapidly growing urban Aboriginal populations throughout B.C.” [8, pg. 9].

In theory, municipal governments have the local knowledge to advance federal, provincial, and regional initiatives that meet the specific needs of their community. Two primary instruments municipalities use to acknowledge housing needs and articulate their priorities in addressing these needs are Official Community Plans (OCPs) and Housing Strategies. Although local governments are not required to adopt an OCP, the vast majority of municipalities choose to do so. Once adopted, all bylaws and work undertaken within the municipality must be consistent with the OCP, so these documents can have significant influence on decision making and development within the

municipality. OCPs typically have a 20+ year timeline, outlining the long-term vision of a community, and must include housing policies which consider the most recent housing needs identified in the municipal population.

Many local governments have also created separate Housing Strategies (also called Housing Action Plans), which outline shorter-term policies and housing initiatives that respond to the current housing needs in their community. Given the diversity of housing issues and community circumstances, there is not a singular housing strategy format. As such, there are no specific content requirements for housing strategies; however, most include actions to support social housing, targets for creating or preserving affordable housing to meet future demand, and affordable market housing policies [9]. BC has recently mandated that all municipalities produce a Housing Needs Report by April 2022 and every five years thereafter. These reports are meant to ensure municipalities make informed decisions when creating housing policy and support housing development that meets current housing needs. There are a number of required statements of need that must be identified in these reports; however, BC has not required nor explicitly encouraged municipalities to include Indigenous-specific data within these reports nor address Indigenous-specific needs in any accompanying housing strategies.

How are municipalities responding to urban Indigenous housing needs through housing policies and plans?

APPROACH

This study was completed over a four-month period during the COVID-19 pandemic and leveraged a mixed-methods approach through content analysis of OCPs and Housing Strategies, surveys, and interviews. Trends in urban Indigenous housing experiences, identified through a literature review, were used to build an initial coding framework to conduct a summative content analysis of the sample documents (see following section for sample selection process). Additional codes were created in an iterative process to capture the diverse ways in which municipalities communicate content relating to Indigenous peoples and perspectives within OCPs and Housing Strategies.

Municipal planning staff who had direct experience working on or who had in-depth knowledge of the processes undertaken to create their municipality's OCP or Housing Strategy were identified and invited to participate in surveys and interviews.

The following section outlines the sample selection process and provides a profile of the data analysed in order to answer the question: *how are municipalities responding to urban Indigenous housing needs through housing policies and plans?*

Key Findings from this study are summarized in the remaining sections, with considerations for the reader interspersed.

SAMPLE SELECTION

There are currently 162 municipalities in BC, of which 83 were reviewed on the basis of the criteria below and 33 met the required criteria. Two municipalities had both an OCP and Housing Strategy which met the required criteria and 3 municipalities that did not meet the required criteria were included at AHMA's discretion. The final sample comprised of 30 municipalities representing 32 documents. The following outline the criteria and considerations that were used to determine the sample municipalities:

Required Criteria

The municipality must:

1. be located within British Columbia, and
2. have an OCP or Housing Strategy that was adopted after January 1, 2015.

Considerations

When selecting municipalities, we:

1. prioritized municipalities in which AHMA members operate,
2. aimed to select a sample representing a diversity of population sizes, and
3. aimed to select a sample representing a regional diversity (based on AHMA regional breakdown).

DATA PROFILE

The data sources for this study were drawn from each sample municipality, including either an OCP or Housing Strategy (HS), a survey, and an interview. Municipal staff with experience working on their municipality's most recent OCP or Housing Strategy completed the surveys and interviews. Table 1 outlines the breakdown of each data source used.

Table 1. Data sources by municipal population size and document type.

Population	Documents			Surveys			Interviews		
	OCP	HS	Total	OCP	HS	Total	OCP	HS	Total
0 - 10,000	6	2	8	3*	1	4	2	0	2
10 - 50,000	11	1	12	4	0	4	0	0	0
50,000 +	4	8	12	2	3 [†]	5	2	1	3
Total	21	11	32	9	4	13	4	1	5

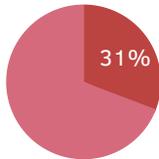
* 5 municipalities responded; however, 2 municipalities did not have any staff that had worked directly on the municipality's current OCP and therefore could not comment on the processes used.

† 5 municipalities responded; however, 1 municipality submitted an incomplete survey response that could not be used and 1 municipality did not have any staff that had worked directly on the municipality's current Housing Strategy and therefore could not comment on the processes used.

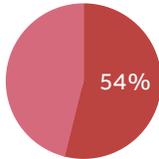
KEY FINDINGS

Our inquiry into municipalities' understanding and response to urban Indigenous housing needs first required an understanding of whether municipalities recognize Indigenous housing needs as unique from the housing needs of the general population and if so, how do municipalities identify Indigenous-specific housing needs?

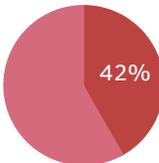
- 1 Although some municipalities do believe it is necessary to identify urban Indigenous housing needs in addition to the housing needs of the general municipal population, there remains significant uncertainty and lack of acknowledgement for Indigenous-specific housing needs in OCPs and Housing Strategies.



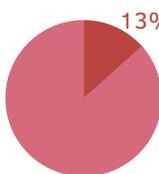
4/13 municipalities responded that urban Indigenous housing needs were considered in the creation of the OCP or Housing Strategy. Of which, only 2 explicitly acknowledged or addressed urban Indigenous housing needs within their OCP or Housing Strategy.



7/13 municipalities responded that they believe urban Indigenous housing needs are distinct from the housing needs of the general population. The remaining 6 respondents were unsure.



5/12 municipalities responded that they have already, or intend to, gather Indigenous-specific data for their Housing Needs Report. The remaining 7 respondents were unsure.



4/32 municipal documents (OCPs and Housing Strategies) explicitly acknowledged there are distinct Indigenous housing needs while 5/32 municipal documents recognized Indigenous people among other marginalized groups, implicitly suggesting there are Indigenous-specific housing needs.

Considerations

The lack of consideration and recognition of urban Indigenous housing needs as distinct needs mirrors DeVerteuil, & Wilson findings that, despite the convincing body of work asserting that Indigenous-specific social services provide better outcomes for urban Indigenous populations, within non-Indigenous service providers there remains a reluctance, indifference, or lack of intentional development of Indigenous spaces [10]. OCPs and Housing Strategies articulate municipal priorities, outline municipal resource allocation, and provide direction for both municipal planning staff and the development community. Therefore, these policies and plans directly impact development outcomes, programs, and services within municipalities. The lack of recognition and consideration of Indigenous housing needs within OCPs and Housing Strategies may reinforce the false dichotomy of urban and Indigenous and enable assimilationist attitudes. Considering the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Call to Action #57, there may be value in further research that illuminates municipalities' understandings of Indigenous rights and how these understandings may contribute to a lack of consideration of Indigenous-specific housing needs.

2 Municipalities that do recognize there are Indigenous-specific housing needs, identify those needs through a variety of means, including the following:

1. Formal engagement with local or neighbouring First Nation(s) leadership and members
2. Informal discussions with local First Nation(s) staff or urban Indigenous partners (made possible through relationships between municipal staff and local First Nation staff or urban Indigenous representatives)
3. Data from census, homeless counts, and housing stock
4. Information from non-municipal consultation or research (*i.e.* Provincial, regional, academic)
5. Engagement with Indigenous non-profit housing or service providers

Example

The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) exemplifies an innovative model that centres urban Indigenous leadership in identifying and articulating urban Indigenous housing needs. In 2015, SUILC formed as a coalition to advocate on behalf of the urban Indigenous community in Surrey, which is one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in BC. The City of Surrey supports SUILC's work, providing financial management and administrative support, but SUILC is an Indigenous-led community initiative.

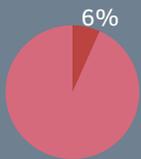
SUILC identified housing as a priority area in their report *All Our Relations: A Social Innovation Strategy* and currently, through the Skookum Housing Solutions Lab, SUILC aims to assess the housing needs and aspirations of Indigenous people living in Surrey and create a strategy for increasing Indigenous housing options in Surrey [11]. The results of this work will directly inform the City of Surrey's Housing Needs Report as the City will work with SUILC to craft an Indigenous statement of need within the Housing Needs Report. Through this model, "the leadership in the urban Indigenous community has ownership of what they're saying as what the needs are." (City of Surrey planner, July 2020).

Considerations

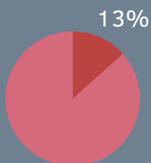
The means by which municipalities identify urban Indigenous housing needs will be dependent on the circumstance within the municipality - the size of the urban Indigenous population, types of local urban Indigenous representation or leadership, agreements between the municipality and local First Nations, or regional housing initiatives will all impact means of and barriers to identifying urban Indigenous housing needs. For example, in some municipalities there may not be any Indigenous service providers or local urban Indigenous organizations that represent or advocate for the urban Indigenous population. In these cases, municipalities seem to rely on local First Nations to identify housing needs of their members residing within the municipality. Further work centering Indigenous perspectives could inform best practices in identifying urban Indigenous housing needs in different circumstances.

When municipalities recognize or identify Indigenous-specific housing needs, are these needs acknowledged or addressed in Official Community Plans and Housing Strategies? If so, how?

3 Most municipalities do not acknowledge or address urban Indigenous housing needs in their OCP or Housing Strategy, despite that, when asked where they believe urban Indigenous housing needs could be acknowledged or addressed, municipal planners most frequently identified municipal housing policies and strategies.



2/32 municipal documents contained the phrase "urban Indigenous" or "urban Aboriginal"



4/32 documents contained the phrase "Indigenous housing" or "Aboriginal housing" and 2/4 of these phrases were passive references to Provincial funding streams or initiatives.



26/32 documents contained content regarding Indigenous people (not necessarily housing related content).

Considerations

Some municipalities identified that Indigenous-specific housing content was not included in their OCP because the OCP is a broad, high-level document, suggesting that detailed housing content, such as specific populations, is better contained within policies in a separate housing plan or strategy. It is important to examine within which types of housing plans or strategies municipalities are including this detailed content.

Coquitlam, Fernie, Kelowna, and Nanaimo Housing Strategies do not contain the words "Indigenous" "Aboriginal" "First Nation(s)" or "Métis" nor any content specifically relating to Indigenous people. Although Nanaimo does not include Indigenous-specific content in their *Affordable Housing Strategy* (analysed in this study) they do have significant Indigenous-specific content in their *Action Plan to End Homelessness*. This Action Plan was produced by the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, of which the City of Nanaimo is a member, and was approved and endorsed by the City of Nanaimo in 2018.

Similarly, Kelowna's *Healthy Housing Strategy* does not include Indigenous content, yet their *Journey Home Strategy*, a 5-year plan to end homelessness adopted in 2018, contains significant Indigenous-specific content. While it is critical to recognize and address the over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness and both Kelowna and Nanaimo acknowledge that their two housing strategies are intended to work in concert, it may be important to question why the urban Indigenous population was only acknowledged in relation to interventions for those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness?

4

Content relating to Indigenous housing is most frequently communicated in OCPs and Housing Strategies in the following ways:

Fact Base (the information that informs policy decisions and plan development)

1. **Indigenous history** - 50% of documents contained content related to the history of local First Nations, recognizing the presence of Indigenous peoples on the land prior to settler contact
 - a. 9% of documents explicitly acknowledge colonization
2. **Indigenous territory** - 50% of documents contained a statement recognizing the traditional territory(s) that the municipality is within
3. **Over representation or marginalization** - 21% of documents identify that Indigenous people are over represented in populations experiencing homelessness and precarious housing or are identified among marginalized groups

Goals (what the municipality aims to achieve)

1. **Partnership** - 44% of documents contained a goal to develop partnerships with Indigenous governments, organizations, or people
2. **Reconciliation** - 16% of documents contained a goal to advance reconciliation
3. **Culturally appropriate housing** - 9% of documents contained a goal to support the development of culturally appropriate Indigenous housing

Policies (commitments to and means of achieving municipal goals)

1. **Relationship** - 56% of documents contained a policy to strengthen or develop municipal relationships with Indigenous leadership and representative organizations
 - a. **Collaboration** - 41% of documents contained a policy to work in collaboration with local First Nation or urban Indigenous leadership
 - b. **Reconciliation** - 16% of documents contained policies to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
2. **Rights** - 19% of documents contained a policy to recognize and uphold Indigenous rights (primarily Aboriginal Rights and Title or Treaty rights)

Implementation (initiatives that put policy into practice to achieve municipal goals)

1. **Support for Provincial or Federal housing initiative** - 16% of documents describe the municipality's previous or upcoming contribution to the development of urban Indigenous housing through Provincial or Federal housing initiative

What is preventing municipalities from identifying urban Indigenous housing needs? What barriers do municipalities face to including content related to urban Indigenous housing in municipal plans and policies?

5 The following factors have contributed to municipalities' difficulty in, or reluctance to, identify Indigenous-specific housing needs:

1. Uncertainty of the municipality's role / jurisdiction to
 - a. engage on Indigenous issues, or
 - b. take action to address Indigenous housing needs
2. Lack of available Indigenous-specific housing data
3. Local First Nation(s) have many competing priorities, so opportunities for engagement are limited
4. Limited resources (time, staff capacity, financial)
5. Housing needs are identified by housing type rather than demographics
6. The urban Indigenous population makes up a small percentage of the municipal population

"When we look at housing needs we evaluate based on demographics but not race or ethnicity. We look at global needs rather than then needs of subgroups. Given the size of our community subclassifying/categorizing is likely not an effective use of time and resources."

- Survey Participant

6 Municipalities have found that the following factors contribute to difficulty in including content regarding Indigenous-specific housing needs in OCPs and Housing Strategies:

1. The document is high-level or does not identify specific populations (urban Indigenous housing needs are captured within broader community housing needs)
2. There were no housing needs within the urban Indigenous community to address
3. Lack of understanding and support from municipal staff
4. Uncertainty if urban Indigenous housing should be something that is regulated or incentivized
5. Uncertainty with appropriate level of detail to include

Considerations

When considering actions to alleviate these factors, it is important to understand they are not isolated barriers, but rather may be inherently reinforcing one another. Uncertainty and lack of understanding may contribute to why Indigenous-specific data is not collected, which in turn may limit the municipal understanding of the local urban Indigenous circumstance and appropriate responses to Indigenous-specific housing needs. Limited financial resources to engage with Indigenous leadership and support the collection of Indigenous-specific information may perpetuate and amplify these factors.

In addition, a problematic theme underlying some of these inhibiting factors and the quote above is the misconception that identifying and addressing needs for the entire population (global needs) and not considering demographics such as race, will produce neutral responses to community needs. This ignores the fact that the default means of addressing housing needs are grounded in colonial settler-Canadian understandings of appropriate housing that will inherently privilege certain populations for which those responses are appropriate. As "Indigenous notions of home, health, and even place have been found to be qualitatively distinct from those of non-Indigenous people in many respects" [12], adequate and appropriate housing for urban Indigenous peoples necessitates an understanding of urban Indigenous housing experiences and needs.

What is motivating municipalities to identify urban Indigenous housing needs or acknowledge urban Indigenous housing needs in OCPs or Housing Strategies? What is enabling municipalities to identify urban Indigenous housing needs?

7 Municipalities indicated that the following are motivating factors to identify urban Indigenous housing needs or to include content regarding Indigenous housing in OCPs or Housing Strategies:

1. Urban Indigenous people are often at a disadvantage for access to information and opportunities for homeownership.
2. Stereotypes and discrimination are continuing barriers for urban Indigenous renters.
3. Homelessness is disproportionately affecting Indigenous people.
4. There are different funding models and streams available to support Indigenous populations.
5. There are specific Federal and Provincial relationships and community partnerships with Indigenous leadership.
6. There are specific cultural protocols, culturally appropriate housing, and culturally different views of land ownership.
7. There are unique demographic factors that need to be considered, such as a younger population and a higher proportion of youth in care.
8. An OCP can be a means of advancing reconciliation and strengthening Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships.
9. Identifying Indigenous housing needs through an OCP process enables small municipalities and local First Nations to combine resources to address common issues.

Considerations

This finding suggests that there is an awareness of distinct urban Indigenous housing experiences within municipalities. Interestingly, UNDRIP and the TRC Calls to Action were not specifically identified as motivating factors to identify or include urban Indigenous housing content within OCPs or Housing Strategies. The *BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2019* (DRIPA) acknowledges Indigenous peoples' right to develop and determine housing programs affecting them. Municipalities operate within the framework of delegated authority from the Province, but it is not clear if or how legislation such as DRIPA will impact municipal housing policy and plans. The Province has committed to work with Indigenous peoples on a Action Plan, which sets out a process to ensure the laws of BC are consistent with DRIPA. As this work may be inclusive of legislation that governs municipalities, whether or not the Action Plan includes initiatives regarding urban Indigenous housing could impact municipal responsibilities moving forward.

8

The following resources have enabled municipalities to identify urban Indigenous housing needs and may support the inclusion of content regarding Indigenous-specific housing needs in OCPs and Housing Strategies:

1. Indigenous-specific housing data
2. Financial resources
3. Council commitment to and support for reconciliation efforts
4. Municipal staff support and recognition of Indigenous experiences
5. Good relationship with urban Indigenous representatives, advocates, and service providers
6. Good relationship with local First Nation(s)

Examples

The City of Vancouver's *Housing Vancouver Strategy* exemplifies one way in which a municipality acknowledges and addresses urban Indigenous housing needs within their Housing Strategy. The Housing Strategy includes a chapter on Indigenous Housing and Wellness which contains the following three strategies along with accompanying key actions for the municipality to undertake:

1. Supporting strengthened capacity for Indigenous partners working together towards a Regional 10-Year Indigenous Housing and Wellness Plan
2. Commitment to deepening urban Indigenous engagement
3. Integrating Indigenous design into housing and wellness projects

The City of Quesnel's OCP exemplifies another municipal approach. First, there is a section regarding municipal-First Nations collaboration, in which the municipality acknowledges

"First Nations peoples have inhabited the region since time immemorial and have strong and thriving cultural traditions and practices. At the same time, the legacy of colonization, including the impact of residential schools, have created unique conditions and challenges. Addressing these issues through dialogue and collaboration as part of First Nations reconciliation and recognition efforts is fundamentally important to the City and the OCP."

- *City of Quesnel Official Community Plan, 2019, pg 65*

The plan also includes a specific housing policy to:

Support the development of a broad range of market and non-market housing options that are culturally appropriate, including for Aboriginal peoples, singles, couples, families, seniors and elders, students, faculty, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable populations, including multigenerational housing concepts and housing for youth.

Considerations

An important aspect of Vancouver and Quesnel's approach to identifying and acknowledging urban Indigenous housing need is the commitment to reconciliation and the recognition of Indigenous leadership in guiding the municipality's work. When Indigenous rights are recognized in urban contexts, models of Indigenous representation are frequently displaced by policies of service delivery for urban Indigenous populations [13]. Thus, it is important to critically examine if and how Indigenous self-determination is upheld through these municipal processes.

CONCLUSION

The eight findings summarized here suggest that consideration of urban Indigenous housing needs is not a wide-spread priority among municipalities in BC, but that there is growing desire for and intention to engage on efforts towards reconciliation between settler Canada and Indigenous peoples within urban municipal contexts. Many municipalities recognize that they are situated within one or more Indigenous territories and acknowledge that Indigenous peoples inhabited and stewarded the lands prior to settler contact. However, only 3/32 or 9% of the sample documents explicitly acknowledge the colonial system that displaced Indigenous peoples from the very lands over which the municipalities have jurisdiction. Recognizing the historic and ongoing impacts of colonization is an important piece of working towards reconciliation.

Sixteen percent of the sample documents contained a statement regarding the municipalities' commitment to reconciliation and 56% of documents express commitment to working in relationship with local First Nations or urban Indigenous leadership. There are examples of large and small municipalities working in partnership with Indigenous peoples to understand urban Indigenous housing needs, but there remains significant uncertainty and little evidence of how these intentions for reconciliation are applied to action through housing policies and plans.

Federal and Provincial governments have made commitments to recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples through the TRC Calls to Action, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Calls for Justice, and UNDRIP. Although municipalities are junior governments with delegated authority, municipal policies and plans have direct impact on local development and municipalities have a role in reconciliation efforts. This study leads to future research questions such as: what is the municipal role in responding to urban Indigenous housing needs? How can municipalities support Indigenous-led and Indigenous-informed processes that uphold Indigenous rights in pursuit of better housing outcomes for urban Indigenous people? And, how is systemic racism and colonial values informing municipal responses to urban Indigenous housing needs, including within which policies and plans Indigenous populations are recognized?

LIMITATIONS

This study provides insight into municipalities' response to urban Indigenous housing needs in British Columbia (BC) through an analysis of current OCPs and municipal Housing Strategies. Surveys and interviews with municipal planning staff were conducted to identify the processes with which the sample OCPs and Housing Strategies were made. Our findings pertain to municipal responses reflected within these OCPs and Housing Strategies specifically. Municipal responses to urban Indigenous housing needs in policies and plans other than OCPs or Housing Strategies are beyond the scope of this study.

It is important to note that this study does not attempt to make suggestions for how municipal processes, plans, or policies should acknowledge or address urban Indigenous housing needs. Indigenous voices must be centred in any further work exploring best practices for how to identify and address urban Indigenous housing needs.

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