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INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

# Best Practices in Sustainable Housing Delivery in Inuit Nunangat

## About Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national representational organization for Canada's 60,000 Inuit, the majority of whom live in four regions of Canada's Arctic, specifically, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador). Collectively, these four regions make up Inuit Nunangat, our homeland in Canada. It includes 53 communities and encompasses roughly 35 percent of Canada's landmass and 50 percent of its coastline.

The comprehensive land claim agreements that have been settled in Inuit Nunangat continue to form a core component of our organization's mandate. These land claims have the status of protected treaties under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and we remain committed to working in partnership with the Crown toward their full implementation. Consistent with its founding purpose, ITK represents the rights and interests of Inuit at the national level through a democratic governance structure that represents all Inuit regions.

ITK advocates for policies, programs and services to address the social, cultural, political and environmental issues facing our people.

ITK is governed by a Board of Directors composed of the following members:

- Chair and CEO, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
- President, Makivik Corporation
- President, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
- President, Nunatsiavut Government

In addition to voting members, the following non-voting Permanent Participant Representatives also sit on the Board of Directors:

- President, Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada
- President, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
- President, National Inuit Youth Council

Prepared for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

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## Introduction

“The reality remains that we have not yet been able to find a solution for a low-cost, well-ventilated, appropriate social housing design that is acceptable to Inuit. [...] Hopefully we can work together across Inuit regions, channel those great minds that can work with us, and also our elders, who have [...] essential perspectives on how to solve this, and then work together towards a solution.”

Natan Obed, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami<sup>1</sup>

Housing affects every aspect of life but throughout Inuit Nunangat (the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut), a deep, costly and persistent housing crisis has been the norm for decades. It began in the second half of the 20th century when Inuit were forced to live in permanent settlements. In each of the four regions of Inuit Nunangat, there are housing policies and programs aiming to address the crisis. The following report describes five best practices in housing policies and programs in Inuit Nunangat:

- The Government of Nunavut’s comprehensive long-term housing delivery strategy.
- Makivik Corporation’s engagement in social housing construction in Nunavik.
- The SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik (Sustainable Communities) initiative to involve communities in the planning of sustainable development in Nunatsiavut.
- The Pivallianiq Program that helps Nunavik families maintain their homes, beautify their surroundings, and create a better and safe living environment.
- The Northwest Territories’ Solutions to Educate People program that teaches financial management and home maintenance to prospective homeowners, including low-income residents, in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

This discussion paper reviews the current housing situation, provides a description of the five case studies, and summarizes lessons learned and recommendations.

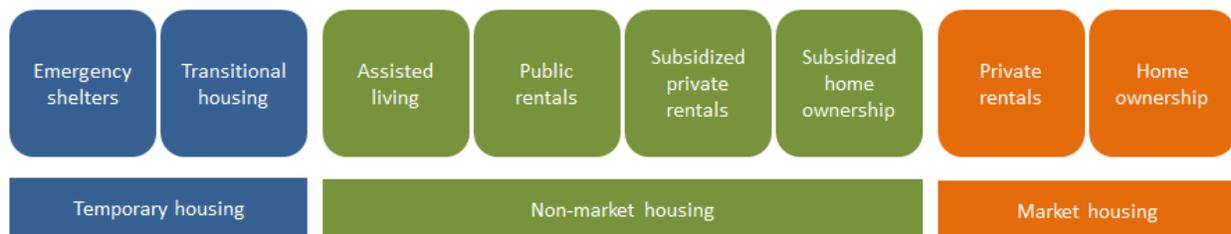
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<sup>1</sup> Parliament of Canada. (March 22, 2016). *Evidence*. The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/sen/committee/421/APPA/52443-e.HTM>

# 1. Housing in Inuit Nunangat

The concept of the housing continuum serves to diversify housing supply based on the needs of different groups, ensuring access to transitional, subsidized and private housing (Canadian Polar Commission [CPC], 2014a). While many provinces and urban centres across Canada have most or all elements of the housing continuum in place, the same elements are often lacking in Inuit Nunangat.

Figure 1: The Housing Continuum<sup>2</sup>



Sources: BC Healthy Communities Society, n.d.; NHC, 2013.

In particular, many Inuit communities rely on subsidized rentals and have low rates of home ownership. Access to supportive or transitional housing, cooperative housing or private rentals remains limited.

The share of inadequate housing – namely with regard to overcrowding, an insufficient number of bedrooms, and the need for major repairs – is generally larger in Inuit Nunangat than in Canada overall (Statistics Canada, 2011). Considering this, the importance of sustainable housing to residents of Inuit Nunangat cannot be overestimated.

Sustainable housing means “healthy, affordable, flexible and environmentally responsible housing [...] that is culturally appropriate to the needs of the users” (Semple, 2013, p. 90). Healthy housing designs help ensure moisture control and air circulation to avoid mould. Environmentally sound housing implies careful consideration of construction materials and sustainable land development practices. Considering the high cost of home maintenance in the North, energy efficiency is a priority. Good quality housing should be available to all residents of Canada’s Northern communities, meaning that housing should be affordable. This is why government support to renters and homeowners in Northern communities is important. Housing providers in Inuit Nunangat are increasingly incorporating elements of sustainable housing in their policies and programs.

<sup>2</sup> The housing continuum does not reflect priorities; for example, home ownership is not the ultimate goal. The continuum simply reflects a range of housing options that are helpful to have to meet the needs of the community.

Key housing agencies in the Inuit regions are:

- In Nunavut: the Nunavut Housing Corporation (NHC).
- In the Inuvialuit Settlement Region: the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWTHC).
- In Nunavik: the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau (KMHB).
- In Nunatsiavut: the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) and the Torngat Regional Housing Association (TRHA).

These housing agencies are implementing a range of housing programs targeted at home ownership, rentals and homelessness.<sup>3</sup> Over 40 per cent of the programs focus on home ownership, which includes support for construction, purchase and maintenance. Another 40 per cent focus on supporting social (and sometimes private) rentals, while 20 per cent focus on supportive housing. Most of these 38 programs are implemented with financial support from the federal, provincial and territorial governments. About 30 per cent of them are done in partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) through the Investment in Affordable Housing program (IAH) and other programs. In 2016/17, the federal government has allocated CAD 76.7 million for housing in Nunavut, CAD 50 million for Nunavik, CAD 15 million for Nunatsiavut and CAD 15 million for Inuvialuit (Government of Canada, 2016).

## 2. Best Practices in Housing Delivery in Inuit Regions

### 2.1 Case Study 1: Let's Build a Home Together, the Government of Nunavut's Long-Term Comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy

Designing a long-term housing strategy has been a priority for the Government of Nunavut since the territory's establishment in 1999. According to the Government of Nunavut, the holistic response to housing in Nunavut includes three phases (Nunavut Housing Corporation [NHC], 2013, p. 8):

- The Igluliuqatigiilauqta: Let's Build a Home Together Framework for the Government of Nunavut (2012) serves as the basis for the subsequent long-term strategy.
- The Government of Nunavut's Long-Term Comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013) is a detailed response to housing in Nunavut.
- The Blueprint for Action (expected in 2016) will be a coordinated interdepartmental plan to implement the housing strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> The list of programs is based on the housing agencies' websites, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) website and other publicly available information, and may not be complete.

The strategic directions, goals and objectives of Nunavut's long-term housing strategy are comprehensive in that the strategy focuses on both housing supply and demand, outlines challenges such as high housing costs and limited investment, and seeks to address the issues of insufficient interdepartmental cooperation and limited federal investment. The strategy is explicitly based on the concept of the housing continuum. Several gaps in the housing continuum have been identified, including transitional and supportive housing, and private rentals (NHC, 2013). The strategy accounts for the territory's demographic and socioeconomic projections, including the reliance on subsidized public housing and insufficient options for progressing along the housing continuum (NHC, 2013, p. 13). While it recognizes the need to increase access to public housing, it also mentions the need to identify and implement changes to Nunavut's home ownership programs in order to make them more accessible (NHC, 2015, p. 15).

The NHC is the driving force behind the strategy. The strategy recognizes that success requires collaboration between different stakeholders, and the NHC took efforts to engage various government departments and agencies through multi-party and one-on-one sessions (NHC, 2015, p. 5). These interdepartmental consultations are a formal and facilitated process leading to the development of an action plan. It is expected that the action plan will include a pathway to financing the implementation of the housing strategy. The Government of Nunavut has indicated that it will use its membership in the National Housing Research Committee, the Canadian Housing Renewal Association, the Tri-Territorial Housing Socio-Economic Working Group, and the Federal Provincial Territorial Housing Deputy Ministers Forum (including its working groups on social housing and long-term funding) to lobby for additional federal funding (Government of Nunavut, 2012, p. 8).

Finally, the strategy specifies that implementing the long-term housing strategy requires a partnership between the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), which ensures that promised made under the Nunavut Agreement are carried out (Government of Nunavut, 2012, p. 8). It also mentions the need to build close relations with Société d'habitation du Quebec (SHQ), including the sharing of information on housing best practices between Nunavik and Nunavut (Government of Nunavut, 2012, p. 8). This focus on partnerships is important for knowledge exchange between the Inuit regions.

The Government of Nunavut's Housing and Homelessness Strategy shows the importance of a long-term, comprehensive strategy for housing provision in Inuit Nunangat. It highlights the need for a whole-of-government approach to planning, as well as the need to base housing policies on research data.

## 2.2. Case Study: Makivik Corporation's Construction Division (Nunavik)

Makivik Corporation is a non-profit entity created pursuant to the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975) and represents Nunavik Inuit on social, cultural, and economic matters. (Makivik, 2015). Since 1998, Makivik, through its Construction Division, has built social housing units on a not-for-profit basis pursuant to various agreements with both the federal and Quebec governments. This initiative was undertaken to maximize the number of social housing units built so as to help address the housing crisis in the Nunavik region, while at the same time promoting training and employment of Inuit in the construction of the housing units and maximizing economic spinoffs for the Nunavik region.

Over the years the Makivik Construction Division has proven itself as an innovative low-cost builder of housing in the North (Northern Development Ministers Forum [NDMF], 2013). The Makivik Construction Division cost per square foot compares very favourably to the cost of other public tenders for housing construction in Nunavik. In addition to the fact that Makivik builds the housing units on a non-profit basis and covers certain administrative costs, additional factors to explain the cost difference include:

- The fact that the housing unit designs have remained very similar year over year results in the ability to better estimate the materials required, which also helps in negotiating better prices with suppliers.
- Experienced workers repeating similar tasks in multiple units leads to less waste of materials and improved production rates.
- Restricting the number of villages in which housing units are to be built in any given year to a maximum of 5 or 6 communities allows for larger distribution of fixed costs.
- Advance planning of housing construction which allows the pads, to the extent possible, and materials to be shipped during the fall of the previous construction season allows construction to commence at least two months prior to the arrival of the first sealift, thereby extending the construction season.

The Makivik Construction Division trains and actively promotes the hiring of Inuit, thus contributing to economic development in the region. Through its Construction Division, Makivik has been able to provide on-the-job training to an ever increasing number of Nunavik Inuit. The skills gained by Makivik employees are transferable to other construction sites and in other industries, including mining, throughout the region. Over the past few years, Makivik has put specific emphasis on Inuit employment, through various training programs conducted in collaboration with the KRG, including cross-cultural training programs. These construction practices are helping to create a sense of pride and self-sufficiency for workers and communities in Nunavik and are helping provide communities with the necessary tools to work towards long-term sustainability. The hiring of Nunavik Inuit together with the purchase of goods and services from Nunavik businesses and organizations provides important economic spinoffs to the region. In particular, the construction of 92 units in 2011 created CAD 7 million in economic spinoffs to businesses, organizations and individuals in Nunavik (NDMF, 2013).

Makivik Corporation's Construction Division demonstrates how housing construction practices employed by Inuit corporations can benefit communities. These practices can help achieve lower construction costs, ensure employment and training opportunities for local residents, and accumulate local expertise in housing construction and maintenance.

### 2.3 Case Study 3: SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik, Healthy Homes in Thriving Nunatsiavut Communities (Nunatsiavut Government)

Since 2005, when Nunatsiavut achieved self-governance, the region has worked to address its housing gap, including homelessness, overcrowding and low-quality housing (Bennett, 2015). In 2012-2013, the Nunatsiavut Government implemented the SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik (Sustainable Communities) Initiative (SCI), an inter-governmental, inter-departmental, multidisciplinary research program that aims to provide information and guidance for best practices and community sustainability (CPC, 2014b, p. 21). SCI was prompted by the increased visibility of the effects of climate change in Nunatsiavut, including the greatest loss of sea ice in the Canadian Arctic and a continued decrease in snow and ice cover (Goldhar et al., 2013, p. 2). Consequently, workshops were conducted with residents of each community to identify priorities for actions on sustainability, and housing emerged as one of the priorities (Goldhar et al., 2013, p. 2).

As part of SCI, the Healthy Homes initiative involved the Nunatsiavut Government, the Nain Research Centre and Memorial University (Nunatsiavut Government, 2013). It included housing needs assessments in Nunatsiavut communities, an analysis of Canadian and international best practices, and partnerships with researchers and practitioners. The program sought to address the connections between homes in disrepair, energy loss and mold. It also focused on addressing overcrowding, house designs that do not account for Inuit traditions and the effects of climate change (Pain, 2014).

Housing design charettes (community consultations) were the central element of the Healthy Homes initiative. Residents of each Nunatsiavut community spoke about issues in housing quality, durability, environmental sustainability and cultural applicability; they expressed the need for more housing units and more diverse housing, including multiplexes or apartments (Goldhar et al., 2013, p. 13). Residents also spoke about specific housing design features they needed in order to support their extended families, as well as their hunting and fishing activities (Bennett, 2015). The research revealed opportunities for simple cost-effective engineering changes leading to improved energy efficiency and the design of a prototype six-unit residential building. Following the construction of the prototype in Nain, researchers from Laval University will evaluate the home to adjust the design with the intent of replicating it in other communities (Bennett, 2015).

The idea behind the Healthy Homes initiative was powerful: a house built by Inuit for Inuit (Nunatsiavut Government, 2013). The strength of the initiative was that it used a holistic approach based on economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability (Sheldon & Goldhar, 2014). Healthy Homes gained support from the regional government's executive council, community mayors and local councils who all agreed that a community-based initiative supported by researchers and decision-makers would present a fresh, new approach for the region (Harron, 2013). Former president of Nunatsiavut Sarah Leo called the initiative "an outstanding example of using research for the betterment of Inuit" (Nunatsiavut Government, 2013). In 2013 the initiative received an Arctic Inspiration Prize, including an award in the amount of CAD 350,000 that will be used to finance the construction of the prototype building.

Healthy Homes in Thriving Nunatsiavut Communities illustrates the importance of partnerships between researchers, practitioners, and communities participating in sustainable housing programs in the Inuit regions. Such partnerships can help document community needs, highlight opportunities and challenges faced by communities, and develop sustainable and culturally appropriate housing designs.

#### 2.4 Case Study 4: Pivallianiq Program, Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau, Nunavik

As provided for by the Act of Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ), the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau (KMHB) was created by patent letters, on January 21, 1999, following a request from the Kativik Regional Government (KRG). It is incorporated as a non-profit organization for the main purpose of acquiring and administering housing for low and moderate-income persons or families.

In 2011, the KMHB in collaboration with SHQ launched the Pivallianiq initiative, a program aimed to help families maintain their homes and equipment, beautify their surroundings and create a better and safe living environment. Pivallianiq is an Inuktut word that means "a change for the better" (Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau [KMHB], 2015a).

Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) has invested nearly CAD 6 million in the program since its launch (KMHB, 2015c). The program is being implemented across 14 villages in Nunavik and uses an informative, action-oriented sensitization campaign to inspire households and communities to acquire a sense of pride and responsibility for their homes. It is aimed to improve housing conditions for all Inuit communities, equipping the younger generation with know-how, and generate significant social benefits (KMHB, n.d.).

The Pivallianiq program comprises three components (KMHB, 2015a; Blueprint for Life, n.d.):

- The Makeover Team is designed for social housing tenants. It is a group of agents who visit tenants and encourage them to join the maintenance and beautification program, inspect their homes and award them Pivallianiq certification if they meet the program criteria. Certified families that pay their rent are eligible to participate in local and regional draws for prizes such as home makeovers, free groceries or free rent (KMHB, 2015b).
- The Nanuk workshops, open to all students in Nunavik, target children in grade school by raising their awareness about the importance of living in a healthy and well-maintained environment.
- The campaign “My home, my village, my pride” is open to all Nunavik residents. It brings together social workers to certain Nunavik communities to raise awareness about violence and bullying, in order to fight vandalism and improve the quality of the living environment.

The program has experienced overwhelming success in recent years and seen considerable improvements in the housing environments of Inuit tenants (Newswire, 2013). In 2015, 960 families (23 per cent of Nunavik families) from across 11 communities participated in the program, and 662 families earned Pivallianiq certification, demonstrating a 20 per cent increase compared to 2012 when the program started (Étienne Lévesque, personal communication, April 24, 2016). According to media reports, Pivallianiq has reportedly contributed to a reduction in rent arrears (Rogers, 2014).

Pivallianiq shows how a community-building program can help maintain public housing, reduce vandalism, and instill pride in Inuit communities. Pivallianiq works with children and adults, strengthening their home maintenance skills and emphasizing the importance of living in a well-maintained environment.

## 2.5 Case study 5: Solutions to Educate People (STEP), Northwest Territories Housing Corporation

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWTHC) has a range of social housing programs, including Housing Choices, an example of an integrated demand-oriented social housing program. It provides a range of community services, including education, first-home ownership support and repair assistance. One of the components of Housing Choices is Solutions to Educate People (STEP) (Northwest Territories Housing Corporation [NWTHC], 2012; Government of NWT, n.d.). The program provides clients with counselling services and educational courses to acquire skills needed to be successful homeowners and take greater responsibility for their homes.

STEP consists of four modules, each 6.5 hours in duration (NWT HC, 2012) related to budgeting, banking and credit, steps and issues associated with a home purchase, and home maintenance and repair. All components include discussions and hands-on involvement by the participants. The first two modules consist of Financial Skills I: Budgeting and Financial Skills II: Banking and Credit, with the first segment being focused on teaching participants the importance of money management and assisting in setting and achieving financial goals. The second financial building block aims to develop an understanding of various banking systems, credit approval, principles of debt management, along with establishing and/or repairing a credit history. The third module focuses on the home purchasing process by helping participants to determine their readiness to become homeowners, to choose a suitable home, and to understand mortgage application and approval processes, including the cost of buying a home. The last module deals with home maintenance and repair. Topics covered include electrical, heating, and plumbing maintenance and repairs; home safety; and preventative maintenance (NWT HC, 2008). The NWT HC has also incorporated energy conservation and efficiency elements into the course, as well as information about mould, its causes, prevention and removal. Thus, STEP provides its clients with important information on health issues and energy cost-reducing measures (OpenNWT, 2011). Through STEP, the NWT HC is helping low-income households improve their financial literacy and better understand the benefits and responsibilities of home ownership.

Solutions to Educate People is a successful program helping residents of remote Inuit communities hone their homeownership skills. The program provides prospective and current homeowners with information related to personal finances, home purchase, maintenance and repairs, as well as advice on energy conservation and healthy living.

### 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 3.1 Lessons Learned from the Case Studies

- Inuit regions have developed successful housing programs in different areas such as strategic planning, housing engineering and construction, homeowner and tenant education, and community-based research. However, these programs are not always well studied and documented, and public information about them is not always readily available.
- The idea of sustainability is not abstract. In the context of Inuit communities sustainability implies healthy communities living according to Inuit traditions, preserving the land and its ecosystems for future generations. In the context of Northern housing, sustainability implies affordability, durability and energy efficiency.
- Multi-sectoral partnerships that involve researchers, policy-makers and communities in addressing housing issues can be successful. These partnerships combine research results and traditional knowledge to develop practical solutions.

- Non-profit construction practices can be cost-effective and provide economic and social benefits to communities.
- Housing programs in Inuit Nunangat are increasingly developed in consultations with communities. These consultations reveal the importance of including Inuit in decision-making to build good-quality, sustainable and culturally appropriate housing.

### 3.2 Recommendations to Replicate Success and Scale up Best Practices

- Continue to document, evaluate and disseminate information about innovative and successful housing practices in Inuit Nunangat.
- Undertake assessments of different housing programs to identify best practices.
- Support knowledge exchange by organizing workshops and study tours involving administrators, specialists and community leaders.
- Adopt a long-term housing strategy approach to planning housing delivery. In particular, the inclusion of different departments and organizations in the design of various elements of the housing strategy can help ensure a collaborative, robust and cohesive response to housing challenges.
- The concept of a housing continuum should be used to develop benchmarks and targets for housing policies and programs. Placing existing housing options along the continuum allows one to identify and address gaps in housing provision.

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