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INUIT TAPIIRIT KANATAMI

National Housing Strategy Submission

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

The housing needs in Inuit communities are the greatest amongst all populations in Canada with 40% of Inuit living in crowded housing compared to 4% of Canadians as a whole. In 2011 the “core” housing need for Inuit was 33.6% compared to 12.5% Canada-wide.

Throughout Inuit Nunangat (the four regions making up the Inuit homeland), 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 and then, in some cases, forced to relocate to other settlements. Commitments were made to provide housing to Inuit settling in these communities, however, the housing provided was extremely inadequate; instantly overcrowded and ill equipped for any household, let alone those living in Arctic conditions. Limited and sporadic investment as well as the federal withdrawal from new social housing construction in 1993 (except on-reserve) has exacerbated the problem.

Our communities lack the numerous and diverse housing options available in southern Canada. The housing continuum for most Inuit communities is generally restricted to public housing units (majority), government staff housing (employer subsidized), and very expensive single family dwellings that are limited to the few communities with private markets. The result is a more dynamic and persistent set of entry-to-market challenges not faced by the majority of the other jurisdictions.

Our society is experiencing enormous stress from the negative effects of overcrowded and inadequate housing. Housing affects every aspect of life, including work, education and family and is therefore one of the most crucial determinants of a healthy life for individuals and communities. Inuit suffer from the highest rates of tuberculosis and the lowest rates of educational attainment. Having access to appropriate and affordable housing is critical for people seeking safety from violence and improving education and physical and mental health outcomes. Investing in housing is therefore an investment in the ability of our people to be self-sufficient and has a positive impact on our economies and overall individual and community well-being.

National Housing Strategy Engagement

Inuit welcome the opportunity through the Government of Canada's National Housing Strategy consultations to help guide the renewal of federal housing policies and programs in a way that benefits Inuit now and into the future and responds to the specific Government of Canada objective to improve housing outcomes in Indigenous communities.

We hope that, through these consultations, we can ensure the recognition of the role of Inuit land claims organizations in the management of housing in our communities and the key role of the federal government in further improving Inuit housing outcomes.

Key Principles for Improving Inuit Housing Outcomes

1. Work directly in partnership with Inuit

According to CMHC's [2011 Housing Conditions Series: Inuit Households in Canada](#), "through the IAH (Investment in Affordable Housing Initiative) the Government of Canada recognizes that **provinces and territories are best positioned to decide how to target funding in order to make a lasting difference**. Under bilateral agreements with CMHC, provinces and territories are responsible for choosing the programs they design and deliver to address local housing needs and priorities." (Emphasis added)

The thinking underlying the above statement needs to change. Through lands claims agreements, Inuit have well established and direct Inuit to Crown relationships as land owners, managers and rights holders, responsible for the well-being of our people. In addition, Inuit are self-governing, working toward self-governance or, in the case of Nunavut, have chosen public governance. Given that Inuit are also responsible for, or involved in, to varying degrees, the management of housing, we are best positioned to decide how to target funding, including determining program terms and conditions, to make a lasting difference in our communities.

Working directly with Inuit organizations on the development of housing policies and programs, and programs and policies generally, will ensure they are more responsive to Inuit needs. A positive precedent has been set through the implementation of Budget 2016 Inuit housing funding. To ensure the lasting impact of these and future investments, Inuit must be directly involved in the delivery of funding and in related decision making. There is an opportunity to develop an alternative housing program delivery model with Inuit organizations directly; an opportunity that can facilitate a more holistic approach to addressing the housing crisis in Inuit Nunangat.

2. Clarity of terminology is important

It is important to be clear on the meaning of terms that may be seen to include Inuit but may actually exclude us. For example, when policies or programs are created for Indigenous peoples, for the “North”, “North of 60” or “off-reserve”, it is not clear if, how, or to what extent Inuit are included. Recent “Northern” housing investments (through the 2006 Northern Housing Trust, and the 2009 and 2013 federal budgets) were available in the territories and benefited some Inuit communities, but were not available to Nunavik and Nunatsiavut as they are outside of the territories, and these funds were not Inuit-specific. In 2006, a parallel “Off-Reserve Housing Trust” was created. Funds transferred to provinces under this initiative only ended up benefiting one of the two Inuit regions in provincial jurisdictions. This reality, coupled with the fact that provinces and territories decide how CMHC housing funding transfers are allocated, leads to inconsistent or non-existent investments of federal funding in our communities.

For these reasons, we are calling for an Inuit-specific approach to the development of policies and programs, in consultation with Inuit, through the National Housing Strategy. This is the only way to ensure that Inuit benefit from federal policies and programs as intended and that clear measurements of Inuit specific outcomes can be made.

3. Eligibility – Direct Inuit access to federal housing investments

Inuit are involved in the direct management of housing in their communities. Linked to working directly in partnership with Inuit to ensure policies and programs reflect Inuit needs, Inuit must have direct access to housing investments and social or other infrastructure investments generally, including, but not limited to, investments for shelters and transitional housing as well as early childhood development and wellness centres.

In addition to managing housing directly, each Inuit land claims organization has well established and reliable construction divisions and economic development organizations that were created to ensure the maximum level of benefits remain in Inuit communities. For example, Makivik’s non-profit housing construction model puts \$62,000 of every housing unit back into Nunavik businesses and its training and development of Inuit ensures maximum Inuit employment.

As land owners, Inuit can offer unique opportunities to complement housing provision in their communities. Affordable housing alternatives could be offered by Inuit themselves which would take pressure off social housing if they were directly eligible for federal infrastructure investments. In most cases, Inuit are not eligible for direct funding and have to compete within their provincial or territorial jurisdictions with many other competing interests, despite having the greatest needs.

4. Flexibility – Ensuring the greatest impact in Inuit communities

The solutions for improving Inuit housing outcomes will not look the same for all regions. Each Inuit region is unique in terms of housing delivery, roles and responsibilities (the nature of partnerships within each jurisdiction for the delivery of housing) and specific housing needs.

In addition to inconsistent or non-existent access to federal housing funding, as described above, the criteria associated with federal and provincial programs generally do not result in appropriate housing solutions for our communities. This leads to Inuit missing out on potential benefits of these programs.

Inuit are looking to vary housing options (including providing more sustainable and culturally appropriate housing), to alleviate pressure on social housing and have worked to define specific needs to ensure the greatest impact of limited investments. In 2012, the Nunatsiavut Government, in partnership with the federal and provincial governments, completed the [Nunatsiavut Housing Needs Assessment](#). This was an assessment specifically designed by and for Inuit to gain an in depth understanding of housing needs in Nunatsiavut communities. The Nunatsiavut Government is using the results of the Assessment to ensure that its housing policies and programs best meet Inuit needs. Frequent housing assessments by the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau in Nunavik also ensure that the best and most current data is available on housing needs in those communities.

Having access to direct, flexible investments will ensure that Inuit authorities can make the most impact toward addressing the needs in their communities.

5. Catch up-Keep up: NHS must take into account both short term and long term needs

Given the critical housing needs in our communities and the link between overcrowded and inadequate housing and many other negative socio-economic outcomes for Inuit, significant short term investments are required to catch up with the rest of Canada. We are therefore calling for increased short term federal investments (10-15 years), building on the positive precedent set through Budget 2016.

In addition to increased short term investments, there is also a need to develop a plan with direct access to long term, stable housing investments (from the nationally established housing infrastructure programs) to ensure that improvements to housing outcomes can be maintained. Longevity and predictability of investments will allow increased attention and investment by Inuit and regional housing authorities in housing sustainability and diversity of housing options. This will contribute to reducing the reliance on social housing and reducing costs over the long term. The creation of a long term plan, specifically designed to address the Inuit housing crisis for Inuit Nunangat is critical and long overdue.

Financial investments in social / affordable housing cannot be taken in isolation from the need to increase efforts to reduce barriers to increasing housing alternatives in Inuit communities. A long term strategy must include commitments to work together, including with provinces and territories, to address the challenges and barriers to increasing market housing (private rental and home ownership).

6. Affordability

Another barrier to increasing private homeownership or rental options is affordability. Housing construction and operation and maintenance costs in Inuit communities is extremely high. When taken into consideration with the high cost of living and low income levels for many Inuit families, renting or owning a home, without significant subsidies, is out of reach.

The National Housing Strategy and subsequent policies and programs must take into consideration these high costs and include commitments to work in partnership with Inuit and with provinces and territories to find innovative ways to reduce the costs associated with lot development, construction, operations and maintenance, including transportation of materials and other considerations.



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INUIT TAPIIRIT KANATAMI

 75 Albert Street, Suite 1101
Ottawa, ON Canada K1P 5E7

 613-238-8181

 @ITK_CanadaInuit

 InuitTapiriitKanatami

 @InuitTapiriitKanatami

 www.itk.ca