

SERIES:

HEALTH AND HOUSING REALITIES FOR INUIT

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Homelessness and Housing Realities for Inuit **Workshop Report**

Report for the Participants of the Workshop
Held on March 18 and 19, 2008

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Inuit Tuttarvingat



June 2008

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

At the time that we conducted this workshop and published the workshop report, we were known as the Ajunnginiq Centre. Several months later, in October 2008, the Ajunnginiq Centre changed its name to Inuit Tuttarvingat. In order to keep the name on our documents consistent, we have re-published this workshop report under our new name – Inuit Tuttarvingat.

Inuit Tuttarvingat (formerly known as the Ajunnginiq Centre)

Inuit Tuttarvingat of the National Aboriginal Health Organization shall promote practices that will restore a healthy Inuit lifestyle and improve the health status of Inuit, through research and research dissemination, education and awareness, human resource development, and sharing information on Inuit-specific health policies and practices.

Inuit Tuttarvingat's five main areas of focus are to:

- Improve and promote Inuit health through knowledge-based activities;
- Promote understanding of the health issues affecting Inuit;
- Facilitate and promote research and develop research partnerships;
- Foster participation of Inuit in the delivery of health care; and,
- Affirm and protect Inuit traditional healing practices.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents a summary of discussions and findings from a two-day *Homelessness and Housing Realities for Inuit* workshop held in Ottawa on March 18 and 19, 2008, organized by Inuit Tuttarvingat¹ of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO). Documents provided before and at the workshop included a list of participants, a logistics information sheet, a backgrounder on homelessness and housing, and a working draft glossary of terms. The latter two documents will be included with the distribution of this workshop outcome report.

Invitations to this workshop were sent to the Inuit Tuttarvingat Governing Committee, all national and urban Inuit organizations, Inuit governments, and Inuit land claims organizations. Further invitations were then extended to individuals recommended by committee members and by the organizations approached in the first wave of invitations. The goal was to arrive at about 12 individuals with an even distribution from four Inuit regions of Canada, if possible, and at least one individual from each urban organization.

A diverse group of Inuit and non-Inuit participated in this workshop, including service providers and organizational representatives from across the four Inuit regions and from two urban centers, Ottawa and Montreal. Researchers and representatives from three federal departments, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the Inuit Relations Secretariat at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and the Homelessness Partnering Secretariat of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), also attended.

Inuit Tuttarvingat held this workshop in order to identify the most pressing issues concerning homelessness and housing as experienced by Inuit and to arrive at concrete recommendations for work that Inuit Tuttarvingat could undertake during the next two years to address the identified issues. Participants were encouraged to prioritize needs identified in their region or municipality. Flowing from the Centre’s mandate, Inuit Tuttarvingat focuses on knowledge and information transfer and translation and is able to conduct and publish research and prepare publications, reports, Web sites etc., to communicate findings and knowledge.

¹ At the time that we conducted this workshop and published the workshop report, we were known as the Ajunnginiq Centre. Several months later, in October 2008, the Ajunnginiq Centre changed its name to Inuit Tuttarvingat. In order to keep our publications consistent, we have re-published this workshop report under our new name – Inuit Tuttarvingat.



Governed by a committee of individuals who are appointed by the four Inuit Land Claim Regions, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, the National Inuit Youth Council, and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Inuit Tuttarvingat is dedicated to improving the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health of Inuit and their communities. The Centre works in partnership with other Inuit organizations, colleges and universities, governments, research agencies, health associations, and communities.

Inuit Tuttarvingat is one of three centres of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO). Initially recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, NAHO was established in 2000 as a First Nations, Métis and Inuit designed and controlled organization. NAHO’s objectives include improving and promoting Aboriginal health through knowledge-based activities and promoting an understanding of the health issues of Aboriginal Peoples. Inuit Tuttarvingat focuses on health issues of concern to Inuit.



3 AN ACUTE HOUSING CRISIS IN INUIT REGIONS

Inuit regions are experiencing a serious housing crisis. Housing shortages and poor quality housing are an urgent public health priority for all Inuit regions in Canada. Insufficient housing can lead to overcrowding, deficient sanitation and ventilation, the spread of infectious diseases, psycho-social stresses, and violence. Among Inuit, housing problems have been associated with low achievement levels in schools, spousal abuse, respiratory tract infections among infants, depression, and substance abuse.

During the workshop, the discussion included an overview on activities on homelessness and housing carried out by the Government of Canada. It was summarized that within the Federal Government:

- There is no clear message on a federal commitment to deal with homelessness past March 31, 2009, when the current Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) is ceasing its program activities.
- A Memorandum to Cabinet is currently being prepared which may outline the federal role in homelessness, however, there is a concern that responsibilities will be further downloaded to the provincial/territorial and maybe even municipal levels.
- There is a need to clarify roles at the federal level of government and to discuss the approach to homelessness for Inuit.

Federal housing initiatives have been developed to complement and accommodate existing provincial and territorial housing measures with regard to increasing the supply of affordable housing and improving living conditions. Some of these initiatives are of general application while others are specific to Aboriginal peoples. For Inuit this may mean that it needs to be clarified how funds are allocated and how Inuit in the various jurisdictions can access these. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) does have a large research section that is uniquely designed to inform and direct policy. It was also noted that CMHC would be open to research partnerships with Inuit organizations.

Workshop participants stressed that the housing crisis is acute. There is immediate need to address the housing crisis. Participants recommended that discussion of housing for Inuit require the following context:

- Housing needs to be seen in the context of Inuit regional history. Today’s municipalities and hamlets in Inuit regions are between 50 and 60 years young.

- Currently, no residences can be offered in Nunavik to service providers such as teachers, nurses and counsellors. This is important to note as with this lack of housing the professionals cannot move into the communities and provide services, even if funding dollars have been allocated and professionals have been hired and are ready to move.
- Appropriate housing is needed, i.e., homes that have enough bedrooms to accommodate larger families. The southern model home is not a fit in an Inuit community. It would help if Inuit would have input into the housing design and construction decisions.
- There is an acute need for old housing stock to be renovated, however, this is very costly and it is a hard decision to allocate dollars for renovation and not for new construction (for example, in 1996 in Nunavik, eight per cent of houses needed renovations, in 2006 the number had risen to 46 per cent).
- There is a high risk for direct health impacts due to not being able to upgrade housing. For example, mould is a big problem due to communities being located in humid coastal areas and due to poor construction techniques used in older housing stocks.
- There is a need for alternative housing even to do the necessary renovations on the existing housing stock – currently there is no place where residents can move to while their house is under renovation.
- There is a pressing need for half-way houses and shelters; in Iqaluit alone, 150 women, many with children, are without a place to call home, as is estimated in the latest study by the Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council.
- There is a need for homes for the elders; crowding and family tensions can result in elder abuse. Elder abuse is witnessed in the communities but is rarely reported.

3.3 Home Ownership

Home ownership was discussed and although it was realized that in itself ownership presents a good goal toward self sufficiency, the realities of northern pricing make it a burden to the owner rather than providing long-term assets. Three points summarize issues of home ownership:

- Even with ownership incentives, home ownership is currently not a viable option in Inuit regions.
- Disproportionally high prices for insurance and high municipal taxes are beyond the means of even the well-employed in Inuit communities.
- The result of this cost imbalance is that homeowners feel penalized for their efforts to be self-sustaining.

A halfway house is needed in Goose Bay (Labrador) to provide shelter and skills training to former inmates of correctional institutions to help them integrate back into the community. In the region of Labrador, for example, there are currently no services available that re-integrate former inmates of correctional facilities back into the community, the most apparent need is that of shelter and housing. Former inmates released from correctional facilities are sent to Goose Bay to continue on to their original home communities, however many find themselves stranded without any means to find housing or jobs.

3.6 Shelters for the Homeless

The number of temporary shelters in Inuit regions is small and shelter facilities are usually fairly limited in size and cannot accommodate many individuals. Not every community has a shelter which means that individuals who require shelter may need to wait for one or more nights to fly to a community that has a shelter. The realities and limitations of transportation between Arctic communities are core challenges in servicing the homeless.

Participants listed the following shelter needs for Inuit regions:

- Many communities do not have shelters and residents may wish to help out by offering temporary housing for individuals in need or by offering to foster children. However, in a town with already overcrowded houses, it is difficult to help in this way.
- Women shelters are needed to provide safe environments for women and children in situations of abuse/family violence.
- Current funding cycles of shelters are built on southern assumptions such as fast transportation access and quick travel between municipalities.
- Financial planning is usually limited to one year.
- Shelter workers often spend considerable time writing funding proposals and program reports, rather than working with residents. They also worry about the continuation of the shelter at the end of every funding cycle.
- There is a need for permanent shelters with core funding.
- There is a need for shelters for people under the influence of alcohol or drugs. These individuals are a risk to themselves and others unless they are safely sheltered.

3.7 Information

There is a lack of information on housing and homelessness for Inuit. Existing information on this issue is not easily accessible and Inuit would like to have easy access to all research and information on this topic. There is an immediate need for:

- Sharing of housing and homelessness research.
- Basic data on the status of Inuit housing and levels of homelessness.
- Supporting the existing providers of services to Inuit by facilitating information and knowledge sharing.

3.8 Services

Participants identified those service needs that are most acute in addressing the current housing crisis. Additionally, different regions stressed the immediate need for services to be targeted towards subgroups of the population, for example youth, elders (seniors), abused women and individuals who have recently been released from correctional facilities. An important focus was to help make individuals self-sufficient. The need for the following services was identified:

- Ways to inform individuals about their rights and rules concerning applications for housing, including help in filling out the forms.
- Re-integration techniques need to be improved and for Inuit, land-based programs work well, therefore, land-based programs are needed. Camps provide very good opportunities for successful treatments and re-integration. There is need for recognition of the traditional camps from which Inuit were relocated by the government around 1960. People from these areas would like to go back in the summer seasons to their ancestral lands. Programs and cabins could be set up to organize this type of excursion and it would be a very good start of a healing process.
- Training for shelter staff in different types of counselling, such as traditional counselling, and treatment techniques that can be used in land-based settings.
- Transitional homes, that is housing that enables former inmates and individuals having finished a treatment program to receive support and life skills training before they are expected to live independently.
- Life skills training in communities.
- Detoxification programs and facilities.
- Inuit counsellors.
- More counsellors (need male counsellors for former inmates, particularly for Goose Bay where there is no halfway house; need more female counsellors too).

- Elders’ facilities for each community.
- Innovative ways to ‘empower’ people, to take charge of their own lives.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS for Inuit Tuttarvingat

Inuit Tuttarvingat of NAHO asked participants to make recommendations for future research and information sharing activities. The following recommendations were made.

4.1 Recommendation One: Write a Meeting Report

Recommendation one for Inuit Tuttarvingat is to provide a meeting report to all participants as soon as possible, highlighting needs and an action plan.

4.2 Recommendation Two: Collect Information on Housing

Recommendation two for Inuit Tuttarvingat is to collect and provide all information available related to Inuit housing, as part of a larger report and, share it with Inuit, via distribution or possibly using a Web site. The information collected would include visuals such as photos.

4.3 Recommendation Three: Prepare a Research Report

Recommendation three for Inuit Tuttarvingat is to prepare a research report on Inuit housing. This report would:

- Provide an analysis of housing stocks, demographic data and levels of overcrowding for all four Inuit regions.
- Provide a national profile of Inuit housing realities and include statistics.
- Try to include a view of the future for Inuit communities. For example, look at demographic characteristics and available population projections and estimated future housing stock needs.
- Highlight the need for action.
- Include a chapter on research findings on housing and health/disease (diseases linked to poor housing, overcrowding etc).

- Include a chapter on history of current day Inuit settlements and their geographic location.
- Include the context of community planning and challenges due to environmental change (some communities are running out of space, some have serious challenges due to melting permafrost and severe erosion).
- Include reference to the contact history between Inuit and non-Inuit and include social and cultural aspects (e.g., the particular mind frame of obedience, could include reference to histories of trauma and disempowerment).
- Include ‘little voices’ in the report to show the human experience and provide first-hand evidence.
- Include visuals in the report. For example, gather photos of houses and housing conditions through e-mail or get them from community organizations.
- Include success stories that highlight the fact that Inuit are responding as well as possible to the current housing crisis.
- Help territorial/provincial/national government officials understand the issues and make a commitment to move forward, starting with essential services currently lacking in the Inuit regions.
- Include a section prepared in cooperation with Inuit to identify what a healthy community looks like. For instance, providing services in Inuktitut so that Inuktitut speakers are included and are able to benefit from services such as counselling.
- Consider a contextual and long-term view as the main approach for analysis.

4.4 Recommendation Four: Facilitate a Network

Recommendation four for Inuit Tuttarvingat is to facilitate a network for information and knowledge sharing that would include the following activities:

- Collect and provide all information available related to Inuit housing, not only for the report but also to share with Inuit, possibly on the Inuit Tuttarvingat Web site.
- Support an identified Inuit group that will be available to government officials and departments to provide advice on Inuit housing and homelessness.
- Co-ordinate media coverage on the housing crisis and related issues for each region and urban centre, using media corporations such as APTN and CBC.
- If possible, check and co-ordinate with the Association of Montreal Inuit (AMI) regarding the creation of visual materials. AMI has been approached by CBC to speak to Inuit homelessness and is in the process of arranging a meeting.

- Get media attention in the regions so that regional examples are documented by media.
- Support the ‘little voices’, which means citing the voices of the vulnerable and impacted and therefore make it possible they are getting heard. It would be up to Inuit Tuttarvingat to identify how this could happen, for instance by holding workshops, meetings to document statements and stories.
- Ensure that people already in elected positions properly take on their role, and represent their constituents who are homeless.
- The network created and the research produced by Inuit Tuttarvingat can provide Inuit, communities and organizations with the necessary information to bring forward and/or to further analyze regional and local issues while at the same time making sure to communicate that the extent of the housing crisis for Inuit is nationwide.

4.5 Recommendation Five: Conduct a Project on Healthy Communities

Recommendation five for Inuit Tuttarvingat is to work together with Inuit to identify how a healthy community looks.

EQuilibrium Sustainable Housing Demonstration Initiative, CMHC

http://www.cmhc.ca/en/inpr/su/eqho/eqho_016.cfm

This is a recent CMHC initiative aimed at linking the public and private sector in an effort to build energy efficient homes. This program addresses sustainable design by challenging builders to construct healthy, energy efficient, resource conscious, environmentally friendly, affordable houses. Presently CMHC is accepting proposals from builders to design and construct a demonstration home in the North. The request for proposal is posted on the MERX Web site (www.merx.com) with a submission deadline of July 14, 2008.

CMHCs External Research Program.

<http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/li/horetore/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=27345>

Under the external research program, CMHC published a study directed at how Inuit are using current living spaces including recommendations for housing design. The study noted that different models of housing were built in the 60s and 70s but that none of them were built to suit Inuit. The author has published several documents on this subject:

- **Dawson, P.** (2004) Use of Domestic Space by Inuit families living in Arviat, Nunavut. <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/63600.pdf>
- **Dawson, P.** (in press) Using Observations of Inuit Spatial Behavior to Design Culturally Sustaining Houses in the Canadian Arctic. *Housing Studies*.
- **Dawson, P.** Marcel Mauss and the Relationship between ‘House Form’ and ‘Culture’ in Inuit society. *Etudes/Inuit Studies*

Research is available to the public online or at the *Canadian Housing Information Centre* (CHIC), which is the CMHC library. CHIC is located at 700 Montreal Road in Ottawa. Staff is available Monday – Friday, 9:00 – 4:00 EST, (613) 748-2367 or toll-free at 1-800-668-2642 (ask for the library) to assist users with any request for information and can be emailed at chic@cmhc-schl.gc.ca. The staff can instruct you on the use of CHIC’s resources and can supply factual information and respond to requests for extensive, in-depth literature searches to complex research questions. Literature searches may involve searching the CHIC’s own collections of books, periodicals, and audiovisual materials, searching the holdings of other research centres, or searching online information sources, including over 7,500 databases worldwide. These online information sources can provide up-to-date citations for articles and reports in specific subject areas, and in some cases, full-text versions of newspaper and journal articles. Fees may be charged for certain reference/information services.

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