



**Native Women's  
Association of Canada**



**L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada**

**A Literature Review Prepared  
for Native Women's Association of Canada –  
Identification and Highlighting of the Pathways (and Barriers)  
to Stable, Culturally Appropriate Housing Experienced by Inuit  
Women**

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**May 2020**

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>BACKGROUND: Issues facing Indigenous communities</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>HOUSING FIRST:</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>WHAT INDIGENOUS WOMEN HAVE TO SAY</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Who We Talked To</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Location is everything:</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>The housing market and genocide</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Caretaking and overcrowding</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS: Impossible Choices</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to identify and highlight the pathways (and barriers) to stable, culturally appropriate housing experienced by Inuit women. The literature review will explore transitions in and out of homelessness; distinct experiences in shelters, transitional homes and Housing First projects; experiences accessing and keeping rental and public housing; and, definitions of culturally appropriate housing. The literature review was performed by searching literature and articles using a combination of the following terms and phrases: “Inuit women”, “definitions + culturally appropriate housing”, “transitions + in and out + homelessness”, “experiences in shelters + transitional homes”, “accessing + rental and public housing” and “keeping + rental and public housing”, and more. In order to reduce the potential for bias in the literature selection, available studies from positive and negative perspectives were equally considered.

## Push and Pull

*“Housing is not the only issue, but all issues relate to housing.” (Andy Moorhouse, 2008)*

Push and pull factors are connected to the historical, political, and economic legacies (Harris, 2015) of colonization affecting migration (Peters & Robillard 2009; Letkemann 2004; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003; Skelton, 2002). These factors could include moving *away* from negative circumstances or experiences (overcrowding, health disparity, violence, abuse) and turn to moving *towards* potentially better spaces, opportunities, and surroundings (Berman et al. 2009; Ruttan et al. 2008; Scott 2007; Bridgman 2006; Bridgman 2003). Though Inuit are overrepresented in research, little information exists on the housing status of urban-dwelling Inuit [self-identified] women, and very few studies intersects these Inuit identities with migration (Young, 2003). According to literature, *push* can be perceived through “[a]...housing shortage ... [which] began when Inuit living in the Inuvialuit settlement Region (Northwest territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Québec), and Nunatsiavut (labrador) were moved to ... 53 communities in Inuit Nunangat” (If Not Now... When?, (2011), p. 11). According to research conducted by Savoie & Cornez, (2016) for Makvik Corporation

Common *pull* factors for Inuit to migrate to Montreal include the following: to accompany (or live with) a family member, partner, sick person, a friend; employment; to receive medical services; opportunities for education. Common *push* factors for Inuit to migrate to Montreal include the following: lack of housing [68% of Nunavik Inuit live in overcrowded houses]; there is a steady increase of blind or hidden homelessness in Nunavik communities; family problems [drugs and alcohol abuse, divorce, suicide]; physical abuse, sexual abuse; high cost of living; lack of employment; relocation of Inuit to federal and provincial detention centres; lack of food [6 Inuit out of 10 do not have enough to eat]. (Savoie & Cornez, (2016), p. 21)

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, an advocacy organization, is the “national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada and is governed by a 14-member Board of Directors from across Canada” and has been advocating on the behalf of Inuit women since 1984 (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada website, para. 1). Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada confirms an historical accuracy, indicating that Inuit were at one time completely reliant on a subsistence economy, they did not live in permanent

settlements. Pre-colonization, they lived in seasonal communities following the seasonal migration of the animals that they depended upon for their survival (Pauktuutit website, para. 1).

And, according to the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada organizational website, "... the factors of remote communities, the high costs of materials and shipping, and a general lack of resources and infrastructure, lack of sufficient employment and it is easy to see how housing is a struggle for most Inuit families" (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada website, para. 2). The website also provides information regarding a recent study on Inuit women's precarity and experiences through homelessness, which proposes that homelessness is a real risk for most Inuit women ...the threat of homelessness exists for a broad range of women, from the unemployed, to members of the workforce who have no subsidized housing or don't earn enough to pay market rents, to Government of Nunavut employees who are in precarious possession of staff housing ... (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada website, para. 2).

Additionally, recent statistics indicate that "Pauktuutit's membership faces the most crowded living conditions in all of Canada ... this has led to a housing crisis in Inuit communities, including the constant threat of becoming homeless in the harshest climate in all of Canada" Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada website, para. 2).

## Transitions in and out of Homelessness

### *Going "Home" through Community and Belonging*

According to the United Nations, "...everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control". (United Nations, para. 1).

Embedded within the nation-state referred to as Canada, are the long-held legacies of generational stories of involuntary or forced mobility. Prior to recent studies that address mobility, it is important to contextualize and understand that this historical mobility exists due to ongoing racist and colonial violences which are enacted against First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and nations. Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and other well documented atrocities enacted against First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Peoples play an enormous role in the displacement that Indigenous Peoples continue to experience. As indicated in Native Women's Association of Canada's own literature, "Housing insecurity is identified as one of the most pressing issues impacting Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. Throughout urban, rural and Northern communities, safe, sustainable and accessible housing remains a challenge and presents a lifelong struggle for community members..." (Indigenous Housing: Policy and Engagement Document, 2019, p. 2).

According to the Ontario Urban and Rural First Nations, Métis and Inuit Housing Policy Framework, "Research demonstrates that FNMI people living outside of a reserve in urban and rural communities continue to experience high levels of homelessness, core housing need, family instability, violence, children placed in care, disability, mental illness, addictions, unemployment, low educational attainment and poverty" (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Urban and Rural Homelessness Policy Statement, p. 11). Homelessness is another effect of the shortage of housing. The majority of Inuit who come to Montreal

stay for a relatively long period of time, but Inuit women stay in Montreal longer than men (Savoie, et al., 2016), it is largely hidden, “becoming visible in the high numbers of overcrowded residential dwellings... overcrowding is contributing to migration to urban centres intended to alleviate housing problems at the expense of other family needs, and to Inuit homelessness in urban environments (Makivik Corporation, 2011, p. 11) And according to Smilie, et al.

Inuit travel to southern urban centres for health, social services, work, school, and other opportunities not available in the north (Patrick and Tomiak 2008). According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 27% of Inuit in Canada lived outside of Inuit Nunangat. Footnote 1 Of this group, four out of ten lived in large urban centres with populations of greater than 100,000 persons (Statistics Canada, 2011). Ottawa-Gatineau has the largest urban Inuit population outside Inuit Nunangat, followed by Edmonton, Montreal, and Yellowknife (Statistics Canada, 2017). (Smylie, J., Firestone, M. & Spiller, M.W., 2018, para. 21)

The literature indicates homelessness is the result of a trans-generational housing crisis (Beavis, Klos, Carter, & Douchant, 1997). Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the “national representational organization for the 65,000 Inuit in Canada, the majority of whom live in Inuit Nunangat, specifically, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Québec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador)” (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018)

## Hidden Homelessness, Shelters, and Respect

Inuit women face inequity when they migrate to urban centres. For instance, Pisuktie, who works with Inuit women who have migrated to Montreal says Inuit women’s homelessness is often “hidden” (Plight of Homeless Montreal Inuit Women Often Hidden from View, 2014, para. 3) and Schoepp, an outreach worker, recommends “... formal housing in any way, shape or form ... something specific to the Inuit community ... when people have a home, they have more control and more calm in their lives...” (Plight of Homeless Montreal Inuit Women Often Hidden From View, 2014, para. 31). Adding to the precarity being experienced by Inuit women are violences being levelled at them while they are in a supposed “safe space”. The following are accounts shared with CBC about encountering culturally-insensitive staff, “When I first moved to the Apex shelter, I noticed right away there was no country food ... all the Inuit women said they weren't allowed to have country food because senior staff thought it was disgusting and gross” (Women at Iqaluit Homeless Shelters Say Non-Inuit Staff Are Culturally Insensitive, 2018, para. 5) and, “... there is absolutely no respect there for Inuit...” (Women at Iqaluit Homeless Shelters Say Non-Inuit Staff Are Culturally Insensitive, 2018, para. 5) shared another woman staying in the shelter.

## Health Concerns

In 2018 Statistics Canada indicated that in 2006, 28% of Inuit women and girls were living in homes requiring major repairs in comparison with non-Indigenous women and girls in Canada overall (Inuit Statistical Profile, 2018). The report also indicated that significant life expectancy gap of over ten years exists between Inuit in Canada and Canada's non-Indigenous population. ... investments that address the social determinants of physical and mental health and ... accessible, culturally appropriate health care would increase Inuit life expectancy and narrow the unacceptable gap with others in Canada (Inuit Statistical Profile, 2018, p. 12).

This gap is connected to systemic under-provision. Inuit report feeling a sense of lack. A collective lack of physical security, a lack of security for possessions, a lack of privacy lack of belonging, and finally, a lack of access to land. The following are some of the overarching comments made by participants in relation to their lived experiences: "I need a different house because it's too wet here"; "this house is cold or very cold, causing sickness or making us stay at someone else's house"; "I do not sleep at home because of problems at home, or because I have nowhere to sleep there" or "violence is a problem related to my housing circumstance"; "Someone sold furniture/appliances/equipment from house because of gambling, drug use, drinking, needing \$ for food, etc."; "I never have time alone or privacy"; "Someone in my house needs to have a house of their own" or "I don't have a bedroom / sleep on the couch, etc."; and finally, "I lack the equipment I need to get out on the land, and it is not okay" (Lauster & Tester, 2014, para. 16).

Thistle (2017) writes that statistics and problems revealed by community-based research are exceptionally complex. Beyond the impacts felt by a sense a lack, health precarity due to exploitation and violence is evident and cyclic, and can be traced back to homelessness. According to Patrick, "Aboriginal females of all ages experience a disproportionate burden of housing problems," (2014, p. 39) and, "Aboriginal women also face specific and persisting vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation, violence, and murder..." (Patrick, 2014, p. 39-40).

## Recommendations

Building and engaging ethical relationality promotes good spaces because "housing is seen as a truly integral piece to one's migration narrative and ultimately their success story" (Harris, 2015, p. 104). Makivik Corporation suggests that engaging ethical relationality along with the following recommendations could that work to reduce issues encountered by low-income and homeless Inuit in Montreal. Continuous work has to take place to consolidate the first level of services related to access to food, clothing and medical services, replacement of ID, a place to stay, and also to ensure that the Inuit that have no income at all get access to government's social welfare programs, and finally they should be adequately informed about social organizations and shelters that can help them, mainly through Makivik's partners in Montreal. (p. 12)

Savoie and Cornez for Makivik Corporation go on to recommend that a second level of services for Inuit should be developed. These relate "mainly to the organization of daytime and cultural activities, education and training, employment, economic opportunities, and strengthening social networking and healing, and provide alternatives to Inuit coming from detention centres in order to enhance crime prevention and support rehabilitation" (Savoie & Cornez, 2016, pp. 12-13).

Suggestions for improving services and policy is found across literature that engage recommendations for improving outcomes for Inuit experiencing precarity through homelessness. In her presentation at



the Considerations for Addressing Inuit Homelessness in Nunavut Conference, Cassandra Vink discussed engaging a framework that involves the following:

- Collaboration between and across government departments and service providers
- Prevention approaches to avoid eviction from public housing
- Prevention approaches that include family mediation schemes
- Policy changes so that clients can stay at the women's shelter even if their income reaches a certain threshold
- Repositioning the homeless shelters as entry points for housing
- Greater range of housing options, including housing options to transition into from homelessness
- Discharge planning from correctional facilities (Vink, slide 17)

And finally, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services provides some recommendations in their document, calling on "Government to meet their commitment to repairing relationships with Indigenous Peoples ... urban communities and organizations. Fair and substantial investments must be made in culturally appropriate housing ... and transitional services that reflects ...high proportion of need ..." (p. 4) and recommend the following to end chronic homelessness for FNMI people in urban and rural areas.

- There must be a "needs-based" (i.e. evidenced-based) approach to allocating funding. [Budget allocation formulas should be developed in a collaborative manner and reviewed annually to ensure allocations reflect changes in community experiences. Allocations should not simply be population-based or pro-rata without taking into account the chronic need and overrepresentation of FNMI who have unacceptably high levels of homelessness and unsuitable housing];
- Budget allocations should reflect an aspiration to close the gap between the documented poor housing and abhorrent homelessness conditions for urban and rural FNMI people compared to the general population;
- Deeper budget allocations will need to be made in higher risk areas, such as homelessness and supportive/transitional capital and operating funding, to reflect FNMI people that are part of a higher-risk population; and
- Specific, Indigenous budget allocations must result in programs that are designed and delivered by community-based organizations who have demonstrated the ability to successfully deliver in a culturally appropriate manner and achieve desired outcomes. (Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, p. 5)

These limited recommendations corroborate the need to end homelessness being experienced by Inuit. Gaps in the literature indicate the necessity for actionable strategies that engage reciprocity with Inuit women in a good way, so that they can take part in crafting good outcomes for themselves and future generations.

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