Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

A Literature Review Prepared

for Native Women's Association of Canada –

**A Highlight of the Pathways (and Barriers) to
Stable, Culturally Appropriate Housing Experienced
by Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA**

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Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to identify and highlight the pathways (and barriers) to stable, culturally appropriate housing experienced by Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) Peoples. 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: "Indigenous", coupled with intersections of the "2SLGBTQQIA" acronym, "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

"The key issue facing Aboriginal women is housing, employment and trying to fit into the community" *(Aboriginal Women's Focus Group, 2011, p. 147).*

Push and pull factors are connected to the historical, political, and economic legacies (Harris, 2015) of colonization affecting migration (Peters and Robillard 2009; Letkemann 2004; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003; Skelton, 2002). These factors could include moving *away* from negative circumstances or experiences (violence, discrimination, abuse) and turn to moving *towards* potentially better spaces and surroundings (Berman et al. 2009; Ruttan et al. 2008; Scott 2007; Bridgman 2006; Bridgman 2003).

Ristock, et al. (2010) state in this lengthy, though important quote, that "*push*" could be attributed to a wide range of challenges including poverty, violence, suicide and hopelessness … residential schools has also left many with negative assumptions about same-sex attraction… Complicating matters is that community members might even perceive people with same-sex attractions to be potential perpetrators. This legacy of abuse, pain, and shame, and the potential misattribution of blame (in identifying Two- Spirit and LGBTQ as 'potential perpetrators') results in further stigma, experiences of discrimination, and compels people to move away from their original communities. In their new places, Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ peoples may be ill-prepared for life in an expensive city and shocked to experience racism (in housing and employment for example and in the larger LGBTQ community), homophobia in Aboriginal circles, sexual exploitation and isolation. (Ristock, et al., 2010, p. 24, Teengs &Travers, 2006).

A participant shared their story

"Well actually like my reasons to come to Winnipeg, I tried moving back home to _____, you know, for - it was sort of like, I had a lover who was really unstable and we were into lots and lots of drugs and we had a situation where I was in real danger and I kinda had that moment where, I was like, if I wasn't doing like mountains of cocaine, I wouldn't be in this situation. Like I need to change everything and so ...I moved home and stayed there for nine months (29 years, Métis, Two- Spirit,

bisexual, poly, queer, female)" (Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project Final Report (2010), p. 25).

And, according to Ristock, et al. (2010), "… push factors compel people to move from something – often seeming like being pushed away from/out of their home or community…people talk about moving "to be myself", "to find myself", "to find people like me", "to find a partner" (p. 25-26). This synthesizes the characteristics of both *push* and *pull* in that individuals are "pulled into moving toward something positive or hopeful" (p. 25).

Transitions in and out of Homelessness

Going "Home" through Community and Belonging

Embedded in the legacy of Indigenous Peoples within the nation-state referred to as Canada, are long held, 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 Indigenous Peoples and nations. Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and other well documented atrocities enacted against Indigenous 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). And, according to the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) (2011), it is confirmed that precarious housing contributes to transitional issues for Indigenous Peoples, and that without appropriate supports face additional precariousness. A participant relayed cultural disconnect being experienced by older Indigenous men

I work a lot with older men that have addictions and mental health issues and the majority are adults who don't really self-identify as Aboriginal, or who don't know anything about their culture or their community. (Aboriginal Children and Youth Focus Group, TARP, 2011, p. 107)

King, Smith, & Gracie (2009) in Browne (2017) confirm that "cities – in contrast to reserve and rural communities – are places with more opportunity but less access to culture and community" (p. 73). Residual effects from trauma, generational disruption, and loss of culture and connection to community due to ongoing colonialism and racisms continue today. Also noted in TARP (2011) was that a large amount of 'lateral violence' is existent in the communities that participated in their study which predominantly took place in the Toronto area.

Health Concerns

Literature points to the many facets surrounding negative impacts of moving, or of being in a transitional space. For instance, in the Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project Final Report (2010), participants shared their experiences with the negative impacts on their physical, emotional and spiritual health. Some of the impacts included physical and sexual assaults

while being on the street, as well as bodily indicators of stresses. One participant in the Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project Final Report (2010) relayed

"Like I wanted to literally commit suicide out there because nobody accepted me because of the way I thought about women. Out here everything changed for me, like I used to be really dark, and like Winnipeg, basically this is a bit forward or too much, but like saved my life, almost, yeah…" (19 years, Métis, bisexual) (p. 24).

Participants also expressed feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress, which in turn amplified pre-existing mental health issues and/or relationship issues. This is also confirmed in the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) (2011). Results of their project indicate when housing precarity exists, wholistic health is in turn impacted, which in turn results in a poor/er quality of life. The Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) (2011) is focused on Toronto, yet other literature echoes similar findings. For instance, housing as an entity remained limited, as does funding. Housing attributed to Indigenous peoples is in high demand, and the though there is a high interest in homeownership, the possibility of home ownership remains tenuous. A concern voiced by participants echo sentiments shared by many across the nation-state referred to as Canada,

My housing situation is so bad. The house is so bad. It's run down. When I ask the landlord to come to fix something it ends up taking months (At-Risk Youth Focus Group, TARP, 2011, p.119) and, Wigwamen, most of the open locations are available at Seawells road, way out in the middle of nowhere, and it takes over an hour to get to downtown. (At-Risk Youth Focus Group, TARP, 2011, p.119) .

Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA Peoples move to larger urban centers where there is often an evident Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA community. The Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) (2011) indicates that the Two-Spirited community in Toronto represents a 'special' group in that it is larger than in any other city in Ontario, yet it tends to be forgotten in discussions about urban Indigenous Peoples. In addition to Two-Spirited Peoples, there are distinct sub-groups within the community including middle class two-spirited people, those involved in specific endeavours such as the arts and media, those experiencing 'double' discrimination being Aboriginal and two-spirited, as well as those experiencing the challenges of being transgendered and the problems encountered by HIV positive people" (TARP, 2011, p. 374).

Despite an "overall tolerance" by Torontonians, (TARP, 2011, p. 374) homophobia, discrimination and violence remain an unfair burden on 2SLGBTQQIA Peoples. And, according to TARP, "… two-spirited people require a safe, supportive community composed of like-minded individuals" (TARP, 2011).

In addition to the difficulties shared, participants also spoke to some of the positive aspects of their moves. An example of this as voiced by a participant, "… you just go around and around and you stop where you feel accepted. Like there's places here. You'll stop there. You won't stop there because you're discriminated there. You go here …" (41 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, straight, transsexual), Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project Final Report, 2010, p. 29)

Experiences of Trans Women and Two-Spirit Persons Accessing Women-Specific Health and Housing Services

According to the Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project Final Report Finding, a particular community was part of the process for some participants of refining their identity (i.e. from gay to trans). Other positive impacts identified included moving away from abuse or discrimination, reuniting with previously estranged family members … some participants coped with transition by getting involved and connecting with people in a volunteer/leadership capacity, thereby creating the community they need. (p. 29)

Lyons, et al. (2016) indicate in their study that "Trans women and two-spirit persons … relied upon services for their health and safety and, therefore, exclusion from women-specific services had potentially severe adverse consequences such as homelessness and sexual violence". (p. 377)

Lyson et al. (2016) also indicate that Trans women and Two-Spirited peoples were experiencing "discrimination based on gender identity; exclusion; discrimination based on gender expression; gender policing; discrimination from cisgender women and [a] lack of staff intervention; and policy and legal implications." (377) Thus, it is imperative that trans women and two-spirit persons, regardless of gender expression, are able to access health and housing services. (Lyons, et al. (2016). p. 377) Browne (2017) relates an interview with Melissa Carroll, a researcher and social advocate.

A lot of youth come from reserves to Toronto, which is heralded as the epicenter for opportunity for anyone who's diverse … They come to the city to realize they can't get into a shelter, and if they can, they're told to go back into the closet or become someone different."

Carroll also indicated in her interview that:

"A lot of mainstream organizations are trans-ignorant and transphobic. If you're a young trans or two-spirit woman who identifies as a woman, but you're chucked into a dorm with a bunch of men because they don't have a special place for you, that can be very dangerous. And a lot don't understand what it means to live on the streets. They want you clean and sober and pure and in bed by 8pm." (Browne, 2017).

Harris (2015) speaks in their thesis about factors that impact health from a distance such as colonialism and racism, influence migration, discrimination, and the safety of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA Peoples, positioning them as "situated knowledges"

This situated knowledge reveals that distal determinants of health shape participants' wellbeing as one's gender, sexual, and Aboriginal identities occur within a sphere of colonization and racism. These intersections negotiate reasons for migration, incidences of discrimination, and feelings of personal safety. Finally, despite how distal determinants of health was only talked about explicitly in the contexts of migration and discrimination, the distal determinants of health continue to permeate participants' narratives at many other intersections between housing, employment, culture, community, and service provision" (Harris, 2015. p. 64).

Harris (2015) (amongst others) speak to how integral housing is to well-being and self-esteem

After years of impermanent housing and employment and ongoing discrimination, it can be challenging for participants to reverse their perception of themselves. Ultimately, this too must be considered in the context of housing, employment, and other proximal determinants of health (Harris, 2015, p. 91)

Speaking to policy, Harris (2015) also asserts that more affordable housing is a policy direction being sought by many organizations, advocates, and researchers to build on the current momentum of resurgence.

Recommendations

Hidden Homelessness and Safety

Building ethical relationality promotes good spaces for everyone because "housing is seen as a truly integral piece to one's migration narrative and ultimately their success story" (Harris, 2015, p. 104). Though drafted in 2011 in, and require an update, TARP had a number of recommendations, though the recommendations are localized to Toronto. Some of these recommendations include

- A safe 'transition' house be established in or near downtown Toronto where two-spirited people moving from rural communities can live during their initial adjustment to the city. It would have a mandate to help access programs and services such as housing, employment, transportation, etc. to prevent individuals from living on the street or becoming involved with the sex trade. It would also serve to connect them with Aboriginal cultural and appropriate gender activities.

- That either through an expansion of the mandate and facilities of the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, or a new organization, a 'two-spirited gathering place' be created to serve the social, cultural and recreational needs of Aboriginal two-spirited people in Toronto. The multi-use space could be used for a variety of programs and activities such as computer access, feasts and socials, drumming, traditional teachings, youth programs, seniors' events, movie nights, kitchen facilities, etc. Its programs should be sufficiently broad to appeal to middle class two-spirited people as well as individuals experiencing problems.

- That a 'two-spirit house' be established for HIV positive two-spirited people in or near downtown Toronto, as well as for families of two-spirited individuals experiencing health problems.

- That the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations organization receive funding for an additional long-term case management worker to allow the agency to more effectively meet the needs of their clients.

- That the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations organization be given funding to increase its work related to two-spirited 'awareness training' for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations that serve two-spirited individuals, including Elders and traditional people, with a view to facilitate sensitivity and acceptance and the increase in use of these organizations by two-spirited individuals. Further, the training should lead to the development of an effective and enforceable 'non-discrimination' policy and practices related to two-spirited people. In addition, increased supports should be made available for two-spirited students in high schools and post-secondary institutions.

- The awareness training should cast a wide net to a variety of organizations including First Nations Band Councils and band members.

- That Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto make an effort to include two- spirited members on the Community councils to ensure that they are sensitive to issues of two-spirited individuals who come before them.

- That a comprehensive research project be undertaken focusing on gaining a greater understanding of the issues and concerns of the two-spirited community including the middle class, transgendered and HIV positive individuals. The study could include an examination of the relationship between First Nations and Métis communities and the city regarding two-spirit issues.

- Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ participation in city and other committees is needed (ex. police services, health, community advisory councils and specific program committees whose service base includes Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ).

- Sensitivity and awareness training offered by experts within the community on Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ concerns is needed for community agency staff, school personnel and child welfare workers (including foster-parents and adoptive families).

- Educational work is also needed that targets First Nations and Métis leadership (Elders, band councils, leaders etc.) (TARP, 2011, p. 27)

Between February and May of 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health undertook an historic study on LGBTQ2S health which resulted in the Report of the Standing Committee on Health (2019). This report examines "the main health challenges facing LGBTQIA2 communities in Canada and identifies ways in which the federal government, in co-operation with the provinces and territories, can address the health inequities that these population face" (p. 9) For contextualization, the Committee heard from 33 witnesses and received 44 briefs. The Committee also travelled to Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver where it met with organizations that provide health services to LGBTQIA2 communities.

The Committee heard that…
LGBTQIA2 youth are at greater risk of being homeless than heterosexual and cisgender youth. This disparity affects their health and well-being. Witnesses estimated that, of the 40,000 homeless youth in Canada, between 25% and 40% identify as LGBTQIA2S … family conflict relating to sexual orientation or gender identity is the main reason LGBTQIA2 youth become homeless. (p.97)

Dr. Alex Abramovich (Independent Scientist, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Institute for Mental Health Policy Research) was interviewed. Abramovich stated that "there are no emergency shelters for LGBTQIA2 youth, and existing shelters offer only binary spaces—for men or women—which do not provide an option for trans youth or those who identify as non-binary" (p. 97). Dr. Abramovich went on to explain that some suitable transition houses do exist, including Sprott House in Toronto and Pride Home in Saskatoon. Pride Home is a long-term residence for LGBTQIA2 youth aged 16 to 21 that opened its doors in 2017. This home offers services tailored to non-binary youth. OutSaskatoon, the

organization that established and operates Pride Home, told the Committee that the funding needed to operate Pride Home each year is difficult to secure. Federal and provincial housing programs offer funding for capital expenses, but not for wages or operating costs.

According to the 2019 report, Dr. Abramovich recommended that "to help LGBTQIA2S youth who are at risk of becoming homeless, Canada's homelessness, housing and poverty reduction strategies should focus on these youth" (p. 29). Abramovich also recommended that "questions on sexual orientation and gender identity be included in all federal health surveys" (p. 29). Abramovich's robust testimony indicates just how integral it is to address hidden homelessness and safety.

One of the biggest issues that LGBTQ2S youth face in shelters and housing programs and institutions more broadly is safety …over the years my research has looked at the different ways that LGBTQ2S people are further marginalized and erased in institutional settings such as shelters and housing programs, making it difficult to quantify how many LGBTQ2S individuals are experiencing homelessness in Canada. While research in this area has certainly expanded in recent years, there is still minimal investigation into these issues and large-scale data collection remains limited. Most of the research and point-in-time counts, or PiT counts, up until very recently have not included any questions regarding sexual orientation or gender identity. Hidden homelessness, such as couch surfing, remains a significant issue among LGBTQ2S youth, especially for those living in rural and remote communities, making it difficult to accurately determine the scale of the problem. A lack of inclusive services and supports as well as the availability of fewer housing options to youth experiencing homelessness in rural areas may force youth to relocate from their communities and leave behind important social networks and emotional connections. Relocating to big cities in order to obtain inclusive services and supports can introduce a whole host of consequences, including worsened health, fewer social networks and support and increased risk of victimization and exploitation. (Dr. Alex Abramovich, testimony, 2019)

Adding her voice to address hidden homeless and increase safety, Martha Smith-Norris, Board Chair of OUTSaskatoon indicates that investments and action are critical to those experiencing precarity.

We need investments and we need action. For the queer community, housing strategies must include non-gendered and inclusive housing at the same time that they include education for existing housing agencies, shelters and residential care facilities, so that our communities can safely access all services.

Rachel Loewen Walker, Executive Director of OUTSaskatoon speaks to the need to decolonize through reciprocity and to do better, in a good way.

Alongside the alarming statistics about our communities … queer, trans and two-spirit people also represent rich and diverse cultural groups…we are innovative in our methods of care… we are progressive in our labour practices, programming and policy development…there is much for other sectors to learn from the queer community, particularly in relation to meaningful engagement with principles of intersectionality, decolonization, anti-racism, feminism and disability rights as many LGBTQ2 organizations work hard to incorporate these into their daily work. At OUTSaskatoon, we have spent years building reciprocal relationships with [I]ndigenous communities, and this has made our work and our centre better. To this end, our second recommendation is for a commitment to meaningful reconciliation and decolonization, including the central positioning of two-spirit people in organizations within this work.

Twenty-three recommendations emerged from the Report of the Standing Committee on Health. The report highlighted the importance of introducing measures to prevent and address health inequities experienced by LGBTQIA2 communities … the Committee notes that the lack of acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in Canadian society is an underlying factor in how LGBTQIA2 people are treated and has a major impact on their health (p. 41).

Yet, just 2 resonate with the theme of this literature review. They are Recommendations 12 and 13:

- Recommendation 12: That the Government of Canada establish an advisory committee on sexual and gender minorities to support departments in their efforts to implement LGBTQIA2 community- specific measures as part of the National Housing Strategy, Canada's Homelessness Strategy, Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Canada's Tobacco Strategy and the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy.

- Recommendation 13: That the Government of Canada's funding of shelter spaces consider the needs of trans and non-binary individuals for non-gendered options.

Gaps in the literature indicate the necessity for actionable strategies, as indicated by those who testified in the historic study in 2019 on LGBTQ2S health which resulted in the Report of the Standing Committee on Health, and by the many individuals interviewed over the years. Creating resilience and community seems to be a critical piece, and has been an intersecting common thread in the literature.

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