

As Mr. John Todd, MLA from Keewatin Central said:

"Housing is an instrument of everything. It is an instrument of health, it is an economic instrument, it is a social instrument. In the Arctic in particular it is even more so. There is nowhere else to go. If we cut the housing by 50% or 55%, there is going to be a cost associated with that. Whether it is a cost of crime, spousal assault, social services, etc. there is going to be a net cost..."

So if I were to say anything to you, it would be to ask you, plead with you, to try to get the message across that we have to get back, at the very minimum, to the 1991 levels of housing." (Mr. John Todd, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, Issue No. 28A:140)

The Housing Crisis: More Than A Supply Issue

The housing crisis in Aboriginal communities is more than just a lack of supply. Witnesses pointed out that houses do not meet the cultural and practical needs of communities.

Chief Steven Fiddler, Bearskin Lake Band, stated that: "the quality of housing currently provided is inadequate to meet the geography, the lifestyle, the culture, and the economy of the reserve." (*Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, Issue No. 26A:2) Examples include the lack of wheelchair access and the inadequate size of houses (24' X 28') for the average family of 4.5 people.

In Iqaluit, Ms. Lynn Hirshman, Director of Social Services commented that the new seniors facility was not designed to have any younger family members live with the seniors, and this is culturally inappropriate and unrealistic. (*Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, Issue No. 28A:57)

In international circles there has been a recognition that adequate housing is about more than providing a supply of houses that meets

building codes. There has been a movement from a consideration of building codes to a broader understanding of housing standards in a more health enhancing sense emphasizing houses that further the well-being and development of the people and the communities where those houses are located (Dr. John O'Neil, Department of Community Health Services, University of Manitoba, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, Issue No. 20:6)

Dr. O'Neil noted that:

"Overcrowding is important, but just increasing the supply of housing units and making sure they've all got running water still doesn't meet that last requirement of having a house that reflects the senses of value and purpose in people's lives." (Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, Issue No. 20:19)

Witnesses described the housing stock as being inappropriate for special needs groups (elders, single mothers, physically challenged).

"The Native senior has been largely overlooked in policies and programs in Canada which typically apply to Natives in general or the elderly in general. Many elders forgo seeking medical or other assistance that they need in order to avoid being forced to leave their family and community. Those that do enter nursing homes outside of Native communities frequently feel extremely unhappy and alienated. There is a need to provide alternatives for those seniors who require care that the family alone is unable to provide, without requiring them to leave their communities and destroying the satisfactory aspects of the social network."

... The housing situation for the disabled on reserves is grim. Most lack supportive services such as home care. Special wheelchair access is rarely available for homes and public buildings. The poor conditions of many homes are not conducive to the maintenance of proper personal hygiene for the house-bound or bedridden." (Northern Health Research Group, The Health Effects of Housing and Community Infrastructure on Canadian Indian Reserves, Ottawa, 1991, p. 41)