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## THE HOUSING CRISIS: SUPPLY, APPROPRIATENESS AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS



There are many aspects to the aboriginal housing crisis. Existing shortages of housing and related infrastructure are not improving, due in large part to federal budget reductions. A growing population only exacerbates the problem. The houses themselves do not necessarily meet the cultural and practical needs of communities. When housing is being constructed in a community, the associated economic benefits do not trickle down to residents.

Despite some shortcomings with existing data, there is ample evidence of an overwhelming need for housing in Aboriginal communities.

The Auditor General, for example, notes that DIAND's backlog figure may not be up to date and are based on responses by bands in a survey conducted in 1983 asking about the status of the waiting list for each band.

Both DIAND and CMHC use statistical information based on Census data. Statistics Canada acknowledges that in the 1986 Census, 136 Indian reserves representing about 45,000 people (about 6% of the overall population reporting aboriginal origins) were incompletely enumerated. This was still a problem with the 1991 Census.

Mr. Daley, Vice-President of Programmes at CMHC noted that the Census information is not precise and CMHC has little faith in the numbers. As a result, the porportion of program activity targeted to Aboriginal people is determined arbitrarily. (*Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, Issue No. 11:16)

### ON-RESERVE

Any dwelling occupied by more than one person per room is defined as crowded. The rates of crowded dwellings on-reserve are considerably higher than the Canadian figure and the gaps are increasing—from twelve times the Canadian rate in 1981 to sixteen times the Canadian rate in 1986. In 1986, the percent of crowded Indian dwellings on-reserve was eleven times that in communities near reserves.<sup>1</sup>

Of the 70,000 units on-reserve, DIAND estimated in 1992 that only half, or 35,000 units are adequate and suitable for living in.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-one percent of units have neither piped nor well water, and 31% have neither piped sewage service nor septic fields.<sup>3</sup>