



POLICY BRIEF 2022

Housing for the Urban Indigenous Community

Madeleine Bégin

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəjəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwxú7mesh* (Squamish) & *səlilwətaɣ* (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

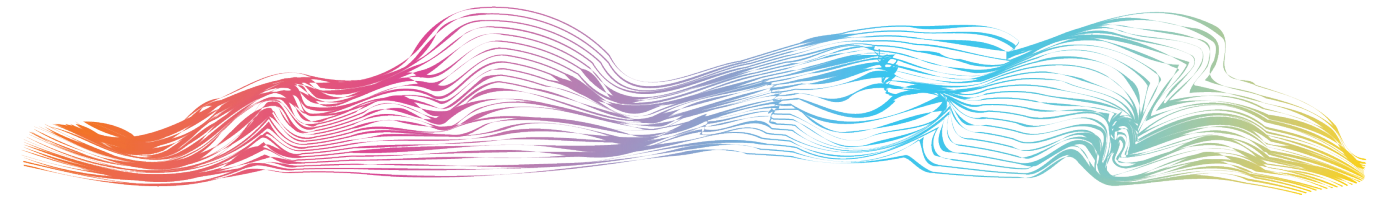
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About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the *həŋq 'əmin 'əŋ*-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the *sníchim*-speaking *Sḵwxú7mesh* (Squamish) peoples.

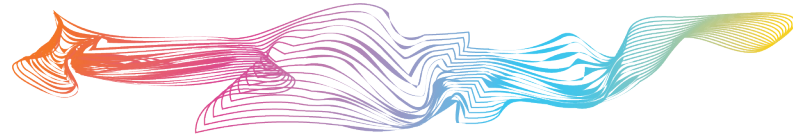
1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

Biography

Madeleine Bégin



Madeleine Bégin is of Mi'kmaw and French Canadian ancestry. She is a second-generation sixties scoop survivor who was born and raised on the traditional unceded territories of the lək'wəŋən and WSÁNEĆ Peoples. She is a certified Indigenous Family Support worker and Early Childhood Educational Assistant. She is currently employed as a consultant for the Victoria Native Friendship Centre's Aboriginal Infant Development program. She co-chairs the board for VIDEA, which is an International Development Non-Profit that works with Indigenous and other marginalized people. In her spare time, she proudly co-hosts a podcast with Katelynne H. Adams called "Spilling Labrador Tea Under Cedar Trees," which covers various different topics surrounding Indigenous issues.

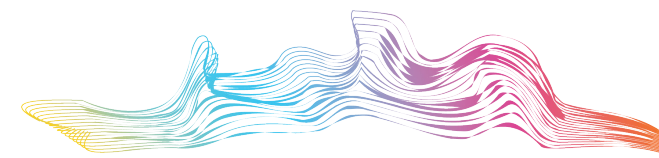


Executive Summary

The policy brief you will be reading examines the housing crisis impacting the urban Indigenous community in BC and four recommendations on how to resolve it.

Following those recommendations is information on how these recommendations address the calls to action and justice found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women,

Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S), and uphold the rights found in United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).



Immediate action needs to be taken to correct the lack of affordable housing and inadequate rental supplements for the urban Indigenous populations.

Background

Housing has been considered a universal human right in Canada since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was written and signed in 1948 (United Nations, art. 25).

Further it became a permanent right for Canadians, First Nation, Inuit, and Métis living within Canada through the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms into the Constitution in 1982. Even with First Nation, Inuit, and Métis being encompassed within these rights, they still continue to face a housing crisis both on and off reserve and settlement areas. Since first contact, the Indigenous population of what is colonially known as “Canada” has continued to face drastic rates of displacement and inadequate housing.

The number of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis moving to urban centres within BC continues to increase every year, though the development of housing has not been keeping up with the urban migration. With a shortage of housing causing rental market costs within BC to become one of the highest in the country, it is not a stretch to understand that many Indigenous people are facing housing instability and/or homelessness. The 2018 Report on Homeless Counts in BC speaks to

the over-representation of Indigenous people within the homeless community. Out of the 7,655 individuals surveyed, 1,904 respondents self-identified as Indigenous, which translates to 38% of that population being Indigenous (Homelessness Services Association of BC). Many respondents in the report said their main barriers to housing are unaffordable rent and low income (Homelessness Services Association of BC).

A recent report by the Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) identified some of the demographics of housing needs within various Indigenous communities in BC, including urban centres. AHMA’s report states that based on a 2016 census there are 14,780 Indigenous households that fall below the affordability line, and of those households, 10,345 are not in subsidized housing and are in need of rental assistance through supplements to afford to access housing (28). Many Indigenous people are moving to urban centres due to the lack of adequate housing on reserves and in



Immediate action needs to be taken to correct the lack of affordable housing and inadequate rental supplements for the urban Indigenous populations.



settlement areas (AHMA 14). Despite the growing population of Indigenous people in urban centres, the development of Indigenous subsidized housing has not increased to meet the needs of the population. In turn, this has created a high need for adequate rental supplements for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People.

Across BC, there is a noticeable housing crisis, which is especially evident within its urban centres. A current rental vacancy rate of less than 2% has resulted in some of the highest averages for market rental prices in Canada (McElroy). Though there are rental supplements available in BC, these rental supplements and other income-assistance

programs that the provincial government provides have not increased to adequately meet the needs of the individuals accessing them. For the urban Indigenous community, this has resulted in long waitlists for Indigenous subsidized housing. Immediate action needs to be taken to correct the lack of affordable housing and inadequate rental supplements for the urban Indigenous populations.

Across BC, there is a noticeable housing crisis, which is especially evident within its urban centres. Photo of downtown Vancouver by Aditya Chinchure on Unsplash

Policy Options

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Create a rental supplement that Indigenous people can apply for that treats any dwelling they live in like Indigenous subsidized housing.

This means that individuals, no matter their income source, pay only 30% of their income on rent with the rental supplement covering the rest, just as subsidized Indigenous housing is run. This supplement would be accessible to Indigenous individuals who are on a waitlist to get into Indigenous subsidized housing in urban centres. This supplement should also be accessible by Indigenous individuals who have been forced to move off reserve due to unsafe or lack of housing regardless of whether they are on a waitlist.

2 The creation of more Indigenous housing, Indigenous-led co-operative housing, and affordable homeownership.

As more Indigenous folks move to the urban centres, the more significant the demand for the creation of affordable Indigenous housing is. The creation of this housing will provide the urban Indigenous community with affordable housing that provides either wrap-around services or connections to an organization that provides them. There has been a large response from Indigenous individuals of various ages and gender identities stating that Indigenous housing has provided them with a safe and welcoming environment compared to non-Indigenous housing (AHMA 47).

Co-operative housing is a great way to ensure that housing will continue to be affordable and provides a sense of ownership to those who are a part of it. There are no known Indigenous-led co-ops within BC.

Similar to the equity of co-operative housing would be the creation of more Indigenous-owned affordable homeownership housing developments. The Ch'ich'iyú development in Vancouver is the first non-profit housing development of this kind in BC (Aboriginal Land Trust). This development stands as a model for further developments of its kind.

3 Increase funding for construction and housing repair on reserves.

Many Indigenous individuals are moving to urban centers as a response to the lack of safe and stable housing on reserves. Though there are yearly funds provided by the federal government for the repairing and construction of housing within reserves, the needs are

greater than those funds provided. The federal government needs to reassess with First Nations to determine the accurate amount of funding needed for the success of these tasks.

BC's government has newly implemented a program through BC Housing to create 1,750 new units for social housing, with some to be built on reserves (BC Housing). With this project being disbursed over 10 years, it is vital that the Province is transparent about the progress they are making to ensure accountability to the Indigenous community.

4 Restrictions on renovations and rental increase control with tenancy turnover.

A large contributor to rental spikes within the private rental market is renovations and landlords drastically increasing the price of rent during rental tenancy turnover. Developing and implementing stronger restrictions on when landlords can justifiably evict a tenant to perform renovations would lower the number of people displaced due to renovations. A similar response would be seen if there is a reasonable amount that a landlord may raise rental prices at tenancy turnover, taking into account the duration of the previous tenancy and the current rental market.

Reconciliation through Housing:

a) Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls to Action

- i) Having unsafe and/or unstable housing can have a detrimental impact on those struggling with mental health issues, and cause significant amounts of stress. Calls #18 and #19 under Health in the TRC speaks to the need for all levels of government to investigate, study, and respond to detriments to Indigenous health.

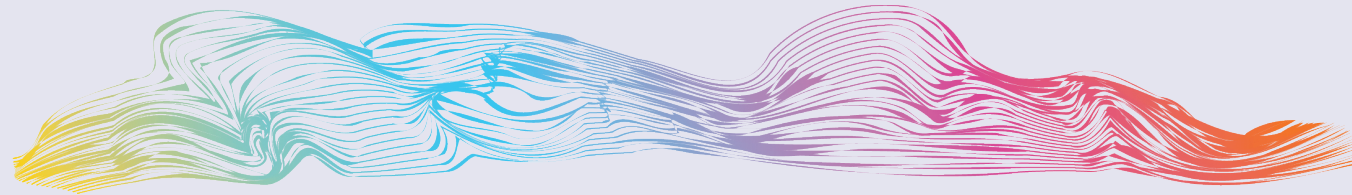
b) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

- i) The implementation of the policy recommendations would be in accordance with article 21(1) of UNDRIP. Article 21(1) states that Indigenous people have a right to improve their social and economic standing, with housing being one of the areas.
- ii) These policy recommendations also allow for Indigenous people to use their right to develop and determine housing that is right for them (Article 23).

c) National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, & 2 Spirit

- i) Throughout the MMIWG2S Final Report, Volume 1, there are comments from families and survivors that the inability to find safe housing lead to experiences of sexualized and/or physical violence (114).
- ii) "Failure to protect women's rights to adequate housing can make people stay in abusive situations to avoid becoming homeless" (188). The implementation of these recommendations would be an important step in answering the calls for justice in the case of the MMIWG2S report.

Conclusion



There is a blatant housing crisis in BC, which is heavily felt by the Indigenous community in urban centers. Indigenous people are visually and statistically the largest percentage in both the street entrenched community and those in low-income or subsidized housing. It is paramount that action be taken to ensure that all Indigenous people have safe and affordable housing. The creation of a rental supplement and Indigenous subsidized housing, increasing funds for housing on reserves, and ensuring that tenants have stronger rights are just some of the recommendations to help resolve these issues. The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) has put out a full report on ways that housing should be addressed for Indigenous people in BC, and should be put into action. This housing crisis is not the responsibility of any one level of government, it needs to be addressed and worked on in collaboration with the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Housing is a right, not a privilege, and therefore this crisis should be addressed with the immediacy that demonstrates this.

Indigenous people are visually and statistically the largest percentage in both the street entrenched community and those in low-income or subsidized housing.

Prior to contact, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people across Turtle Island always had enough housing or shelter for those within their communities. Since contact the restriction and lack of housing has been a large factor of colonization. Indigenous people continue to feel the effects of colonization as they face displacement and racism within the housing realm. Adequate and affordable housing needs to be treated as a key piece for reconciliation and keeping our Indigenous communities safe.

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demonstrates this.*

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

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