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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1700)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, October 9, 2020, the committee will be resuming its study of urban, rural and northern indigenous housing.

I would like to welcome Ms. Dancho and Mr. Tochor as permanent members of the committee. I trust that either you have been vigorously campaigning, or you have been lobbied extensively because of the upcoming election of the vice-chair, which will be part of committee business today.

I would also like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion, with five minutes of opening remarks followed by questions.

From the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, we have Yves Giroux, Parliamentary Budget Officer; Mark Mahabir, director of policy and general counsel; Caroline Nicol, analyst; and Ben Segel-Brown, analyst.

We're going to begin with Mr. Giroux, for five minutes.

Welcome to the committee. We look forward to your presentation.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Giroux (Parliamentary Budget Officer, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today, our first official appearance before the committee. We are pleased to be here today to present the findings of our report entitled, "Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing", which we were honoured to prepare at the request of this committee.

With me today I have Mark Mahabir, director of policy (costing) and general counsel, and Caroline Nicol and Ben Segel-Brown, the lead analysts on the report.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer provides independent and non-partisan economic and financial analysis to parliamentarians. As the legislation states, we provide this analysis for the purpose of raising the quality of parliamentary debate and promoting greater budget transparency and accountability.

[English]

We'd be pleased to respond to any questions you may have regarding our analysis or any other PBO work.

Consistent with the PBO's legislated mandate, at the request of this committee, my office prepared an independent analysis of the federal government's spending to address indigenous housing needs in urban, rural and northern areas. This report examines indigenous housing in all areas of Canada except on reserves.

Canada has 677,000 indigenous households, living in urban, rural or northern areas. Of those households, 124,000, or 18%, are in housing need. Based on our analysis, there is a \$636-million gap on an annual basis between what these households pay for shelter, and the level deemed affordable by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

The federal government has explicitly allocated \$179 million per year to address indigenous housing and homelessness programs in urban, rural and northern areas over the 10-year term of Canada's national housing strategy.

We also considered federal transfers to the provinces and territories for housing and homelessness programs. Federal transfers also contribute to the capacity of provinces and territories to provide housing support to indigenous households. These categories of support, when combined, amount to \$838 million in federal support for indigenous housing and homelessness. Despite these amounts, a gap remains.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Giroux.

We're going to begin with rounds of questions, starting with the Conservatives and Mr. Vis, for six minutes.

Mr. Vis, you have the floor.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Giroux, for appearing before us today.

Based on your analysis, there is a \$636-million annual gap between what indigenous Canadians in housing need pay for shelter and the level deemed affordable by CMHC. It was made clear during our last meeting that CMHC is not collecting data on rural and remote homelessness. If appropriate data were collected, do you feel the problem would be more acute and the monetary shortfall even greater? Do you feel that these are known unknowns or unknown unknowns?

Mr. Yves Giroux: It's difficult to determine whether the gap would be bigger if we had better data. One can assume that it probably would be bigger, but it's very difficult to say that with a high level of certainty. It's not known for sure, but my bet would be that it's probably higher.

As to whether it's in the unknown unknowns or the known unknowns, I think that probably falls into the known unknowns because we know there's a problem in that area. We just don't know exactly how big an issue it is. For that reason, it's not in the unknown unknowns, to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld.

• (1705)

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, sir.

Your report states that for many indigenous families, “affordable housing is unavailable in their community given their household income”. You also make the point that many Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation programs are not designed to support low-income families who are not able to afford market rents and therefore rely on social housing.

How could your analysis help inform the appropriate mix of housing interventions—i.e., rent subsidies, rent supplements, social housing and even home ownership—that the government should be undertaking? Second, how could your analysis help inform how funds are distributed or administered through a separate urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy? Third, did your analysis find that the government was spending all the funds they've allocated to indigenous housing or are they returning surpluses to general revenue in any certain years?

Mr. Yves Giroux: For the third question, I'll probably defer to Caroline or Ben, but let me address your first question on the mix of programs.

It's a mix of various programs. There's a lot of information in the report, and various programs have various pros and cons: flexibility, targeting, admin costs. It's a mix of programs and, really, it's a policy decision as to which are more efficient. It depends on the objective of each intervention.

How the funds are distributed also depends on the programs. There are some programs for which there is direct federal government intervention—for example, some homelessness programs and some CMHC programs. For others, it's by agreements with provinces, which is often the case when it comes to subsidized housing. Provinces also have their own programs when it comes to all these various areas of intervention.

It's really a mixed bag, and that's one of the things that I found in looking at the results of the work of Caroline, Ben and Mark. There is a very wide range of programs in this area.

I will go to Caroline or Ben on spending all the funds or not.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown (Analyst, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): It's possible to say that less was spent than was allocated to some years. For example, under rural and native housing, there was approximately \$12 million allocated for the last few years, and they spent about \$8 million. In that case, the funds that were distributed reflected the operating shortfall of the particular housing providers, so it was linked with the degree of need. These aren't programs that create new housing.

For the other programs, it's more difficult to say, because there is an allocation for the 10 years. In many cases, we're still at the very start of that. Particularly, the Canada community housing initiative has \$200 million, of which we've spent only about \$100,000.

Mr. Brad Vis: When was this program started?

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: That was started in 2017, but the funding phases in over the 10 years of the national housing strategy.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

Over the course of this study, several witnesses talked about the problems with CMHC proposal-based funding programs.

Proposal-based funding creates excessive administrative burden for community-based housing providers. Moreover, communities with the greatest need may not have the capacity to access funding through this type of process.

Does your analysis support these views, and please explain why or why not? How could your analysis help CMHC to better ensure that its programs not only address the needs of indigenous families, but also provide good value for money?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Well, the analysis indicates that there are different administrative costs according to different programs. In that sense, the analysis could be very useful for CMHC, and also for other government departments involved in supporting housing and homelessness programs. They could look at how the admin costs vary. We all know that admin costs are funds disbursed that don't go to the intended recipients, so the government could aim to limit the admin costs so that more of the money goes directly to those in need of housing assistance or funds to address homelessness.

In that sense, there is a wealth of information in the report that could truly help CMHC and federal government departments better target their programs and reduce their admin costs. There is lots of information in the report, but there is also lots of information that we have in the office that did not get published because it's too detailed. We wanted you to have useful information, but we didn't want to overload the committee with too much information.

• (1710)

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you. That was very helpful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we're going to go to Ms. Young, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Giroux for being here today and for the report.

As you said, it's a wealth of information. I went over it in the last couple of days and was really struck by the fact that the provinces appear not to be using federal transfer payments on indigenous social housing.

Is that a fair assessment, as you see it?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Well, I would say it's difficult to make that blanket statement. Provinces and territories receive program funding from CMHC. They also receive general transfer payments, for example, equalization or Canada social transfer. Money is fungible, and it's not always clear exactly how much is coming from exactly which program that eventually gets spent.

There is some level of spending from the federal government that is a bit difficult to trace back to specific housing programs. As I said, money is fungible, so it could be money from other federal sources that ends up in these programs.

Ms. Kate Young: I guess the fact of the matter is that there are so many different programs. That in itself is one of the problems here.

Do you think, as some of our witnesses suggested, that they need an indigenous CMHC, and that would be the answer to many of the problems that are faced with indigenous housing? Do you think that would be the way to go for the federal government?

Mr. Yves Giroux: That's probably an idea that is at least worth considering very seriously.

Right now, there are several departments involved in programs to support affordable housing and combat homelessness, including CIRNA, the Crown-indigenous relations department. If the funding for indigenous people were to be funnelled through one department, I think that would probably help focus the minds when it comes to clientele who have very specific needs, as demonstrated in our report. That's certainly an idea worth considering.

Ms. Kate Young: Page 28 of your report talks about how the total number of units targeted to indigenous people is not tracked by the provinces. This speaks to an earlier question about data.

How does your experience in analyzing all of this government data support other witnesses who told us there was a need for an indigenous-led data strategy by the government?

Mr. Yves Giroux: The report was based on data that was provided by government departments. In the course of drafting the report, we found that getting accurate, high-quality data proved to be a challenge. I'm not saying here that departments were unwilling to provide data, quite the opposite. They were collaborative in providing data, but the quality of the data itself was not what we would have expected.

To give you one quick example, we got updated data the week that we published the report. It is a bit late when you have a report of that magnitude to get revised data a couple of days before you go to publication, taking into account that you have to translate and publish the report.

Data quality is an issue. What you're suggesting could probably help solve at least in part that problem.

Ms. Kate Young: Would data also help in the area of discrimination based upon race and family status when it comes to indigenous people?

• (1715)

Mr. Yves Giroux: That's a very delicate question. I'm not sure if data in and of itself would be a sufficient condition to address that issue. It would certainly be a first step. Having better data would probably allow us to better quantify whether discrimination is present, first and foremost—my bet is it's probably present—and then to what extent, allowing governments to take better action against that.

Ms. Kate Young: The Ontario Auditor General report suggests that the province hasn't been effective in negotiating guaranteed rents at or below market value for units.

Is that one of the problems here, especially, that it is different in each province so that indigenous peoples are treated quite differently depending on where their home is?

Mr. Yves Giroux: That certainly could be one of the issues because of the very different programs, the patchwork of programs, that exist across the country depending on where you live and which jurisdiction you depend on for affordable housing. It makes things much more complicated. Anybody who reads this report hoping to find one conclusion will be sorely disappointed for that very reason because there are wide differences across the country in terms of affordability of housing and also accessibility of housing programs. The needs vary across the country, but the support available also varies across the country. It makes it very complicated to come up with one easy picture of the solution, one easy fix to the problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Parliamentary Budget Officer, thank you and your team for providing us with this analysis, this very enlightening report, considering the time you were given. It will greatly assist us in the production of our report. As you said, you are here to enlighten us, as parliamentarians, and to help us make the best possible decisions for the way forward.

You said that at the outset, and your analysis also shows that 124,000 people need housing, and that there is an annual gap of \$636 million. You also said in your analysis that indigenous households are one and a half times more likely to be in housing need than non-indigenous households.

From your analysis, are you able to assess the progression of needs in relation to investments? Have you drawn conclusions on these two variables? In other words, can we do it?

Mr. Yves Giroux: We have not specifically examined the evolution of the programs over time. That would have required a slightly more complete history than we had obtained.

On the other hand, the indigenous population is growing much faster than the rest of the population. That growth not just a little stronger, it's much stronger. As a result, the funding needed to maintain the status quo is expected to grow much faster than for the overall Canadian population, and inflation. If there is no significant investment directed to indigenous Canadians, the problem will certainly not abate, because, as I mentioned, this population is growing rapidly.

In fact, the housing needs of indigenous people are becoming more acute as household size increases. Households with multiple children are in greater need of adequate and affordable housing than the rest of the population. The differences are less pronounced for one- and two-person households, but six- and seven-person households have the greatest need. This indicates that population growth will not cause these needs to diminish, quite the contrary.

• (1720)

Ms. Louise Chabot: On the last point you just raised—the housing needs of the slightly larger families—according to your analysis, does the market play a role in this housing deficit?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Yes, market prices certainly play a very important role. In some cities, the market makes it very difficult to find affordable housing. However, it is also a matter of the concentration of people of indigenous origin in some cities. Winnipeg and Vancouver are the two cities with the highest number of people of indigenous origin in need of affordable and adequate housing. In Winnipeg, this is not necessarily because of the high cost of housing, but rather because of the size of the population. In Vancouver, it is clearly because of the extremely high cost of housing.

On the other hand, in some areas where the cost of housing is historically somewhat lower, the need is somewhat less acute. The proportion of people of indigenous origin living in unaffordable or inadequate housing is indeed lower.

It is therefore clear that market prices have a significant impact on housing.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Today, we received additional data that bolsters the facts mentioned, particularly with respect to youth—who

represent 24% of those in need of housing—single-parent families, and unattached individuals.

These are pretty significant statistics. It would be interesting to break them down then according to the environment, that is to say urban, rural or northern, since this is the subject of our study. There is also the whole issue of homelessness that comes into play, especially when it comes to youth. In urban areas, we know that homelessness is a significant phenomenon.

How can we improve this data to better monitor and show the changes that may be affecting youth who are experiencing homelessness, in particular?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I will ask Ms. Nicol, Mr. Mahabir or Mr. Segel-Brown if they have any suggestions in this regard.

Mrs. Caroline Nicol (Analyst, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): I can say a few words about this.

In terms of data, our main source of information was the 2016 census. We would need more recent data, such as that provided in the next census or from any other more recent source. We need to take into account that the real estate market is changing rapidly. Also, as Mr. Giroux mentioned, demographics are a big factor.

With regard to the detail of the data, an even more precise regional breakdown would allow us to have a much broader picture, particularly in terms of territories and rural areas. These are data that would also be useful in the census.

Census or other available data sources are quite limited in scope due to confidentiality requirements. In my opinion, the picture we have in terms of age is relatively good compared to other aspects, as there are quite a lot of these data. So the picture for young people and older people is good.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Nicol and Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Next is Ms. Gazan, for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses today to our committee. I really appreciate having you here today.

You mentioned Winnipeg. I represent the riding of Winnipeg where we're dealing with a pretty severe housing crisis. We've only had 143 units built since 2017. Unfortunately, we lost another life today at one of the encampments; the individual died in a fire in a makeshift shelter.

Your PBO report mentions that Winnipeg currently has the highest core housing need for indigenous people. Vancouver is second. As the report indicates, there are 9,000 households in core housing need alone; 8,000 in Vancouver.

You spoke about a \$635-million gap. What portion of that gap is specific to Winnipeg and Vancouver?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I don't have that information off the top of my head, the quantified affordability gap for each of these two cities.

If Ben, Mark or Caroline know off the top of their head they can provide that information, or if not, we can provide that in writing to you after the meeting.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'd appreciate that very much.

There's a severe lack of affordable housing in the country. Clearly, it is targeted more toward indigenous people, and it is a crisis. I've had many discussions with my colleague, Adam Vaughan, about the dire situation in Winnipeg with, for example, trench fever, which popped up in December.

Rental rates are rapidly increasing. Wages are staying stagnant. Unemployment is certainly growing. Would it be safe to say that, without a concerted effort to control rental rates and to build and maintain affordable and accessible housing units, we will see this \$635-million gap continue to increase?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I'm not sure about rent control. That's a decision that would have to be made by governments. I won't pronounce on that. Other jurisdictions have done that in the past, with some different results.

One thing is for sure, without additional investments, and with a growing indigenous population, it's clear that the need for affordable and adequate housing will probably keep on growing. Unless indigenous Canadians are finding high-paying jobs at a much faster rate than the rest of the population, or rental rates go down all of a sudden, which would be very surprising, in all likelihood this issue, without additional investments by governments at all levels, is very likely to continue to increase.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Would you agree that the housing crisis has been even further exacerbated by the pandemic?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I'm not sure. I know people who are looking for housing at reasonable rates and who are finding it very difficult right now, but that's based on anecdotes. It seems to be the case, for sure, based on people we know, because housing construction came to a standstill in the spring of 2020, which seems to have delayed the construction of affordable units. Whether it will be just a blip or something that will be lasting remains to be seen. Not being an expert in the real estate market, I can only base that on the few anecdotes I've heard.

You're probably much better placed than I am to say that, with the contacts you have in your ridings.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have just one last question. Today I wrote a letter, along with all elected officials from my riding in the downtown area, calling for immediate government investment to really address this dire crisis.

As I said, we lost another life today. We had somebody freeze to death in a bus shelter. About two weeks ago, we had a woman who

preferred to live in a bus shelter rather than go into a shelter, because conditions and the safety issues for women are quite intense in shelters.

Our letter is calling on the government to immediately invest. The government gave our specific riding \$12.5 million. We're saying, clearly that is not enough.

Do you believe the \$12.5 million that was granted in the rapid housing initiative is adequate, considering the level of crisis we're currently facing in Winnipeg?

• (1730)

Mr. Yves Giroux: I can't really comment on that because that would venture into the policy world, but I think your question is very valid. However, as I understand it, rapid housing is in the early stages. As I said before, there are many programs, so looking at one program in isolation doesn't give the full picture.

Ms. Leah Gazan: How much more would you—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Oh, thank you.

The Chair: You'll get another chance.

Ms. Falk, please. You have five minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I thank the witnesses as well for being here and for the work they not only have done here but that they continue to do for us across the board.

During this study, we have heard from many, if not most, witnesses that the administrative burden of existing housing programs can be a significant barrier to accessing them. This can be particularly challenging for smaller organizations that don't necessarily have the resources to take on the workload of tackling that burden, and we know bureaucratic red tape is an added cost for the delivery of a program.

Your report has identified some of the administrative costs incurred by existing housing programs. I have noted some significant numbers in your report, including that about 10% of ESDC's total expenses for assisted housing programs are for operating expenses, and that community organizations, through the Reaching Home program, can use up to 15% of the funds they receive for their own administrative costs.

When it comes to CMHC's rental construction financing initiative, the RCFI, and the national housing co-investment fund, the report breaks it down a bit further and estimates that an average administrative cost per single application exceeds \$300,000.

I wonder if you could give us some more insight as to how that per application cost was assessed, what specific administrative costs were included in that average, and who incurred those administrative costs. Was it CMHC and the applicant?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I'll ask Ben, Mark or Caroline to step in to answer what was included in the administrative cost, in order to give you a more fulsome response, if they have the details, but from the outset I'll say that it's data that was provided by government departments. I don't know the level of detail they provided.

Ben.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: With respect to the administrative cost for the financing for housing programs—that's the rental construction finance initiative and the national housing co-investment fund—I estimated that to be over \$300,000 per application. That's not a very precise figure because CMHC was not able to provide a breakdown of its administrative costs by function within financing for housing. Those two programs account for the vast majority of budgetary expenditures, so I assumed that the administrative costs are attributable to them.

They also weren't able to provide administrative costs for prior years, so I had to assume that the administrative costs of \$36 million in 2019 were typical of 2018 to 2020. I took that total administrative cost and divided it by the total number of applications that have been approved, including those that had received conditional approval, because I assumed that some of those administrative costs were incurred up front. It's dividing it over a larger number of applications than is shown elsewhere in the report.

That's how I estimated the administrative cost per application. It's more to flag it as something that should be considered in the designing of programs like the national housing co-investment fund to monitor the administrative burden and determine whether it's necessary.

• (1735)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: For sure. Thank you.

That to me seems like a lot of administration costs, when we're talking in the millions.

I don't know if you can comment on this, but are there similarities to draw between the average application costs for those programs and other existing housing programs?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I'm not sure about other housing programs, but admin costs ranging at about 10% are not uncommon—I would say unfortunately—especially for programs that disburse millions of dollars to one recipient. It's not atypical to have admin costs of about 10% of total program costs.

For housing programs, it depends on the nature of each program. For example, programs that are capital transfers are a one-off, so there tends to be less administrative burden, if I'm correct, rather than ongoing transfer payments for which there seems to be a need for ongoing monitoring of expenditures.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

The Chair: Next, we have Mr. Vaughan for five minutes.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I think I'll step away from the anecdotal evidence, the guessing and the extrapolations and just try to deal with the facts. I'm a former journalist and in my newsroom, they told you that if your mother says she loves you, you still need a second source. I'll try and stick to the facts here.

On page 4, you make the statement that:

Finance Canada's major transfers to the provinces also contribute to the pool of resources available for housing. It is not possible to determine the extent to which these transfers affect provincial spending on Indigenous housing.

You don't know what the provinces spend with federal dollars on indigenous housing. I assume that's what that statement means.

Mr. Yves Giroux: It means we can't follow specific dollars from [Inaudible—Editor]—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: You don't have facts.

Mr. Yves Giroux: Well, we don't have a pure connection.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Right.

On page 25, you say that “within CMHC, most of the funding to address housing affordability is disbursed...to the provinces”. That means that for the bulk of the spending we're doing, you have no line of sight as to whether it's being spent on indigenous housing through the provinces. In other words, when we transfer money to the provinces without strings and criteria and reporting mechanisms, we actually don't know what they're spending it on.

Mr. Yves Giroux: We don't know for sure. That's right. We can't attach one dollar of federal expenditures to that specific aboriginal housing. That's why we had to make assumptions as to the proportion. If a province spends half of its own funding, we would assume that half of the federal dollars would go there.

It's quite possible that federal dollars displace provincial.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: That is interesting because in the same report you talked about how, on average, the average province spends about 25% of its funding on indigenous housing. Manitoba is the lowest, which is surprising. It's a historic low across all provinces. It has the lowest expenditure on subsidized housing for indigenous people.

What I find also interesting about that is that you claim that 53% of indigenous people are in subsidized housing, but you don't know who's subsidizing it.

Mr. Yves Giroux: It's subsidized—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: By somebody.

Mr. Yves Giroux: Yes. It could be a mix of funding that comes from the feds, from the province or the municipality, in some instances.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: In the areas where you do have clear federal jurisdiction on the rapid housing initiative, you've identified that only 127 new units are targeted.

I was very heavily involved in the design of the rapid housing initiative. Can you tell me where you got the target of 127 new units under rapid housing? Where does the figure 127 come from?

My understanding is there is no hard target set. There is prioritized, but not targeted.

Mr. Yves Giroux: It's data that we got from CMHC.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Is that data from CMHC on what they've targeted or what they've achieved so far, halfway through a program?

Mr. Yves Giroux: I think it's what they've achieved, but I'll turn to—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: You think it is.

Mr. Yves Giroux: I don't know all the details—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Fair enough.

Mr. Yves Giroux: —of every single program.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: No, it's clear, it's clear—

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: It's the financial commitments to date. It's not the target for the program. There is no explicit allocation within the rapid housing strategy for indigenous housing.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: That's 127 out of how many?

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: Give me a second....

Mr. Yves Giroux: We can get back to you on that.

● (1740)

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: CMHC did not provide that data to us.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: They just told you 127 units and you put it down.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: No. They gave us a list of all the projects and all the corresponding data, but only for projects that committed to creating indigenous units. We don't have the overall.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Okay.

Getting back to the Canada housing benefit, you say that only about 21% of the dollars have been spent. That's entirely under the jurisdiction of the provinces, right? Of the money that's been given to them, they're sitting on the unspent dollars. Is that what that figure indicates? We have transferred it. They haven't spent it. B.C., for example, has just announced that they'll be rolling out the Canada housing benefit despite the fact that they were transferred the dollars last year.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: Yes. Our report shows that in 2019—it's the first data for which we have reporting—no indigenous households received assistance from the Canada housing benefit—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Did you get a racialized breakdown on all groups that received the Canada housing benefit?

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: It's part of the required reporting under their bilateral agreements that they identify the number of indigenous households who've received Canada housing benefits—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: So unless the federal government makes it explicit that it be spent on indigenous households, we don't have jurisdiction there if the provinces refuse.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: Yes. We would have no cause to complain if they did not spend.... It would not be a breach of the bilater-

al agreement for them to not spend that money on indigenous housing units.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: If we want to intentionally—

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: —spend on indigenous housing, we have to do it federally. Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Giroux, is it possible to include in your analysis a picture of how the amounts transferred to the provinces for housing and homelessness assistance have evolved over the past few years? The provinces are expecting money that could be used wisely.

Mr. Yves Giroux: I will ask Ms. Nicol and Mr. Segel-Brown if we have a history of those changes. If we do, we can send it to you.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: Yes, we have the spending under the prior rapid housing initiative, which started in 2014. There was an increase in spending....

I'm sorry, it's not the rapid housing initiative, it's the homelessness partnering strategy. We have data for the prior homelessness partnering strategy. We could provide the spending for that over the past years. There was an increase in spending from the homelessness partnering strategy to the current Reaching Home strategy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: In your study, Mr. Giroux, you put a lot of emphasis on the large proportion of indigenous households with a large number of people, which you also mentioned earlier.

According to your analysis, what challenges would this pose for programs in the area of appropriate housing construction?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Obviously, I do not work in the housing construction market, but I can say that the particular challenge of this situation is to offer housing with more bedrooms, that is, more than what the market is used to providing to the general population.

The market is often based on the needs of a typical family with two or three children, whereas, when dealing with or building with an indigenous clientele in mind, more housing with more bedrooms than usual and slightly larger living spaces must be provided.

So builders must consider an average household size that is slightly larger than what one would normally expect for a non-indigenous household.

• (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Next is Ms. Gazan please, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a jurisdictional question. My colleague, Adam Vaughan, was speaking about provinces and the feds. In Manitoba, we often miss out on a lot of the funding opportunities due to the cost-matching requirements—something that our current Pallister government doesn't want to do. This has negatively impacted Winnipeg, for example, in terms of being able to secure adequate housing investment even when we are experiencing severe issues like trench fever—diseases of poverty—and losses to life in our community, which are becoming a regular occurrence in my riding.

How can this be changed to ensure that cities in dire need of housing dollars are not disqualified from funding when provinces aren't willing to participate in cost-matching programs?

Mr. Yves Giroux: That's an interesting question. I would probably make the parallel with infrastructure programs. The federal government partners with provinces and territories for cost matching when it comes to building infrastructure, and some jurisdictions don't have the same means or policy priorities. In these cases, direct federal investment—going it alone—is usually the best way to ensure that some pieces of infrastructure are built that do not require cost matching and that there are federal programs that don't need or require cost matching by provinces.

It also means that the federal spending does not leverage provincial funding, but it's an effective way of ensuring that some needs are met despite what provinces want or do not want to do.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I appreciate that. It's clearly not working in Manitoba, and I feel like the provincial government is becoming the greatest excuse in the world for everybody not to help people dying on the street.

I want to go back to a question I had before about the \$12.5 million. It was clearly not adequate, and it didn't work in terms of where people were qualified to get the funding. How much more would be needed? What would be a reasonable ballpark, considering the dire situation we're in in Winnipeg, with the greatest housing need?

Mr. Yves Giroux: That's an interesting question. I don't have the numbers for Winnipeg per se, but we made an attempt at answering that question on page 38 of the English version. For example, we gave the cost to address 25% of the affordability gap for 100% of indigenous households in housing need. Another table shows the cost to provide x per cent of indigenous households in housing need with a typical indigenous housing unit.

We tried to give an order of magnitude for the country as a whole, but I don't have the data for Winnipeg, or Manitoba.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Vis, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you. It's an amazing discussion all around.

I have a point of clarification, Mr. Giroux, on the \$600-million and change shortfall that you reference in your report. Would that include an improved administrative capacity, or did that analysis include the status quo and not account for any of the project improvements we discussed in earlier questions?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Ben and Caroline can probably answer that question with a higher level of certainty than me.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: The \$636-million cost reflects the gap between what indigenous households are currently paying and either the affordable level or the cost of market housing, if the housing is inadequate. We believe that would be the cost to close that gap, excluding administrative costs, under an efficient program design.

Mr. Brad Vis: It accounts for program improvements.

On another point of clarification, how much money has CMHC, since 2015, put into Canada's general revenue fund?

Mr. Yves Giroux: It's probably billions of dollars, but I would have to get back to you with a specific answer because it varies year by year. It depends on retained earnings or not and the dividend it pays or doesn't pay to the government in any given year.

• (1750)

Mr. Brad Vis: How much money, since 2015, has the government spent on all of its programs and, secondly, on indigenous programs?

Mr. Yves Giroux: To give you a total since 2015, we'll probably have to get back to you with a precise number as well.

Mr. Brad Vis: That would be very helpful because I found it odd, given how much we know indigenous people don't have adequate housing, that CMHC paid dividends to the federal government.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: I guess I would clarify that there are separate business lines, so the dividends don't arise from the assisted housing programs. The assisted housing programs are funded by appropriations from the Government of Canada, so they're not using the profits from their mortgage insurance business to cover the cost of assisted housing programs.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

I have no further questions. If Rosemarie would like any time, I'm good to go.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I'm good, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

We're going to close, then, with Mr. Turnbull for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to Mr. Giroux and his team for being here today.

I appreciate the report and all the work that you've put into it.

I understand that the objective of the report is to identify what programs are in place, what expenditure is currently in place and what the housing needs are; to identify the gap; and to talk or project a little bit about what the cost would be to address or close that gap. Would you say that that's correct?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Yes, I think that's a very accurate depiction of what we attempted to do, to provide you with that type of information.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great.

Maybe I can just ask a few clarifications even around that.

You said in your opening remarks, Mr. Giroux, that 124,000 individuals, indigenous people, were in housing need. How does that break down into those who may be homeless, those who may be living in inadequate or unsuitable housing, those perhaps living in supportive housing, or those living in housing that requires some level of subsidy?

Mr. Yves Giroux: Caroline and Ben can probably provide you with a more accurate breakdown.

Ms. Caroline Nicol: I'll refer, maybe, to the matrix on page 14. Just to clarify with regard to the 124,000, we're talking about households, so the number of people would be much greater.

To start, of those 124,000 households, we estimate that 31,000 are in subsidized housing. Here subsidized housing, according to Statistics Canada in the census definitions, could be rent subsidies, social housing or any other housing support that they might receive. However, the total number of households that we estimate receive subsidized housing in Canada is 67,000.

If we were to talk about the number of people in unsuitable housing, I can pull that up really quickly for you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: If it's easier, I could just suggest that maybe that information could be tabled because I don't want you to have to search through the report. I have limited time. Would that be okay, Ms. Nicol?

Mr. Giroux said yes with a thumbs-up sign. Great.

What I was going to ask is this: In terms of the average cost to renovate or retrofit an unsuitable or inadequate unit of housing, do we have an estimate of how much that would cost?

Mr. Yves Giroux: No. We have an estimate of the cost of building a unit. With regard to retrofitting or renovating, the cost would depend on the extent of the damage and the extent to which we

want to retrofit to current standards or to go beyond those. I don't think that's data that we have, but we have the cost to build from scratch, on average.

• (1755)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay, great.

What is the cost to build an affordable housing unit without all the program-added costs? I think it was in there at \$297,000. Is that right?

Mr. Yves Giroux: It depends by jurisdiction. It depends where you are in the country. There are some areas that have lower costs, obviously, and areas where the cost is much higher. I think we have that as well. I can tell you for sure that in the north it's always a bit more expensive because of the short construction season and the cost to get materials up north.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Do you have an estimate of how many affordable housing units we would need to build to solve the indigenous housing crisis that we have in this country?

Mr. Yves Giroux: We can probably derive that. When we say there's about 124,000 households that are in housing need, that's probably about what we'd need to build to solve the housing needs of the indigenous population. That, of course, would have to take into account the demographic increases of that fast-growing population.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I know you've estimated this \$636-million gap, but I noticed the way you defined that gap was that it was how much people paid compared to what was considered affordable. I'm not sure whether that actually addresses....

I'm just wondering whether I can draw this conclusion. If we added \$636 million to support closing that gap, are you saying that would actually solve the crisis that we're in?

I don't see how that makes sense to me. I think we need to build a lot more housing. The supply is not there. That's part of the problem. It's not a matter of just helping people afford to buy houses if there are none in existence.

Mr. Yves Giroux: This \$636 million would bridge the affordability gap, but it would not bridge the suitable shelter gap. There would still be households that would be in inappropriate housing—too small, too decrepit for their needs, or too decrepit, period. At least they wouldn't pay exorbitant prices, or they wouldn't pay more than they could afford using CMHC's definition of affordability.

The Chair: Go ahead if you want to supplement that, Mr. Segel-Brown. Then we're going to wrap up.

Mr. Ben Segel-Brown: For households where there are repair issues or crowding—that's unsuitable and inadequate housing—we aren't measuring the gap between the affordable level and what they pay. We're assuming they would have to rent another unit at market rent. That reflects the rent subsidy that would be required for that household to be able to access a unit at market rent.

The Chair: Thank you very much Mr. Giroux and your supporting staff. We first of all want to thank you for your patience in terms of having to wait until we got through the votes to appear before us, for the work that you've done on your report and for being with us here this evening.

I have no doubt that the report will greatly help us as we are now concluding the study and about to issue drafting instructions. Thank you for the work you have done in furthering the study that we've undertaken.

We are now going to move to committee business.

Mr. Giroux and company, you are welcome to stay but you are free to leave. We don't have any further questions.

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Chair, I have just one quick point before we proceed, if that's okay, sir?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Giroux kindly agreed that they would get back to me on some of those questions. I think it's timely information for our upcoming report. I'm just wondering if they would be able to give us that information in the next couple of business days, if that's most appropriate.

The Chair: Mr. Giroux, can you come up with the answers that you've undertaken to provide as quickly as you can? As I indicated, you are the last witnesses for the study. We're going to issue drafting instructions and the information that you've committed to provide may very well factor significantly in the report.

I'm reluctant to impose a deadline, but if we could ask you to proceed with all due haste, that would be greatly appreciated.

• (1800)

Mr. Yves Giroux: Sure. We always strive to provide information as fast as possible, but we'll put extra attention to your committee. I would say, Mr. Chair, that's what happens when you save the best for last.

The Chair: You don't want to reopen the debate here.

Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Yves Giroux: Thank you.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right, colleagues. We do have quite a few items by way of committee business, so I'll just give you a rundown of what we hope to accomplish and then we'll start chipping away.

The first order of business will be the election of a vice-chair. Then I would like for us to turn our attention to our next study on employment insurance and talk about the next meeting and the opening statements. Also on the EI study, if we could agree on whether we're going to accept briefs, there does appear to be a fair amount of interest, and we have drafted a press release if you wish to do that.

Among the other items for consideration is of course issuing drafting instructions on the report that we're in the process of finishing now and on exactly how we're going to incorporate the testimony we just heard today as part of those drafting instructions. You already will have received a draft outline, so it will be a discussion around how we're going to slot this in.

We have two budgets for you to approve and then perhaps a discussion around the way we structure panels for the next report, bearing in mind that we continue to have encroachments on our time from votes.

That's what I hope to get through in the next hour or less, and, of course, any other business you wish to raise.

We could start with the election of the vice-chair. Now that vice-chair Peter Kent has moved on to greener pastures, there is an opening for the position of vice-chair, who must be a member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. The floor is now open for nominations for the position of vice-chair.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer): Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Brad Vis: I move that Raquel Dancho become the vice-chair of our committee.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Brad Vis that Raquel Dancho be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions? I will now proceed to a recorded division, unless there's unanimous consent for the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare that Raquel Dancho is duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Congratulations.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

For the second item of committee business, I'd just like to have a brief discussion, colleagues, about our upcoming study on employment insurance. We have commitments from some officials to come and provide us with a briefing on Thursday. Given that EI is vast and that the officials will be with us, I'm in your hands as to whether we stick with our normal five minutes of opening statements, or whether you would like something where they do more talking and we ask fewer questions in terms of getting background.

I wanted to test the waters here to see whether there is any appetite for requesting a presentation of longer than five minutes for them, or whether for this meeting we'll stick with the routine motions that we've adopted, as we have for all others.

• (1805)

Mr. Brad Vis: My hand is raised, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mine is too, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. We have a speakers list.

[Translation]

I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Vis.

[English]

Mr. Vis, go ahead.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Generally speaking—and I'm not going to speak for my colleagues on the committee—five minutes seems to be substantive. I think the government officials who appear are welcome to provide further commentary in both official languages in advance that we can read and respond to in our questioning.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Are you able to tell us how many people there would be? In any case, I would be in favour of keeping the five minutes, even if the speaking notes have to be more focused. During our question period, we could supplement the testimony by asking questions of the witnesses.

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, perhaps the clerk could answer this question.

How many witnesses do we expect to have for the first meeting, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: There will be at least four witnesses, maybe five.

The Chair: However, it is likely that only one person will take the floor to represent their organization.

The Clerk: Yes, but the question is whether committee members would like to get additional information in advance if more than five minutes are required. That being said, the normal time frame is five minutes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I agree with the five minutes.

The Chair: Fine.

[English]

I think I'm reading a consensus to not alter the rules and to encourage them to provide a more comprehensive opening statement if they feel restricted by the five minutes.

Thank you, colleagues.

With respect to the next study, it would be customary for us to advise at the beginning of a study that folks can submit written briefs. I would like to hear from you on that.

Normally we would notify people that they can submit a brief, and let them know a deadline. Based on our current workload, I would estimate we will probably finish hearing from witnesses on this study about mid-April. If we set a deadline of mid-April for briefs, subject to it being changed if the circumstances change, that might be reasonable.

Are there any thoughts with respect to the submission of briefs?

Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier today I met with the Canadian Federation of Students. They had a lot to say on employment insurance, but I don't believe they're on our witness list. I think it's in the interest of this committee to get a full appreciation of the complexity of this issue we're trying to address in five meetings; it would be to our collective benefit.

I might have to get some west coast fishermen to challenge all those great benefits you have on Prince Edward Island that I'm sure they would love to have out here on the west coast as well. I'm kidding on the second point.

The Chair: I take it you agree we should allow for written briefs.

Is there anybody with any strong feeling around a mid-April deadline or any other comments with respect to briefs?

I believe I see consensus on that point. Thank you.

Can we come back now to the study at hand?

A draft outline for the report on “Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing” has been circulated. Are there any comments, advice or further directions for the analysts, including what we do with the testimony we heard in the last hour and how we incorporate that?

The floor is open for advice to the analysts with respect to drafting.

Mr. Vis, you have the floor.

• (1810)

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'm sorry for hogging the mike today.

I would just say, under section D, if Chief Leon, who appeared before committee and spoke about the challenges that on-reserve indigenous Canadians also face, could at least be referenced or alluded to, it would be most appreciated. In my riding, which is largely rural and in many areas remote, indigenous people are still living on reserve but still meet all of those other criteria. That's not the focus of our report, but I think it plays heavily into what we discuss and how it relates to urban indigenous issues as well or indigenous people living off reserve.

Otherwise I felt that the draft report outline was generally quite balanced and good.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I agree with regard to the draft outline we were given. I guess it's intended for our discussion of the general situation of indigenous people living off-reserve. Since our study was on housing for indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern areas, our report should delineate each part of the study that was part of our motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mrs. Falk, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the analysts for doing the work they've done so far. It is very much appreciated.

I'm just wondering, with regard to section D as well—D.1: “Factors that Contribute to the Housing Shortage”—if there can be something on limitations of current policies that can be a barrier—for example, administrative burdens or even bureaucracy. I know there was some testimony late last year about some of the administrative burdens and how even though it's current policy it still is a burden, or how some of the smaller organizations actually don't even apply because doing that costs money and takes manpower and that type of thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'm not going to speak to a specific section, but I think that from the perspective of trying to form policy based on the report, which—

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan, just for the benefit of the interpreters, you've dropped your mike.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'm not going to speak to a specific section, but in general, I think we need to ask how big the housing need is, and in a most pronounced way, what we are spending. It's hard to get it from the Parliamentary Budget Office because even though we asked for the breakdown of provincial numbers, we didn't get it. What are we spending in the provinces that might be better spent in indigenous communities themselves, where we know with absolute certainty that it's landing in indigenous households. The goal here is not just to create the program, but also to consolidate existing programs so that we know exactly how we're dealing with indigenous housing as a federal program. It's clear we can't rely on the provinces to partner with us with any certainty.

The second thing in terms of the projection of housing needs now, based on the demographics of the indigenous communities outside the reserve system, which means modern treaties as well as the territories, is that the other information we're likely to need is the demographic growth projections to scale the report, so that we don't solve yesterday's problem tomorrow with today's numbers. Instead, we do it with tomorrow's numbers as part of the solution for tomorrow.

The final piece of it is to break down, based somewhat on what the Parliament Budget Office tried to do, what we need to build, what we need to repair and what we need to subsidize in order to make it viable housing. Good housing systems typically are 50% subsidy, 25% construction and 25% maintenance. That's typically where you try to land your dollars.

I have a feeling that within the backlog of repairs here, we're going to need some sort of assessment of the outstanding state of good repair in existing housing.

The final piece is to make sure that we understand how this intersects with the missing and murdered indigenous women's report and that we also understand that women's housing, housing for youth, and in particular, housing for youth coming out of care are probably the most vulnerable subpopulations of indigenous housing need, even though that covers everything but men in some ways. The reality is that we need to know the demographic split because as we saw in the PBO report, larger families and larger households are typical of indigenous composition. At the same time, we also note that the lack of safe space for individuals puts them in incredibly vulnerable situations. We need a demographic breakdown of what's unique about the housing model so we can scale it appropriately.

The final piece, which I think we need more information on, is that we don't know where the 53% of indigenous people in subsidized housing are. We know that they're getting it—that's what the report tells us—but we don't know whether they're in provincial systems, private systems or indigenous systems or whether their subsidy is coming from a different form of pension, like disability or what have you. If there was any way of helping us to understand exactly what the subsidy needs to be, because the other thing that stood out to me in the report—that I didn't get a chance to ask them about—was that they calculate core housing at 25% for indigenous people whereas it's a 33% calculation for most other Canadians. Why is there an 8% differential for indigenous peoples and do we need to accommodate that in projecting program costs?

Those are some very specific requests that are unanswered by the PBO and some of the testimony we heard.

I hope that isn't too specific and long on the list, but there it is.

• (1815)

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

Ms. Gazan, please.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, thank you, Chair.

I just have a couple of pieces of clarification. In section D, part 2, we have "Impacts on Indigenous Youth, Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA People". Are those going to be separate, because they're separate issues? I'm worried that they're going to be clumped together and then the issues won't be delved into adequately.

I know that Adam Vaughan just spoke about the inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. We know that rates of violence are increasing, particularly for women, by upwards of 400% in some places. We know about youth homelessness. Certainly in my riding and I know in many ridings, there are many kids aging out of care into homelessness. How is this going to be organized?

The Chair: I'm not sure I have an answer for you, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay.

The Chair: I think these are live questions that we make sure the analysts consider. Our goal here is to give them a bit of feedback to help them come up with a draft. As we see the draft, it may be that we'll have further suggestions.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

Looking at that, it's indigenous youth, women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA, but also intersectionality within that, I think is really important.

The other question I had was for some clarification. I don't understand what we were talking about with developing a national indigenous housing organization.

The Chair: That was certainly testimony we heard from more than a couple of witnesses, who recommended that.

I would expect that would be something that would be reflected in the report. Whether we adopt it as a recommendation depends on the will of the committee, but certainly it was an idea that we heard from more than one witness.

• (1820)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay.

I know the focus was primarily on developing a national urban indigenous and rural housing strategy. Certainly with the questions we had today, there's a lot of diversity around the country even in terms of how housing is funded.

Having this kind of one-size-fits-all across the country has actually hurt Manitoba in terms of rolling out a rapid housing strategy. I have some concerns about that, just because there is such diversity. A national housing strategy that reflects that diversity and massive jurisdictional differences, I think was more the evidence I heard, rather than just a kind of one-size-fits-all—because it's not fitting.

Also, congratulations to Raquel Dancho for being elected the vice-chair.

The Chair: Mr. Vis, please.

Mr. Brad Vis: The analysts can maybe clarify a couple of points.

I know there are lots of precedents on committee studies to refer to previous studies that were undertaken to provide context.

Can the analysts confirm which reports on missing and murdered indigenous women they would be referring to? I think that does provide good context, if it's been conducted by other committees that we can refer to in the report.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Brittany Collier (Committee Researcher): Mr. Chair, I can certainly answer that.

We can certainly refer to outside reports and studies, if that's something that the committee would wish us to do, to provide further context for some of those sections.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay. Thank you.

I raised that point...and then to Ms. Gazan's points and all of the different groups she mentioned and the intersectionality lens that she wants to apply, I think we need to stick to the actual people, the indigenous people, we heard at this committee and to the points they were raising first and foremost. They were the ones we brought forward to the committee. I'm worried, with some of those comments, that we're going off what the witnesses were saying and just trying to add additional points right now.

Thirdly, I'm going to make a comment about Mr. Vaughan and Ms. Gazan talking about provincial governments. I just had an indigenous group in my riding rejected from the RHI, because they said that the on-reserve housing was specific. They were asking me why they were rejected already, when we all know that in their neck of the woods, housing is woefully inadequate.

With regard to comments about whatever provincial government is in question about their inability to provide housing, I would raise the same points about the ability of the federal government [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] lack of responsiveness that we heard about from Indigenous Services Canada on basic questions that the PBO was able to answer but they were reluctant to even respond to.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This will be the first report that I will be involved in as a committee member. It is substantial, and it touches on a very relevant and wide-ranging issue. There has been some talk of adding points to the report, but to my knowledge, they were never part of the study. We did not analyze them, nor hear from witnesses about them.

In my opinion, the report should correspond to our study and talk about the barriers we observed, which I will not review now. The conclusions of the report will become very political. If our committee report makes recommendations to the House, the analysts need to be able to work from the briefs and witness testimony we heard. I don't see why we would add anything.

Let me refer to the example of the amounts of money transferred to the provinces. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has just told us that his office does not have these analyses. We are not going to ask our researchers to analyze things that have not been studied. That is my concern. If we do, our report will not reflect what we discussed.

I'd like the report to be based on the testimony, because that's how we'll know what needs to be improved in the programs.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Mr. Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and good evening to all my colleagues. Congratulations to MP Dancho in becoming vice-chair.

I would like to suggest also, if we could, adding a bullet under section E.1 that would be a human rights-based approach. I know that did come out in the questions that I asked and it certainly was brought forward during testimony. I'd like to suggest that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I really am quite flummoxed by the level of detail and the characterization of some of the information of the PBO. It's astounding in its absence of fact and reliance on anecdotal evidence, which I never expected to hear from an accountant.

There is clear indication...and the answer that was given by the PBO was that there is no requirement under provincial transfers to report back on the effectiveness of the spending in an area where we have clear federal jurisdiction. It told me that we are sending money but we're not delivering results, and because of that there is a double whammy. If you're not involved in the federal spending, there is no way of knowing if you're caught and saved by the provincial spending.

As a result—and I think MP Gazan has identified this in Manitoba in particular—if both governments go in the wrong direction at the same time, indigenous communities are left with absolutely nothing. That's exactly why we're finding the numbers so astounding in Manitoba. I think that's a finding. It doesn't really matter in the dollar amount. What matters is that federal transfers are not landing in the households of indigenous families and they are a federal responsibility.

Therefore, the question I asked directly of the PBO was, do we need to be intentional about it, and the response was yes. That's the point that's driven from this, it's not who is doing a good job or a bad job or what's being spent where, it's how do we be intentional about this, which is an area of clear federal jurisdiction and the Supreme Court has ruled on this.

The second point I would make—and I would love to take it offline with Mr. Vis—is we are being briefed by CMHC officials and no one has been told yes or no in the project stream yet. It sounds like it is somebody who was disqualified and has not been eligible as opposed to not being qualified. I would be happy to give you a call afterwards and see if there is a way of rectifying that through a different program. I'm trying to find out too who the projects are because I have needs in my riding. There have been no rejection slips because no positive slips have gone out. We're still in the final days of making that determination.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

Ms. Gazan, you had an intervention.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, I would like to build on indigenous women. I do think it's critical to incorporate the calls to justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Much of it is specific to housing but also income. That's just a suggestion there.

In response to MP Vis, when we're taking about intersectionality that was very much a part of the testimony, for example, on being indigenous and transgender. I think it's really critical that we certainly look at the list of folks, and particularly in that area there is a number of, for example, LGBTQIA youth who find themselves homeless. Why is that and what is the need and what kinds of supports are there? I think we have to reflect that diversity in the report. Certainly we heard a lot of that testimony during the study, which I really appreciated.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot: The important thing for me is that this report really reflect all the testimony we heard.

What I understand from my colleague Mr. Vaughan's comments is an attempt to include in the report, in advance, conclusions suggesting that the provinces are ultimately to blame. My objective for this report is not to find the culprits. The point is not to say that federal funding is insufficient and that the provinces are not meeting their obligations.

We may see weaknesses in some areas, but we need to be able to look at the programs and shared responsibilities. More importantly, we need to be able to determine, based on people's testimony, what barriers have maintained the shortfall and the needs, and how these barriers could be eliminated.

• (1830)

For my part, I will not draft foregone conclusions.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Vis, please.

Mr. Brad Vis: I thank Madame Chabot. I couldn't have explained it any better. I think we need to let the testimony of our witnesses stand before coming to any conclusions. I take that very seri-

ously, because as you all know, I invited many indigenous witnesses from my riding and I will never presume to speak for them or understand what they're talking about from their experiences in life.

I would agree with Madame Chabot in the approach we need to take.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Ms. Gazan, please.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Chair.

I'm sorry for taking up so much airtime, but in terms of this study, MP Chabot certainly brings up a good point. She also speaks to the diversity around the country. Going back to looking at developing a national indigenous housing organization, I also think we have different cultural traditions between our provinces in the country. I think that would be really difficult. Certainly a more productive action would be, in fact, to look at diversity in provinces, see what the differences are and see what the similarities are.

If we are looking at a national plan, we can't develop a national plan if we don't honour the diversity between provinces. It would be ineffective.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

That exhausts the speakers list. I'll go back to the analyst for the last word.

Are there any comments, clarifications or questions on the feedback? I think it was a good discussion. Whether that makes it any clearer in the direction that needs to be taken, I'll leave it to you for any comments you might have for us.

Ms. Brittany Collier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have one point of clarification. It's not quite clear to me at this point how the committee wishes us to integrate the PBO report, so perhaps members could comment on this or provide feedback in some way.

Does the committee wish it to be integrated throughout the document? Is it a separate chapter? Those are just some thoughts for your consideration.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Where the PBO report details what witnesses told us, it's very helpful. Where it veers into conjecture or guessing or anecdotal evidence, it becomes less helpful, because it's just that; it's anecdotal evidence, and that's not helpful when you're trying to build a real report, with real ideas, real facts and towards a real direction.

I can't tell you how astounded I am at some of the language that was used to describe some of the conclusions, like anecdotally we talked to some housing providers who stopped work during COVID. I won't even get into that.

Having it stand as a monumental environmental scan of the situation facing urban, rural and northern indigenous housing—I just don't think it delivered that. What I do think it delivered, however, were some of the gaps, some of the areas where funding is allocated but not directed, and some of the areas where funding is extended but no guarantees are being made that it's being met. I think we heard that from the witnesses in much more profound ways as it relates region to region.

Therefore, I would use it as a document to detail factually, where it's factual, the observations and analysis provided to us by the people with lived experience, most of whom are indigenous, who said we have a shortage of housing subsidies and we can now know exactly what that shortage looks like. However, when it gets into 25% versus 30% and it's just a guess that this is where it's at, I'm not sure how good a report could be if you base it on guesses.

• (1835)

The Chair: Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: I would love to have the PBO report back about whether they believe their testimony is in fact anecdotal and provide commentary that we can perhaps include within our report, because I wouldn't be as dismissive as Mr. Vaughan. Maybe one area where we do come at it in common is that what we've heard from officials and what we've heard from the indigenous testimony is that the federal government falls very short on where we need to be as it relates to housing.

A big part of that is in fact the gaps in data collection and how money is being spent. I think that has become very clear, both within the PBO report and within the testimony we heard. I think it would be best if we referred...and we can get into that debate and leave that judgment to the analysts as well, about where it's relevant in the course of what the testimony said and how the PBO report complements that.

Secondly, I think it should be included perhaps as an appendix to the report, or at least referenced extensively, so that people know that this was a big chunk of how we are trying to understand where money is going, how it's being spent and who it's serving.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I can't speak for Mr. Vaughan, but certainly my impression of the PBO report was that it was written by accountants and financial analysts. When you have those folks—no offence to them—writing a report, they often use financial modelling,

and in financial modelling you have to make a whole bunch of assumptions.

I think I agree with my colleague, Mr. Vaughan, that some of those assumptions may turn out to be false. I think we should take our direction from people with lived experience—the witnesses we heard from—because one thing that the PBO's report does not do is assess the level of effectiveness of any one of the interventions. They haven't broken it down in a way that I think is digestible and makes sense given the testimony we've heard, and I think we have to take their conclusions with a large degree of caution.

Furthermore, I think we should be asking them to clearly identify any of the assumptions they've made in their report so that we can take those and basically include a caveat in any of our final reports that says these are financial models that are based on assumptions.

Mr. Vis, I can see you shaking your head, but I actually know what I'm talking about here. I think there are assumptions that are part and parcel of doing any kind of modelling and projections like this. I think we just have to be careful about how we use those.

Thanks.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'd like to talk about the Parliamentary Budget Officer's analysis and report. Questions were asked about what these people had to work from. They talked about data collection and the 2016 census. All of the analyses may not be relevant to our report, but I have a problem with hearing that it's anecdotal or that it's not serious. I would remind you that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is providing this information at our request, is independent and has a role to play in informing us as parliamentarians.

It seems to me that we have something to work with. Our analysts, who do an extraordinary job, allow us to prepare for the issues discussed in committee. The last document, for our witness today, deals with issues related to testimony we've heard previously. There may be parts of this report that need to be linked to aspects of the testimony that struck us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

As I was listening to the questions and answers today, I thought it was very interesting when Mr. Vaughan asked the officials about how much control we have when the money flows to the province and how that money gets spent on what was originally intended. I thought the answer was very interesting. Also, I think the fact that they can't get relevant information from the provincial governments is very telling.

I remember that Mr. Vaughan made a comment that perhaps—I don't want to speak for him, so he's free to correct me if I'm wrong—we should put more of a leash on the funding as prescribed. This is of interest, because we've heard many times from a few premiers calling for leash-free infrastructure funding or all kinds of funding. I think the study can perhaps shed some light and provide some recommendations to government in that respect.

I just want to highlight that part. I thought that was a very interesting finding from today's testimony.

• (1840)

The Chair: Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: I'm just going to reiterate my point.

While the Liberal members seem to be focused on what the provincial governments are doing, we are federal MPs, and what's very clear from what we're seeing is that we don't even have enough information on what our own level of government is doing. That is where we have responsibility.

We can say to the provinces all day long, “Well, you need to do a better job because we can't do our job, because we don't know what you're doing.” The fact is, irrespective of a Conservative or Liberal government, there's a lot of housecleaning that needs to be done on behalf of indigenous Canadians, to ensure that our taxpayer dollars are being used effectively for the well-being of all Canadians, and that 0.8% and 0.7% and \$500 million or so referenced over 10 years in the PBO report is not sufficient. I think all of us will agree on that.

Starting to go down this pathway where we look at gaps in the report because of the data that PBO was given by our federal public service and that data not being sufficient—per Mr. Turnbull's points—goes back to the primary point. We don't know what the government is doing on behalf of people. We want to put a report together that's going to make a measurable difference in the lives of indigenous Canadians living in rural and remote areas especially.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Vis.

As the only indigenous person on this committee—I'm going to use that card—I'm going to tell you that it is not working.

We have a lot of diversity as indigenous people around the country, including jurisdictional diversity on and off reserve, in terms of how things are funded. We also have cultural diversity around the country. What works for the Mi'kmaq out east probably won't work for indigenous nations in the Prairies. We have that cultural diversity. I absolutely think that there are differences between regions.

I am very concerned that we're not looking at whether money for housing is actually reaching people. This has been disastrous in Manitoba with the provincial government. We need to find ways to make sure that whatever government is in place, if the federal government is giving housing dollars, they actually make it to people. I'll give you an example and I'll leave it at this.

Our community just built a teepee village—it's like -51°C here—because our money for housing is totally inadequate and is not getting to people. Now we're putting up teepee villages, right in my riding, down the street from where I live. This is critical. This is our responsibility. This is looking at how jurisdictions can work together—or not work together—to make sure people don't die on the street. I've had a couple of deaths in the last couple of weeks because we get into this banter. I just need money to get to people so they don't die. That's where it's at. It is not working.

I just want to put that in. It's very rare that I've been this up front in committee, but I can tell you, that conversation is a critical part of the discussion to save lives.

• (1845)

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'm going to leave it there. I don't care which level of government; it's failed—both sides—in terms of the situation. That's right.

The Chair: Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Adam, you have to lower your mike.

I didn't hear what you had to say.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I said that I'm just going to leave it there. Both orders of government have tragically failed urban, rural and northern housing needs for indigenous people. Leah's final comment is enough for me. Let's write the report and get it done.

Mr. Han Dong: Yes, I was going to say the same thing to MP Gazan.

I think we're on the same page. I don't think that there's a partisanship being played here. If the recommendation comes out that we have to put more restrictions, more conditions, more time frames to make sure that the money flows to who needs it and to get these things done, let's do it. Let it be in our recommendations.

I don't want to be misunderstood. It's not to defend the government or put the blame on other governments; no, that's not it. It's just, going forward, as a function of this committee, to give recommendations to the government of what it should do. If it's to, say, give a timeline that it has to deliver this money or get this built, and everybody agrees to it, once the money starts to flow, let's build them. That was my point.

The Chair: Colleagues, I do have a few other things that I was hoping to get through. I don't know whether we've provided clarity for the analysts or gone a little bit off the rails, but the fact is that there is another committee looking to get into this room fairly shortly. If it is the will of the committee, I would entertain a motion now for adjournment. We do have some tougher committee business at the end of Thursday's meeting after we have our briefing from ESDC.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'm in favour of the adjournment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Do we have—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: There is about to be a vote, a simulation.

The Chair: That's right.

[*English*]

Do we have consensus? Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

I read consensus.

Thank you very much. I hope that this has provided some direction for the analysts. I anticipate that we're going to have a spirited discussion once we get a draft just the same.

We're adjourned. Thank you, colleagues. We'll see you Thursday.

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