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Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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• (1310)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

We are gathered here today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe Nation.

Today we are concluding our second study on the effects of the housing shortage on indigenous peoples across Canada.

These are the witnesses from the first panel: Chief April Martel, from the K'atl'odeeche Nation. We also have Mr. Justin Marchand, the chair of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's Aboriginal Caucus Working Group. Finally, from the National Association of Friendship Centres, we have Ms. Kelly Benning, the president, and Ms. Jocelyn Formsma, the executive director.

I would now like to remind all members of the committee to follow the Board of Internal Economy's directive regarding the wearing of masks and physical distancing.

I would also like to outline a few rules for the smooth running of the committee.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. There will be interpretation in French, English and Inuktitut during the meeting. I would ask you to be patient with the interpretation. There may be delays, particularly because Inuktitut must be translated into English first before it can be translated into French, and vice versa.

The button for interpretation is at the bottom of your screen in the form of a globe. If you can no longer hear the interpretation, please notify me immediately, and we will ensure that it is restored before resuming the proceedings.

The "raise hand" feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak to the chair.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating in the meeting by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. The microphone for members in the room is usually controlled by the clerk.

When you have the floor, try to speak slowly and clearly. If you do not have the floor, please mute your microphone.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed to the chair.

Each organization has been invited to give a five-minute statement which will be followed by a period of questions by members.

Members of each party will have six minutes each for the first round of questions. The order and time for questioning for subsequent rounds will be as follows: the Conservative Party, five minutes; the Liberal Party will also have five minutes; the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes; then the Conservative Party and Liberal Party, five minutes.

I'd now like to invite Chief Martel to begin her statement.

Chief Martel, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Chief April Martel (K'atl'odeeche First Nation): Good day, everyone.

Marsi cho from the K'atl'odeeche First Nation. I am Chief April Martel. I want to say that it's an honour to sit here with all of you. Thank you for this opportunity and for giving me a couple of minutes.

I would just like to say that I am a very vocal person when it comes to housing here in the Northwest Territories, but also all over. I sit as the chairperson for the Dene Nation here in the Northwest Territories. I am on the Treaty 8 reserve, the first reserve established here in the Northwest Territories. I was elected three years ago, and my platform is housing. I want to tell you that here on the reservation in the Northwest Territories I also sit with the Assembly of First Nations. I am on a committee for housing with the Assembly of First Nations, so I work with a lot of indigenous first nations across Canada.

I also want to say that here on the K'atl'odeeche First Nation, on the reserve, we only have 80 houses. Capital and renovation costs are very high because the houses are very outdated. The federal funding that K'atl'odeeche First Nation currently benefits from goes through the Government of the Northwest Territories. The Government of the Northwest Territories controls and decides who has housing needs and what housing is required, not only on reserves but for first nations in the Northwest Territories.

In terms of the demographics in our community, basically, housing is required in my community and the need is urgent with K'atl'odeeche First Nation on reserve. That's basically where that is.

In terms of the challenges I see for KFN, it's very hard to access mortgages or credit, to get access with banks. K'at'l'odeeche First Nation just recently passed a land code. We're currently in the process of trying to work with banks, and it's hard to access funding through that. We're trying to work with the Government of the Northwest Territories on housing needs, assessments and renovations currently, but they're telling us that there is no money for renovations or anything.

I just want to say *marsi cho* for the opportunity to speak in addressing the issues around the housing needs here in K'at'l'odeeche First Nation and in the Northwest Territories.

Marsi cho.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Marilène Gill): Thank you.

We now turn to Mr. Justin Marchand, from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's Indigenous Housing Caucus.

Mr. Justin Marchand, you have the floor for five minutes.

• (1315)

[English]

Mr. Justin Marchand (Chair, Indigenous Caucus, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): [*Witness spoke in an indigenous language*]

[English]

My name is Justin Marchand. My spirit name is Firerock. I am Métis, the CEO of Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services and chair of the indigenous caucus. I pray that all our grandmothers, grandfathers, spirits, manitou and Gitchi Manitou be with us all for this important discussion. I humbly pray the words I speak may not be my own but those of [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Meegwetch for the invitation to appear before this committee. I would like to acknowledge all the members who are on this committee. I believe this committee is open to hearing the truth. I am asking this committee to use its influence to convey to the Government of Canada the importance of supporting an URN strategy in a more meaningful way.

We see yesterday's budget choice as a tiny step for indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern areas. It is not truly reflective of the housing crisis. It is disappointing that these so-called new investments are being paid for on the backs of indigenous people who are living through a precipitous and continued cut to urban native housing programs across Canada by this government.

We do not need more tiny steps. We need a big, bold step, both for indigenous people and for Canadians. A continued solely distinctions-based policy is a continued colonial construct that seeks to purposely divide, exclude, assimilate and institutionalize a collective memory loss of some of the richest, most valuable cultures in the world. These colonial constructs are designed to create intentional exclusionary policies that affect the lives of so many indigenous people.

Indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern areas are treated differently than other people. It is admirable and right that

Canada wants to call out human rights abuses, including those based on race, culture and gender, in other countries. That is why it is so terribly confusing that Canada continues policy choices that exclude some people based on race, culture and gender right here. It is a system that is perfectly designed for the outcomes it gets, and the housing outcomes for indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern areas are appalling.

How do we know this awful situation is true? Canada knows this is true and knows these are the facts because this is Canada's own data. Over 80% of indigenous people are living in urban, rural and northern areas. Indigenous people are 11 times more likely to experience homelessness. Indigenous mother-led households have an incidence of need that is twice that of non-indigenous mother-led households, and all indigenous people in urban, rural and northern areas have an incidence of core housing need that is 52% higher than that of all Canadians.

Canada also knows that nearly half of the women in jail and almost half of all children in care are first nations, despite being only 3% of the total population. When indigenous people are exited from government institutions, where do they go? Overwhelmingly, they go to urban, rural and northern areas, and often without a safe housing option.

Canada knows that the report on the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls mentioned housing 299 times, the lack of housing being a significant contributing cause to violence, and the provision of housing being a fundamental solution to end violence against women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Canada knows because the HUMA committee asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer for advice. The PBO provided that advice last year, and the multi-party committee unanimously agreed that a solution for indigenous people by indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern areas was necessary. The national housing council this year strongly communicated the same truths from indigenous people. Yet, again, Canada has chosen not to boldly embrace the truth as told by its own statisticians, its own HUMA committee, its own Parliamentary Budget Officer and its own national housing council.

Using the PBO's estimates, yesterday's budget might address 1.09% of the issue. Using CMHC's updated data, the federal budget might address 0.70% of the issue over the next five long years. In the meantime, we'll continue to pick up the dead bodies of indigenous people off Canada's streets.

So what should Canada do and what is the solution? Canada should accept the advice it asked for from its own institutions, its own officials, its own commissions, and Canada should accept the offer of help from indigenous people, who are willing to do the hard work for indigenous people and rectify the issues being created by Canada's past and current choices.

Canada must immediately make a choice to be intentionally inclusive, starting with the allocation of resources as recommended by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Canada must take a decolonized approach to delivery and utilize the 50-plus years of experience of numerous urban indigenous service providers across this land. Finally, Canada must be brave enough to care about all indigenous people, regardless of their geographic location.

• (1320)

While distinctions-based strategies are absolutely important and are underfunded, we need a distinct urban, rural and northern solution for indigenous people who are consistently not served—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Marilène Gill): Thank you, Mr. Marchand. I apologize for interrupting you, but I am obliged to do so as your five minutes are up.

I remind witnesses that they can always submit their speaking notes to the committee so that we can take them into account.

Mr. Marchand, during the question period you will be able to continue the discussion.

I now invite the representatives of the National Association of Friendship Centres to speak for five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Kelly Benning (President, National Association of Friendship Centres): Good afternoon.

This is Kelly Benning. I'm the president of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

I'm joining you virtually today from northern Alberta, home of the Cree, Beaver, Dene, and Métis people in Treaty 8 territory.

I want to thank the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs for the opportunity to speak on the effects of housing shortages on urban indigenous people.

I would also like to thank the other speakers who have come today and acknowledge the essential work that they do for the community. Together, our work addresses the critical issues of housing and homelessness that impact our communities and will continue to impact our people if community-led, indigenous responses are not implemented.

Most Canadian cities are built on traditional indigenous gathering spaces. As long as there have been urban centres, there have been indigenous people living there. According to the 2016 census, more than 1.6 million people identified as indigenous. More than one million, or over 60% of those people, live in urban environments. Urban indigenous people make up the largest portion of indigenous people, yet we are often left out of the conversation when it comes to issues or legislation that directly affects us.

The distinctions-based approach that the federal government uses in policy, legislation and decision-making is intended to recognize the diversity of the three first peoples of Canada and how their needs, wants, governments, cultures and world views differ. However, there are nuances within indigenous identities. For example, there are layered identities that many of us experience in addition to our identities as first nation, Inuit or Métis, such as gender, location, residency, sexual orientation, age and abilities.

From an urban and service-delivery experience, a distinctions-based approach result is often an inconsistent patchwork of funding, which makes indigenous organizations compete against each other. By prioritizing only distinctions between first nations, Inuit and Métis people, the Government of Canada has no mechanism to see or address the full spectrum of indigenous people's experiences, which ultimately compromises our ability to have our full set of human rights realized.

Since the 1950s, friendship centres have been central in urban indigenous community growth and flourishing by providing programs, services and gathering spaces for our friends and families. Friendship centres across Canada provide a wide range of housing and shelter options, including emergency crisis shelters, violence prevention, homeless shelters, transitional housing, supportive housing and long-term housing. In addition, our work includes crucial wraparound supports such as food, security, employment and training, child care, before- and after-school programming, health care services and counselling, among others.

Friendship centres partner with many organizations to provide the most support to the most people, because community members rely on us. The lack of safe and affordable housing contributes to poor health, chronic illness, homelessness, increased risk of premature death and the breakdown of families. Indigenous and community-led wraparound programming, such as the programs mentioned above, is an effective approach to addressing the housing and homelessness crisis in urban indigenous communities across the country. Housing and homelessness continue to be the central focus of friendship centres' work.

Yesterday's announcement of \$300 million for the urban, rural and northern housing initiative is not enough to meet the needs of urban indigenous people. The national housing council recommended \$6 billion for the urban, rural and northern housing initiative. The National Association of Friendship Centres has offered and remains committed to playing a role in ensuring those funds are administered by indigenous people for indigenous people and organizations.

In our budget ask, we sought funds to make up the infrastructure funding gap in friendship centres, whose costs include major repairs, renovations and securing space for lands and to require...the demands of the community. The national association applied for funds to support friendship centre-wide housing plans wherein we plan to collect data and information on housing needs, including forecasting for every community in which there is a friendship centre. We were denied funding to do this important work.

• (1325)

There are great urban indigenous and—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Marilène Gill): I am sorry, Ms. Benning, but I am going to have to interrupt you as well. Like Mr. Marchand, we invite you to send us your presentation.

We are now ready to begin the first round of questions.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for appearing today.

I'd like to start with Mr. Marchand.

It's disheartening to hear that, after the government has continued to say that the nation-to-nation relationship is their number one priority, you still called this budget "a tiny step" and said that a bold step was needed. Can you comment on what exactly is the gap the government needs to address and the timing you'd like to see on that?

Mr. Justin Marchand: Thank you, MP Gladu.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer undertook a study of this issue. A number of studies have been completed by organizations such as ours. We know that for Ontario alone, for example, that gap is \$22 billion for urban indigenous people. The Parliamentary Budget Officer indicates that the need ranges, depending on how you measure it, between \$638 million and \$1.4 billion per year.

This is help we need now. This is not something that needs to be further "co-developed", as per the phrase used in the budget, for another five years. The strategy has already been developed. What we need is delivery, not further study.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Very good. Thank you.

This question is for Chief Martel.

I appreciate the difficulty of constructing houses in the north, with the short construction season and all of the expenses there. The government has suggested that perhaps multiple houses could be built at the same time. I'm wondering if that's even feasible with the way the financing is overseen by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Could you comment on that?

Chief April Martel: Thank you, Marilyn.

Again, with the weather, we get only two months here in the Northwest Territories. Financing is really complicated with the GNWT. The direct funding comes from the federal government to the GNWT, and then for us to access funding from the GNWT is very complicated. I would have to wait two years. Right now, I applied to the Government of the Northwest Territories under the housing corporation, and it's going to take two years to review the application, and then probably another year, so three years, to actually build my home. It's a little complicated.

If the funding went directly to the first nations, we could take that on and build our own homes, according to the Dene values, in the way our people built our homes. We could do that if they allowed us to build our own homes. It would be a lot better that way.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: That sounds much more efficient. Thank you.

Ms. Benning, you talked about how 60% of indigenous individuals are living in urban circumstances and face challenges that are maybe different from those faced in the remote places. Can you elaborate on that?

Ms. Kelly Benning: Most of the indigenous people, as I said, live in urban centres. It's challenging for people to have their needs met outside of their original community or to constantly be connected back to their original community, which some people may not have lived in for a while. I personally am second-generation urban indigenous. It can prove to be a big challenge when people are directed to a place where they perhaps don't live or they're not recognized.

• (1330)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: We know the affordable housing crisis is making this even worse. Under the Liberal government, house prices have doubled, and there really is a lack of affordable housing available. Is that a factor for indigenous people in urban settings?

Ms. Kelly Benning: Absolutely. In most urban centres across Canada, you see a large number of indigenous people who are homeless or without housing, which, as I said, breaks down family units as well. It puts children at risk. It puts families at risk. As we've seen from all the reports on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, we're at great risk living on the streets of urban centres.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Absolutely. We need to see some prompt action on the murdered and missing aboriginal women report.

Finally, there was talk about the lack of money for renovations. If you can't create new affordable spaces, you at least have to fix the ones that you have. Chief Martel and Ms. Benning, could you comment on what you think the government needs to do there?

We'll start with you, Chief Martel.

Chief April Martel: Yes, there is a lack of renovations here in the Northwest Territories, as well as on my reservation. Renovations are a big thing. It's actually costing our first nations more money to go to elders and fix their homes. We do that through administration. There is no renovation money in the Northwest Territories.

I'm advocating for that, as well, because right now we're seeing a very high amount of overcrowding in homes here on my reserve. There are only 80 houses, with over 220 people. You can see that there is a large amount of overcrowding on the reservation. People get sick. We're trying our best on homelessness. We have to buy small trailers to put people in, but it's not—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC)): That's time. Thank you very much, witnesses.

Thank you, Ms. Gladu, for your questions.

We'll go on to the next round of six minutes.

We're going to the Liberal Party now and Mr. McLeod.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses today. These are very interesting presentations.

I want to quickly make a bit of a statement on the friendship centres, and then ask Chief Martel a question. I really appreciate the work that the friendship centres are doing. I personally think that every indigenous community in this country should have a friendship centre with an expanded mandate and a budget that supports it.

My question is for K'at'l'odeeche First Nation's Chief Martel. First of all, thank you for joining us. It's good to see you here.

I think we've talked about housing many times and some of the challenges that you're facing. First of all, the K'at'l'odeeche is a reserve, but it's not treated the same as a reserve in the south. K'at'l'odeeche is also an indigenous community, but it's not treated the same as the indigenous communities in the north.

Now that you're here presenting in front of us, maybe you can take the opportunity to tell us what steps the Government of Canada could take to recognize the unique nature of reserves north of 60 such as yours, like KFN. How could they make sure that they have better access to federal housing programs?

Chief April Martel: *Marsi cho*, MP McLeod.

To access better funding, I think direct funding would help a lot, not only with KFN, but with our Salt River First Nation. We are very unique in the Northwest Territories, as there are only two reserves in the Northwest Territories. I think we should be treated a lot better.

We don't get access to reserve funding from the federal government. The GNWT takes and claws back that funding. If direct funding could happen, that would help the two reserves in the Northwest Territories a lot.

Marsi cho.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Could you tell us why K'at'l'odeeche, which is a reserve that was formed by the federal government, is not funded like the other reserves in the south are? Do you know why that is?

Chief April Martel: I have asked the Government of the Northwest Territories that question many times. I've met with previous MPs and ministers on that matter. They said the funding.... They speak on behalf of the reserves, so I get treated a little differently, including Salt River First Nation. We're trying to work out direct funding with the GNWT, and I think it would help a lot. They said that the funding doesn't come to reserves because we need to sit with the other governments as well.

• (1335)

Mr. Michael McLeod: Could you tell us if you get any funding directly from the federal government at this point? Has the reserve, at any point since it was created, received any funding similar to what the reserves in the south get?

Chief April Martel: No, we haven't. We have not received any direct funding from the federal government. We have to wait for the Government of the Northwest Territories for any call-outs for funding.

The Government of the Northwest Territories applies for all funding on behalf of the two reserves and all the nations within the NWT. We basically have to apply the same way.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I'm not sure if you would have a dollar figure, but I will ask you anyway. What would it take, what would an annual budget have to look like, to make sure the membership of your community is living in safe and secure homes? Would you have an estimate of what it would cost on an annual basis?

Chief April Martel: For the number of statistics that we went through and just seeing the renovations and housing requirements needed, we are at a high level of poverty right now on the reserve here. We're probably looking at up to close to \$8 million to \$10 million just to build, and this is just modular because right now there's only a certain amount of time with the weather to actually build and bring lumber to the reserve. It will take a lot of money to build a couple of additional houses on the reserve.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Chief.

Those are my questions, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod.

Next, we'll go to Madame Gill from the Bloc Québécois, for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses, Mr. Marchand, Chief Martel and Ms. Formsma, for their testimony.

We ran out of time at the beginning of the session, which is common since there is always so much to say. I would like you to tell us more.

First of all, Ms. Formsma, I would like to go back to something you said yesterday. I noticed in some of the tweets that you were doing an analysis, if not a critique, of the government's budget. We are in the middle of a committee, but yesterday there was a budget that dealt with indigenous housing. I'd like you to elaborate on what you think about what was announced yesterday.

[English]

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Thank you for the question.

There are record amounts of money announced for indigenous under the reconciliation framework, and a fraction of that budget has been even identified for urban. Going to Mr. Marchand's point, which we support, the CHRA, the indigenous caucus, they have a plan and we're supportive of that plan. We want to be a part of implementing that plan. We're doing it anyway. We're just not getting the resources.

Partly why some people come to the urban setting is the lack of housing and infrastructure within first nations or in the north. We absolutely support those resources going to those communities as well. They are our family. We're not in competition with each other. We're just trying to identify the need and trying to address the realities of existing frameworks and funding.

We were extremely disappointed that, considering all of the testimony, all of the information and everything we've provided to the government, to numerous departments, there was nothing really announced for urban-specific strategies. If we don't have urban-specific strategies for indigenous people, we're missing and we're choosing to leave out the vast majority of indigenous peoples. That includes in housing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I'm going to ask you another question, Ms. Formsma. You say that money is being provided, but the amount is not enough. Given the proportion of indigenous people who live in urban areas, the \$300 million for the urban area is not enough. You also say there is no strategy.

I assume you are concerned about this situation. Indeed, we need this housing now. But if we don't know where we're going, how are we going to be able to provide housing, whether it's rural, northern or urban? Is this really a concern? Do you think that developing a strategy is what should be looked at, and very quickly?

• (1340)

[English]

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Yes, in our pre-budget submission we took a whole-of-government approach, and we gave a really good look at what the needs are. I think we were being very reasonable in

our asks. As friendship centres, we're not the only players in the game. We recognize that. We are very large and significant in terms of our network and the reach across the country.

Just to give a sense, as friendship centres, which are grassroots organizations built by and for indigenous people—Métis, first nations and Inuit—we're already subsidizing the services that we support. On average, we think it costs about \$300,000 just to keep the lights on and the doors open in a friendship centre, just for that base amount. What we get is closer to, on average, about \$120,000 to \$150,000 per friendship centre. We're already subsidizing half of what it costs just to operate that. If you were to start the friendship centre movement and provide those grassroots supports to friendship centres for indigenous peoples across the country today, it would cost more than the—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I'm going to have to interrupt you, because I actually want to ask one of your colleagues a question related to strategies.

Thank you, Ms. Formsma. We always run out of time to ask our questions too.

My question will be addressed to Mr. Marchand.

Mr. Marchand, a strategy has been developed by the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. I'd like you to tell us about it.

We see that everyone wants to work together, but they are also working on their own. We can see that everyone is trying to devise a strategy. Where do you think you are on that front?

Has the government taken note of the strategy you were proposing? Where do you think we should go, and how quickly?

[English]

Mr. Justin Marchand: Thank you, MP Gill, for the question.

We proposed a community-led housing solution. We proposed a strategy that is “for indigenous, by indigenous” for indigenous people living in urban, rural and northern areas. What we saw in the budget yesterday was a strategy that will be under the control of CMHC. Similar to what Chief Martel mentioned, we know that strategies and implementation, which are really important, are most effectively led by the people those strategies are meant to serve.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): You have time for one more quick question.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I would have liked to know if Chief Martel was also in agreement. However, I believe she did say so, as did Ms. Formsma.

So I would like to know if all three witnesses agree that this should be conducted by and for indigenous people. I would like to make it clear that the question is for all the witnesses.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Be very quick.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Absolutely. “For indigenous, by indigenous” is us; that’s our model. I think if the government is talking about a devolution of services in the urban spaces, friendship centres have a really important role to play, especially in the wraparound supports.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): I do have to go to our next member.

We have the NDP, with Ms. Idlout, for six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I’d like to welcome you all.

Jocelyn, I’d like to greet you personally, as I went to law school with you at the University of Ottawa.

First, I will ask a short question. The 2022 budget was presented yesterday. Have you read it and researched it thoroughly for aboriginal benefits?

• (1345)

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Yes, we have. We have an analysis that our team has been working on. We’re going to be publishing it later today.

We’re encouraged to see the investments in indigenous communities, absolutely. We hope they’re going to lead to meaningful change. However, we’ve been very critical that with what was announced, the distinctions-based approach is going to leave people behind and leave people out. Also, they don’t have any plan for urban-specific strategies. I think those are two major gaps that need to be closed if the funding that’s announced is going to achieve what they hope it will achieve.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

If I could have the other speakers respond to my question, that would be great.

Mr. Justin Marchand: Sure. I’ll jump in.

Yes, we’ve reviewed the budget with respect to indigenous housing. As I mentioned earlier, the budget indicated that the funds were to co-develop a strategy, something that has already been done. We feel it would be a much better use of resources to actually implement an urban, rural, northern indigenous housing strategy than to further study the issue the strategy of which has already been developed. We’re ready to go and we’ve let the government know that over the last six years. We would like the government, again, to follow the advice of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and provide sufficient funding to the indigenous people, who are best suited to deliver the housing that indigenous people need.

Chief April Martel: I want to thank everyone for the budget, but we did have a strategic plan here in the Northwest Territories. Everyone was on board with strategic planning, but we want to see the building of houses now because it is summertime, so, by the time we get the federal funding dollars flowing to the Northwest Territories, it’s going to take a while, and we have to be planning on building our home, building the pad. We have to acknowledge that the weather, climate change and all that has an effect on the budget. If they can acknowledge that, that would help a lot.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Did they all respond?

One person, I believe—I forget the name—may want to respond, the last speaker from the friendship centres.

Ms. Kelly Benning: Our response was given by Jocelyn Formsma, our executive director. I will reiterate that the National Association of Friendship Centres has offered and remains committed to playing a role in ensuring that funds are administered by indigenous people for indigenous people and organizations.

Thank you.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Do I have time to ask another question?

I can wait until the next one.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): You have a minute and a half left.

Ms. Lori Idlout: I don’t have time to speak with my interpreter, so I’ll just ask this quick question.

We’ve been told various times that flexibility is one of the major needs from different organizations and institutions. To all the witnesses, what does flexibility look like for you?

• (1350)

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Perhaps I could jump in quickly.

We saw what flexibility could do under the indigenous community support fund that the friendship centres have been allocating over the past two years. This was the most flexible funding we have ever seen. It allowed our local friendship centres to come up with solutions that really met the needs of the community members in real time without the typical restrictions of programs, without the typical restraints. We were able to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] what we would have done to respond to community. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] flexibility that’s really worked for us.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout.

Thank you very much to all our witnesses for their testimony today. It will help greatly in our study as we finish the important work we're doing here.

I want to briefly suspend this meeting so we can go to our in camera portion, in which we can go over our draft report—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Davies): It's not the in camera portion, sir. We're going to briefly suspend in between panels.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Okay, that works, too.

I will briefly suspend.

• (1350) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1355)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): I want to thank our first panel of witnesses and reiterate that, but also look to our second panel of witnesses. We welcome them to our meeting.

As you probably know already, you have a five-minute opening statement, followed by our first round of questions of six minutes each.

I have on the list to begin Ms. Coreen Child, executive director of the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society.

Ms. Child, you have the floor.

Ms. Coreen Child (Executive Director, Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society): [*Witness spoke in Kwak'wala*]

[*English*]

My name is Coreen Child. I am Kwakiutl from the northern end of Vancouver Island. I'm zooming in today from the Lekwungen territory, specifically the Esquimalt and Songhees nations. I honour them for allowing me to be here today.

Thank you very much for having this important conversation on indigenous housing.

As the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness, we have an island-wide mandate. We're specifically serving the indigenous population of individuals who are experiencing homelessness here in Victoria. What I'm hoping to highlight for you today.... I won't spend too much time. I've actually looked at and viewed some of the conversations that have happened, and I know that the stats and the data and the numbers, the numbers of incarceration and all of the papers that we have on that research, are there and present. What I'm hoping to share today is a bit about the solutions around asking the federal government to look at the indigenous organizations that are doing the services directly on the ground that impact indigenous communities that are experiencing chronic homelessness or needing other alternatives.

The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness has been.... The birth of it happened about five years ago with a study. We didn't initially plan to be a service provider, but what we realized is that with the connection to the indigenous street community, we needed to address some of the words that were being shared with the ones experiencing homelessness. We have now become a service provider. We've opened up two houses, but the one thing I want to highlight

in the work that we've done is that we've grown exponentially because of the need: 35% of the indigenous people we're serving here in Victoria are experiencing homelessness. We've grown 700% in the past 23 months, going from seven staff to now over 70.

With that being said, as a non-profit organization, that really connects us to having to apply for funding streams and compete with each other, which isn't necessarily always the best avenue to build something unique and innovative, which I'll be sharing with you. Through the work that we've done with the indigenous street community, we have evolved and developed what's called "cultural supportive housing". Cultural supportive housing is more than cultural safety. It's more than offering four walls. It's really having indigenous-led practices so that we can incorporate our teachings and our knowledge and our way of life into some of the practices and services that are desperately needed.

One thing that I specifically remember hearing, going out to visit some of our street community, is "I want to have indigenous people serving me, people looking like you and supporting me and telling me your success stories of how to get out of this." Cultural supportive housing is not defined. It is something that is growing and lives and breathes every day. We have cultural mentors and supports that come in.

The other area we're working on is decolonizing harm reduction, so that's meeting people where they're at, bringing in elders, bringing in traditional medicine, and with that, connecting to land-based healing. One of our main focuses is getting our people off the street, taking a break from the cement and the sounds, and going out onto the land, connecting them to their traditional foods, creating healthy values and creating a healthy awareness of themselves. That has been integral.

I really hope the federal government looks at the landscape of supporting organizations like ours directly and does not necessarily get us to compete for those funds, but realizes that we're making an impact on the ground that is actually creating sustainable efforts. Some of the people we've housed are housed longer than a year and we're celebrating that with them. That's because there's love in our organization and in our delivery of services, and that is something I hold very near and dear. I'm proud of our amazing team and the leadership that is here.

• (1400)

We're not doing things out of "This is what we think. We're the professionals." We're going to them to get the guidance on what it needs to look like: How do we get you out of lineups? How do we get you feeling that you're not entering the building and being documented at every move? How do we make your house a home and a place you can be proud of and familiar with, away from systems that have held you oppressed?

I'm really looking forward to sharing further. Thank you very much.

Gilakas'la.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you so much. I appreciate that testimony.

I want to bring in the next witness. We have a five-minute round for Ms. Roy, the director of operations at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary.

Ms. Roy, you have five minutes.

Ms. Melissa Roy (Director of Operations, Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary): *?aben.*

My name is Melissa Roy. I'm originally from the Tsideldel First Nation in B.C. I am honoured to work and live in Treaty 7 territory.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee members regarding the unique housing needs of our people in an urban setting.

Calgary's 2018 housing assessment notes that "the need for affordable housing is expected to exceed 100,000 households by 2026". That same report cites the need for "culturally sensitive housing and supports" for Calgary's indigenous population.

Cultural reconnection is at the heart of everything we do at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary. Ongoing racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma and colonialism have disconnected our people from our cultures. This is especially true of the urban indigenous people. National trends show that migration from reserves to urban settings is increasing, which means the need for culturally sensitive housing and supports will continue to grow.

Here's the reality of affordable housing in the city of Calgary. Twenty per cent of those renting make \$36,000 a year or less, which means they can afford to pay \$900 a month. Only 11% of rentals can be found for \$900 a month. Most of them are one-bedroom units. Rent has increased by 14% in the last year alone, and landlords have become more stringent on credit checks and income verification. Inflation is at an all-time high.

The oil and gas sectors are rebounding, which is good news for the economy, but the rebound comes with its own challenges. Calgarians are now competing with oil and gas workers who come in from other provinces and countries for rental units, which adds to the pressure and the barriers our people face in finding affordable housing.

The 2018 "What We Heard Report Summary: Indigenous Housing Capital Program, Alberta Seniors and Housing" reports that indigenous families are the most in need of affordable housing. The housing most needed to accommodate families is homes with three or more bedrooms.

Now, consider the housing landscape I have laid out for you. We work with survivors of domestic violence and their children, with youth who left the reserves and do not have the life skills to thrive in the city, and with those who are jobless. We work with individuals who have mental health and addiction issues, the chronically homeless, former sex trade workers and men and women leaving

corrections. Now, imagine that you're one of these individuals and you're trying to turn your life around.

Housing is a social determinant of health, yet the current systems continue to marginalize our people and set them up for failure. Families and individuals may wait up to five years to receive affordable housing. During that time, families and individuals are expected to check in with housing authorities. They don't receive reminders, and if they fail to check in, they must redo the housing assessment.

Twelve-step programs advise you not to associate with the people and places that are part of your life of addiction, yet we place people who are trying to recover in unsafe neighbourhoods, further crippling their chances of recovery and well-being. One mistake may result in eviction and a return to their old lifestyle. There is no flexibility and there is no humanity in the current processes.

We need choice and self-determination. We need an increase in affordable housing inventory that integrates culture and indigenous leadership. We need wraparound supports to help our people navigate that system. Government policies continue to perpetuate poverty and housing insecurity.

What are you prepared to do differently? What you're doing right now isn't working. It is time to move from calls to action into action. We must work together.

We need to pay homage to and value indigenous world views. An example is a recently announced AFCC elders lodge, the first of its kind in Calgary. Funding from the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta, the City of Calgary and the Calgary Homeless Foundation shows how this unique project can inspire future housing opportunities and demonstrate how integral community partners are in our journey to wellness.

Our home fires need to be healthy to heal, and the way to well-being is through culture, which you can only understand through the act of reconciliation. Let us not forget the wise words of the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one."

Sechanalyagh.

• (1405)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Ms. Roy.

Next up, we have Lisa Smith, senior director of governance, international and parliamentary relations at the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Ms. Smith, you have five minutes.

Ms. Lisa J. Smith (Senior Director, Governance, International and Parliamentary Relations, Native Women's Association of Canada): Thank you. It's truly an honour to be among you all today, so thank you for the invitation.

To the other panel members, thank you very much. I'm really enjoying this discussion.

I'm based out of NWAC's national office in Quebec, but I'm speaking to you today from my home in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, the land of the Beothuk.

NWAC believes that addressing indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people's access to housing is a necessary step forward in addressing the ongoing process of genocide in Canada. It is important to ground the basic right of housing for indigenous peoples in UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 23 is engaged. I would also argue, based on the last panel member's submissions, that article 3, self-determination, is always a part of this discussion as well.

Honourable members, indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people experience unique challenges in accessing affordable and safe housing. It is evident that ongoing challenges with colonialism, infrastructure and race- and gender-based discrimination continue to prevent indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people from accessing appropriate housing resources. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, MMIWG, reported that indigenous women tend to experience high rates of violence because they lack housing. In the 231 calls for justice, honourable members, there are 10 calls for improving access to housing for indigenous women.

NWAC is working hard to help. We are very stretched, but we are helping. Under NWAC's environmental conservation and climate change office, the housing project's objective was to conduct research and engage with indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people to determine what their needs are and how they can be fulfilled.

The housing project report was published on March 31, 2020. I'm going to take a couple of highlights from it. It's all very important. I encourage you to read it on your own time. "Extreme weather and coastal erosion brought on by climate change"—so that's a part of the discussion as well—"are already destroying the inadequate housing stock in Inuit Nunangat". The housing in the north has unique and varying factors.

Also, as a backdrop to this discussion, according to Caryl Patrick:

Sections 28 and 29 of the Indian Act prohibit lending institutions from seizing on-reserve assets in the event of payment default. This makes them rarely willing to lend to First Nations people on reserve, making it extremely difficult for First Nations people to obtain financing to build or renovate their homes on reserve.... The result is an acute shortage of housing, which, along with population growth, makes it inevitable for families to crowd into any available shelter, no matter how poorly maintained.

According to an interim report by APPA, in the other House:

Building codes are not developed for Northern climates...and many houses were not designed for local climates and soil conditions, or were built with subpar building materials.... Poor housing conditions have also led to an increase in house fires; the rate of fire deaths on-reserve is 10 times higher than that of off-reserve populations.

Further, according to the Manitoba office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives:

Due to extreme housing shortages, such as in Canada's North, Indigenous women (and their children) can be forced to stay with abusive partners simply because they have nowhere else to go.... If they do choose to flee their abusive homes, they can be forced into exploitative situations to meet their (and their children's) basic needs.

This is increasing the risks of homelessness.

In sum, honourable members, access to safe and good housing is necessary to ensure that the health and safety of indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people are protected. Ultimately, indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people are experts of their own experiences and must be involved in the development and implementation strategies that address indigenous housing needs.

The MMIWG calls for justice must be implemented.

• (1410)

NWAC would like to bring special attention to those relating to housing under the headings of "Human Security", "Child Welfare" and "2SLGBTQQIA-Specific Calls for Justice".

Thank you, honourable members and panel members.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): You're right on time, Ms. Smith. That was well done. Thank you very much.

Thank you to all our witnesses for that amazing testimony.

We will go to our first round of questioning. We have a six-minute round.

First up is Ms. Rood from the Conservative Party.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses today for their testimony.

I'm just going to take a quick moment to highlight some challenges that one of the first nations in my riding, Walpole Island First Nation, has faced in housing. They've had many struggles for years, and 90% of homes on the island can't access natural gas. It forces them to use more expensive propane to heat their homes.

I've also heard from Walpole Island about the struggles of the rising costs of building supplies due to inflation and what that does when they're trying to renovate their homes up to just the minimum standards or when building new structures. The infrastructure gap is wide here too. Land is available for development, but it doesn't have basic services like power, water and sewer available, which have to be added before the land can be developed.

Ms. Child, I know your organization focuses on Vancouver Island, but I see a lot of parallels with indigenous communities in my riding. The Walpole Island and Kettle & Stony Point first nations have all struggled with the opioid epidemic, and they're working to help their communities recover. I'm wondering what kind of impact access to stable housing has on helping address the opioid crisis and alleviate homelessness. Can you maybe tell us what your organization has done that has worked? Also, could you share some success stories?

Ms. Coreen Child: I do want to say how important our land-based healing over the past few years has been for the support of people who are battling not just the opioid crisis but also different forms of addiction. When I look at some of the successes.... There are individuals who have highlighted why they use opioids. You find those conversations when you're having those intimate moments of spiritual connection to the land and to other areas where there's reflection on life and the importance of taking a break from what is actually causing those memories to keep on flowing, and really celebrating the successes of where individuals are at.

There are individuals who have shared, "I've gone from 12 points to six points, and now I'm at one point of opioid use because of pain management." When you start to celebrate those along the way, you see the impact. I've actually seen people move from those 12 points to six points to one point and be able to sustain not using opioids for the past 18 months.

I think it's those moments when you get to be a witness and a little bit of a champion and carer to someone, when someone believes that someone is going to be there consistently for them. I think this conversation is the way in which the federal government can fund directly services like this so that we can create the consistency that is very valid and important to this work.

There's also looking at different avenues of innovation. We use the term "innovation", but that connection to community.... I just want to say this. When we're looking at indigenous people, we need to know where they're coming from.

The other thing I want to highlight is that I went into an institution, one of the prisons, and this person who was supporting that individual said, "This person is not interested in culture and doesn't want to connect." I said, "Where is this person from?" And they're like, "They're not connecting to the elder who's here." The person had the background of Cree, and the individual who was supporting the person was of a totally different background.

If we're not linking that knowledge and the communities together, the practices won't flow and that discussion doesn't become at ease. I would say those are successes when we make sure we're investing into the indigenous population and the partners who want to be able to do this frontline work. We're all impacted in different ways as to why we choose this work.

I want to say that land-based healing has brought a really powerful avenue to our work, and I know we're going to be able to show in those successes that it does work.

Thank you.

• (1415)

Ms. Lianne Rood: Thank you for sharing that.

Ms. Smith, I have a question for you.

It's been identified by previous witnesses on this committee that the lack of available housing on reserve is preventing people who want to move back home from actually moving back home. I saw in your 2021 annual report that you have investigated that link. I'm just wondering if you can expand on that report.

What are the specific rigid housing regulations and practices followed by social service authorities that are in the way? How should government cut back this red tape, so that indigenous women can move back into their communities and reconnect with their culture?

Ms. Lisa J. Smith: Thank you. That's an excellent question.

Unfortunately, I'm not an expert in this regard. We do have people who work out of NWAC who are based on this. My job, as senior director, is more high-level. I am the senior director of international governance and parliamentary relations.

It is an important question. If granted, I can get back to you with specific recommendations in that regard. I do want to be careful with this conversation as it is a very important one.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Ms. Rood, for your questions, and thank you to Ms. Smith and other witnesses for their answers.

We'll go on to our second questioner, who's from the Liberal Party.

According to my notes, we have Vance Badawey for six minutes.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to ask two questions.

As many of the witnesses recognized, the budget was released yesterday. There are two areas of the budget that I was most interested in, as the parliamentary secretary for Indigenous Services. One relates in particular to housing off reserve, in the urban and rural areas. It was announced yesterday that \$300 million in urban and rural housing is going to be brought forward.

I was interested in some of the comments made by other panelists earlier on. I want to clarify one thing and then ask a question.

The one thing I want to clarify was the comment made about the programming being "controlled" by the CMHC. I think that was the word that was used. That's, in fact, not the case. Unfortunately, the federal government doesn't have a department of housing and therefore we delegate and/or count on the CMHC to be a flow-through for the monies we would otherwise be putting towards those programs. In this case, that's what they are—a flow-through.

It's imperative that as the money flows through, we hear from the indigenous community to ensure and/or move forward with the recommendations that are brought to us by the indigenous community.

I think the question might be appropriately given to Ms. Smith. I will aim this question at you.

Can you elaborate on some of the specific strategies that you can see some of these dollars going to? How would it be rolled out to these different objectives in the urban and rural housing environment?

• (1420)

Ms. Lisa J. Smith: Thank you for the question, honourable member.

I will discuss NWAC's action plan. It's called "Our Calls, Our Actions". NWAC is striving to implement the calls for justice under the MMIWG. In terms of housing, we are looking to develop a prototype for an affordable and culturally appropriate housing model on or off reserve.

At this juncture, I will highlight that we do have a healing lodge in Chelsea, Quebec. We're really getting into that land-based healing and we're seeing wonderful results. We're also set to open up another resiliency lodge in New Brunswick.

That's what NWAC is looking to do in terms of our action plan on this subject.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Ms. Smith.

I'm going to roll now into another budgetary item that was contained within yesterday's budget 2022 announcement. That's the \$4 billion for indigenous housing that was announced. It's somewhat unprecedented, with the amount of monies that will now be going on reserve to indigenous housing. We will work in partnership with the first nations, Inuit and Métis communities to co-develop and implement housing strategies.

I want to dig a bit deeper on co-developing and implementing housing strategies. I'm going to open up this question to Ms. Child.

Ms. Child, can you give some comment on that with respect to co-developing and implementing housing strategies that would attach to yesterday's budget 2022 announcement of \$4 billion for indigenous housing?

Ms. Coreen Child: Thank you for your question.

I definitely think that in the co-development and reciprocal information finding, I would really love to have opportunities to share our own frameworks on which we're hearing from the indigenous street communities that we're serving. Over the past few years, we have been meeting directly with the indigenous street community. In that co-development that you're looking for, when we talk about cultural supportive housing, land-based healing and decolonizing harm reduction, I believe there definitely needs to be room and a lane for us to lead some of this work.

In our work, we always have to show and reflect our research and our professionalism and how tight our knowledge is to lead it forward, but I guess in this position what we would be asking the government and others to help us do is allow us to lead this work directly, investing in indigenous organizations like ours that are willing to create different models and different avenues and solutions.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Absolutely.

Ms. Coreen Child: The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society started out with a small dream. We built something very large, in the sense of the impact we're having in successfully housing people. I think that should be seen as not necessarily being about the roof and the four walls but about the service and the programming, and about creating ways to address that feeling of being monitored and watched.

In many ways and at many times, indigenous people have had to feel like they were lining up and were just a number in having a service. The way we want to lead is to address the fact that we

know what those feelings are and we want to eliminate them. We can do that by supporting the indigenous population and by reflecting that we have learned from that knowledge and we're going to do something differently.

Investing into the work that we're doing creates a different platform, in a way. We can actually say that we're housing people with this positive flow that everyone's trying to contribute to—from the street to supportive housing to shelter, and from supportive housing into independent housing and affordable housing.

The numbers may seem small, but I can tell you that we have helped 14 and pretty close to 20 people move into independent housing. We were a champion for them, to witness their work, but in many senses it was the discrimination and the visible viewpoint of them that didn't allow them to be housed. Now that they have the support, here they are, over a year later, rocking it and feeling like a part of society. Rather than "I don't want to be the burden" or "I don't want to be certain things in this world", they're totally going, "People, I'm going to be amazing."

• (1425)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Ms. Child, I'm sorry. We're about 45 seconds over.

Ms. Coreen Child: I'm sorry.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Ms. Child, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): It was a great thought. I was trying to let you finish. I'm sorry.

Our next round of six minutes will go to the Bloc Québécois.

Madame Gill, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank all the witnesses. It is very interesting to hear from witnesses with diverse backgrounds.

I would have many questions for you.

Ms. Child, Ms. Roy and Ms. Smith, you have all spoken about the importance of environments being culturally appropriate. Can you take turns to explain what needs to be addressed to make these environments appropriate? Can you also give us some examples of needs?

I guess it could be consultation, design or funding needs.

I'd like to hear from you on the subject.

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa J. Smith: Thank you for your question.

I think it's very important that we see these issues and solutions that are informed by trauma. Having trauma-informed approaches is necessary. That's the first thing. Also, truth and reconciliation to me means truly understanding why we are in this dire situation that we see ourselves in. That means truly understanding the significance of the Indian Act—and I can't get into all of that right now—so we can go forward.

One thing that came up today from other panel members, which I really appreciate and want to expand upon, is land-based healing. If we understand that approach, with intersectionality and with trauma-informed approaches, I think we can move forward to somewhere great together.

That's what I'll say.

Ms. Melissa Roy: Hello. I would like to start off by saying that, in my experience and within my career, going back to the elders and to ceremony is incredibly important. Even with our elders lodge and with other projects, including Aisokinakio'p—which was the first urban indigenous immunization clinic in Calgary, and we immunized over 15,000 people and addressed vaccine hesitancy—we listened to our elders. Our elders said, “These are the things we need, and this is how we would like to see them happen”, and we worked within that to make the space for ceremony, tradition and storytelling, which are key when we are working with our people, especially in an urban context.

What we're looking for when we're in an urban setting is that connection and that culture and home. If you have those components integrated within programs, within housing, seniors housing or whatever it may be, you're going to see connection response and people living with dignity and respect. That doesn't come naturally; we have to recover that. That doesn't come for free; it comes with connection, with doing that work and engagement.

That's what I would like to say. Thanks.

Ms. Coreen Child: *Gilakas'la*. Our land-based healing... We have an island-wide mandate. We go directly into communities and ask communities for different layers of supports. Sometimes the individuals we're bringing are connected to that community because of the work we've already done with them. We go as far as Kwakwaka'wakw territory. Then there's Nuu-chah-nulth and Coast Salish. We do serve Métis and Inuit, and we make sure that we try to have individuals who can come in to support us directly in some of those teachings, protocols and ceremony.

One thing that I know is important, which we have recently added to our land-based healing, is making sure we also have a medical team that comes with us, so we're using the dual model of health as well. When we are taking an individual who still needs to use opioids or still needs to have a pour through a managed alcohol program, we are taking a medical team with us to support that individual so that the individual can be successful in the camp. It's a non-judgmental space, and we make sure we're looking at all of the risk factors and the measures but also connecting them to individuals who can support them in that ceremony and that space. I can tell you that the beautiful thing I've been able to see is that subtlety in the urgency of having that supply and getting out onto the land and saying, “I don't need it right now. I'll let you know when I need it.

I'm going to enjoy this moment,” so having their own breakthroughs.

When we look at culture, when we look at tradition and ceremony, it is about knowing distinctly where the individuals are from. I could tell you about some of the systems that aren't in place and that we do need to invest in, whether that's data sovereignty discussions or whatever it may be. We as a collective are pulling in that knowledge so we can say directly how we're supporting the indigenous population that needs these services.

The other piece in this is traditional medicine and having access. In an urban setting, that's done pretty much through trade, when you're bringing traditional medicine in and allowing them access to something that's familiar, such as smells. We all have that innate memory of the smell of cinnamon or of our mother's or grandmother's bread, and sometimes that's exactly what medicine brings to us when we're able to say, “I need an alternative.”

Thank you.

• (1430)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Ms. Child, and thank you, Madame Gill.

We'll go on to the NDP now for a six-minute round, with Ms. Idlout.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

First I will ask Coreen, Melissa and Lisa. Your presentations went very well. Coreen, Lisa, Melissa, I would have you, all of you, reply to this.

Have you seen and analyzed the 2022 budget released yesterday? I would like your opinions of this. What is missing that should address the indigenous housing crisis?

Ms. Lisa J. Smith: Thank you for that question.

We did see \$11 billion over six years towards urgent needs such as housing infrastructure on reserve. We're pleased to see that, but from NWAC's point of view, we would like to see additional funds to stop the violence and genocide addressed in the MMIWG. At this point, we're still doing a more detailed analysis.

I'll stop my remarks there, and I thank you for the question.

Ms. Coreen Child: From our experience here in Victoria, I can tell you that unfortunately funding sometimes needs to go in a certain direction, and they're not directly sure where and how to disperse it. Sometimes it gets centralized in hubs. Sometimes friendship centres are used. Sometimes community entities are used. It depends on where the community entity sits or what kind of relationship you have with the municipality. These funds sometimes don't get to have a distinct contact with us who are delivering the services.

We recently—I'll just share this—applied for a healing house and wrote a 268-page proposal in 60 days because of the announcement that had happened. When we look at that connection to the land, the RFPs and understanding where land opportunities are to do infrastructure builds, to create service and to implement our programs, those are majorly competitive and challenging. When we're putting our best foot forward, we're not necessarily getting the response that's needed back to the indigenous organizations that are directly serving those populations. Sometimes it goes to the ones that have a brighter partnership or a longer legacy or—

• (1435)

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you. Keep it short. I have a few more questions.

Melissa has to reply. Thank you.

Ms. Melissa Roy: Thank you for your question.

I will speak from a Calgary context, from my own experience. I can tell you that the urban people in Calgary specifically would benefit from more funding to support folks through a variety of different transitions in life. In fact, there are no transitional services for indigenous women or men, even leaving addiction-based programs and migrating into affordable housing, which there's a shortage of.

I echo what our executive director for the national friendship body said in her previous answer, as well. Hopefully I've provided enough information for you about Calgary's context.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Coreen, Melissa and Lisa, thank you for your responses.

The federal government always responds by saying that they are flexible. They can make adjustments to better suit the needs of indigenous communities. In terms of flexibility with the budget, do you have the flexibility with the budget we heard about yesterday? How would you make the adjustments?

Ms. Melissa Roy: Thank you for your question.

From our perspective, we would definitely put dollars into mental health and addiction support services at the street level. In Calgary, we've seen an increase in opioid ODs. Our team responds regularly, along with other members from collaborating partners, and it is very sad, with the health system being stressed as far as the response is concerned, the CPS response, and things like that.

Especially coming out of COVID and being socially isolated from everybody, we would definitely support and advocate for greater mental health and addiction supports in order to stabilize individuals and get them into safe places, get them into housing and continue to support them. Continuing care is a huge thing, as well as transitional supports. That's what we would advocate for and would like to see more of in all communities, not just urban but rural as well.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Ms. Roy.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Thank you, Ms. Idlout, for your questions.

That was an amazing round. I must say, although Zoom isn't my favourite, it was very welcoming and warming to see that when one of you was speaking the other two would be nodding or giving a thumbs-up. That was pretty amazing to watch. It looked like we had great testimony and everyone's on the same page with that. Well done and thank you very much to all our witnesses.

We're going to suspend quickly for a couple of seconds and log in to our next meeting, so that we can go over the drafting instructions for our latest report.

Thank you, everyone.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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