



## What We Learned

Five key themes emerged in conversations and workshops during community visits. These summaries represent the most common topics discussed but many more ideas were explored and will be part of on-going work. The themes include: housing design, environment, training, access to services and community growth.

### *Housing Design*

A consistent theme throughout all workshops and discussions was housing design and quality of housing materials. Existing common designs do not meet the needs of all occupants because of spatial arrangements, materials used and the short lifespan of many houses. Houses within communities and across communities are repetitive, using similar designs. Small communal spaces such as kitchens, living rooms, entrances, bathrooms and storage space were commonly identified as problems. The need for barrier-free and accessible homes were identified as a priority.



*Mattagami First Nation community housing workshop.*

Accessibility also extended to the wider community, including roads and pathways. More appropriate building materials for the climate and geography of communities were needed to ensure a longer housing lifespan and to decrease and eliminate issues of mould. Mould was identified as reoccurring issue and many participants spoke of the impacts of overcrowding and mould on the health of occupants.



*Brunswick House First Nation youth housing night.*

Conversations around housing needs consistently identified youth, singles and Elders as groups facing the greatest barriers. For many participants, the lack of one or two-bedroom housing meant that youth and singles needing their own space were met with no immediate solution. In conversations this was linked to issues of overcrowding and a need for privacy. Youth shared that they did not expect to ever have a home or their own space. In meetings with Elders many different housing needs and possible solutions were identified

such as multi-unit buildings, being able to age in place and the need for in-community healthcare support.

### *Environment*

Linked closely with discussions of housing and design were talks around the siting of homes and landscaping as well as the impacts of geography and climate change. During the construction of new homes large amounts of land are often cleared resulting in the loss of native plants and topsoil. Finished lots are often backfilled with gravel and are not always graded properly. These changes to the landscape impact vegetation growth, drainage, flooding and erosion.

The impacts of climate change on housing were discussed in particular as it relates to changes to the land and the winter road season. Changes in water tables, riverbank erosion and permafrost breakup causing shifts in the ground impact where and how housing is constructed and the type of foundations used to prevent flooding and mould growth. With shorter winter road seasons, the ability to get all necessary construction materials for new buildings and renovations is limited, impacting construction timelines, costs and budgets and ability to respond to renovation and repair needs. Climate change also impacts energy usage, access to traditional food sources and access to firewood, negatively impacting financial security and well-being.

***“A youth centre would be excellent, I think to have a place for youth to go that they can manage on their own with the help of an older person to show them the ropes... it gives them sense of independence and a sense of belonging”***

- Community Member



Fort Severn First Nation community housing workshop.

## Training

***“The young guys really want to learn ... sometimes they say they look to youtube videos [to learn]”***

- Community Member, Fort Severn First Nation

The need for more training opportunities, especially delivered in communities, was discussed at many of the workshop sessions. Accessing more training and skills courses was discussed as a way to increase local labour on construction projects, decrease the reliance on outside labour, respond more quickly to renovation and repair needs and ensure housing is constructed with care. Other learning opportunities were specifically for home occupants, including home maintenance and troubleshooting, such as understanding Heat Recovery Ventillation (HRV) systems looked to increase the lifespan of homes and reduce renovation costs. Participants shared that along with more training opportunities, proper supports were needed to ensure community member success. Supports suggested for trainees included having better access to mental health services, funding such as living and travel allowance and daycare. Other barriers to accessing and completing training included training locations away from home in cities, length of course and time away from family and support networks, access to resources and not being able to complete the number of supervised apprenticeship hours in community.

## Community Highlights

### Brunswick House First Nation

Throughout conversations with community members and especially with youth, there was a shared desire for change and that it could be achieved by working together.

### Fort Severn First Nation

New housing designs and construction methods were being explored and tested in Fort Severn, including different foundation types and alternative energy.

### Kasabonika Lake First Nation

Future long-term growth plans include the building of a new high school to support youth education.

### Mattagami First Nation

The Mattagami Harmony Movement, a strategic planning framework, provides a holistic approach to long term planning to ensure a unified approach for community growth and development.

### Marten Falls First Nation

Investment and the construction of the community training centre provides new learning opportunities to access within the community.

### Cat Lake First Nation

Youth receiving hands-on and in-class training through Ontario Works were constructing the new recreation centre and gym.



*Cat Lake First Nation Elders' lunch and housing session (left) and Kasabonika Lake First Nation youth housing night (right).*

### *Access to Services*

In many discussions, housing was spoken about as part of a wider network of community services that support health and well-being. Discussions included access to education, healthcare, food security, recreational and play spaces, libraries and daycares. Youth spoke of the importance of having more spaces to play safely, different recreation spaces for sports such as soccer and baseball and access to libraries year-round.

Road access communities described barriers due to limited transportation options and the cost of transportation to services in nearby towns or urban centres. While services are located closer to road access communities, community members without access to their own vehicles or on limited incomes faced barriers to accessing basic amenities such as fresh food. Barriers to accessing education also persisted for high school students with long commute times that are dependent on weather and road conditions.

### *Community Growth*

A main housing challenge, expressed by many of the communities visited, is addressing housing waitlists while planning for expected future growth. Housing waitlists were not always accurate of the true housing need. Community members living off-reserve waiting to return home or community members who have given up on the housing process are not accurately reflected or captured in all waitlists. Housing shortages in combination with limited availability of serviced lots are an urgent concern. Community growth and expansion of roads, infrastructure and lots are often constrained by the surrounding geography or existing reserve boundaries. Discussions of community growth also touched on current infrastructure capacity of water treatment plants and electricity grid. In discussions with leadership and housing managers there was an understanding that greater long term planning is needed but that it is difficult to implement due to inconsistent funding year over year, changing policy environments and flawed funding formulas.



*Mattagami First Nation youth night*

The five themes, housing design, environment, training, access to services and community growth, begin to illustrate the interconnected elements and scope of the housing crisis in NAN territory. Housing must be considered holistically, as part of a large network of individual and community well-being. It is not possible to address only one of the above themes, a systems approach must be taken.



Marten Falls First Nation (left) and Mattagami First Nation (right) community housing workshops.

## Next Steps



Project phases of developing the NAN Housing Strategy

- *Metric development*: The learnings from community visits and previous Housing Strategy events will be synthesized to create NAN specific housing metrics.
- *Community visits in Fall 2019*: The next set of community visits will begin in October 2019 and will be used to test and verify the metrics assembled and learn about other housing systems in NAN.
- *Focus on housing for youth*: With so many participants describing youth housing as their top priority a focus will be placed on understanding the systems changes required to facilitate building housing for youth. Learning from youth themselves, as well as other community members, will all be used to create models of youth housing that communities may choose to implement.
- *Review funding formulas*: Existing funding formulas were described to not adequately factor need, growing costs, or remoteness factors. Formulas will be reviewed with alternatives suggested demonstrating the actual costs and needs of NAN communities.
- *Advisory Lab*: A panel of experts with experience within NAN will be assembled to brainstorm solutions to high-level problems facing NAN First Nations. The focus of this meeting will be: procurement, building standards, materials and design guidelines. Learnings will be shared in the next newsletter and through Housing Strategy events.



Fort Severn First Nation (left) and Kasabonika Lake First Nation (right) community housing workshops.

NAN would like to thank the community organizers in each First Nation we visited for their work in inviting community members and coordinating all the engagement sessions! We would also like to thank the community members that came out and provided their input into developing the NAN Housing Strategy, your feedback is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Gitchi-Meegwetch!

## Next Steps

- NAN specific metrics will be developed from Summer 2019 workshops
- Community visits will continue in Fall 2019
- Focus on community identified priorities including housing for youth
- Review funding formulas to understand how it can better reflect northern construction costs, climate and geography
- Host the Advisory Lab in Fall 2019 with experts focusing on procurement, building standards, materials and design guidelines

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This project entitled Developing Appropriate First Nations Housing Metrics: Nishnawbe Aski Nation received funding from the National Housing Strategy under the NHS Solutions Labs, however, the views expressed are the personal views of the author and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.