



April 16, 2018

Ref: 234054

Ms. Lisa Lapointe, Chief Coroner
BC Coroners Service
Ministry of Justice
Island Regional Coroners Office
5th Floor, 910 Government Street
Victoria BC V8W 3W4

Dear Ms. Lapointe:

Thank you for your report *A Review of First Nation Youth and Young Adult Injury Deaths: 2010-2015*, and your recommendation directed to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to “increase access to low-barrier housing for First Nations young people.”

I would like to begin by outlining recently announced housing initiatives for Indigenous people in British Columbia. As part of Budget 2018, announced in February 2018, the Province released *Homes for B.C.: A 30-Point Plan for Housing Affordability*. This plan reflects the Province’s commitment to Indigenous people and communities by investing \$550 million into the construction of 1,750 units of social housing for Indigenous people in British Columbia. Indigenous people, including youth in many cases, will also be served through all other new provincial housing initiatives, including:

- 2,500 new supportive homes for people struggling with homelessness;
- 1,500 new supportive homes for women and children fleeing abuse; and
- 14,000 new affordable rental units for families and seniors.

The Province, through BC Housing, will continue to work with our Indigenous housing partners to ensure that the new housing to be developed through the initiatives noted above will contribute to increasing the supply of much needed low-barrier housing for First Nations young people. Indigenous housing needs are also being considered in the context of the Province’s implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and for Indigenous people to determine their housing priorities and self-administer housing wherever possible. Future housing investments will be made in partnership with Indigenous communities and their identified needs. As well, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is committed to working across government, including Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and communities to improve the social outcomes of Indigenous peoples.

The Province is also committed to working with Indigenous organizations and communities to enhance partnerships and increase self-reliance in the Indigenous housing sector. The goal is to help address the over representation of Indigenous people in housing that is not adequate or affordable, and the over representation of Indigenous people within the homeless population. An example of this commitment is British Columbia's partnership with the Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) to administer existing social housing for Indigenous individuals and families. In 2017/18, BC Housing transferred over \$35 million to AHMA as part of this devolved responsibility.

There are a range of existing programs administered by BC Housing that specifically support your findings and recommendation. These include:

- Homeless Prevention Program (HPP) - designed to support individuals of Indigenous descent, youth transitioning out of foster care, women who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence, and people leaving the correctional and hospital systems.
- Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program (AHOP) – this program is designed to specifically address the disproportionate number of Indigenous people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The outreach workers come from Indigenous, community-based organizations. Outreach workers assist people 19 years of age and older, and connect individuals under 19 years of age with appropriate social programs and services.
- Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program – provides spaces for women and children fleeing violence through safe homes, transition houses and second stage housing. These programs are encouraged to shelter and support young women under 19 years of age by having a protocol with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. These programs will sometimes bring in young women that have Agreements with Young Adults (AYA), and work to find space for them; this is especially true in northern communities where many of the women accessing the services are Indigenous.

I would like to note that on page 24 of your report, it is cited that 23 percent of the First Nations youth and young adults who died were parents, and 55 percent of those were mothers. BC Housing encourages its community housing partners to make transition houses more accessible to young women at risk, and to remove some of the barriers that make it difficult for young mothers to access services. In addition, six of the transition houses and one safe home have either an Indigenous focus or are operated by an Indigenous agency supporting Indigenous women. Three of these are on-reserve and are partially funded by BC Housing.

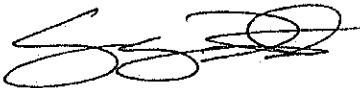
BC Housing is engaged in a number of initiatives that specifically target Indigenous youth. These initiatives include:

- Housing partnership with Broadway Youth Resources Centre and Vancouver Native Housing Society in Vancouver for vulnerable Indigenous youth. The "View" operated by the Bloom Group (former Remand Centre at 250 Powell St in Vancouver) includes 37 housing units designated for Aboriginal youth participating in the BladeRunners Indigenous-focused trades training program for youth.

- Housing partnership with Lu'ma Native Housing Society for the Dave Pranteau Aboriginal Children's Village in Vancouver provides 24 affordable apartments for Aboriginal foster families and youth transitioning out of care and low-income individuals.
- New initiatives involving Indigenous youth in care. As recommended in Special Advisor Grand Chief Ed John's 2016 Report on Child Welfare in British Columbia¹, reducing the number of Indigenous children in care works to break the cycle of the challenges that Indigenous youth often face as they leave care, many of whom are at a higher risk of becoming homeless. An example of this is a new partnership project underway with BC Housing and Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Society in Kamloops.

Thank you for writing and your request for input into this review. We look forward to working with the Ministry of Children and Family Development to address your recommendations and take steps to increase access to low-barrier housing for Indigenous young people.

Respectfully,



Greg Steves
Assistant Deputy Minister

pc: Cheryl May, Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Children and Family Development

Laurel Nash, Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

¹ <http://fns.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf>

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CHIEF CORONER