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# Moving to the City:

## Housing and Aboriginal Migration to Winnipeg

By Josh Brandon and Evelyn Peters

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**Moving to the City: Housing and Aboriginal  
Migration to Winnipeg**

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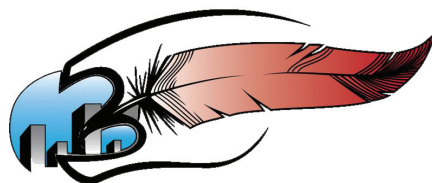
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# Executive Summary

Winnipeg is home to Canada's largest Aboriginal population. Housing in Winnipeg is becoming increasingly expensive and many households struggle to find housing that is affordable. Aboriginal people in Winnipeg, however, are among the most likely to experience homelessness and are also over-represented in housing that is unaffordable, overcrowded or in poor condition. In *Moving to the City: Housing and Aboriginal Migration to Winnipeg*, we document the housing experiences of Aboriginal people moving to Winnipeg.

In conducting this research we worked closely with the Eagle Urban Transition Centre (EUTC). Operated by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), the EUTC in Winnipeg is one of the only Aboriginal run service agencies of its type across Canada that help First Nations, Métis and Inuit people when they are making the move to the city.

Since 2005, EUTC has helped thousands of Aboriginal people in their transition to Winnipeg with finding housing, employment, accessing health care and other services. By bringing all these resources together in one centre, they help connect their members to programs in the community. One of the most important roles EUTC has is helping its members navigate com-

plex and often bureaucratic systems of housing, health and social services. We conducted research in collaboration with EUTC to identify the challenges Aboriginal people have finding housing in Winnipeg and recommend solutions to ease the transition for Aboriginal households. Despite the tremendous work EUTC does already, our research found more resources are needed to ensure that all Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are securely housed.

## Aboriginal migration patterns

Aboriginal people, especially those moving from reserve communities, face barriers to finding quality, affordable housing. Aboriginal people report discrimination, experience high rates of poverty, and are weighed down by histories of colonialism. Research shows that those moving to a major urban centre for the first time have to learn to adapt to a new culture and a new way of life. Many arrive with no rental history, no bank accounts and no government identification.

At approximately 80,000 people, Winnipeg has the largest Aboriginal population in Canada. It is expected to grow by more than 30,000 over the next 20 years. Much of the recent growth

has come from natural increase (more births than deaths) and from more people recognizing and celebrating their Aboriginal identity. Although migration has been a smaller part of the net overall increase, it is nonetheless important as many families move back and forth from rural and reserve communities to Winnipeg every year. This on going connection many Aboriginal people have to their home communities should be accounted for in Manitoba's Aboriginal housing strategy.

Aboriginal people are often pushed off their reserves by poor housing conditions. Participants we interviewed spoke of long waiting lists for housing, overcrowding and lack of running water in their home communities. Others have been forced out by flooding, such as that seen at Lake St Martin. Overcrowding remains six times greater on reserve than off reserve. The shortfall of housing and poor housing conditions force many Aboriginal people to choose between bad housing in their home communities and insecure and unaffordable housing in cities like Winnipeg.

### Barriers to housing

Aboriginal people face considerable barriers to finding housing in Winnipeg, principally related to poverty.

There is a disconnect between what people get on reserves communities and what they find in Winnipeg. On reserve, people take care of each other, you know everyone, and people don't let you fall through the cracks. In Winnipeg there is nothing like that, if you don't know where to go, you are on your own.

— EUTC housing coordinator.

- Aboriginal Manitobans have almost double the poverty rate as the general population: 17.2 percent compared to 9.7 percent

- Unemployment rates almost three times as high within the core working age population (9.3 percent, compared to 3.8 percent).
- For three quarters of Aboriginal migrants to Winnipeg incomes remain below \$10,000 per year 15 months after arriving in the city.

Market housing is increasingly expensive and subsidized public housing is of limited availability. As a result, many people coming to Winnipeg share with friends or family members. Commonly, this arrangement is referred to as "couch surfing" but should properly be seen as overcrowding and a form of hidden homelessness, with consequent social and health impacts. In some cases, family members are visiting for a short period of time, and housing providers need to take the migration needs of visiting family into consideration.

The long-term effects of colonialism and institutionalization haunt many Aboriginal people. The legacy of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, intervention by Child and Family Services and vastly disproportional rates of incarceration continue to be felt. Many Aboriginal people are the survivors of multiple generations of involvement with these institutions. One young person we spoke with had already spent two terms in jail. A revolving door between foster care and detention centres, between jails and shelters, leaves many Aboriginal people without the skills or resources to obtain adequate housing.

People moving to an urban environment for the first time often do not know their rights and responsibilities as tenants. As a result they are more likely to fall prey to unscrupulous landlords. Notwithstanding the many good landlords in Winnipeg, tenants report being coerced into signing leases before seeing their apartments, landlords not returning damage deposits and incidents of sexual harassment of tenants. EUTC

helps inform tenants of their rights, helping to resolve disputes, and also educates members on their responsibilities as tenants.

### Closing the gap

On the basis of this research, we made 16 recommendations in five key areas: Increasing access to social housing; intergovernmental cooperation; increasing settlement and transitional supports; decentralizing transitional services; and increasing financial resources available to migrants. These include:

- Work with the Aboriginal community to create housing to accommodate the multi-generational and fluid family structures of many Aboriginal households
- Increasing cooperation between levels of government so that Aboriginal migrants do not face loss of services during their transition period.
- Better and more secure funding for EUTC and improve access to transition centres in other cities.
- Increase financial opportunities through better training and jobs for Aboriginal Manitobans, and raising shelter benefit EIA rates to 75% of median market rent.

More housing affordable for people with low incomes is needed. The financial resources of many Aboriginal people are insufficient to afford quality market housing. Current provincial investments in social and affordable housing are a badly needed injection into Manitoba's housing system, but without equal federal contributions, demand will continue to outpace supply. Meanwhile, many Aboriginal migrants are left

with too few resources to compete in Winnipeg's tight housing market.

Many of the challenges Aboriginal migrants face in obtaining housing in Winnipeg stem from a gap in services as they transition from federally funded programs on reserve com-

Living in Manitoba Housing has given me purpose because I have somewhere that is home, somewhere I can count on. I see a lot of people struggling with their rent and I feel lucky to have somewhere.

— EUTC community member

munities, to provincially funded programs off-reserve. Streamlining processes for obtaining identification, applying for EIA and other services could help get Aboriginal people new to Winnipeg on their feet faster. Meanwhile, more support for transition services like those provided by EUTC are needed, both within Winnipeg and in smaller urban centres to make the transition easier.

### Conclusion

The divide between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg is heightened by deep economic divisions. Nonetheless, the future of our communities is closely tied: Winnipeg can only succeed if the Aboriginal people of this city find success. Housing is a primary determinant of health and basic precondition of participation in society. Ensuring that equal access to housing is available for Aboriginal people should be a priority for all levels of government and all citizens in Winnipeg.





# Introduction

Winnipeg is at the centre of Treaty One lands and at the centre of Canada. It is also the heart of one of the country's most significant demographic transitions. The proportion of Canadians identifying as Aboriginal is expected to increase to more than 5 percent of the Canadian population by 2031, compared with less than 3 percent in 1991. This population is increasingly urban—in 2006 approximately 53 percent of Aboriginal people in Canada lived in urban centres—and attracted to cities like Winnipeg. Already more than one in ten Winnipeggers is Aboriginal, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit residents.

Aboriginal people are shaping the identity and culture of Winnipeg, especially in its core neighbourhoods. They form a young population that will add considerably to the city's dynamism and represent Winnipeg's greatest opportunities for economic growth, if provided with tools and resources to succeed. Among the most important factors for success is access to stable and affordable quality housing.

The challenges Aboriginal people encounter in finding housing in Winnipeg include those faced by all Winnipeggers looking for quality, suitable and affordable housing. The supply of rental housing is limited, especially for hous-

ing at the affordable end of the housing market. Wait lists for social housing are long, and it is difficult to find private housing that meets the needs of low-income families. Aside from these challenges, Aboriginal people suffer discrimination, higher rates of poverty and are often in the process of healing from the trauma of colonialism and histories of violence and addiction. As a result, Aboriginal people are over-represented in Winnipeg's homeless population and many more are among the hidden homeless, in crowded, insecure and unstable housing.

For those migrating from rural communities, particularly from reserves, there is an added challenge of adapting to a new culture and way of life. For some First Nations people moving from reserve communities, Winnipeg represents a new economic system based on competition and individualism that is foreign to the economy of cooperation and collectivism found on some reserves. Despite bad housing, poverty and unemployment found on many reserves, at least band members have the security that their community will look after them. There is a constant pull and push that propels migrants between deteriorating, overcrowded housing conditions and low economic opportunities in

their home reserve communities and an often hostile environment in Winnipeg. Navigating the rules and expectations of urban off-reserve life requires programs and resources to help Aboriginal people adapt and adjust.

In this paper we examine the housing problems experienced by Aboriginal migrants upon arrival in Winnipeg, describe options and challenges for their successful settlement, and make recommendations aimed at increasing the chances of Aboriginal migrants obtaining good quality, safe and affordable housing in the city. In particular, we examine the work of an Aboriginal organization, Eagle Urban Transition Centre

(EUTC), in assisting Aboriginal migrants in dealing with their housing and related challenges in Winnipeg. This lens makes possible a detailed understanding of the many housing challenges that face Aboriginal migrants in Winnipeg.

Through the course of this study we have formed recommendations on how the transition of Aboriginal people migrating to Winnipeg could be improved. Implementing these recommendations will go a long ways towards increasing the chances of Aboriginal people successfully making a home in Winnipeg. It will also contribute to achieving an inclusive and equitable city for all its citizens.

# Methodology

We conducted interviews with two housing service workers at EUTC, and eight clients including four adults (over age 30) and four youth (ages 18 to 29). Informants were selected in collaboration with EUTC. They had various levels of connection to their home communities, with some having lived in Winnipeg for many years, while others were recent migrants to the city.

As seen in Table One above, participants range in age from 18 to 55. All but one has less than a high school education. Six of the eight were on EIA when interviewed. Three were also earning casual or part-time employment income. Although this is a small sample size, it is roughly representative and typical of the

EUTC population as a whole in terms of housing, source of income, education and Aboriginal identity. Even so, it is difficult to generalize to the entire population of EUTC community members let alone to the population of all Aboriginal migrants. Qualitative research gives us a “depth of insight” from which extrapolation, though not necessarily statistical generalization, is possible (Sensing 2011: 216).

Interviews lasted 30 minutes on average. Participants were asked about their recent housing history and current housing status, as well as their employment status and educational attainment. We also asked them about the services they were receiving through EUTC. Time

TABLE 1 Selected Demographic and Other Characteristics of EUTC Interviewees

Gender	Age	Status	Housing	Education	Income
M	55	FN	Manitoba Housing	Grade 11	EIA
F	50	FN	Staying with friend	Grade 10	EIA
F	43	FN	Staying with family	Grade 8	Disability
M	42	Métis	Staying with family	Grade 12	Casual/temporary employment and EIA
M	27	FN	SRO	Grade 9/10	Casual/temporary employment
M	25	FN	Rooming house	Grade 11	EIA
M	24	FN	Staying with friend	Grade 10	EIA
F	18	FN	Staying with family	Grade 10	Employed part-time and CFS

was left for open-ended, participant-led discussion on housing and homelessness in Winnipeg. Each participant received a \$20 honorarium for participation.

We also began analysis of a database prepared by EUTC. The Adult Housing Case Database includes 169 adult member histories, document-

ing individual pathways into housing and out of homelessness that Aboriginal migrants face in Winnipeg. This analysis is in its initial stages so that only some aggregate data and selected case studies are available here. Further analysis of this database will be the topic of a report by Evelyn Peters to be concluded later this year.

# First Nations Urbanization

Winnipeg has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, and the numbers are growing. Since 1991 the Aboriginal population has increased 122 percent, and now represents 10.3 percent of Winnipeg's population. Projections estimate that this proportion could increase to between 11.3 and 13.8 percent of the population by 2031, with a mean projection of 12.7 percent (Malenfant and Morency 2011).

Aboriginal people often face significant challenges in finding affordable, suitable and adequate housing in urban centres (Spector 1996). First Nations people are the most likely to be in core housing need (Belanger 2012; Spector 1996:48). A CMHC (1997) report showed that Aboriginal lone parents living off reserve, most of them mothered, were most likely to be in core housing need. These issues persist (Belanger 2012; Carter and Polevychok 2004). Aboriginal migrants who do find housing often pay too much of their monthly income in rent. Others become homeless. Aboriginal people are over-represented among the homeless in all of Canada's major cities (Leach 2010). Distasio and his colleagues (2004:19) reported that 70 percent of Aboriginal people said housing was the single most important service needed upon first arrival in the city, higher than

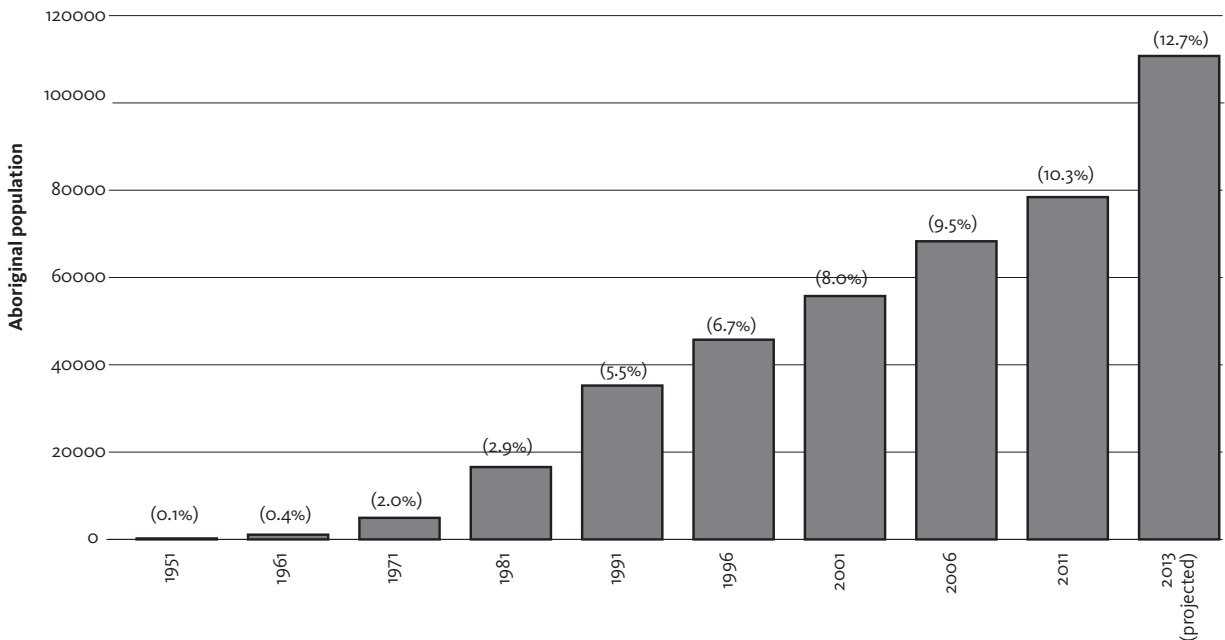
finding employment, which 20 percent of participants identified as the most important. Both Humphreys (2006:7) and Distasio and his colleagues (2004) have estimated that only half of the people migrating to cities are able to find housing.

Aboriginal Canadians face cultural barriers and racial discrimination when they migrate to Canadian cities. Racial profiling and discrimination by landlords, employers, police, and social agencies hinders the settlement of Aboriginal migrants. A large cultural gap between how things are done on reserve or in other Aboriginal communities and the way of life in major Canadian cities makes the transition even more difficult.

However, many Aboriginal Canadians experience difficulties remaining in their home reserve communities because of high rates of unemployment, lower educational opportunities, lack of healthcare services and the serious shortage of good quality housing. Despite its legal obligations, the federal government does not provide services on reserve communities comparable to what is offered to non-Aboriginal Canadians in areas like health, municipal services, or primary education (AFN 2005).

Problems related to Aboriginal migration to Winnipeg cannot be disassociated from the failure

**FIGURE 1** Aboriginal Population in Winnipeg 1951 – 2031 (Percentage of Total Population)



**SOURCE:** Statistics Canada, Census: various years; Malenfant and Morency 2011.

of the federal government to live up to its constitutional and treaty obligations to provide adequate housing on reserve. An evaluation of federal on-reserve housing supports by Aboriginal and Northern Affairs and Development (2011) found that:

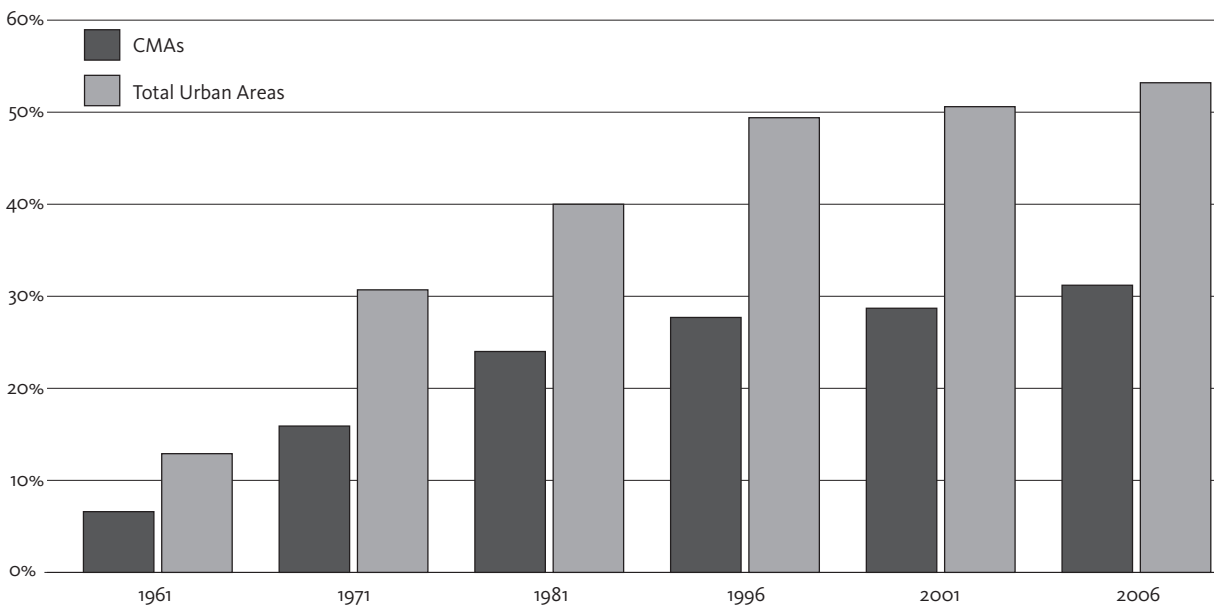
While there have been some improvements to rates of new units built, lots serviced, and units repaired, the existing housing stock on-reserve is deteriorating far more quickly than housing off reserve and rates of overcrowding, while having been reduced from nine times greater than that of other Canadians off-reserve, was still six times greater as of 2006. On-reserve housing needs remain very high and quality of housing on-reserve is far from comparable to those of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Growing on-reserve populations will require the construction of 130,000 housing units across Canada by 2031, but existing funding is insufficient even for the costs of the thousands of units that require replacement or major renovation

each year (Bach forthcoming). The consequences of underinvestment include overcrowding and poor quality housing on reserve, which are major factors driving Aboriginal people into Winnipeg and other cities.

Since the early 1950s, increasing numbers of Aboriginal people have migrated to cities in Canada (Kalbach 1987: 102). Various documents from the 1950s and 1960s suggest that observers saw substantial increases in migration of both First Nations and Métis people for the first few decades following 1951 (Peters 2002). According to the 2006 census, about 53 percent of Aboriginal people lived in cities (Statistics Canada 2008) the majority lived in large Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs). The majority of urban Aboriginal people are concentrated in a dozen CMAs, primarily in Western Canada: Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Saskatoon, Ottawa-Gatineau, Montreal, Regina, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Hamilton. These cities contain over 90 percent of Aboriginal people living in CMAs.

**FIGURE 2 Proportion of Aboriginal People Living in Urban Areas and CMAs 1961–2006**



**SOURCE:** Norris and Clatworthy, 2012.

The growth of Canada's urban Aboriginal population raises questions about the extent to which it is a function of migration. Data are not available for the entire Aboriginal population before 1986, but data for Registered Indians show that migration contributed to the growth of urban Registered Indian populations in the 1966 to 1971 period (Clatworthy and Norris 2007). However, the impact of migration on urbanization diminished after 1971, with large urban areas experiencing either small net inflows or net outflows of migrants. Migration does not appear to be a major contributor to Aboriginal urbanization after 1986 (Norris et al. 2012). In Winnipeg, net migration accounted for only 5.6 percent of the growth of the Aboriginal population between 1996 and 2001. Changes in ethnic identification and natural increase, i.e. the difference in birth rate over death rate of a population, accounted for the bulk of the increase, 47.8 percent and 46.6 percent respectively. Changes in ethnic identification were primarily the result of more people self-identifying as Métis with a resurgence in

Métis cultural awareness since the 1980s. Across Canada, the growth of urban Aboriginal populations is strongly related to changes in patterns of self-identification and natural increase (Guimond 2009; Norris et al. 2012).

That migration does not constitute an important source of growth in the urban Aboriginal population may seem surprising to a variety of service organizations that help individuals 'transition' to the city and make their way in the urban milieu. In various cities, workers in these organizations find that migrants to the city are often not prepared for urban economies and housing markets, which suggests that the city is new to them (Kern interview 2013; McCallum and Isaac 2011; Ward 2008). Distasio and his colleagues (2004) found that 87 percent of the 357 participants in their study had not previously lived in the city. Other work suggests that there is a good deal of movement back and forth between reserves and cities (Norris and Clatworthy 2003). Interviews with hidden homeless First Nations people done by Evelyn Peters and her colleagues (2009) in Prince

Albert, Saskatchewan found that participants had moved on average four times in the previous 18 months, and that about one third of these moves involved a reserve as either origin or destination.

The small contribution of migration to net Aboriginal population growth may also mask larger fluctuations in populations shifting between Winnipeg, reserve communities and other, smaller off-reserve communities. For example, a study of Aboriginal migration 1991 to 1996 found net migration to Winnipeg to be only 60 individuals in this period. However, this relatively small net shift represented 685 people arriving in Winnipeg and 625 people leaving (Hallet 2000: 22). Aboriginal mobility involves a more substantial number of individuals than the net migration numbers would indicate.

The shift back and forth between reserve communities and the city implies that housing policies need to be flexible. Individuals coming to Winnipeg for shorter periods, often for medical care many return back to their home communities after a stay of only a few months. Often this requires breaking a lease or abandoning a suite, impairing the migrant's rental record. Housing that is designed with this population in mind could help reduce the difficulties of periodic migration.

Recent research in Winnipeg suggests that the transition from reserves to cities is often accompanied by living with friends and family for periods of time in order to cope with housing costs (Distasio et al 2004). A 2000 study of 472 homeless First Nations people living in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina found that only five percent were living on the streets or in shelters; the remainder lived with friends or family (SIIT 2000). While the strategy of living with friends or family can assist new migrants, it can also place a burden on hosts' budgets and privacy. A study of hidden homeless First Nations people in Prince Albert found that they constantly monitored the mood of their host(s) and attempted to minimize their impact on the household. These strategies were stressful, and interfered with ac-

tivities individuals needed to accomplish to find housing, such as looking for work or improving education and training (Peters 2012).

Many First Nations people moving to Winnipeg have family in the city already. One of the EUTC staff explained: "People come to the city because a family member invites them: come stay with me. Often they feel like a burden when they arrive. This is the number one issue we see." This is reflected in the fact that five of our eight respondents were living with friends or family. Aboriginal people often face the unwelcome choice between inadequate and overcrowded housing on reserve, and inadequate and overcrowded housing in the city.

EUTC members are mostly First Nations, and most have ongoing relationships with their reserve communities. A typical month may see between 13 and 33 separate communities represented in the EUTC Adult Housing Case Database, mostly First Nations communities in Manitoba, but also in Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario. External events such as natural disasters can influence patterns of migration, and can affect who EUTC staff see come into the Centre.

Since 2011 the flood evacuees from Lake St. Martin have figured significantly on the EUTC rolls. Several were still on the database in 2013. For example, an adult male from Lake St Martin was first listed in the EUTC database in January 2013. He was staying in emergency accommodations in a Winnipeg hotel. Over the next 3 months he was listed as having 13 sessions for help finding housing or other services. EUTC helped him in seeking assistance with both the Manitoba Association of Native Firefighters (MANFF), the organization responsible for helping flood evacuees, and with a Winnipeg property management company. In January 2013, he was scheduled to take possession of an apartment on February 4. However, it fell through, and on February 27 he was still staying at the hotel. EUTC staff helped him with finding other housing resources including several online resources. As of March 6, he



was listed as “picking up lease from landlord to fax to MANFF.” It appears that he was successful in finding accommodation, since he afterwards dropped out of the database. Nonetheless, this case is indicative of the difficulties migrants face finding housing.

One of the participants in our study, a young man from Rolling River First Nation, came to Winnipeg after his grandmother, with whom he was staying on his reserve, died. There was a shortage of housing in his home community, where there was an expected waiting list of 10 years to obtain a house. Once reaching Winnipeg he found himself choosing between staying in overcrowded housing with family, and insecure private housing. The past 11 months he has stayed in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel, but would prefer to find a more stable housing situation.

Another informant came to Winnipeg from a reserve in Saskatchewan. She described the housing there as “horrendous”, and even lacking proper bathrooms. Her housing in Winnipeg is better, but she suffers from overcrowding because she feels a need to share her good fortune with friends and family. To manage, she tries to keep a rule: family can stay two weeks, others only one. Nonetheless, the crowding and poor quality of housing is weighing on her: “[the landlords] do not do enough upkeep. The place is slowly falling apart, especially the bathroom. There is not much maintenance and it’s mouldy. Its not healthy for my daughter’s baby.”

We are informed by EUTC staff that these stories are representative of the complex patterns that push people from their home communities and bring them to Winnipeg, without offering adequate housing solutions.

# Eagle Urban Transition Centre

EUTC is an Aboriginal Service organization that has provided assistance for Aboriginals in Winnipeg since 2005. It is one of only two Aboriginal run settlement services in Canada, the other being in Edmonton. EUTC provides housing, medical care, and employment services, providing direct assistance to 1,700 Aboriginal families each year along with providing walk in service to 8,000 individuals each year. It serves as a central hub for Aboriginal people coming to Winnipeg or living in the city, providing a wide range of services.

Much of the work EUTC does involves providing reference services. It is not a direct housing provider, but instead directs people to resources in the community, according to their needs.

The EUTC evolved out of recognition that there is a big gap in services for Aboriginal people moving from smaller, often reserve communities to a large city like Winnipeg. Institute of Urban Studies Director Jino Distasio described the problem for the Commission of Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Phoenix Sinclair:

If you live in a small community or on reserve and you've got a centralized approach to your

service supports and network, and then you're thrust into a city of 700,000 where, you know, you have to go to Broadway for one type of support, you've got to go here for another, and you've got to go across town, you've got to go onto third floor, fifth floor, and you're running around, the complexity was overwhelming for people (Hughes 2013: 2–471).

EUTC program manager, Jason Whitford, also testifying at the Phoenix Sinclair Commission, reported that transition supports similar to those offered to immigrants and new Canadians are needed for First Nations:

Immigrants are obtaining employment, they're getting educated, their children are healthy, they're well, they're, they're healthy and like if a similar kind of an investment and a similar approach was taken for First Nations people and look at the, the benefits, I think that would be, that would be tremendous (ibid).

EUTC was created by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) to serve the needs of a mobile Aboriginal population. By bringing together a number of resources under one roof, EUTC offers a one-stop service location for Aboriginal

**TABLE 2 Services and Programs Offered at Eagle Urban Training Centre**

Referrals to housing resources, emergency shelters and food banks	Access to traditional and contemporary spiritual healing
Counseling and referrals to treat addictions	Access to on-site resources; telephone, internet, resource library
Advice and referrals to Justice related matters	Referral and access to youth programs and resources
Access and referral to employment and training service organizations (resume writing, interview skills, job search techniques)	Advocacy; employment, education, justice, family, housing

migrants with a variety of needs. This approach helps mitigate some of the sense of dislocation experienced by many Aboriginal people coming to Winnipeg for the first time.

It also allows EUTC staff to work in teams to best serve their community members' needs. This structure recognizes that many of the problems faced during migration are interconnected. Individuals coming to Winnipeg for medical attention or employment may need assistance with housing as well. Some common problems, like lack of identification, will affect people's ability to access multiple resources including employment, housing, and Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). EUTC provides a wide range of services, as shown in Table Four.

Notwithstanding the good work done by EUTC staff, more services of this kind are needed. The Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry specifically singled out the need for more transition services of the type provided by EUTC (Hughes, 2013). Even so, the federal government reduced funding for EUTC in 2014, as it shifted the very limited federal housing funding towards Housing First strategies.

Among the most important services offered at EUTC is housing referral. Two housing coordinators share responsibility for the program with one staff member responsible for helping youth (ages 29 and under) and one staff responsible for adults (age 30 and over). Together they help hundreds of Aboriginal migrants each year. The Adult Housing Case Database includes 169 individuals in 2013. Of these, EUTC helped find stable housing for 63 and helped prevent loss of housing, through intervention with landlords,

The need for more services of the type provided by EUTC was articulated in the recommendations of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry:

**52. Recommendation:** That supports for families transitioning from First Nation communities to urban centres be expanded and enhanced. To this end, Manitoba should collaborate with First Nations and other levels of government

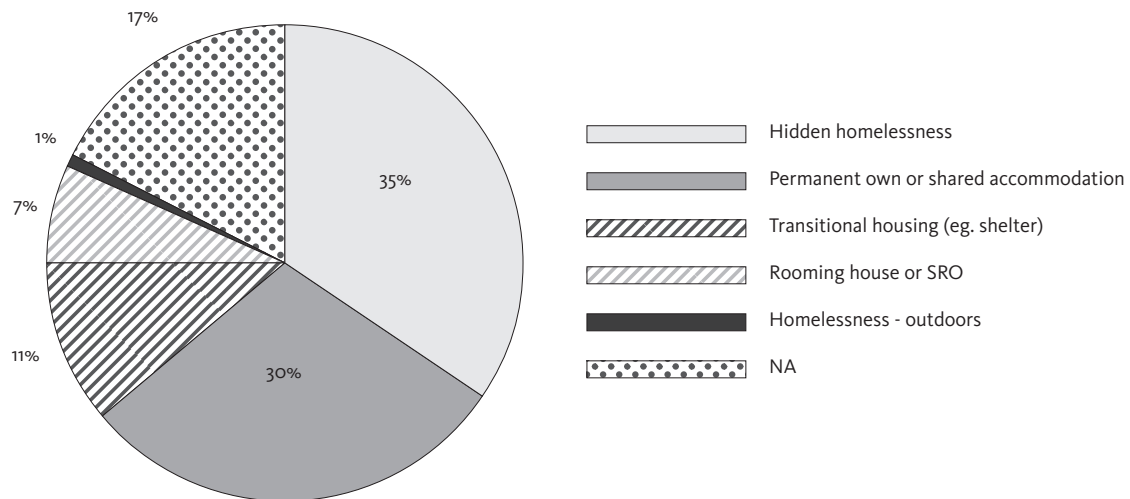
**Reason:** Many families make this move and are ill-equipped to navigate among the services they need to make a successful transition.

(Hughes 2013: 1-48)

for another 20 cases as shown in Table Five below. The youth coordinator helped another 200 cases, including 75 who are serviced through an off-site program called Eagle's Nest offered at the St John's Leisure Centre in Winnipeg's North End.

Housing staff provide training on rights and responsibilities as tenants, as well as the processes required for obtaining accommodation. EUTC does not provide housing directly, rather they provide the tools Aboriginal people need to learn to access housing. This may include providing them access to online resources including Winnipeg Rental Network or online housing boards. It also may involve providing training workshops about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. Once set up with stable housing, EUTC may provide small gift cards to local retailers to help members purchase basic cook ware, bedding or other household goods. As well, they

**FIGURE 3** Current Housing Status for EUTC Community Members



**SOURCE:** Eagle Urban Training Centre Adult Housing Case Database

sometimes provide bus tickets so that the community members can make it to appointments.

Learning that the right to housing in Winnipeg is at best limited is a difficult lesson for many arriving in Winnipeg for the first time. As one of the housing coordinators described it:

There is a disconnect between what people get on reserves communities and what they find in Winnipeg. On reserve, people take care of each other, you know everyone, and people don't let you fall through the cracks. In Winnipeg there is nothing like that, if you don't know where to go, you are on your own.

Anyone who accesses services at EUTC is considered a community member. Community members can be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, although approximately 90 percent are Aboriginal, and of these the large majority are First Nations. The EUTC is affiliated with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, which creates a bond between the organization and First Nations communities. Often bands will refer their members to EUTC when they are coming to Winnipeg. Several other agencies are listed as having referred their clients to EUTC in the Adult Housing Case Database, including John

Howard Society, Main Street Project and Taking Charge! Inc. However, the biggest source of new members is through word of mouth.

EUTC works with their members according to their individual needs and resources. Some members may be ready to seek permanent housing and are directed to both private and public housing options. They provide applications for Aboriginal housing providers such as Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council and Kineo Housing as well as Manitoba Housing, Winnipeg Housing and Sam Management, a non-profit housing management company. Private housing options may be accessed through online resources including Winnipeg Rental Network and Kijiji as well as property listings from property managers such as Winpark Dorchester. For those who may not be eligible or prepared for permanent housing, they may be directed to other housing options such as provided a list of hotels or information about accessing rooming houses. Some individual cases may be directed to temporary shelters. In at least one case listed in the database a woman was directed to a pre/post natal residence.

Of the community members using EUTC housing services, just over half—53 percent—

TABLE 3 EUTC Participant Statistics – Housing (Adult)

Number of Participants	169
Number of sessions (included phone, email and in person)	1,336
Average number of monthly cases	50.5
Average number of months individuals stay in in the database	3.5
Number of cases secured accommodation	63
Number of cases preventing housing loss	20

were in hidden homelessness, in rooming houses or SROs or living in shelters. About 30 percent were in relatively permanent rented accommodations. Many of the latter were seeking help with landlords or were seeking better accommodations. One percent were staying outdoors with no shelter.

EUTC attempts to create a welcoming space for Aboriginal people who may be uncomfortable or unadjusted to the more bureaucratic office environments of other service agencies. The goal is to provide a culturally appropriate and non-discriminatory gateway for Aboriginal people transitioning to Winnipeg. Elders on staff are available for guidance, and a meeting room with traditional medicines is available as a safe space for reflection, prayer, or one-on-one meetings.

Although located in a downtown office building, once inside, the environment is distinctly less corporate. Eagle Urban offers a comfortable space where members browse the up to date inventory of resources on housing, employment, or health. Community members' first point of contact is with the Client Intake & Resource Coordinator who will inquire about the nature of their visit and record basic demographic information. They are then connected with a worker who will guide them through the various programs on offer. Working in teams allows EUTC staff to best meet the needs of their members.

Staff usually start conversations by trying to build a relationship. They ask members about their current living conditions, if they are renting or staying with a friend or family. As well, they are asked about their current income. If

they choose to apply for EIA, staff will call the EIA intake line to book a pre-intake appointment. Notes from the session are recorded in a Client Progress Report Form. At this time, they also provide advice about what they can expect, about timelines and about how to navigate the EIA process. Staff also determine which ID documents the community member needs. Finally, once staff have established their needs budget, they are given training on how to access housing listings websites and databases. If they have other needs, the community member may be directed to another counsellor.

In the morning, computers are available for personal use, social media and communications, allowing clients to maintain contact with their home communities. In the afternoon, the computers are reserved for job and housing searches. This system allows clients the flexibility to maintain attachment to their home communities. Without regular access to internet, this can be difficult. EUTC recognizes that maintaining connections with home communities is an important part of making a successful transition to the city.

Being an Aboriginal-run service organization is also important. Having members, rather than clients or participants, helps to foster relationships and break down hierarchy. "We have a *Neechi* [Cree/Ojibwe for friend, brother, sister] sense of humour," explains one of the frontline service workers as a reason why their members prefer EUTC. EUTC plays a unique role in helping Aboriginal people successfully settle in Winnipeg. As an Aboriginal run organization, its members have a sense of ownership and belonging.

EUTC staff noted the importance of being non-bureaucratic, and not being too rigid or judgmental, but rather being friendly and approachable. At EUTC it is accepted that people who are living on the streets don't have cleaning facilities. However, members must be sober and free of alcohol when they access the centre. An attempt is made to acknowledge the right of members to belong. "People dealing with addictions are used to being turned away at a lot of places they go to. They get turned away all the

time so they think they don't belong anywhere. So we say, you can't be here *right now*, come back later when you are sober."

Nevertheless, there is a lack of resources at EUTC to deal with the scope of the issues faced by Aboriginal people migrating to Winnipeg. EUTC staff report they have access to fewer and less stable resources than settlement agencies working with immigrants and new Canadians, although the challenges Aboriginal people face coming to Winnipeg are often equally great.

# Navigating Systems

Obtaining identification and filing income taxes are key requirements for successfully integrating into urban life in Winnipeg. Government issued identification in the form of a birth certificate, passport or Status card is required to access many types of income and housing supports. Identification (ID) is required for applying for EIA, housing, criminal record checks for employment, or even for obtaining a bank account. Many EUTC members come to Winnipeg from other provinces, meaning that the time it takes to get basic ID documents is delayed. On average it can take four to eight weeks to get a birth certificate, during which time members have limited access to EIA or other programs. If they are fortunate, they may have family they can live with. Others may experience homelessness, staying in shelters or outdoors.

In recent testimony before the House of Commons Committee on Bill C-23 (the Fair Elections Act), Gladys Christiansen of Lac La Ronge First Nation in Saskatchewan highlighted the problem of lack of identification for First Nations people living on reserve:

The reality on the reserve is that many First Nations people living on reserve are

unemployed and live in crowded housing, often with three and four generations within one household. This is the way that I grew up on my First Nation. This means that only one person in that household receives a utility bill. When a person is living on \$320 a month, how can that person be expected to have credit cards, bank accounts, vehicles, mortgages, residential leases, and insurance policies? Many do not have a driver's licence and they do not have any other forms of identification" (Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, April 3, 2014).

Moreover, recent changes have made it more difficult to obtain a Certificate of Indian Status card, commonly known as a Status card, because they can no longer be issued on reserve, but must come from Ottawa. Status cards provide documentary evidence for individuals registered under the *Indian Act* as Indians, and are used to access a wide variety of federal and provincial services. However, with the changes, there can be delays of up to two years for getting the cards, according to Christiansen. For migrants coming directly from reserve, lack of ID is among the greatest barriers to accessing resources in Winnipeg.



Helping community members obtain identification occupies a major part of the workday for EUTC staff. In many cases, there are significant barriers and complications created by lack of jurisdictional harmonization. For individuals migrating from within in Manitoba, obtaining identification can be relatively straightforward. Interprovincial migration can pose difficult hurdles. Some provinces such as Alberta have more rigorous application procedures which require applicants to find a designated agent to appear in person with proper ID. By contrast, applicants from British Columbia can apply online by providing name, place and date of birth and parents' basic information. Jurisdictions with more stringent application rules can lead to longer delays for applications.

Another barrier for obtaining ID in Manitoba is a recent change requiring proof of citizenship to obtain a Manitoba Health Card. In one case, a community member from Ontario came to EUTC to seek help to get a Health Card. His only ID was an Indian Status Card and an Ontario Health Card, both of which had his picture, but this was deemed insufficient for proving his citizenship. He was told that he required a Birth Certificate to prove Canadian citizenship.

A related barrier can be that the application for one document is often contingent on having other documents. For individuals experiencing homelessness or coming from reserve communities, they must build a whole identification history before they can obtain housing. Before getting a Manitoba Public Insurance Identity card or drivers license, applicants must first obtain a birth certificate and Social Insurance Number. As well, previous fines may need to be paid off before some ID is obtained.

Another problem many Aboriginal migrants face is lost or stolen ID. People who are homeless or lack secure accommodations are unlikely to have access to a safe place to store permanent documents, increasing the risk of their being misplaced, lost or stolen. EIA may pay for replacement documents but this is at the discretion of the case worker, and

often documents will be replaced only once. For some community members, EUTC will hold on to ID until they are able to get stable housing.

Difficulties in accessing identification are also symptomatic of the differences in life on reserve communities and life in Winnipeg. Life in smaller communities and especially on-reserve is based on informal community-based relations. Close-knit family personal ties mean that proving one's identity seldom requires documentation. Navigating systems is difficult, as it requires constant "jumping through hoops." Front line EUTC workers provide help, but also guidance for understanding the expectations required for accessing services and resources.

To enroll for EIA or other housing benefit programs, taxes also need to be up to date. Many low-income people, especially those coming from reserve communities, have not filed taxes in several years, if ever. There are programs available to help people file up to the last three back years of taxes, but for longer periods, there is only help available around the tax filing season in the spring. According to EUTC staff, this service is needed year round to help get people the documents and records they need for housing.

In one case, an adult male community member from a remote Northern Manitoba community came to EUTC in March 2013. He had lost his ID and needed help in completing his taxes. He was staying with a friend. EUTC helped him obtain T4 forms from two previous employers as well as from his community. Two months later he was still in hidden homelessness, but was receiving EI and had applied for Manitoba ID. By July he had found employment, and on August 1 he took possession of his own apartment. Over the course of 6 months his case required more than 20 sessions at EUTC. While this is ultimately a success story, this case exemplifies the complex and interrelated needs and barriers faced by Aboriginal migrants coming to Winnipeg.

One of the main tasks at EUTC is helping members navigate through EIA and other gov-



ernmental and institutional systems. Too often the rules are unclear, e.g. what benefits recipients are entitled to. Some options like rent share (two roommates, both on EIA) are allowed but many people needing housing do not know that they are. Even for people trained in understanding the bureaucracy, EIA rules are complex. Frontline staff may not themselves know all the programs that are available. For EIA clients the regulations are challenging. EUTC plays a role in helping their community members understand the process and in advocating on their behalf.

A female community member came to EUTC after being cut off EIA. She lost her home, which in turn affected her ability to get sponsorship for school. She appealed EIA's decision and was denied. EUTC connected her with Legal Aid Manitoba's Law Advocates and ultimately, she won her case. Her EIA benefits were reinstated including back pay. A year later, she has moved into an apartment and is now back in school full time. The success stories of EUTC are rewarding, but demonstrate the struggle many Aboriginal migrants face in Winnipeg.

# Challenges First Nations Migrants Face in Finding Housing in Urban Areas

There are a number of challenges facing First Nations migrants when they look for housing in the city. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1993: 3) noted the “overwhelming problems that are rooted in cultural dislocation and powerlessness, discrimination and economic hardship” that face many urban Aboriginal people. The following sections briefly describe the ongoing legacy of colonialism, poverty, discrimination, the shortage of affordable housing, and lack of skills and experiences.

## 1. Legacy of Colonialism

It is now well established in the literature and in the Aboriginal community that Aboriginal people continue to suffer from the effects of colonialism. Residential schools, the educational, police and legal systems, and child and family services have shaped the lives of many urban Aboriginal people, leading to loss of family and community, and loss of identity and self-esteem (Deane et al. 2007: 136; Silver 2006: 10). Many urban Aboriginal people are stigmatized and stereotyped, and struggle to hold positive views about themselves and their communities. Aboriginal people have been subjected to a succession of forms of institu-

tionalization, from residential schools to the 60s scoop, to youth detention centres and child and family services group homes and foster homes, to provincial and federal penal institutions (Cormack et al. 2013). Stewart and Ramage (2011) found that, after their arrest and either trial or imprisonment, individuals either do not have the funds to return to their community, or they choose to stay and live on the street. There is evidence that the relationship between homelessness and prison is often a vicious cycle: a large proportion (one estimate is 22 percent) of those imprisoned were homeless when arrested; in turn, a large proportion of those released from prison (one estimate is 32 percent) soon become homeless because of the lack of supports for them upon release (Gaetz 2012: 10). A study by the John Howard Society of Toronto and the University of Toronto (quoted in Stapleton et al. 2011: 6) referred to men “caught in a revolving door between jails and shelters” and found that 85 percent of those in the study who were among the incarcerated homeless “anticipated being homeless again upon discharge.” As housing first studies have repeatedly found, this is expensive.

These problems are reflected in the lives of the Aboriginal migrants at EUTC. Many had ex-

perienced residential schools, or had involvement in the criminal justice system or with child and family services. One young woman was in the process of transitioning out of foster care. She had been in group homes for several years. She had recently turned 18 and was eligible for foster care until she is 21. However, the system supports for her have significant gaps which leave her at risk of homelessness. She had recently escaped from an abusive relationship that negatively affected her housing rental history. EUTC was helping her to get her public trustee to supply a damage deposit to be able to rent a new apartment. At the time of the interview, she was staying on the couch of a cousin's girlfriend.

Another EUTC community member is herself a survivor of two generations of involvement with Child and Family Services (CFS). Both she and her mother had been taken away from their homes. Sadly, as a mother, her own children – a third generation – are now involved with CFS. One of the EUTC staff explained: “For some of our community members, they are not always going to get their housing and everything straightened out at once. Just being able to regain access to see their children is often a significant step.”

One of our youth informants, age 27, had already served two terms in jail. Coming out of jail makes it difficult to access housing, since he lacked references. As a result, he could only find housing in rooming houses or SRO hotels. These unstable accommodations were part of the reason he had moved three times in the past two years. Institutional involvement can heighten cycles of poverty, and sets individuals up to fail unless they are given extra resources to succeed.

EUTC provides resources, not only to connect their community members to housing, but also to do so in a respectful, culturally appropriate way that incorporates both traditional and contemporary healing. Providing access to elders and space for smudging can be an important part of the healing journey that allows migrants to find housing. Staff liken the process to

“peeling an onion.” Problems accessing housing are related to problems finding income which in turn are connected to historical legacies of colonialism. Peeling back each layer of the onion reveals layers of barriers, and more deep-seated problems, which cannot be quickly solved. The holistic method provided by EUTC offers a way to arrive at a more long-term solution, but this requires long-term and stable program investment. Too often, results-based funding assessment ignores the complexity of these problems.

## 2. Poverty

The poverty of the Aboriginal population is a persistent theme in work on Aboriginal urbanization. Peters (forthcoming) describes some aspect of their economic marginalization. The unemployment rate among urban Aboriginal people is close to double that of the non-Aboriginal population in most Canadian cities (National Household Survey 2011). Aboriginal people are under-represented in managerial, supervisory, and professional occupations. On average, more than twice as many Aboriginal as non-Aboriginal individuals have incomes below the poverty line. The proportion of lone-parent households is much higher among urban Aboriginal people than among non-Aboriginal people. Respondents identifying as Aboriginal in the 2011 National Housing Survey had incomes averaging 20,701 in 2010, compared with \$30,955 for non-Aboriginal respondents.

Despite reductions in the poverty rate in recent years, for Aboriginal Manitobans the rate is still nearly double that of the general population as of 2009 – 17.2 percent compare to 9.7 percent (Manitoba 2012). Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2008) found a gap between the earnings of Aboriginal Canadians and Canadians of British origin in Winnipeg of 26 percent for women and 32 percent for men. Unemployment rates are also higher for Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal workers. In

Manitoba within the core age population (ages 25–54) the unemployment rate was 9.3 percent for Aboriginal versus 3.8 percent for Non-Aboriginal workers (Usalcas: 2012).<sup>1</sup>

Distasio and his colleagues (2004) found that 75 percent of Aboriginal individuals who had migrated to the city a year or less ago had either no income, or an income of less than \$10,000, 15 months later. As a result, urban Aboriginal people are more likely to experience difficulty in finding quality housing, which means that they are more likely to have to depend on kin, friends, or services to find housing, and are more vulnerable to becoming homeless (National Homelessness Initiative 2005).

Three of the eight informants we interviewed worked at least part-time, however, they were reliant on unsteady employment and wages were low. They worked odd jobs or had periodic rather than formal employment. EUTC provides several job search programs. For the majority of EUTC members, a significant portion of their funds comes either from government sources such as EIA, or from funds from their bands dedicated to helping them settle in Winnipeg.

Low income puts many Aboriginal migrants in the situation of having very limited choices for housing options, none of which are adequate. One informant described the process:

When you don't have much money it's rough trying to find a place. There's a lot of running around. Places are too small or you find places with a lot of security concerns. The heat's not working in the hallways, there's butts and garbage - that sort of thing. There is not much available for \$285, so you just have to look harder.

In recent years, Manitoba has pioneered innovative training programs for inner city and Aboriginal workers facing barriers to employ-

ment. Social enterprises such as Building Urban Industries for Local Development (BUILD) and companies like Inner City Renovations help provide many Aboriginal people with a pathway into employment. Programs that have put people to work doing renovations in Manitoba Housing units have been similarly successful, and are a good example of putting the principles of community economic development into practice. Recent changes to the federal labour market and training funding has put these programs at risk (MacKinnon 2013). Efforts by the Province to ensure that funding for inner city and Aboriginal training programs is maintained produce important benefits. The same can be said for provincial investments in innovative Aboriginal adult education programs, which have a solid record of success (Silver 2013).

### 3. Discrimination

The *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study* (2011: 73), which conducted research in eleven cities (Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Ottawa [Inuit people only], Montreal and Halifax) found that 71 percent of Aboriginal respondents from all the cities believed that non-Aboriginal people have a generally negative impression of Aboriginal people. Statistics Canada's large national survey of over 27,000 individuals found that a larger percentage of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal respondents reported facing some type of discrimination in the past five years (Statistics Canada 2009). Several studies of urban Aboriginal people in Ontario documented their feeling that they were discriminated against in a wide variety of situations (Ontario Association of Indian Friendship Centres et al 2007; McCaskill et al. 2012; 2011). A commonly reported experience was that individuals would go to view an

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 2010 Labour Force Survey data. Manitoba had the highest employment rate and lowest unemployment rates among all provinces for Aboriginal workers.

apartment, and once the landlord realized they were Aboriginal, they were told it had already been rented. Numerous other studies document discrimination in housing for urban Aboriginal people (see, for example, Chu 1991; McCaskill 1995; Cohen 2004) and Aboriginal homelessness in Canadian cities (see, for example, Beavis 1997; Raine 2007; Ward 2008).

Discrimination is part of the experience of EUTC members. According to one: “I tried to get a place in the suburbs. I thought I had an appointment and there was a vacancy sign, but when I showed up they told me it was rented.” According to EUTC housing staff, Aboriginal people suffer discrimination from prospective landlords even in cases where they have a reliable source of income such as sponsorship from their home reserve community.

Both EUTC staff we interviewed noted that such discrimination is a frequent problem for their community members. “Discrimination often begins when the landlord hears your accent, or they see your face, and they know you are Aboriginal. ... There are some slum landlords who take advantage of tenants.” In some cases, landlords have demanded sexual favours of prospective tenants. Aboriginal migrants face stereotypes suggesting that they will party, that they are likely to move often or that they are otherwise undesirable tenants.

There are also reported cases of landlords seeking to defraud tenants who are new to the city, taking advantage of their lack of knowledge of their rights as tenants. In one case, a landlord met an EUTC member at the airport to convince her to sign a lease before having seen the apartment. The suite had bed bugs, mould and other structural problems. EUTC intervened to make the landlord fix the problems.

Discrimination in Winnipeg’s housing market has a long history. Research in the early 1970s found Aboriginal people plagued by slum landlords “who extort exorbitant rents for premises which are unfit for human habitation” (Abell,

quoted in Silver forthcoming). It appears little has changed.

For example, one EUTC community member said: “My last place I lived in, it was already trashed when I moved in. The sink in the washroom was broken; the floors were wrecked. Then, when I moved out, the landlord blamed me and didn’t return my deposit.” This person didn’t know their right to ask for a walk-through before occupancy.

This persistent discrimination notwithstanding, both EUTC staff and the participants we interviewed told us that the bigger challenge facing Aboriginal migrants is poverty and economic discrimination. EIA was seen as a bigger barrier than Aboriginal status, as landlords are seen as not wanting to rent to individuals on social assistance. Given that in Winnipeg there is so much overlap between poverty and the Aboriginal community, it is difficult to isolate what is specifically racial discrimination, and what is economic discrimination.

#### 4. Housing is Unaffordable

The primary determinant of core housing need in Canada is lack of income. Affordability was a factor in over 90 percent of households in core housing need in 2009 (CMHC 2012). Urban households with income in the lowest quintile, below \$27,022 in 2005, had a 54 percent chance of being in core housing need (CMHC 2009b). This problem is especially acute for Aboriginal Manitobans. As noted above, poverty is much more intense for Aboriginal Manitobans.

The majority of the participants we interviewed were on EIA, as are most EUTC community members more broadly. Shelter Benefit rates have a major impact on their ability to access housing:

Employment Income Assistance (EIA) rental rates is the biggest barrier our community members continuously face and with the vacancy rates so low makes finding and securing

TABLE 4 Shelter Benefits for Selected Household Types, 2014

Sample Household Types	Monthly Shelter Benefit 2013 plus Rent Aid	Monthly Shelter Benefit July 2014	75% of Current Median Market Rent
Single Parent With Two Children (ages 4 and 6)	\$430	\$480	\$701–\$825
Two Adults With Two Children (ages 10 and 13)	\$471	\$521	\$701–\$825
Single Adult (General Assistance / Person With a Disability)	\$365	\$435	\$420–\$563

**SOURCE:** (Manitoba 2014: E10)

a place more difficult. Currently the majority of our community members are still staying with friends and family as result of the EIA rates and low vacancy. (EUTC 2014: 8)

In 2014, the Provincial Government committed to raising EIA Shelter Benefits to 75 percent of median market rent with the introduction of a new program called Rent Assist. The commitment will be phased in over four years. It is in response to a longstanding demand from anti-poverty advocates.

Despite the fact that the Province has recently raised EIA shelter benefits, the amount of rent they can afford remains considerably lower than median market rents for some household types. (Table 6). At the time of our research, the 2014 increases had not yet taken effect. For an individual on EIA, the basic rent allowance was \$285 per month, with an \$80 top up through the Rent-Aid program. Finding private accommodation at these rates was next to impossible. Increases announced in the Manitoba Budget 2014 will go a considerable way to alleviating the deepest poverty, but do not represent a complete solution.

For households not on EIA, average rent increases have exceeded both the general rate of inflation in recent years. From 2002 to 2013, the overall Consumer Price Index for Winnipeg increased 23 percent while the cost of a one bed-

room 48 percent and a two bedroom increased 51 percent.

Access to subsidized housing greatly reduces core housing need. Winnipeg households with income less than \$30,000 per year are more than twice as likely to spend 50% or more of their income on rent if they live in private rental than in subsidized housing (Statistics Canada 2011b). However, access to subsidized housing is limited by tight housing markets, high vacancy rates and high rents in the private market. Using Manitoba housing data from between 1999 and 2009, the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy found 40 percent of the approximately 8,000 annual applicants to Manitoba Housing were accepted each year (Finlayson et al. 2013). As of 2014, Manitoba Housing's eligibility list for its directly managed portfolio was 3186 households across the province, with 2,855 on the list in Winnipeg (Manitoba Housing, personal communication).<sup>2</sup> Housing administered by Native housing organizations is in especially short supply (MUNHA 2008), a problem that is likely to be exacerbated as federal operating agreements expire (Cooper forthcoming).

In Winnipeg, affordable quality housing is in short supply. The number of primary rental units, i.e. privately initiated rental units in structures containing 3 or more units, in Winnipeg dropped from 8.5 units 6.6 units per hundred people from

<sup>2</sup> Both the Manitoba Housing data and the MCHP data should be used with caution since they reflect some households already in Manitoba Housing wishing to move and also some households who have applied multiple times, so that applications overlap and do not represent unique households.



1992 to 2013 (Brandon 2014). The shortage of affordable housing is reflected in consistently low vacancy rates, which have been below 3 percent since 1999, and frequently below 2 percent. However, there has been some improvement in vacancy rates in the past few years. The vacancy rate for all private primary apartments in structures with three units or more was 2.5 percent in October 2013. Even so, apartments renting at mid range of affordability (between \$500 and \$799 per month) continue to be in short supply, with the overall rate skewed by a high vacancy rate (5.9%) for apartments renting at or above \$1095 (CMHC 2013a).

The supply of rental housing has declined over the past twenty years even while total population has increased. As a result, market rents have increased faster than inflation, making housing unaffordable for large segments of the Winnipeg population, with 24 percent of renters experiencing core housing need, i.e. paying more than 30 percent of income in rent, living in overcrowded conditions or in units in need of major repairs, and not being able to afford better housing (CMHC 2009).<sup>3</sup>

For families living in poverty, the ability to access housing is even more dire. After the federal withdrawal from housing in the early 1990s, there was little social housing constructed across Canada. CMHC (2013) reports only 603 federally supported units across Canada built in 2012, down from 16,000–20,000 constructed each year during the 1980's.

A moderate positive change in direction occurred in 2002 with the introduction of the Affordable Housing Agreement (AHA). The AHA provided over \$5 million in federal funds annually to fund social and affordable housing in Manitoba. In 2011, this was increased to \$10.35 million annually, through the Investment on Affordable Housing (IAH). As IAH investments

are completed, it is expected that the number of new federally supported housing units will begin to increase. At the same time however, the end of federal operating agreements between CMHC and MHRC will decrease the number of existing units receiving federal support. Between 2012 and 2013 federal contributions to Manitoba Housing decreased from \$86 million to \$63 million and are scheduled to phase out completely by 2031 (Manitoba Housing and Community Development 2013).

In 2009, the provincial government committed to creating 1,500 social housing spaces and 1,500 affordable housing units over 5 years. A further 500 each are planned by 2017. This is an important investment in social and affordable housing in Manitoba. The demand for social and affordable housing, however, continues, as evidenced by the experiences of EUTC participants and the low vacancy rate. This is a problem that, despite the Province's best efforts, cannot be solved without an increased level of federal involvement in social housing. The result is that for many Aboriginal migrants, the housing system in Winnipeg does not provide suitable accommodation at an affordable rent.

## 5. Unsuitable Housing Options

Closely connected with the lack of affordable housing is a lack of housing options. When housing does become available, it is often of poor quality or unsuitable to the housing needs of migrants. Based on interviews with the housing coordinators, only a small minority of EUTC community members are able to access public housing, partly because of lack of identification or housing references, and partly due to the shortage of supply. Given the limited funds and other barriers faced by Aboriginal migrants to both primary private market and public housing options, the

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<sup>3</sup> This is based on 2006 Long Form Census data. CMHC expects to publish updated data later in 2014.

only affordable options are rooming houses and SROs. Both are characterized by substandard housing that is frequently unsafe or in disrepair. One resident of a Main Street SRO had recently switched hotels because of housing conditions: “My old place had no locks on the door. There used to be bed bugs. It makes it hard to sleep at night so I had to get out of there.”

When EIA recipients cannot access public or subsidized housing, they have no choice but to apply for apartments that are above EIA shelter rate guidelines, often taking money out of food budgets to pay the rent. However, above guideline applications require special approval from the recipient’s case worker and can provide a hitch in the lease application process: by the time the case worker approves the apartment, the landlord may have rented it to someone else. One of our informants had found an apartment and at the time of our interview was planning to see his case worker that afternoon to get special approval. As we learned in a follow-up interview, the worker was not available that day, and by the time an appointment could be scheduled, the suite was rented.

Rooming houses are another option, but they too are problematic in many ways (Lottis and McCracken 2014). An announcement by the Province in May 2014 that a committee including representatives of both the provincial and municipal governments, landlords and community-based organizations may hold out some promise for much-needed improvements in this form of housing. In any case, a rooming house strategy could at least limit the loss of single adult housing in inner city areas.

The best route out of housing poverty for low-income families is in public housing, with rent-geared-to-income. Social and public housing provides stable housing with rents set at an affordable level of between 25 and 27 percent of before tax income. For households on EIA, rent is set at the level of the shelter benefit, so that they do not need to spend their food and cloth-

ing budgets on rent as many households living in private market housing do. Public and non-profit housing can also be more stable, since it is not subject to market pressures to increase rent. Moreover, public housing provides a sense of community for many residents:

“Living in Manitoba Housing has given me purpose because I have somewhere that is home, somewhere I can count on. I see a lot of people struggling with their rent and I feel lucky to have somewhere,” explained one EUTC community member. Sarah Cooper (2013) found that investments and renovations at two Winnipeg public housing projects, Lord Selkirk Park and Gilbert Park, have revitalized these communities increasing the safety and well-being of tenants.

Even so, one informant in public housing continued to face housing problems. He described his building as lacking proper maintenance and upkeep, especially in the hallways where broken lights and garbage were common. Another concern was that it was difficult to move to a different building. Struggling with addictions problems, he was concerned that there were drugs in the building. He felt that escape to a different building or neighbourhood would help his recovery process, but no opportunities in public housing were available. Our sample size did not enable us to determine if this was a widespread problem. In fact, research by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy found “the vast majority of people who live in social housing never make a subsequent application,” (Finlayson et al 2013: 20) which may indicate that most residents are happy with their current housing.

Those who succeed in securing a home in the city often feel an obligation to share their good fortune with friends and family. Most of the members of EUTC have spent at least some of the time during the period under study staying with friends or family. This can lead to overcrowding, with a range of associated problems.

National Occupancy Standards (NOS), which limit the number of persons per apartment ac-



cording to the number of bedrooms as well as the age and gender of children to avoid overcrowding. However these are a mixed blessing for many families. Some would like to welcome family members from their home communities, and may be accustomed to sharing space; for others, the regulations may provide a legitimate reason for denying space to a family member they may not have space for.

Manitoba Housing applies the NOS standards, which determine the number of residents permitted in each unit. However, the stringency of application of these rules varies among different buildings. Some managers are more lax than others. For migrants staying with friends or family in Manitoba Housing these disparities can have important consequences. Some will skirt regulations by staying away from their host's apartments during daytime business hours to avoid detection. They are likely to spend their time on the streets for this part of the day.

One housing coordinator noted NOS rules are a "big challenge if a family is in Manitoba Housing. Clients have to wander during the day, since Manitoba Housing doesn't allow guests. Many do a round of the city. Some come to EUTC to hang out during the day, waiting for the housing managers to go home for the day after supper. It's important to have a good relationship with the caretaker, that can help sometimes."

For migrants, the lack of an address creates difficulties in applying for EIA. Applicants staying with family may be told they cannot use their Manitoba Housing address for the application since it could jeopardize their host family's tenancy. Applicants sometimes need to invent a second address to begin receiving benefits.

One option used in Aboriginal Housing Co-operatives in Ontario is to apply a 30 day rule, in which tenants are given an exemption to the NOS standard for up to 30 days to accommodate friends or family. This rule is in keeping with Aboriginal cultural norms of sharing living space, but does not lead to permanent overcrowding

(Craig and Hamilton forthcoming). A similar rule might be considered for Manitoba Housing.

Research on public housing in Nunavut found that making housing options more flexible can reduce housing deterioration and lead to substantial economic savings for housing authorities by increasing resident satisfaction, and sense of ownership and by reducing turnover (Friedman and Debika 2011). Flexible public housing can also increase the ability of housing to adapt to changing family structures, lifestyles and needs. By evolving along with the needs of its occupants, the housing will last longer and will have a lower environmental impact throughout its lifecycle.

To achieve flexibility, Friedman and Debika recommend consideration of the full lifecycle of a unit including pre-occupancy, occupancy and post-occupancy. Consultations about design can help ensure that units built are adapted to community needs. The highly compartmentalized configuration of Euro-Canadian households does not always meet the needs of Aboriginal households. Open concept floor plans, multi-purpose rooms, and standardization of building measurements and materials are examples of ways building design can increase adaptability of spaces for changing family needs as well as adapting the unit to new families when the unit changes hands.

## 6. Lack of Skills and Experience in Urban Living

Service providers have found that migrants from reserves are often not prepared for many aspects of city housing markets. McCallum and Isaac (2011) found that individuals migrating to Toronto from reserves did not have necessary life skills, like navigating the rental market, filling out and submitting rental applications, and securing a lease. According to EUTC service providers, this is very much the case in Winnipeg. Individuals may not have the identification required to apply for subsidized housing.

Application forms require a current and up-to-date income tax form as verification of income in order to receive rent subsidy, but because reserve residents do not pay income tax, many do not have this information. Individuals also need a credit check, and many do not know how to obtain this. Many have no experience paying rent, and are unprepared for budgeting for utilities, phone bills, heat, internet and television, since these are often supplied in band council housing.

In their study of northern communities, Stewart and Ramage (2011) found that Aboriginal migrants did not have strong tenant histories and as a result, had difficulty providing references. Individuals and families may leave the reserve suddenly, and as a result they have not been able to make arrangements about where to stay before coming to the city (Snyder 2012:13). Distasio and his colleagues (2004) study of 357 Aboriginal migrants to the city found that many did not know where to access services when they arrived in the city. EUTC was formed subsequent to this study, but even recently Snyder (2012:14,

26) found that migrants often do not know where to go for services in the city.

EUTC staff see themselves as providing a compass for helping the migration process.

For people coming from reserves and Aboriginal communities, they need help to navigate moving to the city. On reserve, the community acts as a safety net. When people need help finding housing, the band is there to provide it for them. In the city, there is no safety net and no one to provide assistance. When you come to Winnipeg, you are just a regular Joe walking the streets.

EUTC provides skill building workshops with topics relevant to housing, personal wellness and economic independence. These include tenancy rights, budgeting and credit, home ownership, nutrition and health, personal safety, cultural teachings, parenting, and addictions. It is often a challenge getting community members to attend these workshops, as day to day living concerns often overwhelm longer term planning for people facing the severity of Winnipeg's low-income rental market.

# The Importance of Aboriginal Culture and Service Provision

Studies confirm that the involvement of Aboriginal people in delivering services is important for the urban Aboriginal people who access these services. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples suggested that the development of urban Aboriginal organizations created meaningful levels of control over some of the issues that affect urban Aboriginal residents' everyday lives (RCAP 1996: 584). Aboriginal-controlled social services generally have greater scope in delivering programs that incorporate Aboriginal principles, beliefs, and traditions, they create important employment opportunities for urban Aboriginal residents, and they result in significant economic benefits for Aboriginal communities (Hylton 1999: 85–6).

Housing provided by urban Aboriginal organizations has a positive outcome for urban Aboriginal migrants (Walker 2008; 2006). Aboriginal households may have specific cultural values that affect the composition of the household (Ark Research Associates 1996; Peters 1984), and this is best understood when the individuals administering housing have similar backgrounds. Aboriginal housing corporations provide employment and skills-building opportunities for urban Aboriginal residents. Management styles in corporations

controlled and staffed by Aboriginal people have a positive impact on housing outcomes (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1999; Fulham 1981; Lipman 1986). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) viewed culturally appropriate housing as important for the social, cultural, and economic strength of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas (RCAP 1996).

Aboriginal-controlled services to homeless Aboriginal people are also important. In their BC study McCallum and Isaac (2011:21) reported that

Aboriginal peoples who are homeless are not accessing services at the same rates as their non-Aboriginal counterparts...This finding suggest that Aboriginal peoples who are homeless either avoid shelters, that shelters do not service this population as well, or that they are under-reported in the sheltered homeless data provided by the shelters.

Some of the Aboriginal service providers they interviewed indicated that many Aboriginal people felt uncomfortable in existing shelters, especially those operated by faith-based agencies (see also Memmott and Chambers 2007, Snyder 2012:14, 26). One of Ward's (2008:7) respondents indicated that "You need Aboriginal agencies for

Aboriginal people. In the non-Aboriginal agencies, it's difficult, if not impossible for them to provide services that have real meaning to Aboriginals." Webster (2007:33) indicated that shelters run by Aboriginal people differ significantly from mainstream shelters and these differences make Aboriginal shelters more effective for Aboriginal clients. Thurston et al's (2011) study

of organizations that offered services and programs to homeless people in the western provinces recommended that cultural safety should be a foundation for providing services to Aboriginal people, that Aboriginal governance be supported, and that cultural reconnection was important in addressing the needs of Aboriginal people who were homeless.

# Aboriginal Youth

The problems of Aboriginal youth differ significantly from adults transitioning to Winnipeg. Young people are less likely to have experience living in Winnipeg or other major cities. They are likely to have less experience finding housing or living on their own. Lack of skills in finding housing and dealing with landlords puts them at a disadvantage in finding and keeping housing or in negotiating equitable housing terms.

The housing crisis in Winnipeg therefore disproportionately affects youth. Youth are over represented amongst those living in poverty. The median income of youth aged 15–24 living outside of Census families in 2010 was \$15,869, with 20 percent this group having incomes below \$5,000 (Statistics Canada 2013c). Approximately 50 percent of the population living in Manitoba Housing is under the age of 20, compared to 24 percent of the general population (Finlayson et al 2013: 27).

Many of the youth being served through EUTC have histories in the foster care system in Manitoba or elsewhere. As youth age out the foster care system they lose institutional supports, and often lack the ongoing family supports from which other youth may benefit. Youth aging out of care are especially vulnerable and at risk of

homelessness. EUTC staff have referred to the large population of youth who are expected to age out of care in the coming years as a demographic “tsunami” which will likely put pressures on their ability to meet their members’ needs.

Among the biggest differences between the youth Aboriginal migrant population and the adult population is their likelihood to stay with friends or family, a practice sometimes called “couch surfing”. This should more appropriately be called overcrowding, and is a form of hidden homelessness, although many Aboriginal youth do not identify as homeless even when experiencing critical housing need. This lack of self-identification may be a barrier for meeting the needs of Aboriginal youth.

Nonetheless, the prevalence of couch surfing and overcrowding places a burden on both Aboriginal youth migrants and on their host households. Aboriginal households are more likely to experience overcrowding than the general population. Across Manitoba, 28.6 percent of people with Aboriginal identity were living in housing classified by Statistics Canada as unsuitable based on the number of occupants in 2011, compared to 10.3 percent of non-Aboriginal Manitobans (Statistics Canada 2011c). For Aboriginal youth

aged 15 to 24, this proportion jumps to 36.5 percent living in overcrowded conditions.

Overcrowding, particularly in poor quality housing without sufficient access to health facilities such as hot water, showers and clothes washing facilities, can lead to serious health risks including the spread of infectious disease, asthma and mental health risks including depression, anxiety and disrupted sleep patterns (Bailey and Wayte 2006). In a survey of 505 overcrowded households in England, 71 percent “strongly agreed that overcrowding harmed the health of family members” (Shelter 2005: 8).

Overcrowding for youth can also pose barriers to accessing employment and other ser-

vices. Living in overcrowded conditions may mean a lack of space for completing studies, conducting job searches as well as accessing proper rest. As a result, overcrowding is a key determinant of health, affecting social integration and life quality.

Young Aboriginal migrants may also lack control over their living situation, reflecting a lack of social power. One explained: “I find it hard living here. When things get going, they never work out. When I get somewhere nice, I lose it right away.” The sense of things being outside his control is further evidence of the value of Eagle Urban Transition Centre.

## EUTC and Housing First Strategies

An extensive body of research shows that providing people with shelter is a prerequisite for coping with and working towards solving many of the interconnected problems with homelessness including addictions and mental illness (Goering et al. 2014; Tsemberis 2010). The Housing First approach is based on the idea that if people are given housing with supports and without preconditions, they will be better able to access the resources they need to deal with their other problems.

This approach is in contrast to Treatment First homeless strategies that require participants to have dealt with their addictions or mental health prior to being given access to a permanent home. Housing First bypasses transitional housing and shelters to provide people a permanent home in which they can recover. Housing is essential for healing from the complex problems of trauma and addiction.

At Home/Chez Soi, a four-year, large scale, longitudinal study of people who were homeless in five cities tested the efficacy of the Housing First approach for different populations – the Winnipeg study site focused on Aboriginal homelessness (Goering et al 2014). The research found that those who were given access to shel-

ter had higher survival rates and better social and health outcomes than those who only had access to traditional supports and treatments. Aside from better outcomes for the participants, the Housing First model was shown to be cost effective, saving between \$3.42 and \$9.60 for every \$10 invested in the program.

The Winnipeg portion of the study used a delivery model that partnered with community and Aboriginal organizations Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Mount Carmel Clinic, and the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg. The team made several other adjustments to the program to make it more effective with the Aboriginal population it served. It used a holistic “medicine wheel” approach to service delivery, staff were given cultural training and lived experience was considered within hiring criteria, and Elders and traditional teachers were available for ceremonies, sharing circles and individual counseling (Bruce 2013). Similar savings rates were found in the Winnipeg portion of the study conducted by Distasio and his colleagues (2014) with savings between \$3.65 and \$9.35 for every \$10 dollars invested. More importantly, significant gains in housing, use of social services, and social and health outcomes were achieved

in the Housing First population compared with the “Treatment As Usual” control group.

As a result of these conclusive results, the federal government has made Housing First a priority in its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), a five-year \$600 million fund to address homelessness included in the 2013 Economic Action Plan. At least 65 percent of the funding through HPS was designated for Housing First Projects. To maintain alignment with the HPS, EUTC began piloting a Housing First modelled project in 2013.

The program brings together a team of staff to work with clients on an ongoing basis. Mental health, addictions services, housing and employment counselling are integrated to provide intensive support. Monthly home visits and ongoing programming resources are provided. The purpose is to provide an integrated level of supports centred around housing. Monitoring the roll out of this program will be an important topic for future research.

One problem with applying Housing First strategies to Aboriginal populations is that much of the initial research was geared to housing per-

sons with mental health needs. Adapting this research to an Aboriginal context may require re-framing some of the terms of discourse. For example, Ralph Bodor et al. found that the concept of housing stability has different connotations from Western and Indigenous perspectives:

From a Western perspective, housing stability of formerly homeless individuals and families is a first step towards individual self-sufficiency in society. From an Indigenous perspective, housing stability of formerly homeless peoples is a starting point from which Indigenous people can get onto the path of *miyo pimâtisiwin*, the good life — a journey of healing into balance between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of self in relationship with other beings (2011: 20).

Indigenous knowledge stresses holistic approaches to understanding and intervention. Physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of well-being are seen as interrelated. Involving Aboriginal organizations communities in the design process is essential to the success of Housing First strategies for Aboriginal people.



# Conclusion

Housing shortages, limited subsidized housing options and high housing costs in Manitoba make finding an affordable and safe home difficult for all low income Manitobans. For Aboriginal migrants, especially those recently moving to Winnipeg, the obstacles are greater. Moving to a new environment is challenging for all migrants. Aboriginal migrants also experience barriers caused by poverty, colonialism, discrimination are coupled with cultural differences and a lack of skills and experience needed for urban living.

Migration patterns for Aboriginal people are bringing increasing numbers of Aboriginal people into Winnipeg. Meanwhile, they often retain close cultural and family connections to their home communities. Migration is not a one-time and one-directional process, but often involves moving back and forth between reserve communities and the city.

Housing is a critical factor in this process. Migrants are propelled by lack of access to quality housing in their home communities. They all

too often find quality affordable housing difficult to access in Winnipeg. Because housing is a key social determinant of health, the inability to access acceptable housing can replicate the cycles of poverty that have persisted for generations.

EUTC provides a broad range of services for Aboriginal migrants. As an Aboriginal run service agency, it plays an important bridging role helping its members find housing, access services and settle successfully in Winnipeg. The evidence that we have to date, while not conclusive, suggests strongly that EUTC is an important organization that contributes significantly to a more successful settlement process in Winnipeg for Aboriginal migrants to the city. EUTC needs ongoing resources to play this role. The current shift towards Housing First will require an even greater investment in settlement services. This innovative integrated approach will find success if it is given stable long term funding to help Aboriginal migrants find housing with the supports needed for successful integration into urban life in Winnipeg.

## Recommendations

The problems faced by Aboriginal migrants do not exist in isolation. They are connected to issues of poverty and histories of colonization. The housing crisis for Aboriginal migrants overlaps with a housing crisis felt by the poor across Winnipeg who face steep rents and low vacancy rates. The plight of urban Aboriginal people is also directly connected to the housing crisis on reserve communities. Addressing the housing needs of Aboriginal migrants will require co-operation among different levels of governments as well as significant financial resources. However, failure to address these issues will result in a generation of Aboriginal people left excluded from the multiple social, economic and health benefits access to housing provides.

### 1) Increase Access for Social Housing

Publicly subsidized social housing is the most direct solution for making housing more available for Aboriginal migrants. Increasing avail-

ability can come from both building new units in non-profit and Manitoba Housing projects or from creating subsidies for existing units in private or non-profit buildings. Creating new not-for-profit or cooperative housing supply is relatively expensive, recent investments have cost upwards of \$300,000 per unit, but creates long term assets held in public trust without potentially displacing other moderate income tenants paying market rents. Creating new supply is especially important when housing markets are undersupplied and face low vacancy rates.

Currently, the market is approaching balance benchmark of 3 percent, with vacancy rates around 2 percent in Winnipeg and other urban centres. However, the total stock of primary rental accommodations has declined significantly since the early 1990s despite steady population growth. On a *per capita* basis in Winnipeg, the amount of rental housing has declined from 8.5 units per 100 persons to 6.4 units between 1992 and 2013.<sup>4</sup> More rental housing of all types is needed, but

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<sup>4</sup> This apparent paradox between rising vacancies and declining rental housing is largely explained by rise of homeownership over this period — across Canada, the home ownership rate increased from 62.6 percent to 69.0 percent between 1991 and 2011 (Statistics Canada 2013d). Due to the equity required, home ownership is not an option, however, for many Aboriginal migrants. However, in one case, an EUTC member was able to purchase her own home in Winnipeg in 2013.

for low-income persons rental availability is especially limited. Given this balance, it is likely that ongoing provincial investments in new social housing are needed as well as increasing subsidies to make existing suites more available.

Housing researchers and advocates have produced varied estimates of the amount of housing needed. A community consultation-based poverty reduction plan conducted by CCPA-MB estimated 5,000 units of non-profit rent-geared-to-income housing are needed across Manitoba (2009: 25). The report found the need for public rent-geared-to-income housing could be met with a provincial contribution of 300 units of social housing annually, matched by a federal contribution of 700 units a year. The End Homelessness Community Task Force (2014: 48) calculates that 7,500 units of housing accessible to people with very low incomes are needed in Winnipeg alone. It is likely that not all the needs of low income renters will be met by the public sector, so continued work with the private sector including developing rooming house strategy to improve the quality of housing and limit loss of single adult housing in inner city neighbourhoods. Since 2009, the Provincial government has made social and affordable housing a priority and completed 1,500 units of each type by 2014 with a further commitment of 500 units of social and affordable housing to be created by 2017.

The recommendations in this area are:

- 1.1 Manitoba Housing should continue its investments in social housing to ensure an ongoing gain of net new supply, including its current commitment of 500 new units and beyond.
- 1.2 New housing should consider the needs of Aboriginal migrants in terms of temporal flexibility, with suites dedicated for migrants who spend only part of the year in Winnipeg (see page 7). Manitoba Housing should consider adopting more flexible requirements such as Ontario

Aboriginal housing co-op, which allows family members to stay for up to 30 days.

- 1.3 MB housing work with Aboriginal housing providers and other housing providers to create housing units that accommodate the intergenerational and fluid family structures that are common for Aboriginal cultures. This many involve larger suites with more than three bedrooms. Flexible design can also play a role in designing appropriate housing (see page 23).
- 1.4 Help foster Aboriginal owned and operated housing, including both non-profit and co-op housing.

## 2) Intergovernmental Cooperation

Many of the problems associated with Aboriginal migration stem from the discontinuity of services arising from the shift in governmental responsibility as Aboriginal people transition from reserve communities to cities. The federal government has a constitutional obligation under section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867 to provide basic services for First Nations and work with First Nations to ensure that adequate housing is available on First Nations reserve communities.

The lack of comparable and adequate services on reserve in housing, education, medical treatment and other basic services is a driving force of Aboriginal migration. Meanwhile, displacement caused by environmental disasters like flooding in Lake St Martin and other communities has pushed hundreds of Aboriginal people into Winnipeg in recent years. The frequency of these events is increasing due to climate change (Sauchyn and Kulshreshtha 2008). Coordinated federal-provincial response is critical during such disasters, with lessons to be learned.

On an individual level, shifting from federally-funded programs on reserve to provincially funded ones off-reserve creates a series of bureaucratic hoops for Aboriginal migrants.

When they leave the reserve, they are cut off reserve funding, and may be eligible for EIA, however there is often a time-lag of one and a half to two months. This gap is a major barrier for some for adapting to Winnipeg. Recommendations to address these issues are:

- 2.1 The federal government should make transition funding available for Aboriginal migrants leaving First Nation reserve communities and who are applying for EIA off-reserve for three months, until they are receiving provincial EIA.
- 2.2 First Nations communities should develop disaster response plans as a process of climate change adaptation, in cooperation with other levels of government. Contingency strategies should ensure adequate housing is available in the case of flood or other emergencies.
- 2.3 Streamline process for obtaining identification documents, between Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Vital Statistics and Manitoba Health and for inter-provincial migration as well.
- 2.4 Since many migrants are coming to Winnipeg for health reasons, preventative health care options and food security should be increased in Aboriginal communities and where possible, local treatment options be made available.

### 3) Increase Settlement and Transitional Supports

With Winnipeg's growing Aboriginal population, Aboriginal-run services are needed to support this population. EUTC is well placed to provide and expand these services, however is limited due to capacity and funding. Staff time able to be dedicated to housing support is limited. As EUTC shifts towards a more integrated and intensive Housing First approach, even more resources may be needed.

In particular, stability of funding from federal and provincial sources are required for consistent programming to be maintained. Annual and project-based funding agreements are an inefficient way of providing core services. The challenges of Aboriginal migration are not likely to change in the near future, and funding models should reflect this. Ongoing long-term program funding is a prerequisite to the delivery of stable service for Aboriginal migrants. Recommendations are:

- 3.1 Transition centres like EUTC should be funded through long term core funding agreements, rather than project funding to increase stability and reduce administrative burden.
- 3.2 Dedicated funding for housing coordinators should be sufficient to handle the growing caseload of Aboriginal migrants.
- 3.3 Increase linkages and collaboration between EUTC and existing housing location services such as the Winnipeg Rental Network.

### 4) Decentralize Transition Services

Education and resources should be made available on reserve communities regarding preparations for urban migration. Many of the problems associated with migration could be alleviated if migrants had a better sense of what is needed for their successful transition. Also, many migrants to Winnipeg spend time in smaller urban centres like Thompson, Kenora and Brandon before coming to Winnipeg. There are no settlement services in these centres. Settlement services in smaller centres could be an important part of helping Aboriginal people make a successful transition.

- 4.1 As per the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry recommendation (52), (Hughes 2014), establish transition centres in smaller urban communities that are often the first

point of migration for Aboriginal migrants, including Thompson, The Pas, Brandon and Portage La Prairie.

- 4.2 Work with Aboriginal communities and First Nations reserves to develop educational materials and resources for increasing urban life skills to be provided to residents before they migrate.

#### 5) Increase Financial Resources Available to Migrants

The biggest risk factor for homelessness is lack of money. EIA rates are currently too low to afford adequate shelter. Increases to EIA and the creation of Rent Assist announced in Manitoba Budget 2014 will go a long way to closing the affordability gap, but will still leave many households below the poverty level. As the Province rolls out its announced four-year plan to raise EIA shelter rates, more families will likely be lifted out of poverty. In the long term, anti-poverty advocates are looking to a system of Guaranteed Annual Income on which all residents can depend, funded by the federal government (Loney, 2014).

The goal of most Aboriginal migrants is integration into the labour force, a secure well paying job being the best route out of poverty. Recent changes to federal-provincial Labour Market Agreements put funding for some of the most successful training programs at risk as not-for-profit organizations do not have the matching funds required to participate in the new funding arrangement (MacKinnon 2013). The Province should work with the federal government to ensure that training programs that help Aboriginal migrants, especially those in the Inner City remain available.

- 5.1 Increase EIA Rent Assist to 75 percent median market rent for all family types by 2018.
- 5.2 Improve process for EIA applications to secure housing in private rental housing, e.g. by pre-approving rents at levels consistent with the actual market (see p. 21).
- 5.3 Maintain funding for training programs for Aboriginal people and inner city residents.

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