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## Iglutaasaavut (Our New Homes): Neither "New" nor "Ours"

### *Housing Challenges of the Nunavut Territorial Government*

Frank Tester

The Government of Nunavut inherited from the Government of the Northwest Territories a long-standing problem affecting nearly every Inuk in the newly minted territory. The housing crisis in the new territory has a long history, dating back to the mid-1950s when Inuit in Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) were first provided with wood-frame housing. A rapidly growing population, low incomes, the subsequent need for social housing, the cost of providing housing in a demanding physical environment, and ideologically driven biases in relation to housing as a market commodity are all factors that help explain the crisis inherited by the new administration. Serious problems of suitability, adequacy, and affordability confronted the Nunavut Housing Corporation, which is also facing a decline to zero over the next 30 years in Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's contribution to the existing social housing inventory. By August 2000, 1,100 families in Nunavut were waiting for some form of housing assistance. The demand for housing was projected to be 260 homes per year over the next 5-year period. Sixty percent of Nunavummiut live in public housing, 98% of whom are Inuit. This essay examines the problems that have confronted the Nunavut Housing Corporation—a stand-alone corporation—and looks at program and policy initiatives undertaken to address the situation, as called for by the Bathurst Mandate, tabled in October 1999, and establishing principles, goals, and objectives for the new government and the Nunavut Housing Corporation.

Le gouvernement du Nunavut a hérité du gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest un problème de vieille date affectant presque tous les Inuits dans le nouveau territoire. La crise du logement au Nunavut est un problème ancien datant du milieu des années 1950 lorsque l'on donna aux Inuits de Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) des maisons à ossature de bois. Une population en expansion, de faibles revenus, le besoin subséquent de logements sociaux, le coût de fournir des habitations dans un environnement physique difficile et des préjugés idéologiques se rapportant au logement en tant que denrée du marché sont tous des facteurs aidant à expliquer la crise héritée par la nouvelle administration. La Société d'habitation du Nunavut a dû faire face à de graves problèmes concernant le caractère approprié, adéquat et rentable du logement. La Société doit également se préparer à un déclin complet de la contribution de la Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement au stock de logement social actuel dans les prochains 30 ans. Au mois d'août 2000, 1 100 familles du Nunavut attendaient une forme ou une autre d'aide au logement. On prévoyait 260 demandes de logement par année au cours des cinq années suivantes. Soixante pour cent des Nunavummiuts vivent dans des

logements sociaux, dont 98 % sont des Inuits. Le présent article examine les problèmes qu'a dû affronter la Société d'habitation du Nunavut—une société autonome—et les programmes et initiatives politiques adoptés pour traiter cette situation, tel que requis par le mandat de Bathurst déposé en octobre 1999 et établissant des principes, des buts et des objectifs pour le nouveau gouvernement et la Société d'habitation du Nunavut.

**H**ousing Nunavummiut has been one the most serious challenges facing the Nunavut government during its first 10 years. It is also an issue that ought to be of national concern. Since moving off the land in the 1950s and 1960s and occupying shack housing made of waste from the dumps of Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line sites and settlements, Inuit have occupied homes rivaling those found in many Third World countries. The housing conditions faced by Inuit are a national disgrace. What is being experienced—serious problems of adequacy, suitability, and affordability—challenges the way housing policy in Canada has historically been constructed, with the home as a market commodity and state intervention only when markets have failed to meet Canadian housing needs (Bacher 1993). Even under trying circumstances, state intervention has not always been forthcoming (Wade 1994). Interventions have often been the outcome of considerable pressure from organized groups of Canadian citizens working within long-standing liberal democratic traditions with which Inuit have little historical experience.

Since the federal government removed itself from the provision of social housing in 1993, mechanisms for state intervention have been limited to extraordinary measures. The Kelowna Accord (Canada 2005), an agreement among Inuit, Métis, First Nations, and the Liberal federal government to address health, housing, education, and other needs was signed in November 2005. It committed the federal government to meeting 35% of Nunavut's housing needs within 5 years. A reduced amount—\$200 million subsequently committed by the Conservative government elected in January 2006—addresses about 20% of this need (Bell 2006b, 3). The accord was to be an extraordinary measure. Nowhere have the effects of the 1993 federal withdrawal from funding social housing been more harshly experienced than in Nunavut and in the Nunavik region of Arctic Quebec, regions with the worst housing conditions in the country.

Housing—its provision, form, and content—is easily identified as a critical element in the shaping of any culture. The provision of housing to Inuit has been described as a form of planned culture change (Thomas and Tompson 1972). This is a reference not only to the impact that built form has on what Inuit need in order to sustain cultural practices, as explored by Dawson (2003a, 2003b), but also to what happens to a culture that has to reorganize and introduce new social

forms and institutions in order to deal with the regulation and management of new and culturally challenging resources (Chabot and Duhaime 1998).

The history of Inuit housing is a tangled one, including the practical dilemma of addressing, commencing in the mid-to-late 1950s, changes taking place in Inuit economy and lifestyle brought on by other events (Tester and Kulchyski 1994). These include the collapse of the fox fur trade following the Second World War, the introduction of compulsory schooling, epidemics of contagious disease that made proximity to nursing stations and health care important, the construction in 1956-57 of the DEW Line across the Canadian Arctic, and a failure to support Inuit on the land as a hunting culture (Kulchyski and Tester 2007). These considerations help explain the move of Inuit from land-based camps to settlements, commencing in the mid-1950s.

The Nunavut housing shortage has been articulated as an economic problem rooted in the inability of most Inuit to earn enough to permit them to rent or purchase a home. Stating the problem this way assumes a conceptual bias consistent with the history of Canadian housing policy: that housing is a market commodity. Seen differently, the housing crisis is a failure of the market to provide Inuit with the means to afford shelter and a failure of the Canadian state to meet its moral, ethical, and—it can be argued—legal obligations to its original citizens. Moreover, the crisis raises the question as to whether or not housing can, will, or should be seen as a market commodity given Inuit cultural practices and values. In western European culture, home ownership is part of a culturally defined goal of capital accumulation by individuals and nuclear families. Among other considerations, the cost of owning and operating a home in Nunavut undermines this goal. It also appears to be of little importance relative to that of developing and maintaining extended family relations by the sharing of financial and material resources that would otherwise go towards building equity in a home. Maintaining relationships is essential to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of Inuit communities. Inuit cultural logic and practices undermine the market logic of home ownership (Collings 2005). At the same time, for purely financial reasons, there is no housing market of any significance in Nunavut.

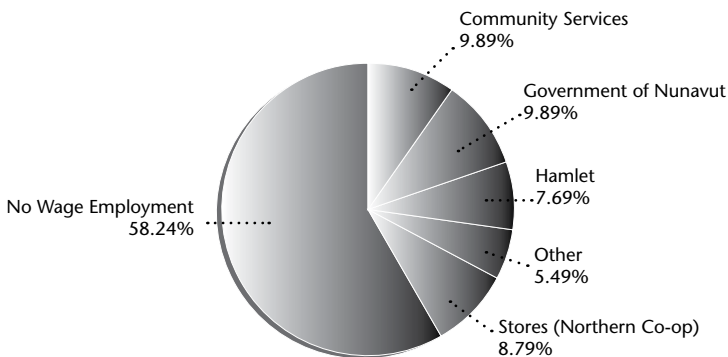
By way of illustration, the official Nunavut unemployment rate in July 2006 was 11.6%, the second highest in the country. The Canadian rate was 6.1%. Rates for Nunavut are skewed, however, by the status of the Qallunnat (non-Inuit) population living primarily in the capital, Iqaluit. Inuit comprise approximately 85% of the citizens of Nunavut. When only Inuit are considered, the picture darkens considerably. Nationally, their unemployment rate (2006 census) is 20.3% and, for those without any certificate of completion, 25.4% (Statistics Canada 2008b). In the census period May to July of 2006, Inuit accounted for 75% of the

working-age population in the 10 largest Nunavut communities but only 60% of those employed. The employment rate for Inuit in these communities was 47.6% while it stood at 90.4% for non-Inuit.

Median income figures make it obvious why there is virtually no housing market in Nunavut. The 2005 median income for Nunavut was \$20,982, a calculation based on the population 15 years of age or older with an income. The median income for Iqaluit was \$44,885. By comparison, the median for Kinngait (Cape Dorset) was only \$15,008, with most communities having a median below \$20,000 (Nunavut Bureau of Statistics 2006). The Canadian median for 2005 was \$41,401 (Statistics Canada 2008a).

Reasons for the absence of a housing market become more obvious when costs are considered. Construction costs in the territory were reported in 2004 to be \$330.00 per square foot, compared to \$103.45 per square foot in southern Canada. Fuel and electricity costs are also high, with the Nunavut Housing Corporation spending, on average, \$18,000 per unit for heat and electricity. This figure approaches and sometimes exceeds the median income for most Nunavut communities. Few communities have the ticketed tradespeople required for construction. Imported labour escalates the cost of housing (Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. 2004). A combination of poverty, high capital and operating costs, and cultural considerations contribute to the absence of a Nunavut housing market.

**Fig. 1: Sources of Earned Income: Wage Employment**



N=91. Thirty-eight Inuit (41.8%) reported that they were employed in one of the above jobs.

Source: Tester (2006b, 37)

Employment problems in Nunavut are exacerbated by the realities of seasonal, part-time employment and dependence on self-generated, insecure sources of income related to arts, crafts, expediting, guiding, and other activities. They are further complicated by a wide disparity between employment prospects in the territorial capital (Iqaluit), the regional centres of Rankin Inlet and Iqaluktuq (Cambridge Bay), and smaller communities. In smaller communities, unemployment can be as high as 50% (Tester 2006b). Territorial and local governments are the largest source of employment, as revealed by a recent survey exploring sources of income among a representative sample of residents of Kinngait (Cape Dorset) (fig. 1). When sources of income were further examined, 46.1% of those surveyed received social assistance and had no additional income. Only 41.8% of the population reported having a good, reasonably stable full-time job. Nearly 30% of the population derived some income from carving and 6.6% reported some income from casual labour, all of which suggests that official employment statistics are misleading (Tester 2006b). These circumstances are unlikely to change for decades, a reality that seriously challenges the assumptions of home ownership and the presence of a strong housing market as foundations for housing policy.

### **Inuit Housing: The Origins**

Different phases in the development of Canadian housing policy can be identified. State intervention following the Second World War addressed the needs of returning veterans and pent-up demand from the 1930s and 1940s (Carroll and Jones 2000). National programs delivered housing that met, primarily, the needs of middle-income families. Intervention and subsidies were intended to encourage the development of a housing industry and market. The Eskimo Housing Loan Program (1959-65), a rent-to-own scheme that provided the first homes to Inuit, reflected this mix of state intervention and market logic (Robson 1995). The program supplied Inuit with tiny plywood homes of less than 300 square feet, affectionately known as “matchboxes” (Tester 2006a). Even at rents of \$10 a month, given the sporadic nature of Inuit incomes and the cost of heating, they were unaffordable. They also contributed significantly to health problems experienced by Inuit at the time. Consequently, many of these were converted to welfare units with the state absorbing capital as well as operating costs.

A second phase in the development of Canadian housing policy has been described by Carroll and Jones (2000) as a period when it was assumed that comprehensive planning could solve policy problems. Recognizing the failure of the Eskimo Housing Loan Program, the northern administration set out in 1963 to develop a social housing policy that attempted to treat housing as a social need

and not a market commodity. The result was the Eskimo Rental Housing Program (1965). It was replaced in 1968 by the Northern Rental Purchase Program, which once again introduced the option of home ownership by treating rents as mortgage payments. The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the federal government shared the cost of rehabilitating units for purchase. Reflecting the community development aspect of this approach to housing, the administration of these units was turned over to trained local authorities.

While not tied to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) policy, the initiative paralleled what was happening with regard to support for social housing nationally. Amendments to the *National Housing Act* in 1964 greatly extended the assistance given by the federal government to public housing projects and for a brief time challenged the idea that the market could ever meet the housing needs of Canadians (Oberlander and Fallick 1992). The Inuit social housing initiative was accompanied by an extensive program of adult education, funded with a grant of \$169,000 from CMHC, designed to introduce Inuit to every conceivable aspect of occupying, operating, and collectively managing housing stock, consistent with Canadian ideas about home ownership. The program provided different units geared to family structure with rents subsidized at a rate of 20% of household income to a maximum of \$100 a month. The Eastern Arctic districts of Baffin and Keewatin, where Inuit were increasingly relocating from land-based camps to settlements, received 655 of the 864 units delivered under this program (Robson 1995). Given a limited fuel subsidy, the costs of heating, and the seasonal and inconsistent nature of Inuit incomes, these homes were still unaffordable (Collings 2005).

In 1969, responsibility for housing Inuit was handed to the Government of the NWT. In 1973, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NTHC) was created to access CMHC funds for public housing rental units, to manage the social housing stock and to encourage home ownership. Its prime responsibility during the 1970s was the construction and operation of public housing. Between 1974 and 1980, 1,343 units of single family housing were built across the territories (Hulchanski 1988). In 1981, section 40 of the *National Housing Act* was used to fund public housing in the NWT: CMHC paid 75% of the capital costs of construction and 75% of the operating deficits. By 1984, the number of public housing units had risen to 2,700 (Robson 1995). In 1983 and again in 1985, the NTHC undertook extensive measures to adjust rents across the territory, taking into consideration income, family size, and costs of living by creating zones where different rates and assumptions applied. Rent scales varied between 16 and 25% of household income, being generally higher in the Western Arctic where the objective was to promote home ownership. This was a tacit acknowledgement that a

housing market and prospects for home ownership were minimal in Eastern Arctic communities. Nevertheless, the primary goal of the NTHC, reflected in its 1983 revised goals for management of social housing programs, was “to encourage and facilitate home ownership” (Hulchanski 1988, 32), consistent with what Carroll and Jones (2000) identify as policy initiatives characterized by fiscal restraint on the part of the federal government and free market privatization.

The NTHC introduced a number of programs to encourage homeownership in the 1970s and 1980s, commencing with the Small Settlement Home Assistance Grant Program in 1975, an initiative redesigned and made available to Eastern Arctic communities in 1984 as the Homeownership Assistance Program. If applicants met income criteria, they became eligible for a \$40,000 forgivable loan towards the cost and transport of building materials and were permitted to contribute equity towards their unit by supplying their own labour. Owners had to occupy the unit for a minimum of five years and pay taxes and utilities. It was an expensive program funded by CMHC, the NTHC, and Employment and Immigration Canada, and only produced 189 units across the territories (Robson 1985). It was phased out in 1992. Like its successors, Access to Housing and the Down Payment Assistance Program, introduced in 1997 and providing a forgivable loan of up to 25% of the total cost of a unit for applicants who qualified for a private mortgage, these initiatives had greater relevance to the Western Arctic than to Inuit communities of what is now Nunavut. Most Inuit could not meet the basic financial requirements allowing them to participate in the programs.

Despite the success of retail and marketing co-operatives among Inuit, the Inuit Non-profit Housing Corporation, operating under the *NHA*, was never able to make a significant contribution to the provision of Inuit housing. By 1987, it had only produced 16 units of housing in Inuit communities. The policy record of the NTHC suggests that virtually no support or attention was paid to co-operative housing initiatives. By 1990, the Inuit Non-profit Housing Corporation was in serious organizational and financial trouble, and currently only provides accommodation to Inuit living in the Ottawa area. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, public housing remained the primary means by which Inuit families were accommodated despite ongoing attempts by the NTHC, as the federal government withdrew from funding public housing to encourage private home ownership. The capital cost provisions of section 40 of the *National Housing Act* were cancelled in 1993, and CMHC support for the maintenance of public housing is also scheduled to decline to zero by the year 2037.

What the Nunavut Housing Corporation (NHC) inherited from the NTHC can be described as a culture constrained by the 1993 withdrawal of CMHC from funding public housing and therefore directed to relationships with private



sector interests (banks, developers, landlords) and the idea of housing as a market good. The question as to whether the subsequent territorial program and policy initiatives are a reflection of ideological convictions or simply a case of “no other options” is an intriguing one, made all the more so by the territorial government’s commitment to introducing Inuit Qaujimagatugangit (IQ), or Inuit traditional knowledge, to government operations, including the NHC.

The policy and program legacy inherited by the NHC was made particularly painful not only by the federal withdrawal from responsibility for social housing, but also by market initiatives introduced with particular enthusiasm by John Todd, the NWT minister of Finance in the two-year period prior to partition. Todd was a well-known businessman and entrepreneur with financial interests in the Kivalliq region of Nunavut. In his first budget as Finance minister, in May 1996, his stated goal was to make the NWT “a place that’s friendly to outside business people who want to make investments” (*Nunatsiaq News* 1996b, 3). The next two years were characterized by a number of initiatives that set the tone for the newly minted Nunavut administration. These included balancing the budget by disposing, wherever possible, of state-owned assets and reducing the size of the public service.

In his first budget, Todd created a territorial Mortgage and Loan Company in partnership with private interests, funded with \$5 million to provide mortgages to home owners and housing developers in small communities. Rents charged for accommodation in government-owned facilities were increased to market levels, causing hardship for residents of Iqaluit’s elders’ facilities (*Nunatsiaq News* 1996a, 3). Staff housing was put up for sale while the Nunavut Implementation Commission, fearing problems in accommodating the decentralized civil service it was planning as part of the new administration, recommended to the contrary (Nunavut Implementation Commission 1995). Leases for staff and other housing were handed back to owners and landlords, affecting students living in government housing in Iqaluit’s White Row who could not afford to pay market rents (Phillips 1996, 19). Unsold staff housing was turned over to the NTHC to be used as social housing. One hundred and twenty million dollars was committed to Plan 2000, a program that subsidized down payments and encouraged Northerners to buy their own homes. Once again, the program better met the needs of residents of the Western Arctic than those of Nunavut, where even subsidies, in the presence of poverty, left home ownership out of reach. Single people, however, quickly accessed Plan 2000 funds as their incomes were low and the resulting subsidies they received were correspondingly high. Funds were soon exhausted, and Inuit families—the most in need—were left out in the cold (Wilkin 1997, 2). By comparison, the NWT government spent \$160 million between 1992 and 1997 on

1,435 social housing units in an attempt to address a growing housing shortage (Bourgeois 1997, 1). Todd's response to the persistent housing shortage was to inject even more funding (\$40-50 million) into another home ownership program (Bourgeois 1998). The need for social housing units had grown between 1992 and 1997 from 3,500 units to 4,350 units (Northwest Territories Housing Corporation 1997).

### **How Bad Is It?**

The housing situation of Nunavummiut is an extreme case of what the withdrawal of the federal government from funding social housing has done to low-income Canadians in general, and that accounts for a considerable number of homeless lining the streets of Canadian urban centres. In Nunavut, homelessness has taken new and different forms, reflected in statistics that detail extraordinary problems with adequacy and suitability, as well as affordability. For obvious climatic reasons, no one sleeps on the streets. Homelessness is a matter of "couch surfing" and severe overcrowding.

The NHC's business plan for 2004-2005 reported that 45% of the homes in Nunavut were public housing units. Another 19% of the units managed by the NHC were staff housing, and 8% were rental units. Only 7% of all housing in Nunavut was privately owned outright, with another 21% privately owned with government assistance and subsidies (Nunavut Housing Corporation 2004a). By comparison, home ownership in Canada is currently approaching 70% of all units.

Of approximately 4,000 social housing units, 98% are occupied by Inuit. In fact, almost 54% of Nunavummiut live in social housing units. Half of these units are more than 25 years old (Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. 2004). This highlights another problem unique to Inuit housing—adequacy. Adequate housing is housing that is not in need of repair. In the extreme conditions of the Eastern Arctic, a 25-year-old house is considerably older than its southern counterpart, due to the effects not only of climate but also of overcrowding.

How badly overcrowded are Inuit homes? Different standards have been used to indicate the problem. The 2001 Aboriginal People's Survey used a standard common to the United States. A home is overcrowded if it is occupied by more than one person per room. Using this criterion, 19% of homes in Nunavut are overcrowded compared with 5% for Canada as a whole (Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. 2004). A more meaningful standard is used by CMHC. Rates of overcrowding are based on a formula sensitive to personal

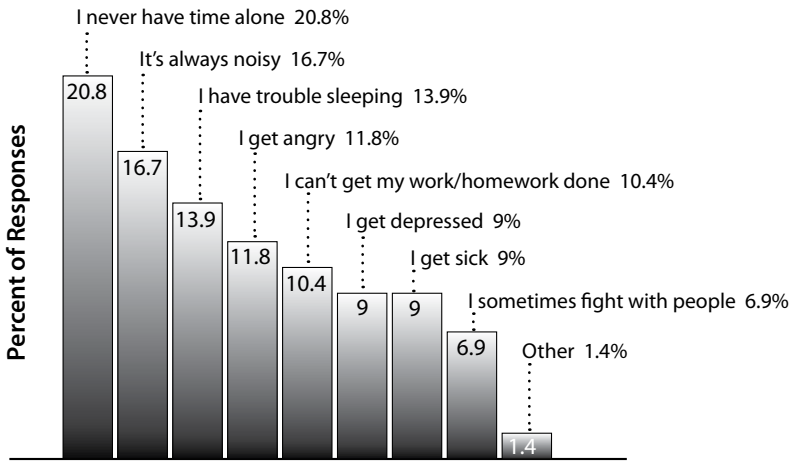
and privacy needs and take into consideration the number of people, their age and gender, and the number of bedrooms. For example, two teenagers of different genders would not be expected to share a room. By these standards, Nunavut is experiencing a housing crisis exceeded only by the problems in Nunavik (Arctic Quebec). The problem is particularly focussed on Inuit, with 54% of Inuit living in overcrowded conditions compared to 7% for the rest of the country. The waiting lists for social housing are long, some people having been on the lists for more than three years. The number of people on these lists is growing.

The assistant deputy minister of the NHC announced in August 1999, soon after the creation of Nunavut, that 673 Nunavut families (approximately 2,000 people), or 10% of Nunavummiut, were on waiting lists for social housing (Rodrigue 1999, 3). In 2008, an audit of the NHC by the auditor general of Canada reported that 1,200 families were on waiting lists for social housing, nearly double the numbers reported in 1999. This is a clear indication that the NHC has been unable to keep up with the growing need for social housing. Young families constitute many of those on waiting lists, explaining why in many situations as many as four generations—grandparents, parents, perhaps one or more of their children and their young children—can be found living under one roof. The problem is compounded by a birth rate in the territory that has been around 25 per 1,000 population for the past 10 years, compared to approximately 10.5 for the rest of the country. Nunavut has a very young population with a median age of 19.1 years compared to 37.7 for the non-Aboriginal population of the country.

The social dimensions of the current housing crisis are many. The implications of overcrowding and poor design are well known and documented. Both contribute to the high incidence of tuberculosis (TB) among Inuit, which was 93.4/100,000 in 2002 or about 18 times the Canadian average (Healey et al. 2004). A recent survey of Kinngait (Cape Dorset) suggests as many as 65 people in this community test positive for TB; Kinngait's population in 2006 was 1,150 (Tester 2006b). It has also been suggested that respiratory problems among infants have their origins in some aspects of Nunavut housing conditions (Greenberg et al. 2003; Jenkins et al. 2003; Kovesi et al. 2006). Inuit also identify their housing situations as contributing to a significant list of other physical and related health problems (fig. 2).

The relationship between social problems and the condition of Inuit housing is difficult to establish. Intuitively, the connection is obvious. The Kinngait survey, conducted by the author and Kinngait youth trained as researchers, asked residents to indicate what they believed to be the nature and extent of the relationship between crowded conditions and social and personal problems. The results suggest the extent to which poor housing contributes to issues that cost

**Fig. 2: The Following Problems Were Attributed to Overcrowding by Inuit Who Reported that Their House Was Sometimes or Always Overcrowded (N=43)**



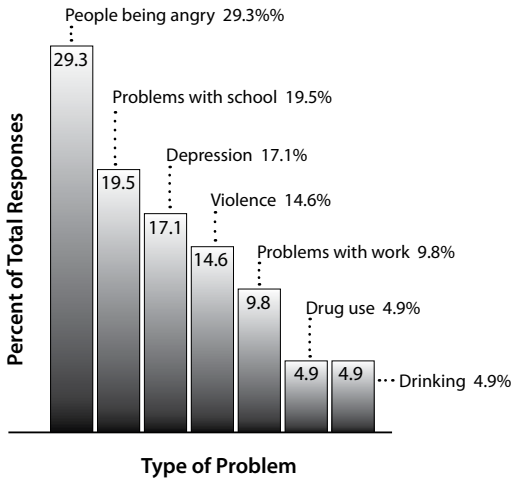
N=43. Thirty-one Inuit indicated that their house was always crowded, while 12 reported that it was sometimes crowded. Some respondents listed more than one problem. The total number of responses was 144.

Source: Tester (2006b, 46)

the Government of Nunavut millions of dollars annually. These include evacuations related to domestic violence and the protection of women and children, poor performance at work and at school, and wide-ranging demands on both the health-care and social service systems. As figure 3 indicates, Inuit living in overcrowded conditions were convinced, to some considerable degree, that having fewer people in their homes would do much to address this long list of serious domestic and social problems.

These observations are of considerable importance. Nunavummiut, and particularly Inuit women, currently experience the highest incidence of assaults and sexual assaults in the country. Statistics Canada data for 2004 puts the rate of sexual assaults at 941.2 per 100,000 compared to 73.1 for the rest of the country. Similarly, the rate of assaults, levels 1 to 3, is 6,628.7 per 100,000 compared to 731.8 for Canada. Other crimes of violence are reported at 226 per 100,000 compared to 42.3 for Canada (Tester 2006b). Under-reporting is likely a factor in interpreting much of these data. While housing conditions—especially overcrowding—obviously cannot by themselves explain the extent of these problems, as Inuit have clearly indicated, they are a significant contributing factor.

**Fig. 3: Number of Inuit Who Think That Having Fewer People in Their House Would Help with Personal Problems**



N=91. The total number of responses was 41.

Source: Tester (2006, 50)

### Dealing with the Problem

The NHC, created in 1999 under the *Nunavut Housing Corporation Act*, assumed the same duties and responsibilities as its predecessor, the NTHC. Its mandate is to create, co-ordinate, and administer housing programs to provide families and individuals in Nunavut with fair access to a range of affordable housing options. It clearly struggles to do so. Its operating budget in 2008 was about \$160 million, of which 75% was directed to its public housing program. This is delivered in partnership with local housing organizations and, in several cases, municipalities that perform the day-to-day responsibilities of delivering programs to families and individuals. Local housing organizations are independent organizations incorporated, with the exception of the Iqaluit Housing Authority, under the *Societies Act*. In addition to a public housing program, the NHC is responsible for a staff housing program and a homeownership and capital program intended to assist residents who cannot afford the costs of home ownership to secure and maintain their own housing. The corporation provides short-term guarantees for interim financing and counselling services to homeowners.

The NHC is decentralized, with its headquarters and the regional headquarters for the Kivilliq Region in Arviat, a directorate in Iqaluit, and other regional offices in Cape Dorset for the Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin) Region and Iqaluktutiaq (Cambridge Bay) for the Kitikmeot Region. In late 2007, the corporation had 89 full-time employees; 23 positions were vacant, leaving the NHC with a considerable challenge in managing its portfolio. Vacancies can be explained in terms of the availability of trained Inuit and Inuit willing to assume positions that may require them to break extended family ties and relocate to Arviat, Iqaluit, or regional offices. Ironically, the availability and cost of staff housing, a program for which NHC is responsible, contributes to the hiring problems confronting the NHC and the territorial government. A recently announced staff housing policy reflects the long-standing emphasis on private sector development and home ownership in Canadian housing policy: "The rental rate structure for GN staff housing is designed to support and stimulate the emergence of private affordable rental and homeownership markets" (Nunavut 2005, 1).

The first problems confronting the NHC and the Government of Nunavut were those created by the policies and programs of the NWT administration. Nunavut housing was described by one source as being "in a state of confusion and crisis" (Wilkin 1998, 3). The privatization of staff housing had created a situation where increased rents were being charged for units that were not being maintained either by private sector landlords who had taken over responsibility from the Government of the NWT or by the NTHC. The complaints were many. The same set of policies had created a severe shortage of staff housing, units needed to accommodate a decentralized civil service. Furthermore, rents charged for social housing penalized Inuit when they got a job to the point where accepting employment, in some cases, offered Nunavummiut little reward.

Momentum towards a number of extraordinary interventions in the Nunavut housing situation was facilitated immediately after the creation of Nunavut by a report tabled 7 May 1993 by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The result of consultations held in Nunavik and Nunavut, it stopped short of identifying adequate housing as a right, but clearly stated that all Canadians are entitled to basic services that include housing. It called on the federal government to do more to address the housing and infrastructure needs of northern communities. In the meantime, the territorial government was attempting to develop an approach to dealing with the problems it had inherited from the NWT. In his budget for 2000-2001, Kelvin Ng, minister of Finance, predicted a surplus but directed most of it to dealing with deficits run up by regional health authorities. He declined to deal with the housing problem without a plan. The Minister, Maniok Thompson, set about drafting a

five-year strategy to deal with the crisis, producing a Task Force on Housing report in December 1999 and, in January 2000, a document that recommended dealing with the social housing shortage by leasing available units from the private sector for terms up to 10 years, concurrent with construction of new public housing units. The 2000-2001 budget set aside \$16 million to build 100 new social housing units, far fewer than needed to address the crisis. The report also recommended rent scale revisions (Amagoalik and Associates 2000). The NHC subsequently identified about 100 units that could be rented for a 5-year period, and plans were made to modify the rent scale applied to social housing.

Market logic was used to underline the merits of leasing units from the private sector. The Amagoalik report suggested that "The leasing of existing housing stock, in communities where they are available, will support the private sector and has the advantage of leveraging private capital" (2000, i). Enthusiasm for the scheme was not shared by the auditor general, whose 2001 report to the Legislative Assembly pointed out that the money being spent by the government on leases was not money well spent and that property ownership by the government was preferable. In response, the minister of Finance, Kelvin Ng, noted that many lease agreements had been inherited from the NWT and that the Nunavut government lacked the resources to purchase the facilities in question (Murphy 2001). Nevertheless, consistent with policies pursued by the NWT administration, in September 2002 the Government of Nunavut introduced a program called TOP, providing subsidized mortgage payments to public housing tenants who might want to buy their units from the NHC. The program included provision for taking the operating costs of a unit into consideration and reducing mortgage payments by an equivalent amount. The NHC had 145 home ownership projects underway as of 31 March 2004 at a cost of approximately \$2 million, a figure that stands in sharp contrast to the 3,854 social housing units operated by the corporation, only 26 of which were being assessed full rent (Nunavut Housing Corporation 2004b; Bell 2004a).

By 2003, the federal government had finally responded to recommendations coming from the parliamentary committee and to ongoing pressure from Nunavut. Using another extraordinary measure, the federal government announced in October that it would make \$20 million available for housing over a 2-year period from the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund if the Government of Nunavut would match the amount. With 1,100 families on waiting lists for housing and an estimate of 250 units needed per year to keep up with demand, the funding was estimated to provide 160-200 homes. This "nickel-and-dime" approach to addressing Nunavut's housing crisis was inadequate in a number of ways. Apart from not keeping up with growing need, no funds for operation and maintenance of the units were included, suggesting that in future, the territory might find its

budget for capital projects compromised by ongoing and increasing operational costs, a problem compounded by the withdrawal of CMHC funding for the operation and maintenance of social housing units. Since the creation of Nunavut, the government had managed to build, on average, only about 50 units of social housing a year, or 2-3 homes per community (Bell 2004b).

By October 2004, the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), responsible for overseeing provisions of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, had prepared a comprehensive plan to deal with the territory's housing crisis. The \$1.9 billion proposal, called the *Nunavut Ten-Year Housing Plan*, called for the construction over a 10-year period of 5,730 units of housing and the renovation of another 1,000. It proposed an Inuit Social Housing Trust to oversee the project. The proposal fell on deaf ears. A year later, Joe Fontana, the federal minister responsible for CMHC, had still not responded. The response was to come in November with the signing of the Kelowna Accord. It was not what was asked for and under the Conservative government that came to power in January 2006 was to become even less. In its first budget, the newly elected government announced \$300 million for northern housing, of which \$200 million was set aside for Nunavut.

Meanwhile, the Nunavut government, faced initially with a staff housing problem that had resulted in numerous attempts to lease and build housing for its public employees, embarked on yet another initiative aimed at moving employees into market units. Announced the week of 16 September 2005, the policy committed the NHC to withdrawing from the provision of staff housing in Nunavut's three largest communities (Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet, and Cambridge Bay) by 2015 (Bell 2005a, 3). In the meantime, rental rates for staff housing were to increase annually until they reached what the NHC determined to be a market level. The government indicated it would continue to supply staff housing in communities outside the territory's three largest communities until a private housing market developed (Bell 2005b, 3). In December 2005, the Nunavut Employees Union released a survey of its members, suggesting that 9 out of 10 of those responding believed the plan would make it increasingly difficult for the government to attract new employees (Bell 2006a, 1).

In May 2008, the auditor general released an audit of the Social Housing Program of the Nunavut Housing Corporation. It included an examination of the management of the \$200 million allocated under the Nunavut Housing Trust, which was to build 725 new public housing units in 25 communities over 3 years. The audit revealed serious problems related to the capacity of the NHC and relevant to any program as ambitious as the \$1.9 billion venture proposed by the government and NTI.



The three-year Housing Trust initiative added substantially to NHC's annual budget of \$160 million. No funds had been requested or obtained to address the additional managerial implications. With 23 positions vacant, management problems were inevitable, and multiple problems plagued the initiative. The complications of co-ordinating the organization and shipping of supplies and operating a training program in conjunction with construction produced a lack of interest from contractors. Where contractors were chosen to package and deliver building materials from southern Canada to Nunavut communities, inadequate attention was paid to the capacity of those bidding to actually do the work. Problems were encountered in attempts to integrate a program of training Inuit in the building trades and become certified. Coursework with Nunavut Arctic College had to be co-ordinated with the on-the-job experience of apprentices. As general labour often failed to show up at a construction site, it became impossible for apprentices to put in the hours necessary for certification and to co-ordinate this experience with the required coursework. Whether many Inuit would acquire trade certificates as a result of participating in the initiative became a matter of concern. In some cases, community partners—local housing authorities—were asked to manage projects without being given clearly defined roles or understanding the financial responsibilities involved. The result was that in the first year of operation (2007), of the 96 units to be built, only 20 had been completed by December.

The NHC is revealed in the auditor general's report to be overwhelmed. It lacked a strategic plan to meet the needs identified in the Ten-Year Housing Action Plan produced by the government and NTI. NHC's corporate executive committee, dealing with operational issues, was found to have devoted little effort to matters of finance, policy, planning, and evaluation. An examination of the practices of local housing authorities revealed that the process and point system used for awarding social housing units was rarely being followed, raising questions about the fairness of the system and interesting questions about the intersection of familial loyalties and commitments with a system based on Western ideas about merit as a way of allocating housing.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing the Nunavut housing crisis is more than a matter of funding the construction of homes. Nunavummiut need resources to develop the capacities necessary to managing and developing housing resources. The crisis of Inuit housing is closely associated with other considerations, including capacity, the nature and role of the extended family in Inuit culture, self-reliance and labour, and the relationship between housing form (physical design) and Inuit cultural needs.

What has not attracted adequate attention in the short history of Nunavut is the relationship between Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, or IQ, and the form and content of Inuit housing policy. A brief history of policy-making suggests that a culture carried over from the NWT dominates the policy-making landscape of Nunavut, tempered by the stark reality that social housing is a substantial and indelible feature of any housing policy horizon. Nevertheless, the goals and objectives for Inuit housing remain consistent with the commitment to housing as a market commodity. Where possible, the Government of Nunavut has pursued home ownership—understood as one family owning and occupying one housing unit—as an ideal form for housing Nunavummiut.

Other organizational forms have not been explored by the NHC. Canada has an assumed culture of housing policy-making that history—and the situation faced by Aboriginal peoples—suggests is in need of critical examination. We might ask, “What are the implications for housing of the values, social forms, and relationships characteristic of Inuit as a hunting culture, if the celebration of Inuit culture and uniqueness is to truly characterize ‘how things are done’ in Nunavut?”

Hugh Brody uses “individual egalitarianism” to describe Innu and Inuit as hunting cultures (2000, 264). It requires some measure of rationalization, but articulating the co-operative as a form that addresses what the concept of individual egalitarianism implies for how Inuit have and might work together within and across families and genders, seems possible. Despite the failure of a limited attempt at housing co-operatives, the historical success of the retail and marketing co-operative movement throughout Nunavut attests to a social form that challenges both the collective (and often paternalistic) responsibility assumed by state agents in providing housing to those in need and the rugged and competitive relations of the market. Brody’s characterization of hunting cultures helps one better understand why co-operative forms have had a lasting place in Inuit social organization. As they currently exist, housing policies and structures for their delivery—notably through local, community-based housing authorities—tend to create relations of ruling that reproduce the class-ridden, hierarchical, and gendered relations found in Euro-Canadian culture.

The absence of a housing market in Nunavut suggests that the limited time and resources of the NHC are best spent developing, strengthening, and reconceptualizing elements of its public housing program. Given the importance of extended families and relationships, the organization of extended-family housing co-operatives, where family units are allocated resources and given responsibility for the provision and allocation of housing to members, might be a workable alternative to an allocation system that appears to some extent to be currently functioning, in a clandestine way, along the lines of family loyalties. Families and

individuals, given options for joining one co-operative or another, would make a choice and be bound to that family-oriented co-operative for a number of years necessary to give stability to the organization. The extent to which co-operatives address Inuit principles of sharing and collective responsibility and housing as a need rather than a market commodity merits consideration. Collective ownership of units might also address well-documented problems associated with the maintenance of public housing units in which residents have little substantial or long-term vested interest (Alcantara 2005). Co-operatives organized along extended family lines might employ the skills of family members in maintaining, modifying, and constructing new units, and be consistent with principles of IQ. The consideration of principles of equity and equality would also be important to the design of such a program.

The Nunavut housing crisis can only be addressed by a significant commitment of federal funds. The case for federal funding is a strong one. While there has been some recognition on the part of the federal government of the limits to market-based policies in the North (as illustrated by support for the Homeownership Assistance Program), the trend towards a reduced federal presence was obvious with the signing of the *Nunavut Act* (1993), whereby under section 29 (1) the Government of Nunavut inherited the law establishing the NTHC and subsequently created the NHC, modeled after the NTHC. No extraordinary provisions were made to deal with Inuit housing. The NHC was created as a corporation responsible for delivering policies and programs and relating to CMHC and its policies in doing so. These policies and programs were clearly in the direction of devolving authority and fiscal responsibility to the provinces and territories (Carroll and Jones 2000). Unlike the Western Arctic, however, the population of Nunavut is overwhelmingly (85%) Aboriginal. Like all Aboriginal populations, Inuit have special housing needs and circumstances not easily met by policies of devolution and by market logic. Inuit, not having reserves, have also not been eligible for special federal programs intended to address the severe housing problems on Indian reserves in southern Canada.

Section 2.7.3 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement appears to be at odds with the underlying logic by which the NHC was created and operates, however. It states, "Nothing in the Agreement shall: (a) be construed so as to deny that Inuit are an aboriginal people of Canada...; (b) affect the ability of Inuit to participate in and benefit from government programs for Inuit or aboriginal people generally as the case may be." This raises the serious question as to whether the federal government can pursue policies of disengagement that assume no greater responsibility for the housing of Inuit than through the ordinary transfers that currently fund the operations of the Nunavut government, and whether or not Inuit are entitled

to the equivalent of the extraordinary measures directed at First Nations and their housing needs.

What are the rights and benefits of Canadian citizens in relation to housing? While it has never been explored by the courts, section 36 (1) of the Canadian Constitution (1982) commits Parliament to “(a) promoting equal opportunities for the well-being of Canadians; (b) furthering economic development to reduce disparities in opportunities; and (c) providing essential services of reasonable quality to all Canadians” (Nader and Morrow 1999). The liberal world view inherent in the wording of this section is obvious. Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that since the creation of Nunavut, Parliament has done much to promote equal opportunities for the well-being of Inuit (and others), recognizing that adequate, suitable, and affordable housing is essential to one’s capacity to participate in all aspects of Canadian society. It is a line of reasoning worth pursuing.

Canada has also signed and ratified the United Nations *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Article 11 of the covenant commits signatories to recognizing “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including food, clothing and housing.” It furthermore commits the state to working for the “continuous improvement of living conditions.” On both accounts, the federal government appears to have fallen far short of its obligations to Inuit.

In meeting its obligations in regard to Inuit housing, more attention must be paid to developing capacity. The short history of Nunavut suggests that the NHC is stretched to the limit and lacking the capacity to do much that is demanded of it under difficult and trying circumstances. The transfer of funds without concomitant attention to developing and expanding institutional capacities to use those funds effectively has meant that needs are only partially being addressed. The most recent auditor general’s report on the NHC (2008) suggests that greater capacity to manage housing stock is needed at the community level. A reconceptualization of how housing is organized, allocated, and managed might also be in order. Finally, if as Wade (1994) has noted, social activism has been essential to ensuring that the housing needs of those whose circumstances are not amenable to market solutions are addressed, limits to the development of Nunavummiut within the confines of western liberal democratic traditions also merit consideration. Without strong advocates, alternatives to existing policies and practices are anything but certain.

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