



Canadian
human rights
commission

Commission
canadienne des
droits de la personne

Claiming the right to housing: The Federal Housing Advocate's review of Métis housing conditions, in partnership with the government of Métis Nation – Saskatchewan



Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission

344 Slater Street, 8th Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1

Toll Free: 1-888-214-1090 | **TTY:** 1-888-643-3304 | **Fax:** 613-996-9661 | www.housingchrc.ca

How to cite this report:

The Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, 2024. *Claiming the right to housing: The Federal Housing Advocate's review of Métis housing conditions, in partnership with the government of Métis Nation – Saskatchewan.*

Ottawa: The Office of the Federal Housing Advocate.

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada,
as represented by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2024.

Cat. No.: HR34-23/2024E-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-72931-2

Table of contents

<i>Forward by the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan</i>	1
<i>Foreword by the Federal Housing Advocate</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	6
Engaging with the Métis.....	6
Purpose of the report.....	7
Language and terminology.....	7
International standards & domestic framework	8
<i>Part 1: A history of Métis in Saskatchewan</i>	10
Pre-confederation, the fur trade and early Métis settlement in Saskatchewan.....	10
Louis Riel, the Red River Resistance and the Manitoba Act	11
Diaspora of the Red River Colony and settling in Saskatchewan	12
Scrip Commission – 1885-1924	14
Road Allowance People and Métis farms	16
Advocacy for a Métis land base and title	17
Intersection of history and adequate housing	18
The Advocate’s key observations and statements of concern	18
Self-government & housing programs offered by MN–S	19
<i>Part 2: Observations</i>	24
Current data on Métis in Saskatchewan.....	24
<i>Saskatoon</i>	27
Addiction, homelessness, and lack of supports in Saskatoon.....	27
Métis-led solutions and housing supports in Saskatoon	31
The Advocate’s key observations and statements of concern in Saskatoon	41
<i>North Battleford</i>	43
<i>Northern Saskatchewan</i>	49
Pinehouse	50
Île-à-la-Crosse	56
La Loche	58
Timber Bay	61
Nipawin	62

Prince Albert	65
The Advocate’s key observations and statements of concern in Northern Saskatchewan	70
Part 3: Recommendations.....	73
Recommendations for municipalities.....	73
Recommendations for the Government of Saskatchewan.....	73
Recommendations for the Federal Government.....	77
Joint federal, provincial, MN–S recommendations	78

Forward by the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan

The Métis Nation – Saskatchewan (MN–S) was pleased to host the Federal Housing Advocate on an official visit to observe firsthand the housing and infrastructure gaps faced by Métis citizens in Saskatchewan. These gaps are serious and are the result of more than a century of displacement and dispossession.

As a government, we are committed to closing the gaps experienced in the province, including the northern regions. We welcome the Advocate’s efforts to bring attention to what the Métis are experiencing in Saskatchewan. We are at a critical time in our history. We have a lot to look forward to, but at the same, my heart is heavy for those who are suffering with addictions and mental health challenges and their families. I cannot help but feel that we are losing a part the next generation, and this is absolutely unacceptable.

We are proud of our efforts to serve our people with programs and policies that reconnect them with our communities and restore them as individuals. We have come a long way in a short time. But we know there is a lot more work ahead, and we cannot do all of this work alone.

Ensuring that all Métis have adequate housing will take sustained effort. More than that, it will take transformational change in our partner municipalities, province, and the federal government. Taking care of our people requires that we recognize where they are at and that we exercise empathy for how they got there.

I hope that in reading this report, you, too, will be moved to action so that we can all move forward together.

Glen McCallum
President

As Infrastructure and Housing Minister for Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, it is my mandate to help provide adequate housing for all Métis citizens in the province. Over the last five years, the MN–S government has offered programs, in partnership with Canada, to meet the need in the north, central, and south regions of Saskatchewan.

First launched in 2019, the Emergency Repair Program and the First Time Home Buyers programs were introduced to close gaps and support our citizens. Since then, more than 1,100 homeowners have been able to repair their homes and help address housing inadequacy, and 819 Métis citizens were handed the keys to their very first home.

The MN–S government has successfully constructed tiny homes, single family units, and seniors housing throughout the province through our Housing Sub Accord with the Government of Canada. More necessary projects are slated for this coming construction season.

As highlighted throughout this report, while we are making inroads, we know the need for adequate housing is great and there is much more investment and work to do. We respectfully request you join us to help provide the best possible living conditions for citizens now, and into the future of our Métis Nation.

Sincerely,

Loretta King
MN–S Infrastructure and Housing Minister

Foreword by the Federal Housing Advocate

As Canada's first Federal Housing Advocate, my role is to be an independent, nonpartisan watchdog. My goal is to drive change on key systemic housing issues and to hold government decision-makers accountable for their human rights obligations related to housing and homelessness. I do this work by bearing witness to violations of the human right to adequate housing, directly engaging with people experiencing housing precarity and homelessness, and advocating for systemic change through recommendations to Parliament.

The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right for everyone in Canada. It means that all people are equally entitled to live in dignity in a safe, accessible, and secure home, and that everyone should be able to access housing that meets their needs without discrimination or harassment. This right is an important precondition for other rights. Recognizing housing as a human right means that government has legal obligations to protect this right for everyone, and especially for people whose right to housing is being violated.

Following an initial visit to attend the Saskatchewan Housing and Homelessness Conference hosted by the Métis Nation Saskatchewan (MN-S) in March 2023, I returned Saskatchewan at the invitation of MN-S from July 12-21, 2023, specifically to review the local housing and homelessness systems, with the understanding that the Métis are disproportionately represented in the unhoused and precariously housed population. I spent time in various communities and met with organizations working to address pressing housing needs in the homeland of the Saskatchewan Métis. I wanted a firsthand view of the Métis experience with housing conditions, housing precarity and homelessness in Métis communities across the province with the goal of writing a report to be delivered to the federal government as legislated in my mandate.

This trip was planned in partnership with the MN-S. I travelled throughout the main part of the homeland of the Saskatchewan Métis. I started in Saskatoon, and traveled north to North Battleford, visiting Métis communities and their representatives from Pinehouse, Ile a la Crosse, La Loche and Timber Bay. I also visited Nipawin and Prince Albert. My trip coincided with Back to Batoche, the annual Métis celebration, in which I was honoured to participate.

During my trip, I observed a massive shortage of adequate and culturally appropriate housing supply for the Saskatchewan Métis. As the greater conversation across Canada focuses on the issue of supply, it is always important to highlight that supply alone will not solve the housing crises that ravage the country. It needs to be the right kind of supply.

The housing in Métis communities widely varies in terms of habitability – that is, housing that is in good repair and has enough bedrooms for its inhabitants. A lot of the homes are aging and in need of expensive maintenance and capital repairs. The exorbitant cost to heat these homes compared to those in the province's large urban centres are the result of two issues: the cost of electricity is much higher for people in the province's remote areas, and the homes themselves are in dire need of capital upgrades to minimize heat loss.

Many Métis in Saskatchewan experience extreme poverty and trauma related to the cumulative impacts of colonialism, forced displacement, severed cultural connections due to residential schools, the 60s Scoop, and continued disproportionate numbers of child apprehensions.

As a result, there are also high rates of addiction and violence. At one time or another, everyone will require support from police, emergency respondents and health practitioners. However, due to underfunding and continued racism, these systems are causing further trauma and distrust for the Métis. Alarming, as these systems harm rather than help the people they are created to support, drug use becomes a way to cope for many.

The complexity and severity of poverty and drug use among the Métis, and how these issues intersect with housing, have created a trajectory that threatens to overwhelm and destroy yet another future generation.

The complex issues faced by the Métis are not simply the result of historic displacement, but also current systemic gaps that have compounded these issues. The gross underfunding and neglect make it difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that there is sufficient emergency and transitional supportive housing to meet the increasing needs in these communities. During my visit, I found myself questioning whether stop-gap solutions created to address homelessness serve to exacerbate the situation and create other issues. I discovered deeply entrenched barriers that undermine the dedication, resilience, and fearlessness that every housing provider brings to their work every single day.

What I observed was a fragile housing continuum with a critical shortage of emergency shelters, transitional housing, group homes, and independent living with a range of wrap-around supports. In some communities, this type of housing is not fully available or are outright missing. Non-market and private market housing that is culturally appropriate are also required. There is no doubt that a Métis-informed approach to housing plays an important role in providing the stability and security necessary so that people in need are connected to community and are supported to address the root causes of their addictions. While I met service providers who are fiercely dedicated to their missions, there remains an unmistakable urgency for greater compassion, structural accountability, training, support, and funding for both housing providers and housing supply.

Métis in Saskatchewan need a housing supply that that fulfills their right to adequate housing. It must be affordable, habitable, accessible, available with supports, and culturally relevant.

I want to recognize and express deep gratitude to the tireless advocates, including Métis community members and leaders, Métis government officials, hamlet officials, and community service providers who took the time to meet and share their insights with me. I appreciate the rich contributions made to this report by the advocates working on the frontlines of the housing crisis across the Métis homeland in Saskatchewan.

I would like to recognize and thank all the provincial and municipal officials who shared their time and expertise.

Most importantly, I want to recognize and express deep gratitude to the individuals and families who shared their stories.

I acknowledge that some of you may be curious, hopeful, or skeptical of systemic change that the Federal Housing Advocate can bring. I want you to know that I share these feelings. Trust must be earned. I am deeply committed to leveraging what you have shared with me, and advocating with and

alongside you to all government duty bearers. Together, we can hold them to account for human rights-based approaches so that nobody is left behind in Canada's housing policies and laws.

To this end, the recommendations co-created with MN-S contained in this report force us to ask ourselves how we, as a nation, want to take care of the most disadvantaged people in our society and whether we truly live up to the standards we set for ourselves.

I ask that all levels of governments carefully consider and urgently implement the recommendations found in this report.

Sincerely,

Marie-Josée Houle,
Federal Housing Advocate

Introduction

In 2019, Parliament passed the National Housing Strategy Act, which recognizes housing as a human right and commits the federal government to further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing. The Act includes the appointment of a Federal Housing Advocate (the Advocate) to promote and protect the right to housing in Canada. The Federal Housing Advocate's office is independent and non-partisan, and is supported by the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right for everyone. Adequate housing is more than just four walls and a roof. It is a place to live in security, peace, and dignity. It is central to physical and mental health, community, and sustainability. Having an affordable, suitable and safe place to live helps people and families succeed and thrive.

Adequate housing must be:

- **Secure** – security of tenure provides protection from arbitrary eviction, forced relocation or harassment.
- **Provide basic services** – including safe drinking water, sanitation, heating, lighting, and emergency services.
- **Affordable** – housing costs should not be a barrier to meeting other basic needs such as food, and costs should be protected against unreasonable increases.
- **Habitable** – dwellings should have adequate space for the inhabitants, be properly maintained, and provide protection from the elements and other threats to health and well-being.
- **Accessible** – for people of all abilities, particularly those experiencing discrimination or living in vulnerable circumstances.
- **In a location** – that is close to employment and basic social services such as childcare, education and healthcare, and is not located in a polluted or dangerous area.
- **Culturally adequate** – respects and is appropriate for the expression of the inhabitants' cultural identity and ways of life.

The Advocate's mandate directs her to put particular focus on those with the greatest housing need. To this end, the Advocate is committed to understanding the unique social, economic, cultural, and geographic realities faced by people in different parts of the country. A top priority is to address and review the systemic housing issues of Indigenous peoples.

Engaging with the Métis

In March 2023, the Advocate was invited to participate in the first annual Housing and Homelessness Conference organized by MN-S. A return trip was planned to specifically look at housing conditions, homelessness and housing precarity in different parts of the province. Across the Métis homeland, Métis people experience disproportionately higher rates of homelessness and housing precarity compared to the non-Indigenous population. Additionally, they experience higher rates of addiction and mental health issues. Causes for these disproportional rates can be found in a history of a denial of rights, racism and systems that perpetuate harm. The Advocate travelled throughout the traditional Métis homeland in Saskatchewan north of Saskatoon from July 12-21, 2023.

Purpose of the report

The Advocate visited Saskatchewan to undertake a systemic review of the housing challenges of unhoused and precariously housed Métis.

The first part of this report contains valuable historic context about the Métis in Saskatchewan that led to where we are today.

The second part is a summary of what was heard when meeting participants during the Advocate's time in Saskatchewan. This part does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the issues, but rather highlights the opinions and concerns of housing providers, Métis citizens, MN–S government officials, and others who met with the Advocate regarding their experiences and observations of violations to the right to housing.

The testimonies shared with the Advocate during her visit contribute to a body of evidence that will support and inform the ongoing advocacy work of the Federal Housing Advocate in the following areas:

- Engagement efforts with people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity and federal, provincial, and municipal governments;
- Research and reports that include recommendations to Parliament; and
- Monitoring the progressive realization of the right to housing in Canada and the related goals and outcomes of the National Housing Strategy.

Part 3 of this report contains a full set of recommendations co-developed with MN–S that serve as calls to action for municipalities, the provincial government, and the federal government.

Language and terminology

Throughout this report, the Advocate has strived to use words and terms that do not carry stigma or impart judgement. The words we use matter; they underlie our mindset, influence our thoughts, and determine our actions. This seemingly small detail has tremendous impacts on how public policy and programs are developed and implemented. Keeping a human rights-based approach at the forefront means ensuring that we value and honour each and every single individual, no matter their circumstances, with words and terms that reflect their dignity, integrity and belonging in our community.

Our first act in taking care of marginalized and vulnerable people in our society needs to be about changing the words we use to describe them. For example, it is common to refer to a person struggling with substance abuse as an “addict”; this suggests that the person is the problem and should be punished like a criminal, as opposed to the person having a problem who should be treated like a patient. It is equally important to recognize others as people first because they are complex beings in constant state of change – rather than defining them by a single experience or state of being. Instead of “addict”, the better term is “person with a substance use disorder” or “patient”. This reflects a change from thinking that addiction is a moral failing that is a criminal issue, to thinking that substance abuse is a chronic, treatable disease that is a health issue.

The Advocate recognizes the challenges and complexities of both the opioid crisis and the housing crisis. At the same time, these crises are not just about the toxicity of the drugs or the lack of funding for housing. At the heart of these crises are people who fundamentally deserve dignity and belonging – not just because they are human, but because they are our children, our parents, our brothers, our sisters, our family. How we think about them and describe them as we try to find paths out of each crisis matters.

International standards & domestic framework

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) provides a framework for “the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples of the world.” (article 43) Adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007, it sets out a constellation of rights, including those related to self-determination and self-governance, rights to lands, territories and resources, and rights to equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of human rights, including economic, social, and cultural rights.

In relation to the right to housing, the UN Declaration contains several key provisions:

- Articles 1 and 2: The rights to equality and non-discrimination, as individuals and as peoples
- Article 3: The right to self-determination
- Article 4: The right to self-government
- Article 8: The right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or cultural destruction
- Article 10: The right not to be forcibly removed from Indigenous lands or territories
- Article 21: The right to be free from discrimination
- Article 22: A focus on the rights and special needs of Indigenous Elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities; the right of Indigenous women and children to live free from violence
- Article 23: Right to development, including housing programmes
- Article 26: Right to own, use, develop and control lands, territories and resources
- Article 40: Right to just and fair procedures for the resolution of conflicts and disputes
- Article 44: Equal guarantee of rights to male and female Indigenous individuals.

On June 21, 2021, the Parliament of Canada passed into law the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UN Declaration Act), which commits the federal government to achieving full implementation of the UN Declaration, including by ensuring that federal laws, regulations and policies are consistent with its requirements. While the government of British Columbia has adopted provincial legislation with similar requirements and intent, other Canadian provinces and territories, to date, have not.

Action Plan

On June 21, 2023, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan was tabled in the House of Commons and Senate, fulfilling one of the requirements of Canada’s commitment to implement the UN Declaration. The Action Plan was co-developed with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across Canada. The Action Plan is intended as a road map of actions Canada needs to take to implement the UN Declaration.

Action #88 is specific to housing and is a shared priority amongst First Nations, Métis and Inuit:

When people have access to safe and affordable housing, they are more economically secure, healthier, and see brighter futures for themselves and their families. While the National Housing Strategy prioritizes Indigenous and northern housing projects, significant gaps exist in addressing the housing needs of Indigenous peoples living in urban, rural and northern areas. The Government of Canada is committed to implementing a co-developed Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy with Indigenous partners. The Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy will complement the three existing distinctions-based housing strategies: First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy, the Inuit Nunangat Housing Strategy and the Canada-Métis Nation Housing Sub-Accord¹.

Chapter 4 of the Action Plan contains 13 priorities that were co-developed with the Métis. These 13 priorities include action items related to self-government and recognition of treaties, civil and political rights, participation in decision-making and Indigenous institutions, economic, health and social rights, and education, information, and media.

Methodology

The Advocate's visit was co-developed with MN-S to focus on the traditional areas of Métis settlement in Saskatchewan. These areas currently house larger Métis communities. The Advocate was accompanied at all times by knowledgeable, trauma-informed community members and service providers.

Photographs of people collected for the purposes of this report were taken with written consent for use.

Part 1: A history of Métis in Saskatchewan

The Advocate’s visit to the traditional territories of the Métis in Saskatchewan used a right to housing lens to reveal the intersection of history, present day circumstances and future opportunities. A key starting point of this intersection is history. The history of Métis in Saskatchewan is not commonly known and often, the role of the Métis in the creation of the province is overlooked. The first part of this report provides important context for understanding how the Métis experience housing today and how unique the Métis experience is to Saskatchewan. It is hoped that this overview will bring to light a history that has been hidden, provoke further questions, and establish a foundation for understanding the observations the Advocate noted during her trip.

Métis in Saskatchewan pre-date the 1869-1870 Red River Resistance, with settlements across what is now the northern part of the province. While the Métis were fur traders, they were also some of the earliest farmers.

One of the challenges that assembling this overview presented was that Métis history has not always been documented. This is an unfortunate consequence of the Métis being erased in history.

Pre-confederation, the fur trade and early Métis settlement in Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, Métis settlements are thought to have pre-dated agrarian communities by over 100 yearsⁱⁱ. Archaeological evidence points to Métis history at Saskatchewan’s oldest permanent settlement and fur trade post at Cumberland House, and at Métis wintering or “hivernant” sites such as Petite Ville (an hour northeast of Saskatoon) or Chimney Coulee in the Cypress Hillsⁱⁱⁱ.

Métis history can be traced back to the fur trade and alliances with Indigenous nations. As noted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP):

Intermarriage between First Nations and Inuit women and European fur traders and fishermen produced children, but the birth of new Aboriginal cultures took longer. At first, the children of mixed unions were brought up in the traditions of their mothers or (less often) their fathers. Gradually, however, distinct Métis cultures emerged, combining European and First Nations or Inuit heritages in unique ways. Economics played a major role in this process. The special qualities and skills of the Métis population made them indispensable members of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal economic partnerships, and that association contributed to the shaping of their cultures. . . . As interpreters, diplomats, guides, couriers, freighters, traders and suppliers, the early Métis people contributed massively to European penetration of North America.^{iv}

Between 1763 and 1821, approximately 86 trading posts were established in what is now the province of Saskatchewan, mostly by French speaking fur traders or “voyageurs.” These posts were on the Churchill River, the north, south and lower Saskatchewan rivers, the Upper Assiniboine and the Qu’Appelle.

Métis communities were originally distinguished by whether they were French speaking or English speaking. The term Métis was originally applied to individuals with mixed French and Indigenous descent. Anglo-Métis, known as Countryborn or “English halfbreeds,” were Scottish or English^v. Both groups had lived in adjacent communities along the Red River in Manitoba. In 1812, the French community was located around St. Boniface and the English community was located around Selkirk. Descendants from both communities moved west into Saskatchewan to form new settlements^{vi}. Early French-speaking Métis communities were found in northern Saskatchewan. These settlements include Ile-a-la-Crosse, La Loche, Buffalo Narrows (Lac-de-Boeufs), Green Lake (Lac-Vert), Beauval and Meadow Lake (Lac-des-Prairies)^{vii}. As the fur trade slowed down, some Métis turned to buffalo hunting. In the 1850s-60s, Métis communities developed further south at Chimney Coulee in the Cypress Hills, in the Frenchman River Valley, at Lac-Pelletier and Vallée-Ste-Claire, around Montagne-de-Bois (Wood Mountain) in the Big Muddy Valley, on the Missouri Coteau, in the Souris River Valley, in the Qu’Appelle River Valley, and at La Prairie Ronde (Round Prairie), south of present-day Saskatoon^{viii}.

Anglo Métis settlements were located around Prince Albert. James Isbister, who was known as a leader of the “English Half-Breeds”, established a farm on the Lower North Saskatchewan River in 1862 with his wife Margaret Bear. They were joined by relatives from both families, as well as other Métis settlers, and the area became known as Isbister’s Settlement. However, James Isbister’s role in the founding of Saskatchewan’s third largest city has long been overlooked. Historical records indicate that a Presbyterian mission led by Reverend James Nisbet was established at the community and named Prince Albert^{ix}.

Through the lens of history, the erasure of James Isbister’s role in northern Saskatchewan demonstrates a pattern of how Métis history disappeared from the narrative of Canada. The tension between Métis settlements and other settlers is further revealed following the transfer of Rupert’s Land.

Louis Riel, the Red River Resistance and the Manitoba Act

In 1869, the Hudson’s Bay Company transferred its interest in Rupert’s Land to the Dominion of Canada. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s vision was to open the west for colonization and encouraged western immigration. The influx of new settlers would have significant impacts on the Métis, but the government did not take into account the fact that the Métis settlements were established societies. The conflict that this lack of recognition caused was initially centered at the Red River Settlement.

As recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. v. Canada* 2013 SCC 14 (at para. 23), the Red River Settlement in 1869 was well established in what is now downtown Winnipeg, with a free enterprise system that included retail stores, hotels, trading posts, and saloons. In addition, the Settlement had judicial and civic institutions. A land holding system was based on a traditional system of river lots that was modelled on the “rangs” in the St. Lawrence and Richelieu valleys in Quebec. When the British based Canadian government began surveying the land in a grid system, the Métis system of land ownership was disregarded.

The Red River Métis, led by Louis Riel, established the National Committee of Métis to protest the land transfer in October 1869, marking the start of the first government in Manitoba, as well as the start of the Red River Resistance. A provisional government was later established in December, with Riel its president. Riel’s goal was to negotiate terms to enter Confederation. Initial terms included a Métis Bill of Rights, which sought recognition of their own legislature at Red River, the election of federal members

of Parliament, two official languages, and the right to maintain Métis Culture and customs. By the spring, the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia was established by the provisional government to pass laws. This Assembly, with 28 elected representatives including a president, an executive council, an adjutant general, a chief justice and a clerk. As the first elected government of the Red River Settlement, the Assembly was operational from March 9, 1870 – June 24, 1870^x.



Picture of Louis Riel and his Council, 1869-1970

In May, the Manitoba Act was passed, formally creating the province of Manitoba and admitting it into Confederation. English and French language rights were recognized as official languages, Protestant and Catholic education rights were recognized, and the province received 4 seats in Parliament. Also, 1.4 million acres of land were set aside for the Métis^{xi} in s. 31, and s. 32 of the Manitoba Act.

Diaspora of the Red River Colony and settling in Saskatchewan

While the Manitoba Act set aside land for the Métis and recognized existing land holdings, the process to distribute land was a failure, resulting in many Métis moving further west into Saskatchewan. This migration resulted in the site of Métis government moving from Red River in Manitoba to Saskatchewan.

The Canadian government had begun the process of implementing s. 31 in early 1871, dividing the 1.4 million acres amongst all of the Métis, as opposed to the children of the Métis heads of families as set out in s. 31. In 1873, the government changed course, and decided that only the children would be entitled to the s. 31 land grants. When a new government was elected in 1874, there was a delay in moving forward on the grants until 1875 (SCC, para. 34-35), and at that time, the government appointed two officials to verify the claimants entitled to the s. 31 grants. The officials concluded that more land needed to be allotted; this process had begun in 1876, but was not completed until 1880. In the meantime, speculators began acquiring the Métis children's s. 31 interests. By 1885, the government had realized that it had underestimated the number of eligible Métis children, and instead of re-starting the allotment process again, the government stated that the children for whom there was no land would be issued with \$240 worth of scrip redeemable for land.

During this period, new settlers in Red River soon became the majority. Without secured land holdings and Riel's exile to the United States in late 1870, the Métis faced social, political and economic uncertainty. Many of the Métis left the Red River Settlement, concerned about the survival of their communities and culture. Settling in Saskatchewan, former Red River communities established a number of settlements, including Wood Mountain-Willow Bunch, St. Laurent, St. Isadore de Belleville, and Batoche^{xii}. These settlements were in addition to previously established Métis communities in Saskatchewan.

By the late 1870s, the Métis did not have political representation, were experiencing a failing economy with the disappearance of the buffalo, and still did not have secure land tenure. Multiple requests to the federal government in Ottawa went unanswered. In 1884, a Métis delegation led by Gabriel Dumont travelled to Montana to persuade Riel to return to Canada to negotiate with the federal government. Riel petitioned Ottawa for the recognition of Métis title to lands already occupied by Métis families. The government agreed to form a commission to further investigate the grievances. By 1885, tensions continued to increase, and the Métis formed the Provisional Government of Saskatchewan, with the seat of the government at Batoche. Similar to the government previously set in Manitoba now recognized as the first government of Manitoba, the Provisional Government was the first government of Saskatchewan.

On March 26, the Battle of Duck Lake resulted in a victory for the Métis and signified the start of the North-West Resistance. Led by Gabriel Dumont, the Métis would also be successful at the Battle of Fish Creek. However, in May 1885, the North West Resistance ended for the Métis at the Battle of Batoche. More Canadian troops were able to arrive by train and overwhelmed the smaller Métis forces. The Resistance for the Métis ended with Riel's surrender, who was subsequently found guilty of treason and was hanged on November 16, 1885, in Regina. The end of the North-West Resistance also marked the end of the Provisional Government of Saskatchewan.

Following 1885, the Métis in Saskatchewan were labelled as rebellious by the government and the provinces. This caused the Métis to become marginalized and displaced from their communities and lands.



Back to Batoche Days, Opening Ceremony – July 2023

Scrip Commission – 1885-1924

Both the Red River Resistance and the North-West Resistance sought the recognition of a distinct Métis way of life, as well as the recognition of Métis title to lands. Generally, Métis land entitlements were recognized in two different pieces of legislation, Manitoba Act and the Dominion Lands Act, and implemented through a scrip process. However, the setting aside land for the Métis through scrip was a failure in both cases. The Manitoba Act scrip process led to a diaspora of the Métis. The Dominion Lands Act process was open to abuse and essentially robbed the Métis of lands they were entitled to.

In 1879, the Dominion Lands Act that was originally passed in 1872 was amended to recognize outstanding Métis claims to their lands in present day Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Section 125(e) provided for the scrip system that would address Métis lands outside of the Act:

to satisfy any claims existing in connection with the extinguishments of the Indian title, preferred by half-breeds resident in the North-West Territories outside of the limits of Manitoba, on the fifteenth day of July, one thousand eight hundred and seventy, by granting land to such persons, to such extent and on such terms and conditions, as may be deemed expedient^{xiii} .

In 1885, a series of Métis Scrip Commissions were established to distribute scrip to individual Métis. Essentially, the federal government offered either land (160 or 240 acres) or money (\$160 or \$240) scrip in exchange for removing any Métis claim or title to land. The purpose was for the Crown to consolidate control of the lands and ensure that the lands could be settled without encumbrance. The approach to securing title from individual Métis contrasted with how Canada secured title from First Nations. Instead of scrip, Canada negotiated treaties that required the surrender of land in exchange for a reserve and benefits.

Scrip was distributed in at least three different processes. In the 1876, scrip distribution began in Manitoba to meet obligations under the Manitoba Act after a long delay in implementing s. 31. However, the process of distribution was hampered by numerous administrative challenges. An additional scrip commission was required, which was operated at the same time as the commission established after the North-West Resistance based on the amendments to the Dominions Land Act. This second distribution of scrip in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta took place in the 1880s. Essentially there were two scrip distribution processes for two different purposes operating at the same time. As an additional layer of complexity, due to the diaspora, some Métis were eligible for scrip under both the Manitoba Act and the Dominion Lands Act. The third distribution of scrip was completed in conjunction with treaty negotiations. Scrip commissioners were present during the negotiations of Treaty 8 (1899), Treaty 10 (1906) and Treaty 11 (1921), as well as during the treaty adhesions of Treaty 5 (1908) and Treaty 8 (1901). In both First Nations and Métis families, some took treaty, while others took scrip. As a result, one family would have members who had status as per the Indian Act, and others who were Métis^{xiv}.

Issuing and receiving scrip was a formal process with multiple forms, paperwork, and lengthy wait times between steps. The process to receive a scrip coupon required a form to be filled out and an affidavit to be sworn and signed. As the population was mostly illiterate, scrip commissioners had to verify the process through an interview. Applicants also had to provide two witnesses that could confirm the applicant was a “half-breed” and resident in the North-West Territories (present day Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta) prior to July 15, 1870. Once verified, commissioners would then provide a certificate confirming that the claimant was entitled to the scrip set out in the certificate. A duplicate certificate was provided to the Department of the Interior as a record of the transaction^{xv}.

To redeem the scrip coupon, a trip to the Dominion Lands Office was required. Land had first to be located and then registered in person with the office. Located in cities and towns, going to a Dominion Lands Office required extensive travel. The office would issue a patent after verifying that the lands claimed did not have any other overlapping or conflicting uses. Picking up the patent required another trip to the office. Redeeming money scrip also required a trip to the Dominion Lands Office.

The scrip process was not a process that fit the circumstances or ways of life of the Métis. In the end, the scrip process left the Métis with little or no land. Scrip was vulnerable to speculation and fraud. Scrip speculators were often present with the scrip commissioners. Aware that some scrip holders were in difficult economic circumstances, scrip buyers would undercut them by purchasing their scrip for well below their value. Scrip buyers would then fraudulently obtain a patent and then re-sell the land at higher prices. One land surveyor, William Pearce, who was a critic of the Métis and scrip, noted that the scrip process had been corrupted, and that the commissioners were in business with the speculators^{xvi}. At the same time, lands were not set aside or protected for the Métis, resulting in less and less available lands to be selected.

By 1921, scrip speculation had become widely known, and triggered a change in the Criminal Code for prosecuting scrip offenses. A limitation period was passed, limiting the ability to pursue scrip offenses. A Department of Justice memo noted:

It appears that the scrip was handed to the half-breeds by the agent of the Indian Department and it was then purchased, for small sums of course, by speculators. However the half-breed himself was required by the Department of the Interior to appear in person at the office of the land agent and select his land and hand over his scrip. In order to get over this difficulty, the speculator would employ the half-breed to impersonate the breed entitled to the scrip. This practice appears to have been very widely indulged in at one time. The practice was winked at evidently at the time and the offences were very numerous^{xvii}.

As history demonstrates, scrip ultimately failed in resolving Métis title and claims. Contrary to the suggestion that both the Manitoba Act and Dominion Lands Act recognized Métis land title, scrip allowed lands to be sold to anyone without any recognition. Instead of setting up a path to stability through land tenure, the way scrip was implemented resulted in dispossessing the Métis of their lands, displacing them from the ability to establish stable homes and communities, and ultimately, disempowering them. What cannot be ignored in this history is the role that government played in deliberately and systematically marginalizing the Métis.

Road Allowance People and Métis farms

With increasing displacement from land entitlements, Métis communities developed on unused portions of land along the sides of roads, becoming known as the “Road Allowance People”. These communities were not connected to any services or infrastructure, like running water and electricity. Houses were makeshift and uninsulated, often built from discarded materials. Usually containing one or two rooms, these houses accommodated entire families.

The children in these communities did not have access to schools^{xviii}. Without the kind of stability that housing provides, the social and health outcomes for these communities were correspondingly low. Because the road allowance communities persisted for approximately sixty years, at least three generations of Métis children were not able to obtain a basic education.

In the 1930s, the Saskatchewan government became concerned with the Métis road allowance communities. A policy of establishing farms and relocating Métis communities to these farms was implemented from the late 1930s to the 1950s. The aim of the policy was to “rehabilitate” the Métis, and after becoming farmers, become assimilated into broader society. Multiple farms were purchased, mostly from the Roman Catholic Church and related orders in Lebrét, Baljennie, Crescent Lake, Crooked Lake, Duck Lake, Glen Mary, Lestock and Willow Bunch. As many as 2500 Métis lived on these farms^{xix}.

An initial Métis farming colony was established at Green Lake. In 1939, Métis families were removed from their road allowances, loaded onto railway cars, and while the Métis were on board, forced to watch as officials burned down their homes. They were relocated to an isolated northern area. This practice of forced relocation continued to the mid-1950s^{xx}. Once at the farms, the Métis were excluded from the governance and the operation of the farm. Often government officials were dismissive and racist. There was a failure to recognize that the Métis did not prefer farming. By the late 1950s, many

Métis were leaving the farms and moving to the cities to seek employment. The government then looked at shutting down the farms and integrating the remaining Métis into the cities.

Advocacy for a Métis land base and title

Despite communities dispersing and being relocated, the Métis in Saskatchewan continued their advocacy for a land base and recognition of title through political organization. A land base would allow for stable housing and communities. During the 1930s, Joe Ross, J.Z. LaRocque and Fred DeLaronde, who were based in Regina, organized the Métis in Saskatchewan into “locals”. This structure was based on a labour union model, with each local having its own elected officials, governance and bylaws operating as part of a larger structure. The Métis locals, mostly in south and central Saskatchewan, operated within the Saskatchewan Métis Society (SMS)^{xxi}. In 1937, J.Z. LaRocque was elected president of the SMS, and lobbied government to address scrip, poverty and other issues. The SMS also lobbied the province to grant a land base to the Métis, to mirror the creation of Alberta’s legislation that recognized Métis settlements and set aside land for them. The Saskatchewan government provided a \$10,000 grant for legal research into the claim, but the legal opinion had concluded that Métis land claims had been extinguished by the scrip system. During World War II, the SMS disbanded as many of its members enlisted^{xxii}.



National Métis Veterans' Memorial Monument, Batoche



By the 1960s, two different Métis organizations emerged. The Métis Society of Saskatchewan, founded in 1964 by Joe Amyotte, represented the Métis in south and central Saskatchewan. Northern Métis and Non-Status Indians were represented by the Métis Association of Saskatchewan that was led by Malcolm Norris and James Brady. However, these two organizations merged in 1967 to become the Métis Society of Saskatchewan. The focus continued to be the recognition of Métis title, health and education.

In 1975, the Métis Society of Saskatchewan became the Association of Métis and Non-status Indians of Saskatchewan. At this time, the organization began receiving funding for program and service delivery from federal and provincial governments. The funding arrangements provided an opportunity to meet with government officials regularly, and bring increased attention to the issues that the Métis in Saskatchewan were facing as well as Métis history.

The inclusion of the Métis in constitutional talks and eventually in s. 35 of the Constitution in 1982 was a pivotal moment for the Métis. The inclusion of the Métis as one of the Aboriginal groups in Canada with First Nations and Inuit meant that the identity of the Métis was finally recognized. In 1988, the Association of Métis and Non-status Indians of Saskatchewan was disbanded, and a Métis-only political body, the Métis Society of Saskatchewan, was created. The Métis Society of Saskatchewan was renamed in 1993 to become the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. Throughout the 1990s, led by Gerald Morin, Jim Durocher and Clement Chartier as presidents, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan worked to have Métis rights, including the right to self-government recognized and implemented. In 2023, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MN–S) concluded a formal self-government agreement with the federal government.

Intersection of history and adequate housing

The arc of Métis history has been defined by tireless efforts to secure lands for stable homes and families to grow and establish communities so that the distinct Métis ways of life could continue. From the perspective of adequate housing, the Métis in Saskatchewan have experienced historic violations of all their rights to housing, which has resulted in leaving their communities destabilized and in a continuous state of poverty. Just as housing can provide a stable foundation, the lack of housing can erode a way of life.

The transfer of Rupert’s Land to the Dominion of Canada triggered an entire series of historic violations. From the diaspora of the Red River Settlement to the history of creating Prince Albert National Park, the security of tenure experienced by Métis communities was constantly tenuous. Their communities were disrupted by forced relocation, driven by racist government policies combined with anti-Métis sentiment from non-Indigenous settlers. Following the North West Resistance, the Métis faced harassment from non-Indigenous settlers and many felt no other choice but to move elsewhere. The failure of the scrip commissions became a barrier to accessible and affordable homes that are culturally adequate. Being forced to live in road allowances meant little or no availability of basic services like sanitation, heating, and emergency services. Children did not have access to education.

The Advocate’s key observations and statements of concern

- The Métis have a history that demonstrates adaptability, resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit. They forged a new way of life by applying the best of their ancestry to the potential of the country they found themselves in, making them formidable.
- Predating Louis Riel, the history of the Métis in Saskatchewan is unique and rich. Their role in forming the first government in Saskatchewan and triggering its path to joining Confederation has been completely overlooked.
- The displacement, dispossession and disempowerment of the Métis have had devastating impacts, many of which can be felt today. In particular, the failure of the Scrip Commission undermined the ability of the Métis to secure lands for a home.
- The government played an active role in the forcible removal of the Métis, resulting in barriers other Canadians do not face such as the interruption of stable home ownership, poverty, and challenges to transfer wealth to the next generation.



Art by Christi Belcourt – MN–S office

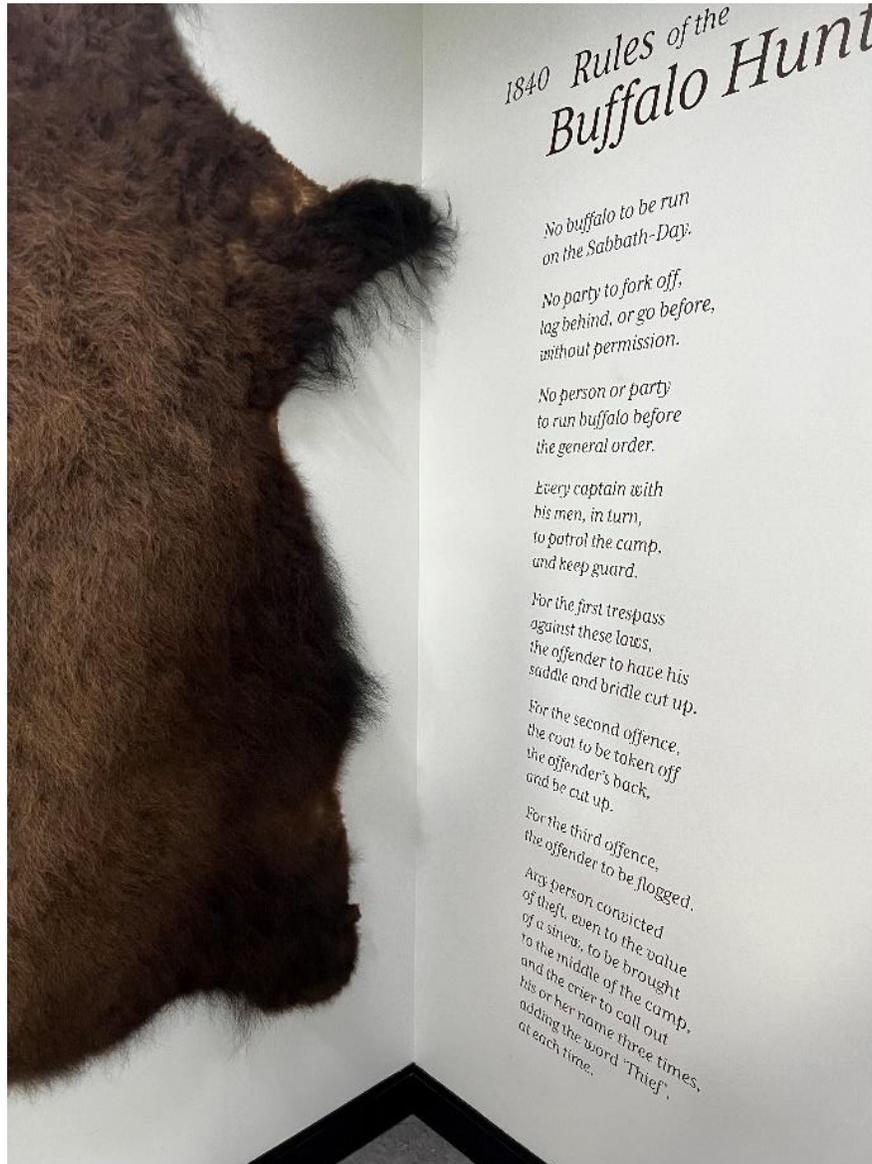
Self-government & housing programs offered by MN–S

The Métis Nation-Saskatchewan Self-government Recognition and Implementation Agreement confirms that Canada recognizes that the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan is the representative government of the Métis communities who are successors to the historic Métis Nation within Saskatchewan. These communities have the inherent right to self-government set out in s. 35 of the Constitution, which includes the recognition of Métis governance structures and law-making powers. This agreement is consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes the right to self-determination and self-government.

Self-government negotiations for the MN–S formally date back to the Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation signed by Canada and the Métis Nation–Saskatchewan in 2018. An initial self-government agreement was signed in 2019; this agreement was one of the first self-government agreements reached with Métis in Canada that recognized a Métis right to self-government.

The 2019 agreement was updated in 2023, and includes federal recognition of the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan’s jurisdiction over governance and a new commitment to negotiate a core governance treaty. The future core governance treaty envisioned in the Agreement will focus on governance matters, and will include further details in key areas such as harmonizing laws and resolving disputes. The treaty will then replace the Métis Nation–Saskatchewan’s self-government agreement.

As demonstrated by the historic overview, the Métis in Saskatchewan have a long history of self-governance that pre-dates the self-government agreement signed in 2023. Early governance principles are reflected in the rules of the buffalo hunt. To this end, MN-S has always represented the social, political, and economic interests of Métis in Saskatchewan. The fundamental principles which guide the governance of Métis Nation–Saskatchewan are based on the MN–S Constitution, The Métis Act, The Citizens Act, The Boundaries Act, The Senate Act, The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly Act, and The Wildlife and Conservation Act.



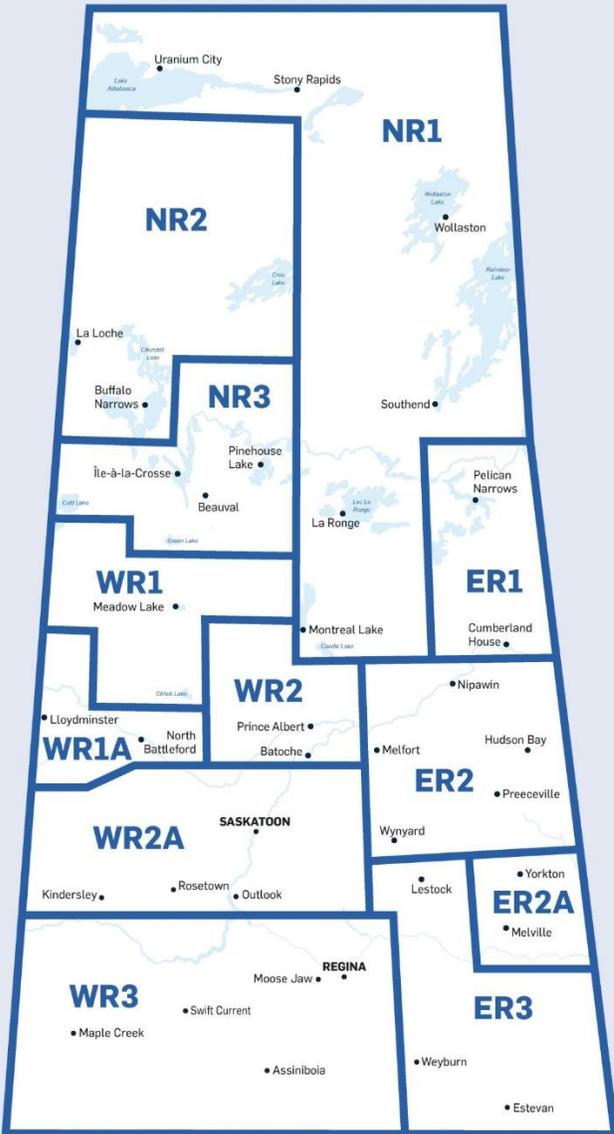
Rules of the Buffalo Hunt

MN–S’s governance is organized with a Legislative Assembly, a Senate and Cabinet known as the Provincial Métis Council (PMC). The PMC is composed of a four-member executive, as well as elected officials representing all 12 MN–S regions, women, and youth.

MÉTIS NATION–SASKATCHEWAN

Executive & Regional Directors





MN-S EXECUTIVE

President
Glen McCallum

Vice President
Michelle LeClair

Provincial Secretary
Lisa McCallum

MN-S REGIONAL DIRECTORS

Northern Region 1 – NR1
Laura Burnouf

Northern Region 2 – NR2
Leonard Montgrand

Northern Region 3 – NR3
Mervin ‘Tex’ Bouvier

Eastern Region 1 – ER1
Ryan Carriere

Eastern Region 2 – ER2
Brent Wilford John Digness

Eastern Region 2A – ER2A
Tim J.W. Roussin

Eastern Region 3 – ER3
Marg Friesen

Western Region 1 – WR1
Loretta King

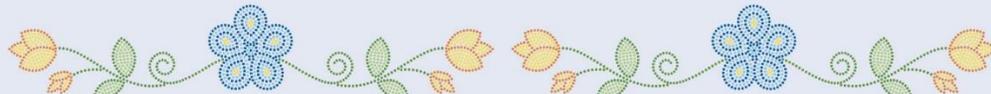
Western Region 1A – WR1A
Billy Kennedy

Western Region 2 – WR2
Sherry McLennan

Western Region 2A – WR2A
Kathie Pruden Nansel

Western Region 3 – WR3
Wendy Gervais

metisnationsk.com



MN–S Government leadership structure

The Housing and Infrastructure Portfolio is currently led by Minister Loretta King. Minister King oversees programs and partnerships targeted at closing housing and infrastructure gaps, supporting first-time home buyers, funding for emergency home repairs and renovations, developing a regional housing strategy, developing a northern housing strategy, and addressing homelessness. In July 2018, the Canada – Métis Nation Housing Sub-agreement was signed. This historic accord provided \$500 million of funding over a 10-year period. Part of Minister King’s budget includes the MN–S allocation of \$125M of this funding over 10 years to address housing, with additional funding from Budget 2022^{xxiii}.

In October 2023, MN–S opened a one-stop community hub to connect its citizens with social, economic and mental health support services through Ma Faamii located in Saskatoon. The centre, whose name is Michif for “my family”, offers a place for Métis citizens to connect with supports and programs needed for themselves and their families. Ma Faamii plays a significant role in addressing housing needs for Métis citizens and connecting them with their local housing partners.



Ma Faamii building entrance - July 2023



Ma Faamii meeting room

MN–S offers several programs to meet the diverse needs of their citizens. These programs match a broad housing needs continuum, from funding emergency needs to actively increasing housing supply.

Programs that are offered by MN–S include:

1. Emergency Repairs Program

The Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN–S) Emergency Repairs Program (ERP) is for low-income Métis citizens in Saskatchewan. It is a one-time grant for homeowners to undertake critical repairs required to ensure the safety of their dwelling. Examples of critical repairs include leaking roofs, primary heat sources that do not work, mold remediation, retrofits to accommodate disabilities, fire protection (smoke/carbon monoxide detectors), critical foundation/structural repairs, and connection to municipal water and sewer. The program provides up to \$40K for citizens in the North and \$25K for citizens in South/Central.

Citizens must own their house, live in it as their primary residence and stay in it for 5 years. In addition, gross household incomes must be less than \$100K and there must be less than \$500K in total property equity.

2. First Time Homebuyers Program

The MN–S First Time Home Buyers' Program (FTHB) is for Métis citizens in Saskatchewan who are purchasing their first home. It is a one-time grant to provide financial assistance with the down payment and legal fees associated with the purchase of their first home. The program provides \$15K in down payment assistance and \$2,500 towards closing costs.

To qualify, citizens must not have owned a home in the last 4 years, must qualify for a mortgage and make less than \$150K gross annual household income. Citizens must remain in the home as their primary residence for five years.

3. Commercial Harvesting Improvements Program

The Commercial Harvesting Improvements Program (CHIP) is a pilot program aimed at promoting economic opportunities for eligible Métis commercial harvesters by providing financial assistance to build, maintain or improve structures that support their commercial harvesting practices and facilitate traditional land use activities such as commercial fishing and trapping.

CHIP aims to address the specific problem of citizens slowly losing their connections to the land. Those who still commercially harvest face a dilemma of deciding how to allocate their limited income – their homes or their traplines. Many citizens live a good portion of the year on their trapline with very poor living conditions.

The program provides up to \$15K towards the materials and labour for projects such as commercial fishing/trapping cabin, smoke shack, outhouse, dock, and generators. Citizens must have a valid trapping license, a Crown land lease and earn less than \$100K gross annual income. CHIP accepted 30 applicants in 2023/2024 and is now closed.

4. Home Efficiency Initiative

MN–S is also planning to launch its home efficiency initiative. This program will be largely funded by Natural Resources Canada as part of the Greener Home Program. All retrofits under that program will be eligible under the MN–S program. These retrofits include insulation upgrades, window/doors, heat pumps, solar panels, and air sealing.

While the program is still in its planning stages, it focuses on supporting Métis homeowners needing to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and decrease their carbon footprint. The program is intended to provide up to \$30K for citizens in the North and \$27K in South/Central areas.

5. Regional Housing Strategy

This strategy focuses on increasing housing supply and provides up to \$1.5M to each Métis Region towards housing projects identified by the Region. To date, one Region has completed its projects, with 4 other Regions in progress. Projects are primarily new housing builds for affordable rentals.

Part 2: Observations

This part of the report summarizes what was heard from meeting community members, housing providers and government officials during the Advocate's time in Saskatchewan. Planned in partnership with the MN–S, the Advocate travelled throughout the main part of the homeland of the Saskatchewan Métis. The trip began in Saskatoon, and the Advocate proceeded to North Battleford, visiting Métis communities and their representatives from Pinehouse, Ile a la Crosse, La Loche and Timber Bay. The Advocate also visited Nipawin and Prince Albert.

Generally, Métis communities experience disproportionately higher rates of homelessness and housing precarity compared to the non-Indigenous population. Additionally, they experience higher rates of addiction and mental health issues. Causes for these disproportional rates can be found in a history of a denial of rights, racism and systems that perpetuate harm.

Current data on Métis in Saskatchewan

General data

According to the 2021 Statistics Canada Census, there are 1.8 million Indigenous people in Canada, representing approximately 5% of the country's total population. Of this 1.8 million, 624,220 are Métis. 83.2% of the 624,220 live in either Ontario or Western Canada. Of the 624,220 Métis in Canada, 224,650 reported being a member of a Métis organization or Settlement. 62,800 people identified as Métis in Saskatchewan.

The Indigenous population as a whole is younger than the non-Indigenous population, with an average age of 33.6 years compared to 41.8 years for the non-Indigenous population. The average age of the Métis population is 35.9 years.

General data shows that Indigenous peoples are much more likely to live in a low-income household than the non-Indigenous population. Statistics Canada defines low income as the median household income, after tax, is below 50% of median household incomes. This is a relative measure^{xxiv}. Of the 1.8 million Indigenous population, 18.8% live in a low-income household compared to 10.7% of the non-Indigenous population. For Métis, 12.8% live in a low-income household.

Housing data related to Métis in Saskatchewan

Across Canada, 49,565 Métis, or 1 in 12, were living in crowded housing, defined as housing not considered suitable for the number of people who live there based on the National Occupancy Standard. The National Occupancy Standard (NOS) assesses crowding using the required number of bedrooms for a household based on the age, sex, and relationships among household members. In Saskatchewan, 10% of dwellings occupied by Métis are crowded. In addition, 10% of houses require major repairs. This statistic is down 1.2% from 2016.

Statistics Canada shows the following for Métis in Saskatchewan relative to other Métis in Canada:

- Saskatchewan has the highest percentage of subsidized housing
- Average monthly total of all expenses of a household are lower
- Renters are charged the highest rates for water
- Renters are charged slightly higher costs for housing
- Saskatchewan Métis have the highest levels of unsuitable dwellings (overcrowding)
- Saskatchewan has a higher percentage of houses requiring repair
- Saskatchewan has the highest core housing need, especially in the areas of suitability and adequacy (crowding and repair)

In terms of gender indicators:

- Métis men and women in Saskatchewan have the highest levels of unsuitable dwelling (crowding) compared to other Métis men and women across Canada
- Métis men in Saskatchewan live in housing requiring the highest need of repair
- Métis men and women in Saskatchewan live with highest level of core housing need compared to other Métis men and women across Canada

Most housing in Saskatchewan was built between 1961 to 1990, signifying a major building boom. Houses built between 1920-1945 require the highest percentage of repairs compared to the rest of the Métis homeland in Canada. Also, Saskatchewan has the highest percentage of housing built after 2000 requiring repairs.

In January 2023, a Housing Needs Assessment Report was conducted for the MN–S. The report focused on three separate core housing needs: affordability, suitability and adequacy. Affordability is defined as housing costs being less than 30% of total gross household income. Suitability is defined as the home having enough bedrooms to accommodate the size and composition of the household. Adequate is housing that does not require major repairs. Key findings from this report include:

- 40.4% of those surveyed have all three core housing needs met and 59.6% have at least one need not met.
- 50% of those surveyed lived in housing that met the affordability criteria compared to 84.2% of all Canadians, while only 33.5% of potentially vulnerable groups are in housing that is affordable for them, with seniors and veterans most deeply affected
- 91.8% report that housing is suitable
- 87.1% report that housing is adequate

		By Respondent (A household)				Household Members					
		Core Housing Needs (Met = 1, Not Met=0)			Score (% needs met)	Core Housing Needs (Met = 1, Not Met=0)			Score (% needs met)		
		Affordability	Suitability	Adequacy	Core Housing	Affordability	Suitability	Adequacy	Core Housing		
		AF _i	S _i	AQ _i	CHNM _i	AF _i	S _i	AQ _i	CHNM _i	n household	
		n respondent									
Potentially Vulnerable Grps	All	324, 667	50.0%	91.8%	87.1%	75.5%	52.6%	84.7%	86.4%	73.6%	901, 1896
	Seniors	50, 113	22.0%	96.5%	90.3%	72.0%	30.1%	94.6%	88.8%	72.3%	83, 205
	Disabilities	85, 158	25.9%	93.0%	83.5%	67.5%	37.3%	88.4%	82.1%	68.8%	158, 285
	LGBTQQA2S	16, 33	56.3%	93.9%	81.8%	75.0%	52.8%	84.5%	80.3%	71.3%	36, 71
	Single Parent	79, 130	31.6%	82.3%	81.5%	65.4%					
	Women	211, 406	48.8%	91.4%	86.0%	74.1%	52.6%	87.8%	86.7%	74.7%	363, 743
	Veterans	6, 14	16.7%	92.9%	100.0%	72.2%	18.2%	90.5%	95.2%	66.7%	11, 21
	Rural	71, 170	57.7%	88.8%	85.9%	78.4%	57.7%	80.7%	85.1%	74.8%	220, 503
	Urban	253, 497	47.8%	92.8%	87.5%	74.7%	51.0%	86.1%	86.9%	73.2%	681, 1393
	Owner	155, 456	61.3%	95.2%	89.0%	82.4%	66.6%	90.4%	89.8%	84.3%	425, 1273
Renter	169, 171	39.6%	86.0%	81.9%	69.2%	40.1%	74.6%	77.1%	64.1%	476, 485	
Regions	NR1	5, 21	20.0%	85.7%	85.7%	53.3%	9.5%	64.5%	79.0%	28.6%	21, 62
	NR2	0, 4	#N/A	75.0%	75.0%	#N/A	#N/A	36.4%	90.9%	#N/A	0, 11
	NR3	5, 19	20.0%	84.2%	84.2%	73.3%	13.3%	74.6%	81.0%	71.1%	15, 63
	ER1	0, 3	#N/A	66.7%	100.0%	#N/A	#N/A	36.4%	100.0%	#N/A	0, 11
	ER2	21, 28	52.4%	96.4%	85.7%	79.4%	60.0%	97.0%	87.9%	82.7%	50, 66
	ER2A	6, 10	50.0%	90.0%	70.0%	61.1%	40.0%	91.9%	75.7%	64.0%	25, 37
	ER3	10, 36	50.0%	97.2%	80.6%	70.0%	39.3%	92.6%	83.2%	63.1%	28, 95
	WR1	26, 54	50.0%	90.7%	79.6%	70.5%	52.9%	81.9%	77.7%	65.1%	85, 166
	WR1A	17, 34	47.1%	97.1%	88.2%	76.5%	54.8%	94.9%	89.9%	77.0%	42, 99
	WR2	86, 172	52.3%	91.3%	92.4%	77.9%	61.6%	83.4%	91.6%	78.7%	229, 475
WR2A	50, 97	58.0%	91.8%	94.8%	80.7%	57.1%	86.6%	93.1%	77.6%	147, 291	
WR3	42, 76	40.5%	90.8%	81.6%	70.6%	39.3%	83.7%	79.8%	69.5%	117, 208	

MN-S Core Housing Needs Met

Saskatoon

Addiction, homelessness, and lack of supports in Saskatoon

The Advocate began her trip in Saskatoon, a city that traditionally has a large Métis population. Like many Canadian cities, Saskatoon is experiencing increasing rates of homelessness. A joint community and university team conducted its fifth Point in Time Count in 2022 and found a record number of 550 people living on the streets. Ninety percent self-identified as Indigenous, and an overwhelming 86% reported substance abuse. However, only 23% confirmed accessing detoxification services^{xxv}. Many believe the number underestimates the actual number of people experiencing homelessness.

Changes to Saskatchewan's Income Assistance Program

During interviews with the Advocate, many people identified changes in the provincial social assistance program, consequences of the pandemic, and increased toxicity of street drugs as causes for the increase in homelessness and housing precarity.

In 2019, the Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS) program replaced the Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP) and the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA) with the goal of enabling greater self-sufficiency by providing money directly to the applicant. Under SAP, rent was paid directly to the landlords and utilities were guaranteed. SAP ensured rental stability because the tenant did not fall into rent and utilities arrears that led to eviction. When Saskatchewan replaced SAP with SIS, no additional services were provided to program recipients or to organizations supporting recipients to help navigate the transition to the new program.

When the program changed, community organizations were concerned that there would be an increase in homelessness, particularly among those who are dealing with mental health and addiction issues, and who have limited financial literacy. In September 2021, a month after SIS went into effect, the Saskatchewan Landlords Association reported that over 31% of all SIS clients had not paid their rent, and another 18% were in arrears^{xxvi}. The Saskatchewan Landlords Association further warned that SIS eliminated the ability for a landlord to connect with a tenant's social worker in the event of issues with the tenancy, like rental payment. From a landlord's perspective, conditions under SIS increase the risk of loss, not just for the landlord, but also for the government and the SIS recipient:

For example, in the event that the tenant receives a lease from a landlord and receives SIS funds from the Ministry but does not return to the landlord and begin the tenancy, the landlord cannot alert the Ministry of the situation. The tenant can then receive funds month after month for housing that they are not living in because the Ministry is not aware that the tenancy never began^{xxvii}.

The change to SIS meant that the social safety net and supports for individuals and households were lost, leaving struggling individuals more vulnerable by undermining their human right to security of tenure. SIS not only left people vulnerable to eviction, it absolved the government from their responsibilities related to the human right to providing habitable housing. The Advocate heard that people were paying up to \$1600 per month to heat their homes with diesel, propane or electricity during the winter, the cost being double and even triple what people pay for rent.

These exorbitant costs are symptoms that illustrate the degree of unacceptable general housing conditions, due to lack of proper insulation in the walls, roof, and foundation, as well as failing windows and gaps in doorframes caused by shifting buildings. Had the government remained involved in the direct payment of utilities for its most vulnerable citizens, not only would they be able to keep track of addresses where housing conditions were poor, programs could have been created for capital upgrades to address the inhabitable and expensive conditions and decrease the overall carbon footprint of these structures. It would also have been a signal to governments that the income allocated for housing was far from adequate, forcing people into dangerous situations such as staying in overcrowded conditions, violent relationships, elder abuse, sex work, human trafficking and illegal activity just to survive.

In response to criticism, the provincial government announced in late 2021 that it would make direct payments for rent and utilities for those at high risk of homelessness^{xxviii}.

Corresponding data shows that rental evictions have increased:

The Office of Residential Tenancies, which adjudicates hearings between landlords and tenants on evictions, received 4,037 applications from landlords seeking an eviction between April 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2023. Almost 50 per cent of those, 1,984, resulted in a writ of possession being granted. In December 2022 alone, it issued 172 writs of possession, 58 of which led to the Sheriff's Office enforcing eviction. As of Jan. 27, 2023, 145 writs of possession had been issued since the start of the year^{xxix}.

The most common grounds for eviction are rental arrears and non-payment of rent. The reported number of arrears-related evictions do not include the number of residences that have been abandoned without a hearing or are going through the eviction process. Because of the lack of housing subsidies and affordable rentals in the current market, it is highly likely that people are evicted into homelessness. The Advocate was concerned about the provincial government's role in creating additional barriers to people exercising their right to adequate housing; in particular, how the change from SAP to SIS limits access to housing and threatens the security of tenure for housing vulnerable populations.

Drug toxicity crisis

The current drug toxicity crisis is another layer to the very complex issue of homelessness and housing precarity that Saskatchewan Métis face. Deaths resulting from drug overdoses in Saskatchewan have consistently increased since 2016. The drug supply has become commonly mixed with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is exponentially more lethal than heroin. In 2017, fentanyl was present in 13% of overdose deaths in Saskatchewan and was present in over half of overdose deaths in 2020. Fentanyl is both a prescription drug and one that is made and used illegally.

Saskatchewan's rate of prescribing opioids is well above the national level. A 2019 Provincial Auditor's report found that prescription monitoring is limited:

The Ministry [of Health] does not actively monitor dispensing practices of Saskatchewan's 385 pharmacies, or know whether those practices contribute to the opioid crisis. A risk-based monitoring approach would help it determine whether pharmacies properly dispense opioids. Also, the Ministry did not monitor all opioids prescribed in Saskatchewan including ones known to be more addictive, and to cause overdose or death. Monitoring all opioids would help detect misuse and inappropriate opioid prescribing^{xxx}.

A Coroners' Service report dated August 1, 2023, mentions that there have been 268 suspected and confirmed drug toxicity deaths in the province, a trajectory described as "concerning" by the coroner's office^{xxxi}. Street drugs are now more toxic. Recently, support workers have noted the addition of benzodiazepines in the fentanyl, a combination that causes extreme sleepiness, slurred speech, memory loss, dizziness, and the loss of consciousness. This combination limits the effectiveness of naloxone, making recovery less immediate, and potentially requiring additional medical attention.

Methadone is a common treatment for opioid use disorder and has been prescribed for over 50 years. Because of the strength of fentanyl, stronger doses of methadone are needed. Treatment protocols have shifted to prescribe methadone, which is a more concentrated version of methadone. Another alternative treatment is to prescribe suboxone, a combination of naloxone and buprenorphine. Suboxone is a Schedule III controlled substance. This means that suboxone carries a lower risk of abuse, addiction, and dependence than methadone. However, prescribing methadone remains the most commonly used practice to treat opioid addictions.

Some experts have suggested that prescribing methadone and other opioids is incentivized by pharmaceutical companies. In 2022, the federal and provincial governments reached a \$150 million dollar settlement with Purdue Pharma for health care costs resulting from the opioid crisis that originated with Purdue Pharma's deceptive marketing practices. The original legal action alleges that Purdue Pharma and 40 other pharmaceutical companies knew or should have known that opioids were addictive and would contribute to drug overdoses^{xxxii}. The class action lawsuit is being pursued against the other companies and is in the process of a certification hearing^{xxxiii}.

The over-prescription of opioids, combined with an increasingly toxic drug supply on the streets has resulted in a health crisis which has, in turn, exacerbated a housing crisis by compromising the ability to provide adequate housing that is secure and accessible to affected people. The Advocate heard from housing providers dealing with multiple challenging issues. Housing providers reported a significant increase in clients with erratic behaviors and psychotic episodes that not only place them at risk as front-line workers, but also makes finding appropriate housing for their clients more difficult. As a result, fewer people are housed, with many high needs individuals left with no other option than sleeping rough on the streets or in encampments.

In addition, because opioids can be injected, there has been an increase in Saskatchewan's already high rate of Hepatitis C and HIV infections. Without stable housing and support, it is virtually impossible for people with these infections to access anti-viral medication and treatment. Without access to safe use kits and sterile needles, and a stable environment, people experiencing homelessness who are opioid users are much more likely to become infected themselves and infect others.

The Advocate heard from housing providers who observed an increase in homelessness as a result of the pandemic lockdowns. Addiction support services, programs, and shelters were closed during the pandemic, resulting in people who were already vulnerable go without access to information, services, or treatment. Prior to the pandemic, the services available were not able to keep up with the increasing demand. The pandemic exacerbated the problem. Saskatchewan, which has the highest HIV rates in the country, has experienced a steady increase in HIV cases since 2021. Eighty percent of new cases are in Indigenous communities^{xxxiv}. After the pandemic, these services became overwhelmed by demand, with many people unable to access any of the necessary services. People contracted HIV and became ill, despite it being a preventable illness, and without access to emergency shelters, ended up on the streets sleeping rough or in encampments.

Regular treatment makes these conditions manageable, but people need to be able to access it. Safe use sites and housing provide the kind of stability necessary to begin to break this cycle. For example, at the Prairie Harm Reduction Centre in Saskatoon, the Advocate heard that a doctor visited the centre regularly to provide Hepatitis C treatment to a patient. The Centre effectively became the person's regular address, enabling weekly treatments to manage and resolve his medical issues.

Many groups supporting people using opioids are encouraging people to inhale rather than inject the drugs to reduce the risk of Hepatitis C and HIV infection. The residual smoke from inhaling drugs, however, can put others nearby at risk. Inhaled drugs pose an additional risk for staff and neighbours in low barrier housing that allow drug use in the units.

For those studying and addressing the drug toxicity crisis, the consequences of long-term drug use on the individual user, housing providers and health care providers is slowly beginning to be understood. While the impacts of long-term use and overdose recovery have yet to be studied in-depth^{xxxv}, there is increasing evidence that long term use can result in organ damage, bone decalcification leading to physical deformity, and increased health risks. This trajectory increases the need for the built form of housing to be accessible, or at the very least adaptable, to meet the needs of those experiencing changes in mobility. Current housing, either emergency shelter or transition housing, is not equipped for these types of challenges.

Housing providers also told the Advocate about the consequences of overdose reversals. During an overdose, breathing slows down. As a person loses consciousness, the brain is starved of oxygen. The longer period a person is unconscious, the more extensive the brain damage. An individual may require more time to immediately recover and may also require additional medical support. Emergency shelters accommodate a wide range of clientele and are not funded to support medical or complex needs^{xxxvi}. As a result, an emergency shelter is not able to provide immediate support to a person recovering from an overdose. At the same time, a hospital may not be able to provide support for recovery. This means that an individual recovering from an overdose may not be able to access appropriate and safe shelter or medical care^{xxxvii}.

Over the longer term, an individual who experiences repeated overdose reversals with multiple health consequences may no longer be able to live independently and will require housing with social and health supports in perpetuity. These supports could include help with every day tasks like cooking and cleaning, purchasing groceries and personal hygiene. Other people may require housing loss prevention services to ensure the rent is paid on time, that they understand their responsibilities as tenants, they learn how to keep a budget and they are able to access social benefits to which they are entitled. People might also require mental health supports to prevent verbal and physical conflicts with housemates,

guests, neighbours and housing staff. Mental health supports might even include ensuring people are connected to the greater health system for appropriate diagnosis and psychiatric treatment, and even address struggles with substance abuse. The current system of transition and supportive housing is not focused on long term, continuous or permanent support. In turn, housing providers are increasingly unable to support those with complex needs.

The Advocate was extremely concerned by the impacts that the opioid crisis is having on individuals with the highest need for emergency shelter and housing. The additional challenges to treat and recover from opioid use, addiction and overdose put further strain on those providing housing supports because the options in the current housing system ranging from emergency shelters, transitional housing or permanent housing, do not meet the complex needs of these individuals. The drug toxicity crisis is overwhelming and outpacing available emergency housing, which in turn makes the ability to provide adequate housing to the most vulnerable nearly impossible.

Métis-led solutions and housing supports in Saskatoon

After years of advocacy, Métis in Saskatoon are now able to access a range of culturally relevant housing supports to meet individuals 'where they are at'. MN-S has established programs to implement its obligations to provide housing for its citizens and to address housing issues. The programs are delivered by local partners, many of whom the Advocate met during her visit.

CUMFI

The Central Urban Métis Federation Incorporated (CUMFI) is a Métis local and MN-S partner that provides housing and related supports. This community-based, non-profit, charitable organization is focused on addressing the issues, challenges and socio-economic discrepancies faced by the urban Indigenous population in Saskatoon. The Advocate met with the President of CUMFI, Shirley Isbister, at CUMFI Headquarters located in the Riverdale area, an inner-city neighbourhood with numerous organizations providing Indigenous-focused services.



CUMFI Headquarters, Saskatoon

CUMFI owns and operates many buildings that provide housing at different points on the housing continuum. Auntie's Place and Kokum's Home provide emergency housing to ensure the safety of children and families experiencing abuse, neglect or personal crises. A better alternative to child apprehensions by social services, these homes provide care for children while their mothers seek treatment for substance addiction. The goal is reunification with the parent once they have completed a substance rehabilitation program and are able to provide stability for their family.

Funding for this program allows children to transition to a longer-term care home also operated by CUMFI. Siblings are provided an adequate home with enough bedrooms allowing them to stay together in the same household and prevent traumatic separation. Additional support is provided by two social workers funded by the Ministry of Social Services. This is an important type of support, largely contrasting the '60s Scoop-style approach, which ensures that children remain connected to their cultural community and identity despite periods of instability in the family unit and the home.

Shirley shared a story with the Advocate exemplifying the important role that CUMFI plays. A new mother was caught drinking by a case worker who called the Ministry of Social Services. CUMFI intervened, explaining the intergenerational trauma caused by child apprehensions, the impacts of the '60s Scoop, and the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care. CUMFI stepped in, provided supports to both the mother and her child, while the mother underwent substance use rehabilitation and completed the education program in which she was enrolled. The Advocate noted the importance of an Indigenous-informed approach to social services, and learned how a community response to support the mother ensures that she remains connected to her child as opposed to disrupting this bond and further increasing the trauma for both parties.

For older children who are under the care of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Social Services and reach the age at which they no longer qualify for this type of support ('aging out of care'), CUMFI operates the Coming Home program that provides transitional support to ensure that young adults have an apartment and furniture. Once they are in their new housing, CUMFI's outreach team provides additional support to ensure they develop the financial, legal and housekeeping skills that will keep them successfully housed.

Men suffering with addictions are accommodated at McLeod House, while Stewart House supports families living with HIV / AIDS. The Round Prairie Elders Lodge, which opened its doors in December 2021, fulfills a 20-year promise to house Métis Elders. Shirley is most proud of this Lodge, which has 26 units – all of which were immediately occupied. Currently, CUMFI has a long wait list of Métis Elders seeking housing that could easily fully occupy another two similar buildings.



Round Prairie Elders' Lodge front entrance



Round Prairie Elders' Lodge



Round Prairie Elders' Lodge – Community garden

Other recent projects include 14 units of community homes funded by the Reaching Home Initiative. Three of these units are dedicated to Métis. Some of the housing is targeted to larger families that have a difficult time finding suitable housing. One building has two larger suites each with 6 bedrooms, while many of the units have 3 bedrooms. Already fully occupied, one of the larger 6-bedroom units houses a group of younger people who operate as a family unit while the other large unit houses a teacher and her seven children.

Wheelchair accessible units could only be built on the ground floor because retrofitting an elevator was not financially feasible. The building was designed and built to accommodate an expansion if the funding was available. The expansion to create additional larger 6-bedroom units is estimated to cost \$2M.

The Advocate was informed that funding for housing comes from a number of sources, including partnerships with the province and leveraging the equity of the existing properties. While CUMFI maintains a mortgage on its properties, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Social Services provides a guarantee that it will make payments in the event CUMFI is not able to in order to ensure that there is no risk of default that would undermine CUMFI's ability to operate. The partnership with the Ministry has created a path to joint solutions.

At the same time, there is a great need for more emergency and transitional housing with supports to address Indigenous family violence. While CUMFI has recently received new funding for emergency and transitional housing, challenges remain. The model for emergency housing is based on a longstanding view that this type of housing is meant to be temporary, resulting in basic accommodations that are dorm-style with communal facilities and no privacy. Shirley's dream concept for emergency housing featuring small, enclosed units equipped with kitchens to provide dignity for individuals who are vulnerable and may be coming from a violent situation has been met with resistance. The Advocate was concerned that this detail has been consistently dismissed as it directly relates to supplying adequate housing that is secure, accessible, and culturally adequate. Without the attention to the safety, comfort and dignity of an individual, an emergency shelter can re-traumatize an already vulnerable person, leading to an early departure from the shelter into homelessness and sleeping rough on the streets. If no attention is paid to how emergency housing creates more barriers and harms, the likelihood is that people will increasingly be deterred from seeking help to begin with. Ultimately, the traditional model of emergency housing is failing to do what it was designed to do: to provide the critical first step to help people out of homelessness and precarious situations.

Shirley is also increasingly concerned with vandalism and violence. CUMFI constructed their houses in downtown Saskatoon, with \$12M of new housing funding invested into the city core in two years. While significant, this investment is not enough to meet the need for housing. The housing shortage is compounded by an increased impact of the toxic drug crisis, resulting in more people on the streets, with erratic and violent behaviour. As a result, community housing has been damaged. Shirley recognizes the importance of community to stabilize people, but community housing needs to be safe for everyone, and may have to be located outside of the downtown core.

Camponi

The Advocate visited another non-profit housing provider in Saskatoon, Camponi, which provides affordable and market housing for Métis. Camponi's history dates back to the 1970s, when the founding partners supported Indigenous families and individuals with housing and facilitated access to social services. Camponi also developed employment programs with CMHC funding. With SaskNative Rentals, Camponi manages over 400 units in Saskatoon that offers a range of housing programs. These include rent-geared-to-income housing, affordable housing and supportive living. Rent-geared-to-income housing offers housing with the rent costs based on household income, while affordable housing offers housing with fixed rent. Supportive living includes social supports from a case manager. Properties include apartments, single family dwellings, duplexes, senior housing units and accessible units.

The Advocate met with Adam Kulrich and Dale Petit. They shared that over the past year, Camponi properties experienced low turnover rates. This is likely attributed to their rents being affordable compared to the increasing rents on the private market. Consequently, Camponi's waitlist for affordable units has increased. Wait times for a two-bedroom are a few months, but the wait time for a three-bedroom unit is up to three years.



Meeting at Camponi Headquarters. L-R: Dale Petit, the Advocate, Adam Kulrich

The Advocate was told about Camponi's transition and wrap-around services, which are tailored to support each tenant's specific needs. For example, one Camponi client who was recently released from custody needed support to stay away from gang activity and wanted to reunite with his siblings who had aged out of care. Camponi provided housing for him and his siblings, in addition to providing parenting support. Without Camponi, he would not have been able to find adequate and affordable housing. The support Camponi provided not only diverted him from homelessness and recidivism, it also allowed for a family to be reunited.



Housing managed and provided by Camponi/T-R: Dale Petit

With SaskNative Rentals, Camponi operates Edwards Manor, a 24-unit housing complex that accommodates people with high mental health and addictions needs. Edwards Manor provides housing with supports focusing on harm reduction by providing clean needles, safe inhalation supplies and even alcohol. On site, there is 24-hour support that includes health services, a food program, a psychiatrist, and case workers. Rent is \$660 per month, and 3 meals a day are included. People who stay at Edwards Manor are struggling with complex and severe addictions, often accompanied by behaviors that are anti-social, violent, erratic and psychotic. They are people classified as being the hardest to house and potentially dangerous. While these symptoms are increasingly common with meth addiction, it is hard to determine if an underlying issue like schizophrenia is being triggered or amplified. Edwards Manor provides stable housing that reduces the harm from substance abuse. The Advocate noted that not punishing people for substance abuse by denying them housing is key to the success of supportive housing. A person needs stability through housing in order to manage substance use disorders, but a person with an existing disorder will not always be able to access housing. A Housing First^{xxxviii} approach is based on the premise that people cannot adequately address substance abuse disorders and mental health challenges without being housed first. Housing is provided at a rate the person can afford (usually with a subsidy), and includes an array of wrap-around supports to address the substance abuse disorders and mental health challenges, and ensure people develop the life skills to live in and keep their home.

Currently, Camponi is developing a large-scale supportive housing project on the west side of the Saskatoon urban boundary. Phase 1 of the Hart Road development is currently under construction and will provide 73 new housing units, 36 being affordable (ie., household income below provincially set maximum limits) and 17 being fully wheelchair accessible. This phase is expected to be completed in the fall of 2025. The entire project includes 6 buildings of residential space, with a daycare, a gym and new offices for Camponi. All of the buildings are designed to meet the energy efficiency definition of 'net zero,' and will be fitted with a 220 kilowatt solar system to provide power. The municipality has agreed to buy surplus power back at a discount. What sets this project apart is its bottom-up planning and design process that was undertaken by the community. The project was collaboratively designed by the people who are on Camponi's waiting lists for housing. Ambitious and inspiring, Hart Road is a community being collectively developed by the community to meet their specific needs. At the same time, this project challenges the notion that custom home construction can only exist for those at the upper end of housing market.

The Hart Road development is a \$47.2M project and received funding from the province. In addition, Camponi sold 150 of its units from their existing portfolio to further support the project and will be receiving municipal property tax rebates from the city. While the construction of the Hart Road project has been funded and construction of the first three buildings is underway, Camponi is concerned about ensuring long term funding and resources to support the operating and long-term capital maintenance costs of the Hart Road buildings, despite the buildings being constructed to exceed current construction and sustainability standards which are designed to lower operating costs. The rents alone will not generate these required funds. Without enough operating dollars to cover repairs or maintenance, any building will deteriorate below its asset value. As a non-profit providing affordable housing, Camponi is not focused on commoditizing its units. The challenge is ensuring secure funding to maintain and support the sustainability of these buildings in order for them to remain habitable.



CAMPONI

Hart Road Supportive Housing Project Phase 1



OUR HISTORY

Camponi Housing and our sister company SaskNative Rentals own and maintain approximately 338 homes in Saskatoon through various affordable rental programs. There remains a large waiting list of families still searching for adequate housing – especially larger families in need of more space, and individuals living with mobility issues or in need of completely accessible housing. Camponi's answer to this need has been to pursue this development by starting with the needs of the tenants first, and designing the neighbourhood and supports around those foundational needs. By gathering the input and experience of our tenants, we have developed a plan that will become a vibrant and sustainable project that will lift up not only the residents in these homes but also the community around it.



CONSTRUCTION BEGINS JUNE 2023

Anticipated tenant move in Fall 2025

50

YEARS

SaskNative Rentals and Camponi Housing are entering their fiftieth year of delivering safe, affordable homes for families and communities.

73

HOMES

The development will have 198 bedrooms in 73 homes, including 17 completely accessible one bedroom residences. The rest of the units are made up of 19 two bedroom units, 5 three bedroom units and 32 four bedroom units

\$38M+

INVESTED

The development represents a \$38M+ investment in our community in estimated construction costs.

OUR MANDATE

We are committed to providing, maintaining and sustaining affordable, safe and respectable housing for families; with particular emphasis and priority upon individuals and families of Aboriginal ancestry.

For further information please contact us
Camponi Office 306-653-0384
Project Manager: Adam Kulrich a.kulrich@camponi.ca
Project Admin: Amanda Schuler a.schuler@camponi.ca

WWW.CAMPONI.CA/PROJECTS.PHP

Description of the Hart Road Housing Project

The Advocate was advised that Camponi also faces funding gaps to provide wrap-around services. Currently, the funding agreement is for a single year, without guarantee of renewal. This approach fails to provide enough stability to allow for long term planning that would ensure quality service for the tenants, and staff retention. The Advocate noted that operational support in the form of long-term multi-year funding agreements is necessary.

Elizabeth Fry Society

The Elizabeth Fry Society is a non-profit organization that specifically works with women and gender diverse people who are facing, experiencing or have been released from incarceration. The Advocate met with Nicole Obrigavitch, Executive Director; Sydney Wouters, Program Manager / Social Worker; and Aly Bear, 3rd Vice Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) to discuss some of the organization's most pressing issues, including a growing concern that Indigenous women are released from correctional centres into homelessness.

Nicole described the link between the vulnerability that Indigenous women face in Saskatoon, homelessness, and the role of the correctional system. The lack of safe emergency housing with supports leaves Indigenous women vulnerable on the streets, likely to commit petty crimes and more likely to be arrested. Indigenous women are more likely than non-Indigenous women to be denied bail and then held on remand in a correctional centre until their next court date. They are also more likely to be sentenced to jail time.

Aly spoke to the systemic racism that exists in the judicial system. She related how she was pulled over by the police for no apparent reason while driving her daughter to Tae Kwon Do and how poorly the police treated her. Aly's children were terrified and in tears. Aly questions how different the experience would have been if she wasn't Indigenous. There was no reason for the police to have pulled her over other than being Indigenous. Aly suggested that Indigenous people are being racially profiled and targeted, with women being that much more vulnerable.

Indigenous women are overrepresented in Canada's correctional system. In 2018, 40% of incarcerated women in Canada were Indigenous. A 10-year study from 2009 to 2018 shows that the situation has worsened, as the number of Indigenous women who were federally sentenced increased by 60% in the last decade^{xxxix}. Meanwhile, the incarceration rate of Indigenous women continues to be much higher than that of non-Indigenous women. Finally, the data for Indigenous women does not differentiate between First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. The justice system needs to collect distinct Métis data to ensure appropriate cultural supports both in the correctional system and upon release.

Nicole states that at least 90% of women in Saskatchewan's jails are Indigenous. Jails in the province are also notoriously overcrowded. The Pine Grove Correctional Centre for Women in Prince Albert has a capacity of 166, but Nicole reported that a recent count was 254. Overcrowded conditions create an unsafe environment for inmates and have the potential to fuel violent behaviours.

Of those 254 women, 156 were on remand or held in the centre awaiting a court date, without conviction. While held in remand, people are absent from their houses, not able to work to generate income, and pay rent on time. The accumulated arrears increase the risk of eviction and losing housing. Even before being convicted of a crime, these people are usually rendered homeless.

Women released from incarceration are often released without any transition support directly into homelessness. This leaves women more vulnerable to being victims of crime or more likely to commit more serious crimes. This means that institutions like Pine Grove are not actually rehabilitating inmates; instead, the system is at best, entrapping women in vulnerable situations, and at worst, victimizing women into becoming criminals. As another consequence, mothers are likely to end up losing their children to the foster care system, creating another generation of trauma and systemic abuse.

Releasing inmates into homelessness without supports is a common practice. In January 2021, Kimberly Squirrel was found frozen to death in Saskatoon three days after being released from Pine Grove. She was a 34-year-old mother of six, who struggled with drug addiction and mental health issues after her brother died. None of Kimberly's immediate family were notified that she would be released. Many questions that were raised at the time Kimberly was found remain unanswered.

Both Nicole and Aly have received calls from Pine Grove to pick up women who have been released. One woman who was 7 months pregnant was released from Pine Grove and dropped off at a Tim Hortons. Another woman was found hitchhiking on the highway from Prince Albert to Saskatoon. Nicole believes that part of the problem is the lack of supports or diversion programs that can serve to prevent people from entering the justice system to begin with. She notes that there is a significant shortage of safe and culturally relevant housing for Indigenous women. Parenting support is also lacking.

A deeper problem is that funding is being directed to programs that are not safe or appropriate. For example, new housing funds are mostly targeting 1-bedroom units, which are not large enough for a person with children. The inability of obtaining larger units either break up a family, cause children to be apprehended by social services due to lack of suitable housing size, or result in entire families being homeless. She points to a Kamloops program that offers graduated transitional support for families over the span of two years as a potential model for best practice. Although this program is a huge success, the funding for wrap-around services is missing and is therefore putting this program at risk.

The Advocate's key observations and statements of concern in Saskatoon

- The Métis-led housing providers are leading the way by creating and investing in new emergency and transitional housing models. From providing culturally relevant services and spaces, to building communities, there is a collective response that aims to connect a person to community and provide a sense of belonging.
- At the same time, these efforts are undermined by provincial government policy that makes housing for those most vulnerable and in need difficult to access and afford. Changes in social assistance have eroded social supports for vulnerable individuals, which in turn have undermined secure housing. Instead of implementing the right to adequate housing, government policies and programs are creating barriers.
- New housing models that include wrap-around support services over a longer period of time lead to successful outcomes for people. However, current funding models to provide wrap-around services are usually short-term, which sets up the program, housing providers, and the tenant for failure. To ensure proper trauma-informed training, appropriate staffing and continued quality support for the tenants, the funding needs to be long-term.
- The increase in individuals who are harder to house has undermined efforts to ensure that everyone who needs access to emergency shelter receives it. Additionally, for those who can access emergency shelter, the existing model of emergency shelter can traumatize them further. This points to shelter models that violate the standards of being secure and habitable.
- Releasing people from correctional centres or medical centres without any supports or plan directly into homelessness is a systemic and social failure in providing security of a person.
- The housing and homelessness systems in Saskatoon are overwhelmed with demand, under-resourced and not able to adequately address the type or severity of issues that currently exist. Without appropriate support and funding, the systems inadvertently create vicious cycles and place already vulnerable people at greater risk.



Travelling north from Saskatoon

North Battleford

North Battleford, Saskatchewan's 7th largest city, is located 136 km northwest of Saskatoon. In North Battleford, the Advocate noted the strong role the municipality played in addressing homelessness. The mayor, David Gillian, is a strong advocate for housing and for raising awareness of the link between homelessness and people battling substance use disorders. The municipality, First Nations and the Métis have worked jointly to develop and support initiatives to address homelessness and issues of housing precarity.

Miwasin Kikinaw

In 2021, The Lighthouse, which provides emergency shelter and support services, almost closed due to lack of funding at a time when the need for the shelter was dramatically increasing. In addition to serving vulnerable unhoused people, the shelter had become a default location for the hospital to send ill people they refuse to treat and for the court and correctional system to send people they release without transition plans. Even the RCMP would drop people off without warning.

The Advocate met with Marlene Opekokew, the shelter's director. She described the partnership between the Battlefords Agency Tribal Chiefs Inc., the MN-S and the City of North Battleford that developed to save the shelter. MN-S agreed to provide interim funding to keep the shelter open, while the Tribal Council took over operations. Today, MN-S funds 40-50% of the shelter costs, with additional support from the city and private donations. Currently, little to no funding is received from the province.

Upon taking over operations, the Tribal Council renamed the shelter to Miwasin Kikinaw, which means "a beautiful place" in Cree. At the time the Tribal Council took over, the shelter was in poor condition and needed \$160K of immediate work. The building had numerous deferred maintenance issues, including lack of air conditioning, lack of emergency fire suppression systems, previous unaddressed flood damage, and poor insulation that led to power bills of over \$2500/month.



Miwasin Kikinaw Shelter, North Battleford

In addition to immediate repairs, horizontal partnerships and interagency collaboration to address racism, health services, and overcrowding at the shelter were developed. While there are fewer incidents of using the shelter as a default, there is still a lot of work to be done to address the long history of colonialism and systemic racism that leads to the neglect and mistreatment of Indigenous peoples by health, correctional and police services.

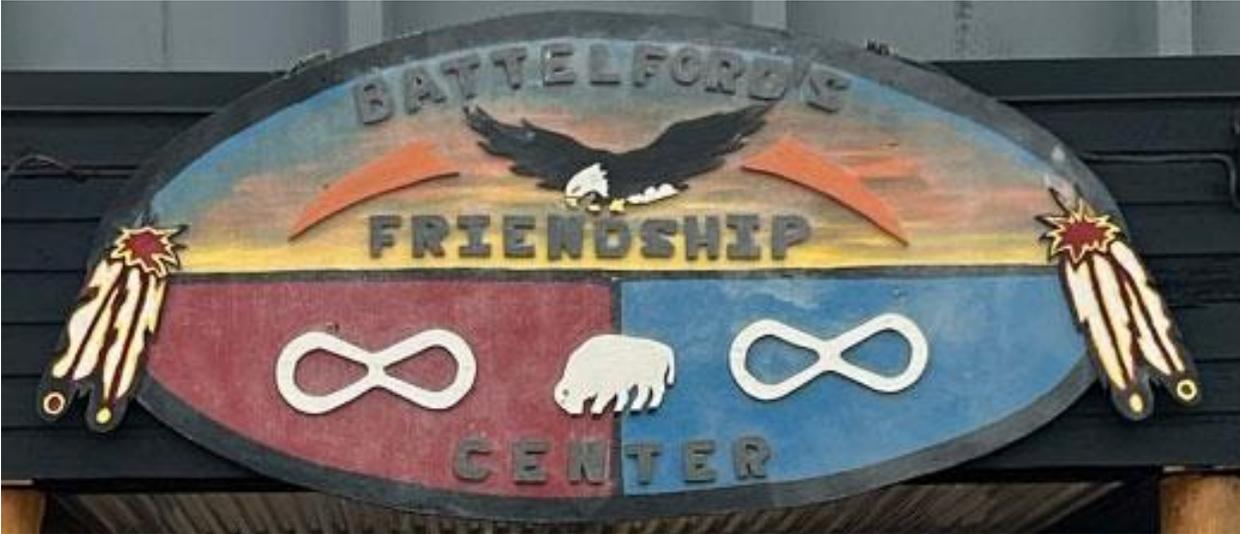
Multiple incidents of racist and abusive treatment by medical workers and police towards vulnerable Indigenous people experiencing housing precarity and homelessness continue in North Battleford. In interactions with the health system, there are reports of a common practice amongst paramedics to continuously ask an Indigenous patient if they really want to go to the hospital until the answer no is received. At the hospital, there are reports that ill Indigenous patients are refused admission and discharged into homelessness. There are also reports of the RCMP randomly stopping and questioning Indigenous people encountered on the street, as well as reports of the RCMP neglecting an unconscious Indigenous person in a doorway and simply leaving the individual there without any care or attention.

With limited shelter space and housing supports, the police and hospitals face increasing pressure to provide or find temporary housing solutions for hard to house individuals, especially those facing addictions. The shelter, city, RCMP and other stakeholders now meet regularly to develop a coordinated plan for people experiencing homelessness in North Battleford. This working table would benefit from provincial involvement.

While the interagency meetings provide an opportunity to share information, there is no system in place to capture data. The HIFIS – Homeless Individuals and Families Information System – is a comprehensive, federally funded data information management system that benefits communities and supports collaboration. While mandatory in urban areas, it is not required for rural areas. MN–S has been testing the feasibility of HIFIS for their own use. Preliminary assessments indicate that the system could be effective in helping locate missing men and women across the province.

Battleford Indian and Métis Friendship Centre

A second example of a joint First Nations and Métis co-operation is the Friendship Centre, where the Advocate met with Dan Villeneuve, Jackie Kennel and Kathy Whitford. The Centre is instrumental in providing culturally relevant housing supports that include teaching tenancy rights and responsibilities, home maintenance and minor repairs, and facilitating access to various health and social assistance programs. Longer-term transitional support is offered through targeted case management.



Battleford Indian and Métis Friendship Centre

Currently, the Friendship Centre is also building an onsite sweat lodge, which was completed at the end of July 2023.



Sweat Lodge under construction

Case Managers at the Friendship Centre are encountering an increasing number of barriers to help people along the housing continuum. Increasing rents – even for uninhabitable dwellings that require significant repairs – and fewer landlords willing to rent to Friendship Center clients have made it almost impossible to access housing. Average rent in North Battleford has been increasing, in 2023 the average was \$894 per month. Exploitative and negligent landlords dominate low-income housing, and charge high rent for substandard housing that usually requires repairs before moving in.

The SIS program provides a monthly basic benefit (food, clothing, travel, personal and household items) and a shelter benefit (rent, mortgage payments, utilities, taxes and other shelter related costs). Within a northern district, a single individual without children would receive a basic benefit of \$410 and shelter benefit of \$570. A couple without children would each receive the basic benefit, and a shelter benefit of \$695. The basic benefit for a child is \$65. The shelter benefit for a family with 1-2 children is \$795, and increases to \$895 for 3 or more children^{xl}.

Because the province no longer directly pays the cost of utilities as it did as part of the previous social assistance program, the actual costs of utilities is not currently tracked by the provincial government. Data collected on utility costs for people receiving social assistance could be instrumental in monitoring increasing utility costs but could also be an indicator of housing that is substandard and in dire need of capital upgrades. Without any data related to utilities, there is no clear accountability for the use of the money provided for utilities. The Advocate notes that this is not only an important missed opportunity for the province to monitor housing conditions of affordable rental housing stock in Saskatchewan, but also to be able to target capital repair programs and subsidies to help address deteriorating housing conditions.



Haven 4 eight sign

To provide housing for people considered to be the most challenging to house, the Battleford Indian and Métis Friendship Centre owns and operates Haven-4-Eight. Haven-4-Eight provides safe, affordable and sustainable group housing in a single, purpose-built and carefully designed detached house for eight individuals. They offer 24-hour onsite support services to address issues related to housing retention, mental health and substance use disorders. Residents are prohibited from using substances on the property; however, sobriety is not a condition to access the home. This is regarded as a successful program and model, especially for Indigenous individuals. The Friendship Centre hopes to expand the program and build a second house.



Wheelchair accessible entrance

Haven-4-Eight is fully occupied and there is currently a wait list. Clients are referred to the residence by the Ministry of Social Services, with Haven-4-Eight making the final decisions on the referrals. Some applications are denied due to a history of erratic behaviour that could pose a danger to the staff or the other residents.

The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability Program (SAID) provides tenants with a subsidy of \$813 / month. This amount includes rent, power, cable, internet, programming, a living allowance for clothing, toiletries and groceries. Onsite services include a laundry facility, distribution of medication, security, transportation to detoxification programs, and facilitated access to other social supports.

Each bedroom is equipped with a lock and key, as well as a private ensuite bathroom. There is a common kitchen and eating area, as well as a social area in the backyard. The backyard also has space for a community garden. The residents cook and eat together and have formed strong bonds with each other. They decided that they are a family and look out for one another. There is also a warm relationship with the staff, who are all addressed as "Auntie" by the residents.



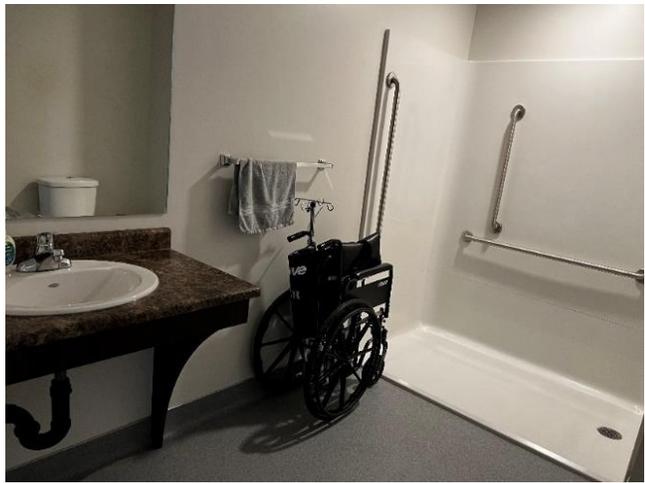
Haven-4-Eight's Common Kitchen- adjust horizon



Haven-4-Eight's community garden



Accessible bathroom



Bathroom



Communal TV room

The support that Haven-4-Eight provides has resulted in families re-connecting and re-uniting. The Advocate was told about a resident who now regularly sees their children and extended family. The Advocate noted that the combination of appropriate housing and supports has stabilized their housing situation and allowed for personal healing over time, helping them to rekindle family relationships.

Northern Saskatchewan

After North Battleford, the Advocate travelled further north. Populations in northern Saskatchewan experience five times the national average of alcohol-related issues and injuries. In addition, with a lack of treatment beds and appropriate cultural supports, meth and crack use disorders are becoming increasingly common. Innovative approaches to treating these disorders through supportive housing models were noted, along with significant gaps in infrastructure.



Landscapes Northern Saskatchewan

Pinehouse

Pinehouse, a village in the boreal forest on the western shore of Pinehouse Lake, is located approximately 400 km northeast of North Battleford. The closest community is Beauval, which is 107 km west of Pinehouse. Both the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had trading posts in the area. Today, Pinehouse has a population of 1,013, and is predominantly a Métis community.

The Advocate observed the unique Métis-informed recovery program operated by the community. The Pinehouse Recovery Lake Program promotes healing from substance and alcohol abuse through land and culture-based activities. The program focuses on a Métis-based model, rather than a western model of treatment. The Recovery Lake Program is hosted on a campsite that operates on a seasonal basis from April to November.

Up to 15 clients spend 42 days in the camp immersed in the program. The individuals participating in this program face additional traumas related to intergenerational substance abuse, racism, poverty, fractured family units, and disconnection from land and culture. Western rehabilitation programs do not address these issues in a culturally relevant way. The key to this program is the connection with culture and nature as part of individual healing. This program involves an initial week focused on detoxification, followed by a series of sessions on building life skills, first aid, hunting and gathering, basic reading and writing, home and family needs assessment, sharing circles, and interaction with Elders.



Pinehouse Lake Recovery Centre

The Advocate met with the Recovery Lake Team – Manager Kimberly Smith, Effie Misponas, Krista Natomagan and Farrah Natomagan. The team expressed concerns that despite the success of the Recovery Lake program, clients battling substance use remain highly vulnerable to relapse because of the lack of available continuing supports once people have left the camp and graduated from this first step.

One gap is the lack of programs to allow family members to undergo recovery together at the same time. This type of program could help family members develop new patterns of interaction that promote healing as a family unit and helps to stop the intergenerational cycle of harm. A program focused on the family recognizes the family unit and the community as pillars of support; this integrated approach could be transformative for a family and not just an individual. For a person participating in an individual-focused model program, post-program recovery is isolating and precarious. Relapsing is destructive not just for the individual, but also for anyone around them.

To partially fill this gap for families, the Advocate was told about the expansion of a wellness centre. The Muskwa Lake Wellness Centre received a grant from the provincial government in early 2022 to winterize the camp in order for it to operate year-round. The Centre focuses on land and culture-based approaches, and will be part of a four-year study by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) examining programs that recognize the connection to the land as part of Indigenous culture and healing.



Muskwa Lake Wellness Camp

Another post-recovery challenge identified by the Pinehouse team is finding adequate housing. The family environment may trigger or bring to the surface unresolved issues, potentially leading to relapse and fundamentally making the family home an unsafe place. Many people who go through the Recovery Program have poor credit as well as utilities arrears, which disqualifies them for placement by any housing authority. The Advocate was concerned that the lack of a robust range of housing options including transition homes, housing with supports, and housing for independent individuals and families that is affordable, threatens an already fragile recovery for people. The lack of adequate housing leaves people recovering without stability and therefore vulnerable to relapse.

In 2020, an encampment was created in the village of Pinehouse. The encampment originally began with three people. Today, the numbers have increased to over 40, with some residents as young as 16. The increase in numbers reflects a series of issues related to rural housing, starting with affordability. In 2020, Statistics Canada data reports that the total median income in Pinehouse before taxes was \$29,400, and median after-tax income was \$28,600^{xi}. On average, this means people in the community make \$2,450 / month before taxes and \$2,383 / month after taxes. The Advocate was told that electricity costs in Pinehouse average about \$913/month and fuel charges for home heating average \$1,497 / month, not including other housing costs such as rent.

In addition to substandard homes that are not energy efficient, the Advocate was informed that Pinehouse is missing infrastructure. For example, the infrastructure for natural gas energy stops in Beauval and has not been extended to Pinehouse, resulting in the use of more expensive sources of energy such as electricity, for heating.



Housing in the Village of Pinehouse



Tiny homes with solar panels – Rapid Housing Initiative.



Accessible housing



Land being developed for new housing



Playgrounds



The Advocate was also told that barriers exist to improving energy efficiency in homes. While there are many energy efficiency initiatives and incentives to renovate homes, these programs are not well advertised, are administered by numerous organizations, have varying qualification criteria to meet, and require time and effort to navigate. Northern communities do not have the capacity to be able to take advantage of these programs. At the same time, these programs often require up-front payments before reimbursement, meaning that only a privileged few will be able to benefit from government-funded programs.

Being able to efficiently maintain a house with limited financial resources is a challenge. For example, installing a wood burning stove could reduce the cost of utilities. However, doing so requires home insurance, which is an additional expense for a household already under significant financial strain. If the choice is to pay for home insurance or buy groceries, buying groceries will always be the priority.

People living in northern and remote communities are further disadvantaged by a lack of services that support home maintenance and ownership. Competitive home insurance rates are not available in remote areas. Home insurance is not required by law in Canada if the house is fully paid for, even though it is highly recommended to have, as it helps to protect from theft, loss, or damage. When a homeowner in a northern region no longer has a mortgage on their home, insurance is an unaffordable expense and often foregone. This is alarming for the Advocate because when disaster does strike, homes are lost without any kind of recourse or protection. Because of the gross shortage of housing in the area, people are rendered homeless with no options.

Simply building more houses will not solve the housing issues in Northern Saskatchewan. Remote areas lack adequate infrastructure. Pinehouse, for example, experiences regular power outages and therefore relies on gas-powered generators as back-up. The challenge is not just building houses, but servicing the houses with infrastructure that makes the house affordable, habitable, and sustainable. At the same time, rural communities face limited funding sources as well as limited economic development opportunities. Without sustainable employment that allow for communities to be established and housing to be affordable, housing issues will not be resolved. Addressing housing is part of an interconnected set of public policy issues, with roles for all levels of government, Indigenous governments, communities, and industry.

Multilateral partnerships in the form of public-private partnerships could provide innovative solutions. Pinehouse's mayor and council have been working with private industry to further invest in the community. Since 2012, Pinehouse has had a Collaboration Agreement^{xliii} with a private extraction firm that includes training and employment opportunities. In addition, this firm makes an annual payment into the Pinehouse Community Trust, which funds community-based initiatives, and could be used to decrease overall housing costs for residents and housing providers.

The Advocate was told about additional challenges in remote areas. In the northern regions, the construction season is shorter, creating another barrier to increasing adequate housing supply. Often the best choice is to renovate, even though the renovations required often exceed the value of the house. According to MN-S, the average home in Métis communities in Saskatchewan require \$130k in work, but the house's market value is only \$60k. A market value that is less than renovation costs is unique to northern communities and a key challenge. Because of this market dynamic, there is no incentive to invest in housing in remote communities. In turn, as housing deteriorates and with fewer and fewer sustainable employment opportunities, families and individuals in these communities are becoming more vulnerable to housing precarity and related issues.

Grants are available to support renovations; however, the process requires forms, approvals, and inspections – all of which can take up to 6 months before the renovation project is even started. MN–S can provide \$40k for emergency renovations. Assistance from MN–S is also available to accelerate the process of filling out forms, and to make referrals to inspectors and contractors; however, the homeowner is responsible for ensuring the work is carried out.

Another challenge the Advocate was told about is that there is very little skilled labour available to complete the work. As a result, easy and temporary repairs are often recklessly prioritized in order to immediately address an issue. This practice creates other long-term problems and potentially dangerous situations that could cause fires or other damage. With limited alternative housing, families end up staying in damaged and unsafe houses while trying to do repairs. At the same time, remote communities do not have formal building standards, permitting or inspection processes to ensure that renovation work is completed safely and correctly. These gaps in regulation and enforcement are major contributors to sub-par renovation work in remote communities.

Île-à-la-Crosse

The Advocate stopped in Île-à-la-Crosse to meet with Marvin Bouvier – who goes by the name of Tex and is the Regional Director for MN–S’s Northern Region 3. Île-à-la-Crosse was the site of historic trading posts that date back to 1778, as well as home to the second oldest community in Saskatchewan, after the Red River Settlement. The village is located at the confluence point of three different lakes with multiple integrated passageways and routes. Today, the village has a population of 1,425. In the 2016 census, 77% of respondents identified as Métis.



Northern Saskatchewan

In Île-à-la-Crosse, there is widespread reliance on social assistance. Tex describes people as living in a poverty system which impacts housing conditions as well as social outcomes. He also sees people being too dependent on social assistance but having little choice to do otherwise. Part of the solution lies in cultural revival. He struggled with substance use disorder, but promised his dying brother that he would get involved in politics and contribute to reviving Métis culture. He credits land-based training and his cultural background for staying clean. Stability by being adequately housed is also an important part of the solution.

However, the housing in the village is substandard. Tex notes that many houses require investments greater than the \$40k that MN-S can provide. With most homes in dire need of new furnaces and roofs, he estimates that at least \$140k for each house would be required for capital upgrades alone. The \$40k may be enough to cover materials for these renovations, but this amount does not include the cost of labour. In a northern village like Île-à-la-Crosse, skilled labour to complete renovations is limited and in some cases, may have to be brought in from other communities, with the effect of increasing costs. Many houses are also uninsured, which makes rebuilding after natural disasters like a wildfire financially impossible. Although insurance is available, rates are higher in a remote community with few services. Similar to what was observed in Pinehouse, with people living paycheque to paycheque, insurance is not considered a priority when compared to food. Many families in the area lack the financial literacy to support a household and are inexperienced in navigating banking and insurance company policies, as well as overseeing construction and renovation contracts. When damaged, a house will likely remain unrepaired and because of limited options, families will continue to live in them. In this northern rural village, the Advocate noted with concern that housing is not anywhere near meeting the standard of adequate housing, with specific issues related to affordability, security and habitability.

To begin addressing the housing crisis in the area, MN-S is partnering with the village of Île-à-la-Crosse and Sakitawak Development Corporation to build six tiny homes and two 3-bedroom homes. The tiny homes are preferred for their energy efficiency and generally cost less to build. While these homes will relieve some of the pressures that residents in substandard houses face, the Advocate notes that a long-term plan with multi-year, secure funding from the provincial government would be required to address the large gaps in housing need.



Île-à-la-Crosse tiny homes project

La Loche

The Advocate's most northern Saskatchewan community visit took place in the village of La Loche, located in the boreal forest 325 km northwest of Pinehouse and 600 km north of Saskatoon. Like Pinehouse, both the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had fur trade posts in the area. According to the 2021 census, the population of La Loche is 2,514, with 95% identifying as Indigenous.



Village of La Loche

The Advocate met with several employees of the Methy Housing Corporation that stated that La Loche has a wait list of 250 people needing housing – nearly 10% of the entire population. At the same time, La Loche does not have an emergency shelter, a women's shelter nor a food bank. The community transfers people with shelter needs to Meadow Lake, which is a 3 ½ drive to the south. In La Loche, there are few community resources. The rate of violent crime is high in the community. La Loche was the site of a shooting carried out by a 17-year-old that killed four people and injured seven others in 2016.

As part of a previous initiative to meet housing needs, MN-S purchased prefabricated mobile homes to provide affordable housing quickly. The mobile homes were offered to families as part of a rent-to-own program, with the title being transferred to the tenants within five years.



Housing in La Loche



Housing in La Loche

The Advocate visited a family of six living in a 4-bedroom mobile home. The initial excavation and grading for their lot were not properly completed and caused the structure to shift. After the lot was regraded, the trailer continued to shift, causing doors to swing open and nails to pop out. The trailer was intended to be energy efficient, however, during the winter months, this family pays \$490.70 / month on average in electricity to heat the home. They also report significant heat loss through the drafty windows and doors. While the family appreciates having access to a home with running water and indoor plumbing, they would like to have a bigger space with better storage and more privacy to better suit their needs.

In their current location, the family does not feel safe. They have experienced vandalism and harassment from their neighbours who suffer from alcohol and drug abuse and are suspected to be affiliated with gangs. Frequent police visits add to the family's feelings of vulnerability.

Since then, MN–S has decided to discontinue using mobile homes to address housing shortage and affordability issues. Instead, MN–S they have partnered with Methy Housing Corporation, a local non-profit organization that provides property management and construction services, to build tiny homes, which ensures that desperately needed employment and skill development opportunities remain in the community.

To date, 28 one-bedroom homes have been built in La Loche through this partnership. This construction project was jointly funded through the federal Rapid Housing Initiative, provincial funding, and additional support from MN–S.



MN–S and Methy Housing Corporation – new builds

Methy’s property management division takes care of property management and keeps a Support Services Coordinator on staff to provide additional services such as employment training, and facilitated access to health services and counselling.

Timber Bay

The Advocate met with Larry Lavallee, a Councillor of the hamlet of Timber Bay and the MN–S local president. Approximately 124 km north of Prince Albert, Timber Bay has a population of 81 people, with all but two families identifying as Métis or a mix of Métis and First Nations.



The Advocate meeting Larry Lavallee

Timber Bay has a significant overcrowding issue. There are merely 16 units to house its entire population. The houses are typically older two-story homes with three bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs, and one full bathroom. These houses are not insured. In the event of a disaster, there would be no support to repair or rebuild the houses. Larry lost his own house due to a fire. Because it was an older home that had been sold to the Métis for \$1, it was not insured. As a result, Larry was not able to rebuild his house and now lives in a trailer behind his sister's house.

Accessible or barrier free accommodations are limited, although two houses have ramps to accommodate wheelchairs. As additional housing to address overcrowding and a lack of emergency shelter, a number of mobile homes are parked behind the permanent houses. Community services are similarly limited. Hamlets are often without fire services, health services, schools or stores. Children attend boarding schools in either Montreal Lake or Prince Albert. Without emergency shelters or vacant homes to move into, people in need will go to a friend's home during times of crisis.

With the hamlet experiencing power outages on a regular basis, the food security of the entire community is threatened. The nearest grocery store requires a 180 km round trip. People often buy in bulk and rely on their freezers for storage. A power failure that lasts for days can spoil large quantities of food for all of the families in the community.

Nipawin

The last Northern town the Advocate visited was Nipawin. With a current population of 4,570, the town is located approximately 140 km east of Prince Albert. Nipawin was also a fur trade post, although this history has not been well documented.

Nipawin Oasis is a co-operative organization that provides culturally relevant housing loss prevention, educational and diversion programming as well as housing support services to the community since 1992. It is governed by the membership and board of directors. The Oasis owns and operates seven supportive housing homes for families experiencing homelessness. They also own the main building from which they operate, as well as five vans and a garage to store donated furniture awaiting distribution.



Visiting Nipawin Oasis



Childrens play area





Food bank



Household items

The Advocate met with Joy Hanson, Executive Director, Leigh Landry and Gilbert Moostoos. In addition to providing information about the social and housing support services they provide, they shared details of how they are funded, their organizational vulnerabilities and what is needed for Oasis to remain viable over the long-term.

In 2012, the organization faced financial strain, and was forced to examine the option of dissolution and selling the building it owns and occupies. The Board of Directors took over operations on a volunteer basis until 2014, when an Executive Director was hired. The Oasis has faced continuous challenges in maintaining low operating costs, securing funding, and ensuring little to no service disruption to the community while remaining financially viable.



Meeting in the main room of Oasis. Standing: Joy Hanson; seated: Federal Housing Advocate and two Oasis employees.

The Oasis has 7 full time and several part time and casual employees. The Executive Director's salary is currently capped at \$40k a year. Since 2014, administration costs have been kept low, and the Oasis has relied on the flexibility of its staff and volunteers. The Advocate is alarmed by the lack of resources to develop a viable financial and succession plan to ensure stability and sustainability of the organization. Oasis' services directly depend on their staff being available at every hour of the day and night every day of the week, and being fearlessly dedicated. The shoestring nature of the operation puts the organization at risk. Employees are at high risk of burning out. At the same time, clients are at risk of not receiving the services they need.

The Advocate was advised that core funding from the province or the federal government is not available to the Oasis, and the town does not offer property tax relief, even though the churches and the legion are both exempt from municipal taxes. Given that Oasis plays a significant role in providing housing, the Advocate is concerned with the differential treatment Oasis receives. Oasis is currently funded through grants and donations, which cover \$9,153.56 in property taxes for the Oasis building, and an additional \$14,546.49 in the supportive housing property tax bills. Many of the grants are provided on a year-to-year basis and require the completion of an extensive application and reporting process each year. The major funder is the province's Ministry of Social Services for the Family Support Program and the second major funder is federal funding from the Reaching Home program (if application is approved). The only way Oasis has been able to remain viable is due to their low administration costs.

At the same time, the needs of the community are increasing rapidly in number and degree of severity. Nipawin does not have a women's shelter. Women escaping violence are accommodated in hotels for a maximum of three nights. Without other options, women either return to abusive homes or end up homeless. In 2022-23, Oasis interacted with over 300 Nipawin citizens experiencing homelessness, providing food and crisis intervention supports in a time when the cost of living has drastically increased and income support has decreased. Nipawin is facing increasing homelessness exacerbated by substance abuse, and general overcrowding in existing housing.

Often, Oasis employees face potentially dangerous situations when interacting with gang members or clients exhibiting psychotic behaviours from meth substance disorders. One client who had been through detoxification was housed in private market housing with a subsidy and was receiving housing supports provided by Oasis. This client relapsed and suffered a psychotic episode, which led to significant damage to his home. The landlord refused to do any repairs. When the Oasis case worker dropped by for a visit, the door was answered by gang members wielding knives. The client's home had been taken over by a gang that constantly subjected the client to physical violence.

These kinds of stories are not unique to Nipawin and were heard throughout the Métis communities in northern Saskatchewan during the Advocate's visit. Organizations such as Nipawin Oasis, among many others, shoulder the burden of trying to address complex and serious issues that they are not funded for, nor properly resourced to undertake.

Prince Albert

The Advocate ended her trip to northern Saskatchewan in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan’s third largest city and the last major centre people will encounter before moving into the forested areas in the north of the province. Prince Albert is the site of an early Métis settlement founded by James Isbister in 1862. In addition, Prince Albert was the capital of the District of Saskatchewan from 1882 until Saskatchewan became a province in 1905.

In the 2021 census, Prince Albert had a population of 37,756. 44.65% of its population identifies as Indigenous, making Prince Albert the city with the largest concentration of Indigenous people in Canada.

While Prince Albert is an economic hub in northern Saskatchewan, the city has the third highest violent crime rate in Canada, following Thompson, Manitoba and North Battleford^{xliii}. The Advocate was advised that the downtown core is very dangerous in the evening, with violent crime highly normalized.

Like many cities across the country and the province, the population of people experiencing homelessness is growing and getting younger, with increased exposure to violent crime. The 12-bed women’s shelter and the 10-bed men’s shelter are constantly at capacity. The shortage of shelter space, compounded by unaddressed domestic violence, creates a difficult cycle to break. People encounter long waiting lists for transition housing. Without a robust housing system offering various housing types and related supports to meet the needs of women fleeing domestic violence, women will either remain in abusive homes or will return to them after finding the courage to leave. The only other alternative is homelessness.

In October 2023, the YWCA received provincial funding as part of the Provincial Approach to Homelessness Plan to create 45 additional shelter spaces with access to supports and transition services^{xliv}. The Advocate visited the YMCA and met with Rob Duncan, Teegan Jeffers and Niki Kereluk.



The Advocate meeting with L-R: Teegan Jeffers, Rob Duncan, Niki Kereluk

The YMCA operates a number of programs and services to support youth, women, families and vulnerable individuals, including emergency assistance, an emergency shelter and supportive housing. Their goal is to help people achieve independence. There is a separate building that supports women, one building for families, another building for individuals with special needs, and a fourth building that serves as an emergency shelter. The emergency shelter only operates in the winter. The Advocate was told that the shelter does not have stable funding, and can only provide stop gap, last resort measures to keep people alive. With an increase in toxic street drugs causing erratic and violent behaviour, clients are much harder to house.

Clients with high needs are often referred to the YMCA. To support these clients, the YMCA provides a private dwelling unit, access to other services including recovery and wellness, and in-house programs that focus on independent living. The Advocate noted the link between health and housing. Some clients are so unwell that maintaining a house is impossible. In some cases, clients with limited skills to self-regulate their emotions will take their frustrations out on their apartment. In other cases, clients can be overwhelmed by guests who vandalize or end up taking over the apartment. The YMCA reported that many evictions are caused by guests and the tenant's inability to manage them. Mental health and life skills supports are necessary to prevent the loss of this housing, which plays a critical role in maintaining a stable environment for an individual.

The Advocate visited a recently vacated one-bedroom unit. Rent for the furnished unit is \$700 / month, including utilities and all other operating costs.



One bedroom unit managed by the YMCA



Apartment complex



Drug dispensary



Language training

The YMCA is funded to provide longer-term housing with additional regulatory powers. An exemption from the provincial Landlord and Tenant Act allows staff to enter an apartment for wellness checks and suicide prevention. Staff is trained to be trauma-informed and to treat all clients with dignity and respect, especially when entering someone’s home. YMCA staff is also trained to identify behaviours that indicate distress. In one case, a YMCA employee noticed that a client failed to pick up their medication and was behaving oddly. This prompted a wellness check during which this client was found unresponsive after a suicide attempt. The person was rushed to hospital but was released one day later without a doctor’s referral for psychological support. They were also released with an inserted IV to treat an infection in their leg.

People can stay at the YMCA for as long they need. The understanding is that if the supports are removed, then there is a strong likelihood of relapse. The Advocate noted that the YMCA focuses on harm reduction. As long as the safety of other residents and staff is not affected, the use of drugs onsite is tolerated. The YMCA has, however, experienced extreme drug-induced behaviors in some tenants that have led to evictions. In one case, a client’s paranoia resulted in them carving out the unit’s walls to look for cameras. In other cases, clients had directed their anger and antisocial behavior on particular staff members. Because of the shortage of treatment options in Prince Albert and only 10 beds in the city for detoxification, the clients who cannot be accommodated are unable to get the treatment they need, and end up homeless on the streets.

The Advocate was informed of a working partnership between the MN–S and the YMCA. MN–S recently opened a service centre in Prince Albert that helps facilitate the transition from homelessness into housing, which the YMCA provides. MN–S also provides program support, including funding a bus to take clients where they need to go around town, and sponsoring a campfire social for clients to connect with one another.



*MN-S and the YMCA partnership
(bus funded by MN-S)*



Social area



Community garden

Because Prince Albert is a hub city, the YMCA's clients are from various regions of northern Saskatchewan. Services are already limited for Prince Albert's permanent population. With the influx of people from the northern part of the province in dire need of services and housing, the YMCA is stretched thin. The Advocate was told that the northern region suffers from a lack of health care, limited or no community services, and limited employment opportunities. People migrate to Prince Albert seeking better housing and jobs, but often encounter barriers, such as racism, to these opportunities, and very few supports to bridge these gaps. To address some of these issues, the Prince Albert Grand Council, a tribal council representing 12 First Nations, is focusing on growing its capacity to provide services. The Council purchased a former motel that it is being converted to house families accessing medical care. In addition, the Council is increasing its services such as shelter support in Prince Albert.

The Advocate was concerned that the absence of a northern housing strategy would overwhelm the YMCA and similar organizations that find themselves supporting the entire northern Saskatchewan population. Not only do the properties require funding for regular and long-term maintenance, but there are also few to no supports to provide stability to an individual. Treatment centres that allow for longer stays to address the complexities of substance abuse and mental health are needed to ease the pressures that organizations like the YMCA are facing. At the same time, diversion centres that provide health and housing supports for northern residents would go a long way to address increasing challenges with toxic street drugs. While some services can only be accessed in Prince Albert, there is no rural public transportation service to get people to and from the city from other communities. If people do not have vehicles and money for gas, people either forgo required services, need to impose on friends and family members who have vehicles, or are forced to take huge risks by hitchhiking.

The Advocate's key observations and statements of concern in Northern Saskatchewan

- In northern Saskatchewan, the Advocate observed the availability of culturally adequate housing and supports. However, much of the existing housing requires significant repair and is barely habitable; in some cases, the houses are not habitable at all, but remain occupied. There is a serious housing supply shortage all along the housing continuum. Combined with needing repairs, the costs of utilities increase the cost of housing beyond affordability. Infrastructure gaps mean that basic services are not always available.
- The northern regions faces similar problems to urban centres, but have fewer resources to meet the growing needs. The urban centers have a patchwork of mostly uncoordinated services trying to help people with diverse housing needs. Meanwhile, many northern and rural areas have huge gaps in services, with few emergency shelters, no shelters for women and children fleeing domestic violence, and a significant lack of transitional housing.
- The existing housing is overcrowded, substandard and extremely energy inefficient, with shockingly high costs for utilities. Repairs and renovations in remote areas are challenging due to a lack of skilled labour and the short construction season. This makes the housing less and less habitable.
- The lack of adequate housing combined with few employment and economic opportunities makes northern and remote communities unattractive for market investment. As a result, housing market values remain low. The future viability of northern communities is threatened.
- The opportunity for land-based recovery and healing as a culturally relevant model for recovery is an important innovation. To ensure its success, the gap for transitional support and housing needs to be filled in order to meet people where they are at.
- Housing providers operate in a continuously under-resourced state. Not only is funding for services compromised, there is a lack of resources to support the people who deliver these services. Underpaid, under-resourced and bearing the burden to provide services to vulnerable people with the highest needs, the system puts these front-line workers at grave risk.
- There is a need for deeper understanding of the gendered pressures of housing precarity as it relates to domestic violence and individual trauma.

Tools and Initiatives

During her trip, the Advocate heard about tools and initiatives being used to address homelessness and its link to the opioid crisis. A brief description of each follows below.

Prairie Harm Reduction

Located in Saskatoon, Prairie Harm Reduction (PHR) provides social supports and programs to individuals and families actively using or affected by substance abuse. The organization is guided by principles such as every individual matters and meeting every individual where they are at.

Multiple initiatives were spearheaded by PHR. These include founding Canada's first Safe Consumption Site (2020), opened Oski Kisikaw a semi-independent apartment building and visitation program for families living with active addictions (2021), and Michael's Place (2021) and Ester's Home (2022) which are semi-independent youth homes for youth that are no-longer allowed to live in other supported housing programs in Saskatchewan. In addition, the former Executive Director, Jason Mercredi, co-founded Canada's National HIV Testing Day, and successfully advocated for the provincial expansion of take-home naloxone program (2019), the implementation of Saskatchewan's safer drug pipe program (2019 – program cancelled in 2024), and wrote the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disabilities (SAID) Program policy which allows over 17,000 people on the SAID program to work and keep more wages earned through employment (2019).

PHR operates a drop-in centre with outreach support. As well, PHR provides training and resources on HIV, Hepatitis C virus, Harm Reduction, service navigation and engaging with people who use drugs. Naloxone training is provided to anyone. In addition, PHR has Needle Patrollers who pick-up needles throughout in a number of neighbourhoods.

A primary focus is harm reduction. Prairie Harm Reduction is Saskatchewan's first of only two safe consumption sites in the province. The site, opened in 2019, focuses on preventing overdoses and other adverse medical effects. The site has 7 individual booths and a safe smoking room, which accommodate injection, ingestion, inhalation, and intranasal use. The space is overseen by a support worker and a paramedic who provide support to people while they use substances. In 2020-21^{xlv}, the site received 724 visits and in 2021-22 increased to 4590^{xlvi}.

PHR is not supported by provincial funding and relies on donations and sales of merchandise. In October 2023, the province formally announced that it would not fund safe consumption sites based on the continued use of illicit substances^{xlvii}. PHR, with unstable and uncertain funding, is concerned about shutting down its operations as the opioid crisis worsens.

The Advocate briefly visited PHR in Saskatoon. What was critical to note is that the consumption site offers a measure of safety and stability. People using the site then have access to other services that will support treating their disorders and transition into a different lifestyle. The Advocate is concerned that the lack of funding from the province undermines a path to stability.

Homeless Individuals and Family Information System (HIFIS)

Throughout her visit, the Advocate heard about the HIFIS system. HIFIS, the Homeless Individuals and Family Information System is a data collection system that supports the operations of housing providers across the country overseen by the federal government as part of the Reaching Home Initiative. In Saskatchewan, the HIFIS lead is the Saskatchewan Housing Initiative.

The software is used to capture and share comprehensive data about homelessness in real time. For housing providers and communities, the system can aggregate data at individual, service and system levels. Currently, the software is in its fourth release. The federal government chairs a technical working group that is focused on continuously improving the software, and will work with any provider requiring greater customization.

The Advocate spoke to a former housing provider who has used HIFIS from its initial release. The first phase was used solely for a provider to provide data on its own agency to the federal government. In

the second phase, the system connected agencies to each other, while the third phase focused on case management for individuals.

Some of the challenges in early use was that it was not clear how the data was being used for at the federal level as there was limited feedback. Also, the use of the system was not mandatory in rural areas, which made it difficult to re-connect people in transit between rural and urban areas to reconnect with families. At the same time, HIFIS is noted to have tremendous potential to strengthen horizontal co-ordination amongst different governments and play a role in family reunification.

Federal policy initiatives

The Advocate met informally with federal officials to gain a better understanding of some of the overarching policy initiatives related to the opioid crisis and homelessness. To this end, the Advocate met with officials at the Public Health Agency Canada (PHAC) and the Chief Medical Officer at the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch within the Department of Indigenous Services Canada.

PHAC advised that the management and delivery of health care services, including mental health and substance use services, falls under provincial / territorial responsibility. However, recognizing the need to improve health care in Canada, in February 2023 the Prime Minister announced the [Working Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians plan](#). This is a historic investment of close to \$200 billion over ten years to improve health care in Canada and includes \$25 billion over ten years in new funding to provinces and territories through bilateral agreements for four shared priorities that include expanding access to family health services, supporting health workers and reducing backlogs, increasing mental health and substance use support, and modernizing health care systems. These agreements are currently being negotiated.

This new funding complements the additional \$1 billion invested by the federal government since 2017 to address the toxic drug supply and overdose crisis and includes more than \$500 million invested through the [Substance Use and Addictions Program \(SUAP\)](#) to community-based organizations across Canada. This program has supported over 380 projects that address substance use, mental health and intersecting issues such as homelessness.

PHAC further advised of ongoing intergovernmental work co-ordinated by the federal government. Senior level forums with officials from the federal and provincial governments meet regularly to discuss the link between housing and complex needs driven by substance use and mental health challenges. To this end, provinces have raised issues around affordability of programs, the need for best practices and models that have proven to be effective, and implementation barriers. At this time, Indigenous governments do not participate in these forums.

The Chief Medical Officer and his staff recognized the intersection between housing, substance abuse disorders and mental health. For many years, these issues were treated separately, and systems grew to support isolated solutions with respect to programs and funding. Siloes between departments remain a problem and require systemic fixes.

Part 3: Recommendations

The following recommendations have been co-developed between Métis Nation – Saskatchewan and the Federal Housing Advocate. Every level of government has a responsibility and a role to play in solving the issues identified in this report.

Recommendations for municipalities

- Municipalities can play a key role in addressing housing needs through advocacy, facilitation and partnership. Working with the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), it is recommended that municipalities declare that housing is a human right.
- It is recommended that municipalities adopt a proactive role in fulfilling the human right to adequate housing, especially with respect to emergency and transitional housing. Official community plans and development processes could include these considerations.
- It is recommended that municipalities develop a strategy to work with housing providers to explore options to support emergency and transitional housing supply; this could include tax abatement, ownership and long-term lease arrangements, maintenance and other services.
- Métis housing providers in urban centres are currently operating culturally relevant housing models. A stronger partnership with municipal and village partners based on sharing information, establishing common tools and scaling best practices to address complex challenges would strengthen communities. It is recommended that municipal and village governments work with MN–S to focus on common housing goals.
- It is recommended that municipalities and villages adopt building codes and bylaws to ensure housing is safe, accessible, and adequate in accordance with the current National Building Code. This will ensure housing builders are building safe, accessible, and adequate housing. A compliance system in municipalities is required to uphold standards and ensure accountability. In the Northern areas of Saskatchewan, by-laws are required to better account for the northern climate and geography.

Recommendations for the Government of Saskatchewan

Theme 1: Human right to housing

- It is recommended that the province develops its own legislation to recognize and support the human right to adequate housing. Recognizing housing as a human right in legislation creates accountability and aligns with federal law.
- To implement legislation recognizing housing as a human right, it is recommended that the province adopts a housing-first strategy that focuses on moving those who are experiencing homelessness into housing with necessary supports and services that are culturally appropriate.
- To ensure accountability for recognizing housing as a human right, it is recommended that Saskatchewan appoints an independent Provincial Housing Advocate. Part of the Advocate's duties would include amplifying the voices of Métis and advocating for the timely creation of a rights-respecting, culturally-appropriate housing system. This role would ensure oversight and accountability of efforts to uphold the human right to housing for Métis. This office needs to be separate from the Office of Residential Tenancies and could be placed within the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.

Theme 2: Recognition of the Métis in Saskatchewan

- The Métis played a significant historic role in the establishment of Saskatchewan, yet this role remains obscured. It is recommended that the province recognizes the importance of the Métis to Saskatchewan history. Increased visibility on government websites and public imagery would help with greater recognition efforts.
- In addition to a unique role in history, the Métis have a distinct identity and way of life that focuses on the relationship between generations, the importance of Elders, and the prioritization of healthy, thriving communities. It is recommended that the province recognize the importance of the unique Métis ways of knowing and doing and how they are critical for effective housing solutions that are culturally appropriate and responsive.
- Recognizing the MN–S as a government would be consistent with its self-government agreement, as well as meet the threshold established by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. It is recommended that the province focuses on deepening its government-to-government relationship with MN–S.
- While MN–S has been effective in developing initiatives to address issues and working with local partners to deliver services, a continued partnership on a government-to-government basis with the province is critical. It is recommended that the province establishes a joint technical working group on housing issues with MN–S.

Theme 3: Northern Strategy

- Urban areas and remote northern areas have distinct needs, with the needs of northern areas far more acute. It is recommended that a Northern Saskatchewan Housing Strategy be co-developed with MN–S and First Nations leadership for distinctions-based funding with federal involvement to address these needs.
- It is recommended that northern municipalities and villages are funded to develop building codes and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that northern and remote housing meets national and provincial building standards. Ensuring that housing meets national standards contributes to the long-term sustainability and growth of healthy northern communities.

Theme 4: Emergency and transitional housing

- There is a critical shortage of emergency and transitional housing. It is recommended that a housing-first strategy be implemented so that new units of intensive supportive housing are urgently established for those facing complex needs in urban and northern regions, with Métis communities prioritized. This includes immediately addressing vacant Saskatchewan Housing Corporation units (make required repairs etc.), reducing barriers to accessing units, and ensuring adequate supports are in place once an individual's basic need of housing is met.
- Many communities are operating without an emergency shelter. Additional funding for operating second-stage shelters must be included in the next provincial budget, to reflect the level of crisis in Saskatchewan. The increase of \$300k for 3 shelters made in 2023 is inadequate. It is recommended that funding levels are increased to address the overwhelming need.
- Many communities are being forced to decide between building more emergency shelter spaces or transitional housing when the funding that is provided falls short of what is needed and requested. It is recommended that incentives to develop and build both types of housing be implemented; this could include tax rebates, ownership and long-term land lease arrangements on government land, and public housing models.
- Current funding models are not adequate to meet the needs. There is a funding gap for transitional housing and wrap-around services, combined with an urgent need to scale up

existing best practices and transition support models. In addition, funding is not long term or predictable, which makes operating emergency housing difficult. It is recommended that funding models be reviewed and expanded for this purpose.

- A hidden pressure in providing community housing is the pressure on housing providers themselves and their staff. Without reliable and adequate funding, income levels are lower, employment stability is non-existent and yet, employees are expected to continue to deliver services at their own risk. It is recommended that funding and supports be immediately put into place to address the specific operational needs of housing providers.
- MN–S has overseen the development of several Métis-informed housing models that are innovative and demonstrating early success. However, this early success is being compromised by unstable funding and different priorities that do not align. It is recommended that the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) works with MN–S on a government-to-government basis to identify and invest in shared priorities so that new funding models can be jointly designed and implemented.

Theme 5: Income assistance

- The current model of income assistance, Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS), is contributing to homelessness and leaving people trapped as opposed to empowered. It is recommended that SIS be reviewed, with community housing providers and MN–S involved to shape policy amendments that could include:
 - Increasing SIS rates to meet the basic cost of living, restoring direct rent and utility payment for all that need them, and developing more supportive housing options for complex care due to mental health and substance use disorders.
 - Immediately restoring emergency rent stabilization measures that provide individuals and families with rent to satisfy initial tenancy conditions (first and last rents payments) so that they can be adequately housed and prevent homelessness.
 - Increase income supports as well as the minimum wage to reflect the high cost of living, reinforce efforts to prevent homelessness, and allow for successful transitions to adequate housing solutions.
- The Federal Housing Advocate and MN–S agree with the solutions identified and endorsed by SUMA which include:
 - Expansion of in-person application services, in particular for SAID applicants.
 - An immediate increase to SIS and SAID rates to give people a strong enough platform on which to rebuild their lives and to ensure those with permanent disabilities are living in adequate housing or not rendered homeless.
 - Reinstatement of direct and full coverage utility payments for all income assistance clients with no reductions or further restrictions to housing, basic, or other benefits currently accessed. Utility arrears are resulting in people losing their security of tenure and evictions. There is no avenue to rectify this situation beyond payment in full, which is out of reach for many Métis citizens. Collaboration between the Ministry of Social Services and related Ministries is necessary to develop workable solutions immediately. It is recommended that the Ministry of Social Services and MN–S jointly lead this initiative.

- Reinstatement of direct rent payment arrangements, including eliminating barriers to access for clients who request this support. Instead of individuals with the most complex needs having to request direct payment be reinstated, have individuals with fewer needs request being removed from direct payment, as required.
- Creation of a community intake unit within income assistance that meets people where they are to replace the call center application process, which has largely proven ineffective. Caseworkers should be accessible outside of 8-5 Monday-Friday on a rotational basis and physically located in areas easily accessible for people in low socio-economic areas, including in Métis communities, in areas outside of Saskatoon and Regina.
- Develop and implement ongoing regular ID clinics provincially and work with the Federal Government to eliminate barriers to accessing required identification so that people can be housed. There are effective examples with civil society that are already doing this work (Ma Faamii in Saskatoon; Queens City Wellness in Regina) that the Ministry can build on. This service needs to be accessible across the province.

Theme 6: Cross-cutting strategy

- Homelessness and extreme poverty are tied to substance use disorders and mental health. Barriers to accessing Saskatchewan Housing Corporation units remain insurmountable for most. The lack of compassion, understanding, and reasonability when people are being denied or evicted needs to be acknowledged and addressed. It is recommended that the province works with MN–S to undertake an immediate policy and decision-making review and assessment. In addition, it is recommended that the province work with MN–S to develop a comprehensive strategy that includes effective evidence-based responses, increased awareness and training related to bias and stigma, and a policy framework so that all forms of discrimination can be eliminated from related Ministries, police services, municipal governments, primary and secondary health services.
- Métis individuals are overrepresented in the correctional system as a result of complex root causes that include systemic issues. These issues are not always addressed upon incarceration, resulting in individuals leaving the corrections system in a vulnerable state. It is recommended that the Minister of Social Services work with the Minister of Corrections, Policing, and Public Safety, to improve case planning for individuals leaving the corrections system so they do not end up living on the streets.
- As part of a housing-first strategy, it is recommended that supportive housing is recognized as a diversion from the criminal justice and corrections systems. Supportive family housing is a less expensive alternative to the cycle of policing/correctional system/child welfare system. MN–S is currently working in partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society to develop a modular housing strategy for families. MN–S calls for a significant increase in funding to establish additional supportive housing options for families with available wrap-around services.
- Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) is a data information system with tremendous potential to facilitate interagency and intergovernmental co-ordination to address homelessness and housing precarity. It can also be a valuable tool in reuniting families. However, the system is not broadly used throughout the province, even though the province encourages its use. It is recommended that the HIFIS system:
 - Be adopted throughout the province.
 - All federal and provincial funded programs require the use of HIFIS.
 - The data be shared province-wide by community organizations using it.

Recommendations for the Federal Government

Theme 1: Jurisdiction

- Consistent with Métis rights to self-determination and self-government, it is recommended that the Federal Government transfer jurisdiction over Métis housing programs and services to MN–S, while also ensuring that funding for Métis housing is adequate for Métis needs. This includes:
 - In cooperation with MN–S, establishing a process to transfer care and control of program funds from the National Housing Strategy (NHS) and other existing programs.
 - Reallocating funding from existing NHS programs to MN–S governments' FFAs (fiscal funding agreements).
 - In cooperation with Métis governments, establish appropriate funding levels for Métis housing programs that account for Northern realities in Saskatchewan and Métis cultural practices and values, with built in program escalators that account for inflation and population growth.
- Many policy initiatives and discussions related to both the opioid crisis and the homelessness crisis are taking place at senior levels of government. These discussions involve federal and provincial officials, but not Métis governments, such as MN–S. Métis populations are experiencing these issues at exponentially higher rates than non-Indigenous populations and Métis governments have been applying Métis-informed models to address these issues. It is recommended that Métis governments be involved in these discussions to not just contribute their experiences, but to also shape future programs and initiatives.
- Mental health and support for substance abuse disorders are best addressed at a local level. It is recommended that the federal government discuss the transfer of care and control of mental health and additions programming as it relates to Métis citizens in Saskatchewan to MN–S.

Theme 2: Economic reconciliation

- The ability to afford and obtain adequate home insurance is a major barrier, especially in remote communities. It is recommended that the federal government work with MN–S to develop a strategy to ensure that there is no discrimination in the provision of insurance to Northern Métis. This strategy could include providing MN–S with the capitalization to self-insure and offer affordable and barrier-free insurance to citizens.
- To increase the supply of affordable housing, access to capital and preferential lending rates are necessary. It is recommended that the federal government work with MN–S to develop a capital fund for building affordable houses that provides preferential lending rates and allows for high-risk lending.
- MN–S has piloted innovative housing models to address housing supply. It is recommended that the federal government work with MN–S to continue to incentivize innovation and productivity in the housing sector by supporting Métis owned enterprises in manufacturing modular housing to address the shortage of supply.
- At the same time, MN–S has encountered a shortage of skilled labour to build houses. It is recommended that the federal government work with MN–S to enhance Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) agreements to provide direct funding for skills training.
- MN–S is faced with an aging population with a disproportionately high percentage of mobility challenges. It is recommended that the federal government work with MN–S to develop a culturally appropriate aging in place strategy that includes building adaptive and barrier-free housing so that seniors can remain in their home communities and live independently.

- Remote and northern communities lack basic infrastructure that compromises the affordability of housing and safe and secure communities. To ensure energy security and affordable living conditions, it is recommended that the federal government works with MN–S to seek an extension of the natural gas line to communities like Pinehouse and Cumberland House, Dorintosh (near Meadow Lake) as well as other forms of climate friendly energy sources that are aligned with Canada’s sustainability goals.

Theme 3: Historic grievances

- It is recommended that the federal government work with MN–S to urgently address historic wrongs and experiences identified by communities like Timber Bay and families who were forcibly relocated from Prince Albert National Park and from Maple Creek / Willow Bunch area to Green Lake.
- It is recommended that the federal government also work with MN–S to examine and explore remedies for the operation of the scrip commissions. The failure to operate the commissions responsibly is directly related to the displacement of Métis in Saskatchewan and undermined the ability to establish homesteads.

Theme 4: Mechanisms to sustain progress

- As part of implementing the MN–S Self-Government Agreement, it is recommended that housing related issues be negotiated as part of future implementation measures.

Joint federal, provincial, MN–S recommendations

Theme 1: Trans, Non-Binary, Women and Children

- In responding to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG), the federal and provincial governments must address the importance of the right to housing in ensuring the safety of Métis women and girls, including by:
 - Creating a Métis shelter initiative in North, Central, South Saskatchewan to ensure there are Métis family safety shelters and transitional housing projects in operation, this would be consistent with the First Nations and Inuit child and family services initiative.
 - Supporting a coordinated and adequately funded approach to the development of a network of safe shelter spaces for Métis women and children fleeing domestic violence.
 - Providing funding for training to ensure communities have the capacity to operate shelters with qualified local Métis staff, trained in trauma-informed responses.
 - Consistent with Métis rights to self-determination and self-government, program and service funding related to violence against women and girls should be transferred via the FFA.

Theme 2: Co-development and partnership

- Support distinctions-based homelessness plans as developed by the Métis National Council and Métis governments.
- It is recommended that the federal and provincial governments work with MN–S to develop a combined addictions treatment plan that ensures localized treatment in community without having to relocate to another urban centre and ensures appropriate housing options to allow for recovery.

ⁱ <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/ah/p2.html>

ⁱⁱ https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_communities.html

ⁱⁱⁱ https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_communities.html

^{iv} Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Perspectives and Realities, vol. 4, at pp. 199-200

^v Brown, J. S. H. (1985). "Diverging identities: The Presbyterian Métis of St. Gabriel Street, Montreal." In Peterson, J. & Brown, J. (eds.) *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (pp. 195-206). Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

^{vi} https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/french_and_metis_settlements.html

^{vii} https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/french_and_metis_settlements.html

^{viii} Ibid

^{ix} http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/isbister_james_14E.html

^x "Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia". Indigenous & Northern Relations. Retrieved 6 March 2021.

^{xi} <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/manitoba-act>

^{xii} https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_history.html

^{xiii} Canada, Statutes, Vic. 42, Cap. 31, Sec. 125(e). Dominion Lands Act (1879)

^{xiv} <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/scrip/>

^{xv} https://digital.scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/exhibit_scrip#fn3

^{xvi} <https://digital.scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/solr?query=ID:26264&start=0&rows=10&mode=results>

^{xvii} Memorandum for Mr. Newcombe, 14 October 1921 (NAC RG 13, Vol. 2170, File 1853 [1921])

^{xviii} <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/Métis-road-allowance-communities>

^{xix} <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/MétisMétis-settlements-and-farms/#:~:text=Saskatchewan%20M%C3%A9tis%20Farms&text=In%201939%2C%20Saskatchewan's%20Liberal%20government,into%20a%20segregated%20northern%20community.>

^{xx} Ibid

^{xxi} https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_nation-saskatchewan.html

^{xxii} <https://metisnationsk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/MN-S-Emergence-and-Evolution-of-the-Metis-Nation.pdf> at p. 17

-
- xxiii <https://MétisnationskMétisMétisnationsk.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Mandate-Housing-Minister-King.pdf>
- xxiv <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/backgrounder.html>
- xxv <https://cuivr.usask.ca/documents/publications/2020-2024/cuivr-pit-homelessness-academic-report.pdf>
- xxvi <https://leaderpost.com/news/local-news/sis-assistance-program-not-working-says-sask-landlord-association>
- xxvii <https://saskatchewanlandlordassociation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SIS-Position-Paper.pdf>
- xxviii <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/changes-saskatchewan-income-support-program-homelessness-1.6246874>
- xxix <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/rising-homelessness-saskatoon-1.6752859>
- xxx https://auditor.sk.ca/pub/publications/public_reports/2019/Volume_1/07_Health%E2%80%94Monitoring%20Opioid%20Prescribing%20and%20Dispensing.pdf
- xxxi <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/90505> and <https://leaderpost.com/news/saskatchewan/overdose-rates-for-2023-concerning-says-sask-coroners-service>
- xxxii <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-purdue-canada-agrees-to-pay-150-million-over-opioid-harms/>
- xxxiii <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-opioid-epidemic-class-action-lawsuit-certification-1.7041180>
- xxxiv <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/hiv-help-people-1.6275755>
- xxxv <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/opioid-injuries-drug-poisoning-crisis-bc-hugh-lampkin-1.7000860>
- xxxvi <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/hard-line-approach-drug-users-saskatoon-wellness-centre-1.6979335>
- xxxvii <https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/they-re-not-waking-up-sask-addiction-workers-concerned-over-mixed-opioids-1.6454028>
- xxxviii <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/resources-ressources/housing-first-logement-abord-eng.html>
- xxxix <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/oip-cjs/p3.html>
- xl <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/financial-help/saskatchewan-income-support-sis>

-
- xli <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?DGUIDlist=2021A00054718065&GENDERlist=1&HEADERlist=0&Lang=E&STATISTIClist=1&SearchText=Pinehouse>
- xlii https://www.cameconorth.com/sites/default/files/2024-03/Pinehouse-2022-CA-Report-web_0.pdf
- xliii <https://panow.com/2023/07/27/prince-albert-ranked-third-for-violent-crime-in-national-report/>
- xliv <https://globalnews.ca/news/10045573/emergency-shelter-prince-albert-saskatchewan/>
- xlv https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0269/3192/0962/files/PHR-AnnualReport_2020-2021-F_Miranda.pdf?v=1671483510
- xlvi https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0269/3192/0962/files/PHR_Annual_Report_2021-22_-_1_Miranda.pdf?v=1671483512
- xlvii <https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/it-s-terrifying-prairie-harm-reduction-fears-shutdown-as-sask-denies-funding-for-supervised-consumption-sites-1.6620777>

