

In the Absence of Policy: First Nations & Aboriginal Housing in Canada

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URBAN ABORIGINAL HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA



1 IN 15 Aboriginal people in urban centres experience homelessness, compared to **1 IN 128** for the general population.



ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN MAJOR URBAN CENTRES ARE 8 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS.

6.97% of Aboriginal people in cities experience homelessness

0.78% of the general population in cities experiences homelessness

0

25%

50%

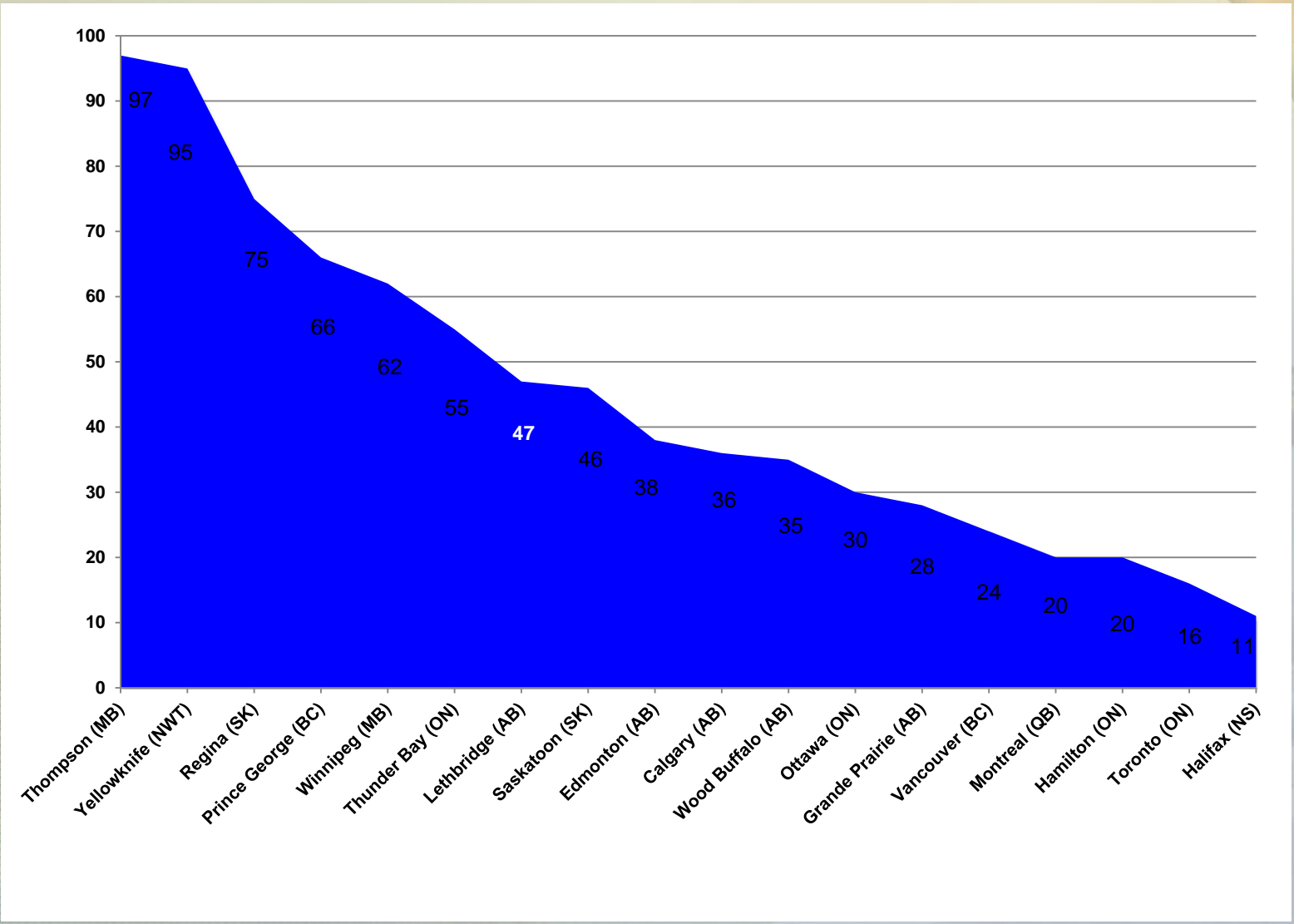
75%

100%





Urban Aboriginal Homelessness





*What leads to these
trends?*

*Is the absence of policy
the cause?*



- Layering: “grafting new elements onto an otherwise *stable* institutional framework ... [that] can alter the overall trajectory of an institution’s development”;
- Conversion: adopting new goals/bringing in new actors that alter the institutional role or the core objectives of an institution;
- Policy drift: inaction of policymakers whose actions sustain and enhance policy legacies [that] can lead to significant institutional transformations;
 - * *One must explain the direction it takes while remaining aware that policies are socially constructed.*



- A well-specified theory of ideas will imply:
 - a series of predictions about the observable footprints that ideational mechanisms should leave on a political terrain.
- This will include:
 - individual elites' statements;
 - sequences of events;
 - flows of information;
 - organizational membership;
 - institutional routines.



Study of Aboriginal housing policy represents an ideal context to also explore Indian Affairs' failure to respond to what I will demonstrate is an 8-decade long reserve (and growing urban Aboriginal) housing crisis.



- No need for a reserve housing policy;
- Urban relocation/reserve dissolution imminent;
- Looming to actual Aboriginal housing crisis identified (*count 'em – 17 studies*):
 - Ewing Commission (1934-36)
 - SJC (1946-48)
 - Hawthorn (BC) (1955)
 - Federal Housing Study (1958)
 - SJC (1959-61)
 - Hawthorn-Tremblay Report (1966, 1967)
 - RC on Health Services (1964)
 - RC Status of Women in Cda (1969)



- Penner Report (1983)
- Nielsen Task Force (1985)
- *Unfinished Business: An Agenda for all Canadians in the 1990s* (1990)
- Auditor General report (1990)
- *Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs* (1992)
- RCAP (1996)
- Auditor General report (Fraser 2003)
- *On-Reserve Housing Support* (2011)
- *On Reserve Housing & Infrastructure* (2015)
- Aboriginal separateness evident

Why?



- Overwhelming complexity;
 - *BNA Act*, 1867 (S. 91, ss.24)
 - Basis of inter-jurisdictional feuding dating to the 1950s.
 - *Indian Act*, 1876
 - Indians were non-citizens (*wards*);
 - Retain status and programming until civilized.
 - Aboriginal, Métis & Inuit (1982);
 - Treaty and non-Treaty Indians
 - Status and non-status Indians
 - Urban and reserve/rural AB peoples
 - AB separateness: social, legal, policy.



- **Action is required (urgency):**

1958: 7,000 units and \$140M (2014\$)
for additional infrastructure/repairs;

1961 (housing crisis noted) to the 2000s
(ongoing and worsening crisis):
ad-hoc response?

2014: endemic/chronic reserve housing
crisis (~30,000 unit shortfall; ~89,000
units in need of renovations) that cost
\$2.3B to manage, 2006-2013.

• **Timeline of a Crisis** (9 of 404 *Globe and Mail* stories, catalogued 1959-2011):

- * “Indian housing termed poor by minister.” 14 August 1959, p. 4.
- * “Houses for Eskimos described as dumps.” 10 June 1967, p. 11.
- * “Housing plan for Indians curtailed.” 14 May 1970, p. 12.
- * “Métis seek better housing.” 22 April 1972, p. 37.
- * “Half of Indian housing is substandard.” 18 July 1985, p. 1.
- * “Housing crisis grows for Canada’s Inuit.” 2 June 1994, A5.
- * “How to put a roof over their heads.” 20 June 1999, A17.
- * “Housing crisis on reserves worsening, Fraser says.” 9 April 2003, A10.
- * “A Christmas wish for our many Attawapiskats (constitutional debate not required).” 17 December 2011, A9.



Anatomy of a Housing Crisis

	New Homes Required	Replacement Homes Needed	Home in Need of Repairs/Renovations	Estimated Total Cost (2015\$)
1958	6,999	n/a	n/a	\$140M
1966	12,000	n/a	n/a	\$607M
1985	10,000	2,400 annually	11,000	\$1.02B
1992	21,700	6,700	44,500	\$3.17B
2003	8,500	n/a	39,160	\$4.66B
2011	20,000-35,000	5,200	16,900	n/a



- Substantially heightened homeless rates;
- Lack of reserve, urban, and combined policies debilitating (both for housing and homeless);
- What is attempted doesn't work:
 - \$300M, First Nations Market Housing Fund: 99 of 25,000 projected homes completed (end date 2018);
- Unique drivers/pathways remain unexplored or poorly understood:
 - the Indian Act;
 - jurisdictional and coordination issues;
 - residential schools;
 - child welfare;
 - social marginalization/isolation, systemic discrimination and stigmatization (Thurston & Mason 2010).



- Canada's early Indian policy model based on disappearance / assimilation of FNs;
- New ideas/strategies grafted onto non-evolutionary management model;
- Compels crisis management rather than problem resolution (we're failing!);
- Overwhelmed officials are constrained;
- Compounding effect that hinders conversion;
- Policy drift = failure to civilize coupled with reliance on this approach resulting in crisis management.



- Projected costs to Aboriginal housing, 1985-2003 (large majority reserve):
 - increased 4.57x from \$1.02B to \$4.66B.
- Projected increase in management mode, annually costs in 2031 ~\$15.1B;
- AANDC budget of ~\$10B projected to drop to \$7B by 2017;
- Reserve population growth: 361,000 (2006) to 511,000 in 2031 (~1/4 of Aboriginal population);
- Métis and Inuit housing often ignored:
 - Métis: 404,000 (2006) to 500,000+ (2031)
 - Inuit: 53,000 (2006) to 77,000 (2031).
- In 2031 upwards of 40% of Aboriginal peoples likely to live in a CMA.



Because institutional change is generally related to the strategies of concrete social and political actors, understanding the effect of their ideas and assumptions on the social and economic world is essential for explaining the way in which these actors can bring about institutional change in a particular policy area, and the form and orientation this change will take.

Beland 2007, 23

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