



Context

Ever since Inuit began to settle in villages, adequate housing has been a priority. In recent years, new housing construction has failed to meet increasing demand. In fact, overcrowding is more serious in Nunavik than in any other Inuit region in Canada.

The *Housing Situation in Nunavik: A Public Health Priority* produced by the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services at the close of 2009 states, “From the point of view of public health, the problems of housing and overcrowding in Nunavik constitute a major risk factor for the population’s physical and psychological health.” In 2010, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse noted that overcrowded housing exacerbates the region’s social problems.

A Few of the Challenges

Seventy-one percent of the population is under the age of 35. The households being created by the region’s young adult population have produced an unprecedented demand for housing.

The *2010 Housing Needs Survey* prepared by the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau shows that, despite the construction of 163 units in 2008 and 2009, demand climbed during the same period by an additional 80 units.

In May 2010, the housing deficit in Nunavik stood at 995 units.

Overcrowded housing impacts negatively on the physical health of Nunavimmiut and can foster contagious diseases, such as respiratory tract, skin, ear and eye infections, and tuberculosis.

Overcrowded housing is a chronic source of stress. The *2007 Investigation into Child and Youth Protection Services in Ungava Bay and Hudson Bay* by the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse states that the lack of sufficient and adequate housing is an obstacle to the success and development of Nunavik students, does not provide families with optimal conditions for exercising their role as a basic unit, and subjects an alarming number of children to situations of physical and sexual violence that lead to mental health problems and suicide.

The high cost of living combined with the very high costs of construction and municipal taxes are an obstacle to homeownership that could help alleviate the housing shortage.

The existing social housing stock is deteriorating at a rapid pace due to arctic climatic conditions (extreme cold, abundant snow and strong winds) and overuse caused by overcrowding.

Disparity between the rent paid by social housing tenants and the symbolic rent or no rent at all paid by workers of government and some regional organizations creates social tensions in the communities.

Solutions and Priorities

The *Agreement respecting the Implementation of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement on Housing in Nunavik* signed by Canada, Québec, the Makivik Corporation, the Kativik Regional Government and the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau in 2000 and renewed subsequently for five-year periods is helping alleviate the housing shortage. The construction of 50 additional units was also announced by Québec at the 2007 Katimajit Conference on Nunavik socio-economic issues. The ongoing renewal of the *Agreement respecting the Implementation of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement on Housing in Nunavik* is essential.

In addition to existing government commitments, a construction catch-up program is needed to meet current demand.

Under the 2007 Plan québécois des infrastructures, funding for the replacement, improvement and modernization of existing social housing in the region increased from \$53 million to \$135 million from 2008 to 2010. The ongoing renewal of this funding is vital.

The northern villages require additional funding to ensure the delivery of municipal services for newly constructed housing through amendments to the *Agreement concerning the Block Funding for the Northern Villages of the Kativik Region*.

An adequate supply of electricity and heating oil to meet the demand created by increased housing and a growing population must be ensured.

In the context of rapid climate change, technical assistance is needed to identify new sites for housing development.

Changing housing needs must be monitored to identify trends regarding the number, type and size of units required.

Plan Nunavik pre-condition 1: Québec has to commit to a catch-up program (1000 units) and to the regular housing program for Nunavik.

Discussion

Access to adequate and affordable housing continues to be a challenge. The recently announced Program to Promote Home Ownership and Renovation in the Kativik Region suggests that governments will more and more seek the financial participation of individuals to resolve the housing crisis. Many obstacles to a viable private housing market nonetheless remain. What else can Nunavimmiut still contribute to the resolution of this situation?

