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NOTICE

Ending the Housing Crisis:

Strategic Advocacy Stories

Summary of strategic advocacy stories from the July 2022 Strategic Advocacy Summit.

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Laura Murphy, Lisa Thurber, Misha Khan, Sahar Raza, Victoria Levack

Report prepared by Alex Nelson

“The responsibility we bear to sustain each other is massive. Through this report, we want to hold space for the labour that advocates are putting in to keep people housed. The stories shared can serve as advice that can be potentially translated to other contexts — or even as a reminder, that we are not alone in this struggle.”

Alex Nelson, National Right to Housing Network.

This report was made possible with funding from The Community Housing Transformation Centre, through The Community-Based Tenant Initiative.

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In July of 2022, the [National Right to Housing Network](#) hosted a **Strategic Advocacy Summit**—a virtual, two-day event that brought together over 100 advocates from across the country with the goal of connecting leaders in the right to housing movement to network, plan, strategize, and share the stories of their advocacy learnings. Our strength in the right to housing movement comes from our connections and ties with one another. Knowing that this work can only progress if we work as a collective, the Summit was envisioned to provide a venue for conversations amongst people who might not be able to talk to one other because of where they are, who they are, and what they do—but they all have the same goal:

to make the right to housing real for all.

During the Summit, attendees heard from two keynote panels comprised of human rights defenders and housing advocates leading change in their communities. The right to housing may be legislated at the federal level, but it is action at the provincial, territorial, and local levels that is spurring action and change. These advocates were invited to speak to some of the learnings they wished to share with Summit attendees. These panels set the stage for a broader conversation about moving the needle within housing-related advocacy and driving progress on the right to housing forward through grassroots organizing, innovation, and strengthening cross-movement solidarity between community-based advocates.

The Strategic Advocacy Summit was a stepping-stone for our collective advocacy when it comes to housing and tenants’ rights. While this event highlighted the deepening effects the housing crisis has had on communities across Canada, it also exemplified the passion, drive, dedication and commitment of grassroots advocates and people with lived experience who continue to work towards advancing our shared goals.

This event was made possible with funding from the [Community Housing Transformation Centre](#), through the Community-Based Tenant Initiative. This funding allowed us to bring Alex Nelson, our Community Engagement and Research Specialist, and Misha Khan, our Strategic Development Manager on to our team to plan and host this event. Alex moderated the event and panel discussions.

Thank You & Building the Event

In order to guide the creation of the event, a committee of dedicated advocates came together to help think through equity, safety, and accessibility. Their insight, patience and care have been critical to building a space where advocates—specially those with lived experience—could meaningfully participate. We discussed the importance of building an event that, at every stage of planning and execution, was able to address and respond to the challenges and systemic inequality people face, and the very same dynamics that create housing inequity in the first place. The process of building this space thoughtfully took months of hard work, and required us to be flexible and nimble. When we talk about creating a new approach to housing from a human rights perspective, this type of thoughtful and equity-focused work is fundamental. Integrating rights-based approaches allows us to test and think through ways of building in equity that are often absent or overlooked. This group worked tirelessly to identify ways to make the Summit as safe a place as possible for people experiencing violations of their right to housing to discuss what was happening to them and be met with community support and strategic guidance. To that end, we worked collaboratively to draft a Respectful Space Agreement for online events as part of our process of trying to create and maintain better spaces.

We offer this Respectful Space Agreement here as a template for others working to hold space for lived experience advocates and marginalized communities. As we learn, this agreement will serve as a living document, and the most up-to-date version can be found on [our website here](#).

Respectful Space Agreement

The National Right to Housing Network (NRHN) wants its online meetings and events to welcome all people in a safe space. It is important to us that the voices of those that are usually ignored are actively included and listened to.

This usually includes:

- People with lived experience of homelessness,
- Indigenous Peoples,
- People of colour,
- Those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities,
- People with disabilities, impairments, and limitations,
- Otherwise marginalized groups and individuals.

We also understand that people can be in more than one of these categories and that will affect their experiences in a different way than some others.

In particular, the NRHN acknowledges that historically, Indigenous Peoples have and continue to experience dispossession, dislocation, and displacement from their lands, languages, and cultures.

Because of this, we use these tools to inform our work:

- [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.](#)
- [The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.](#)
- [The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls to Justice.](#)
- Principles of Indigenous self-determination.

To achieve our goal of being a safe space, The NRHN has zero-tolerance for any form of discrimination, violence, bullying, or abusive behaviour. We are committed to ensuring that NHRN events remain safe and respectful spaces for all participants. All of us are responsible for making sure our events continue to be safe spaces, and we call this “our shared responsibility”.

Our Shared Responsibility

Registering for an NRHN event means you will treat your fellow participants respectfully and help ensure Network events are a safe space for everyone. It also means that any form of discrimination, violence, bullying or abusive behaviour may result in your removal from the event.

Part of building a shared space also involves being mindful of speaking times. As a courtesy to other participants, please keep your speaking time brief to let others share their thoughts.

If any discrimination is witnessed or experienced during an NRHN event or if you feel unsafe, please notify an event organizer or any member of our staff. If you have suggestions on how we can improve the NRHN event experience for all or make our events more inclusive spaces, please [message us on our contact page](#) to let us know.



DIVERSE
INCLUSIVE
TOLERANT
WELCOMING
SAFE SPACE
FOR EVERYONE

What is the Right to Housing?

The right to housing is the concept that all people have the “right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity”, according to the first United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing. ([Housing Rights Watch, 2023](#)).

This requires the government to implement policies and programs to make sure everyone has this opportunity in the shortest possible timeframes. It also means giving priority to vulnerable groups, and those with greatest need.

On June 21, 2019, Canada passed Bill C-97, which included the [National Housing Strategy Act](#). This Act contains official policy outlining how federal money is spent on housing, and finally recognizes the right to housing that advocates have been working on, for decades.

This report discusses some of their work in the context of the Strategic Advocacy Summit.

Note: in this report, when we mention the [National Housing Strategy Act](#), we are referring to a piece of legislation passed in 2019, and link to the Government of Canada information page about it. The NHSA is the next stage of the [National Housing Strategy](#), which is a plan released in 2017. If you want to access the official legislation, it is linked here:

[Department of Justice Canada – National Housing Strategy Act.](#)

The right to housing can feel really abstract, and oftentimes it can be challenging for advocates to describe what “success” looks like—but successes are taking place. We can’t lose our grasp of what this work is for, even amidst the disappointments and frustrations it comes with. We need to collectively strengthen our ability to recognize what success looks like and celebrate it.

Beyond celebration, the wins that advocates are experiencing in their communities can form the building blocks for successful human rights projects by tenants, people with lived experience of homelessness, and rights claimants in other local jurisdictions. Collectively, we need to amplify work communities are already engaged in to move the needle on housing rights locally—and look to the movements across the country that are championing major systemic change.

Anticipated release of Canada’s National Housing Strategy:

In the fall of 2017, the community of people who were working to bring changes to housing systems across Canada waited in anticipation—there was buzz that the federal government would soon release its housing strategy. One question stood out in particular: would the [National Housing Strategy](#) recognize housing as a human right? Would the federal government make real the legislation that was so desperately needed?

Within the right to housing movement, however, the question was, “will the government listen to us?” This group of leaders had a window for a promising political moment, and never released pressure on the government to implement their vision. They knew from their collective expertise what the right to housing could look like, taking guidance from international human rights frameworks. Civil society and legal experts eventually drafted model legislation for the federal government to follow and enact—they had come together to show the government what could be done to tackle the human rights crisis of homelessness and inadequate housing. They leveraged their skills, knowledge, and determination and made something monumental happen.

Long-time human rights leaders, Bruce Porter and Elizabeth McIsaac, were at those tables as this model legislation was being drafted. As they explain in a [2019 article](#), “this commitment to a legislated housing strategy—one based on the right to housing—was unprecedented.”



How did we get here?

For more than three decades, advocates came together and worked to achieve something that had never been done before in Canada: they were working to breathe legislative life into the right to housing. The advocates at the forefront of this work faced frustrations, hurdles, and a lack of political will to match their dogged determination.

“I am here today because, like all of you, I am passionate about social justice, which quite frankly means that we are all slightly irrationally optimistic—because despite overwhelming signs pointing to the contrary, we really do believe that we can build a better world, and we are willing to work for it and fight for it,” says Sahar Raza, Policy and Communications Director at the National Right to Housing Network.

And so the story of the right to housing in Canada goes.

After the National Housing Strategy (the policy document outlining how federal money is spent on housing) was first introduced in late 2017, on August 14, 2018, advocates released an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, signed by over 170 organizations and prominent Canadians (totaling 1,100 signatories), urging him to enshrine the right to housing in the Act—alongside a draft piece of model legislation for the government to work from. What followed was a massive government relations and advocacy effort by civil society and rights claimant leaders pushing the government to ensure that Canada’s first right to housing legislation genuinely worked to disrupt the housing crisis.

On April 8, 2019, the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) (NHSA) was introduced in the 2019 Budget Implementation Act (Bill C-97). The legislation, as first introduced, affirmed a commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing as recognized under international human rights law. But when it was first introduced, it had some major flaws – for example it did not include any meaningful accountability for the commitment to the right to housing and didn’t provide for hearings.

What followed was a new wave of advocacy by rights claimants and civil society - building off of over 30 years of grassroots advocacy, engagement with UN human rights bodies and court challenges- which met unprecedented success when the draft legislation was changed at third reading, resulting in what we now know as the [NHSA](#).



Current status of Canada’s National Housing Strategy Act

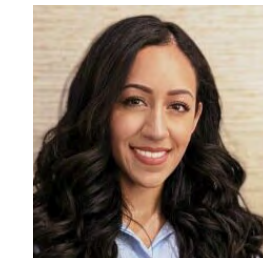
As it stands now, the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) (NHSA) requires that governments:

- Adopt and maintain a national housing strategy
- Establish oversight mechanisms—including a National Housing Council and a Federal Housing Advocate—through which major systemic housing inequities could be investigated and addressed.
- Provide appropriate rights-based accountability mechanisms, including access to hearings through Review Panels, on important systemic issues. [Read more on review panels here.](#)

“In 2019, Canada passed the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) (NHSA), and the National Right to Housing Network formed [in February 2020] to mobilize a broad-based, grassroots civil society network to fully realize the right to housing in Canada” ([NRHN 2020](#)). The [NHSA](#) is a legal tool, but it isn’t always treated that way. The Act holds the blueprint for legal pathways to address systemic housing rights violations, forged in international human rights law.

That human rights blueprint is what leads the way to a truly transformational paradigm for understanding governments’ obligations to people across Canada when it comes to housing.

1. “When we talk about housing as a human right, we are not just talking about four walls and a roof—we’re talking about adequate housing,” Raza says. “That means we’re talking about housing that is:
2. Habitable;
3. Stable;
4. Affordable and spacious enough for your household and family;
5. Accessible;
6. Culturally adequate for diverse and differently abled people;
7. Has necessary infrastructure and facilities like water, sanitation, heating and cooling, and I would even say, internet in this day and age; and,
8. Located within reach of employment, healthcare, and community.”



“A critical piece of the social justice puzzle and journey is ensuring that everyone has access to safe and secure housing that meets their needs.”

Sahar Raza, Policy and Communications Director at the National Right to Housing Network.

This right to adequate housing is not a privilege—it’s a fundamental human right, inherent to the dignity and well-being of a person.



STORIES OF CHANGE

To understand why this is important, and what we can do to strengthen the right to housing, we have to listen to success stories, and stories of hardship. We have to acknowledge the great and unprecedented efforts taking place in advocating for housing to be understood as a human right. We have to share the stories of where progress is being made—both along the pathway of building the right to housing framework with the federal government, and the incredible work communities are doing right now on the ground to make local change. Stories not only make the right to housing feel tangible, but they also allow advocates to witness the very real successes communities are having in defending rights.

The following report outlines some of those stories of the right to housing.

The right to housing means something, and during the Summit, we were able to hear from advocates who are engaging with the process and making real, tangible change happen in their communities.

People are claiming the right to housing—let's talk about how they are doing it.

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Building the Infrastructure to Claim the Right to Housing at a Municipal Level Building Spaces for Rights Claimants to Exercise their Human Rights through Co-Creation and Equity

The National Right to Housing Network: A Story of National-Level Coordination to Breathe Life into Canada's First Right to Housing Legislation

National Right to Housing Network staff [Sahar Raza](#) (Policy and Communications Director), as well as [Alex Nelson](#) (Community Engagement and Research Specialist), spoke on the coordination work done behind the scenes to bring Canada's first right to housing legislation to light.

*"The newly legislated right to housing in Canada, under the 2019 **National Housing Strategy Act**, is so significant [because] it finally gives us domestic commitments, tools, and mechanisms which we can use to hold every level of our colonial government accountable to the right to housing as it is understood in international law," says Raza. "And it signals to our governments, policy-makers, and housing sector the need for a paradigm shift away from our current conception of housing, which is very much an extension of the capitalist and colonial project, and treats housing as a commodity or vehicle for certain people in society—who already have wealth and power—to increase their power and wealth at the expense of everyone else."*

Sahar Raza, the National Right to Housing Network's Policy and Communications Director



What I really want to focus on, more than the specifics of that legislation, is how we got the legislation adopted in the first place. Our Summit gathering was about strategic advocacy, so I want to share some of our strategic learnings and takeaways that have stood the test of time, and which we continue to see and apply in our work today.

What the Journey has Looked Like

No advocacy success happens overnight; it builds on the momentum of years of prior organizing and advocacy, and often takes advantage of policy windows.

We often won't see successes on a day-to-day basis or even a year-to-year basis, and it can be really disheartening.

But we are always pushing the needle. The legislated right to housing was built on decades of people from the housing, poverty, and human rights sectors, all pushing the federal government to re-enter the housing space after decades of recusing itself from that responsibility.

We started seeing some progress in 2017 when the federal government finally passed its National Housing Strategy. In that housing strategy, the federal government mentioned that housing is a human right. From there, we were able to further advocate to have this actually legislated as a human right. This demonstrates how slow it can be, but every effort is contributing.

We need allies in government to see change implemented

Thus far, the success we've seen in the right to housing movement has been bolstered by a few key government allies who championed the right to housing internally.

[Adam Vaughan](#) was the Parliamentary Secretary for the housing Minister from 2017 to 2019. Adam championed the right to housing movement. Right to housing advocates were able to develop a collaborative and trusting relationship with him, and he was able to drive the movement forward.

We also need to be able to offer evidence of public and civil society support.

Interestingly, while only a handful of advocates or organizations were directly working with Adam Vaughan and other government players to legislate the right to housing, they were able to demonstrate through public campaigns and community ties that there was vast public support for the right to housing.

For example, the [Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario \(ACTO\)](#), [The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness \(CAEH\)](#), [Campaign 2000](#), [Maytree](#), and many other organizations ran letter-writing campaigns. They were able to collect over 10,000 names of supporters who were behind the right to housing. This was significant in getting the government's attention.



We need to be able to offer practical solutions in the form of legislation, policy, and programming—and we need people with the right vision and skillset to offer those practical solutions.

Many of us are drawn to the sector because we are so passionate—we want to end poverty and injustice.

If we, as passionate experts who are actually connected with the community, can't come up with practical solutions, how can we expect our flawed government to do that? In the right to housing context, this was critical. Advocates from ACTO and many others had already demonstrated public support for the right to housing. We had the former [UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing](#), Leilani Farha, working closely with these groups to demonstrate the significance of the right to housing to power holders. And then we had human rights expert, Bruce Porter, who actually worked with a former drafter of legislation to literally draft the [National Housing Strategy Act](#).

This strategy was so effective—not only did we build on decades of advocacy, but we also demonstrated civil society support, built government allies to champion our efforts, and then we gave them a draft of the legislation.

I think it's a beautiful story, but it does not end here. As you can imagine, once the draft was in the government's hands it was watered down by many players within the government. This leads me to my last takeaway, and the reason we held the Advocacy Summit.

How we contribute to change

We need civil society networks and spaces for collaboration to continue that dialogue with the government, to continue the monitoring, accountability, public education, and community

mobilization. We really can't leave it to the government after an advocacy success, because it's an ongoing process of progress and accountability.

In the context of the 2019 [National Housing Strategy Act](#), it was the continuous and collective advocacy efforts—folks from civil society were lobbying, attending federal standing committee meetings, and making submissions and statements. Eventually, from these efforts, we got the robust legislation that we have today, which recognizes housing as a fundamental human right. It has legislated open hearings on systemic housing issues, and it requires that our National Housing Strategy, our National Housing Council, and our Federal Housing Advocate are all focused on advancing the right to housing. None of that was in the original legislation that was drafted, so it just exemplifies how important continuous mobilization is.

As the National Right to Housing Network, we continue to create spaces like this, where housing advocates like you and I can strategize and collaborate. We also work to translate our collective calls to action to government so that our right to housing can be seen as practical, and part of the solution.

A slow but steady drive forward

While progress may be slow, we have seen more wins since 2019. For example, we have seen federal budgets and many housing programs under our National Housing Strategy [revamped to make housing more affordable](#). We also saw our first [investment in co-op housing in decades](#). So, we are pushing the needle, and I have hope that we will continue to see real and meaningful change in the years to come.

Together, we are a powerful force for change and justice.

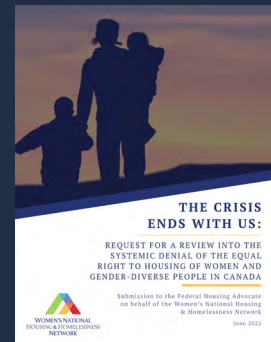
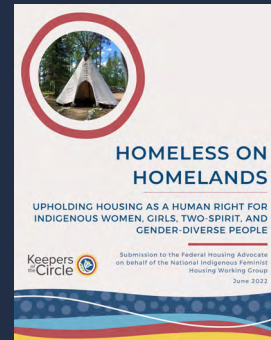
“The National Right to Housing Network formed to help build momentum and sustain pressure on the government to implement the legislation, creating partnerships and helping people see themselves in movement. Many of those in the coalition of advocates that worked to push for the NHSA eventually became part of the National Right to Housing Network. Our role is also to build energy and capacity across the sector to do this work: from this process, we came to understand the scope of the work necessary, as well as the immense amount of time and resources that organizations and individuals need to engage in this work.

The National Housing Strategy, released in 2017, is the vehicle for advancing the country's commitment to the right to housing. The 2019 [National Housing Strategy Act](#) lays down a roadmap for this vehicle, and provides the inciting fuel to put it into motion—but the vehicle still needs a driver. In order for the right to housing to be realized, rights claimants and allied organizations still need to push forward to make sure the government remains accountable for implementing the legislation—for driving it forward.”

Alex Nelson, Community Engagement and Research Specialist, National Right to Housing Network

Keepers of the Circle and the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network: A Story of Advocates Exercising their Human Right to Housing Under the National Housing Strategy Act

In the summer of 2022, two grassroots-led systemic claims on gendered violations of the right to housing were submitted to the Federal Housing Advocate. The two claims—one led by the National Indigenous Women's Housing Network (formerly the National Indigenous Feminist Housing Working Group), and one from the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network, complement each other.



For months leading up to the launch, advocates discussed:

- What gendered violations of the right to housing looked like.
- What factors need to be considered in addressing the rights violations faced by this community.
- What the stakes are for engaging in human rights processes.

The creation of the Claims was guided by rights claimants, and the process offers learnings for other individuals or organizations (who may be rights claimants themselves) who can bring people together and provide logistical and administrative support. This organizational support is important to ensure community advocates are well supported in what can be a highly taxing and demanding process.

The Claims brought human rights defenders together to make sure community voices are being heard and responded to at the federal level.

You can access the two claims [submitted here](#).

Update: as of May 2023, the Federal Housing Advocate has asked the Government of Canada to [establish a human rights Review Panel](#) stemming from this work.



Khulud Baig



Kaitlin Schwan

What building a human rights claim looks like

Kaitlin Schwan, the former Executive Director of the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network, and Khulud Baig, the Director of Policy and Community Engagement, opened the panel discussion, reflecting on attendees' comments around the urgency of this issue and the need to actualize the right to housing: Khulud Baig, will talk about what we have been doing at the [Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network](#), with the National Indigenous Women's Housing Network.

Khulud Baig: I work with Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network and Keepers of the Circle, which is a North-Eastern Ontario-based Indigenous women's organization. We do a lot of work on housing research – specifically, in my work, I support the National Indigenous Women's Housing Network. I look at how we can create spaces and hold spaces for Indigenous women to take control of their own solutions and agency when it comes to housing and homelessness solutions.

We will talk about the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network's [Human Rights Claim](#) that we submitted to the Federal Housing Advocate in the summer of 2022. Khulud is going to speak to the Indigenous-led Claim, and what that process looked like, in partnership with Janine and Lisa. Sahar did a beautiful job talking about the history of advocacy to get the right to housing in legislation in a deeply historic way in Canada, leading to the passage

of the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) and the establishment of the Federal Housing Advocate.

In 2022, the Federal Housing Advocate began to take submissions of human rights claims, so groups and individuals can put forward a claim related to a systemic housing issue. The (WNHHN) has been working for quite a long time on the gendered nature of housing need and homelessness, and discrimination and inequity related to gender and other intersections.

We've built up a ton of research, but what we wanted to do was move forward with thinking about how we use this legislation to advance equity for women and gender diverse folks in the country.

I appreciated some of the questions and comments from the Summit asking: how do we move beyond seeing the right to housing as exclusively within the domain of the State, and instead see it as something that's owned and defined by people themselves?

I want to highlight what we did with our Claim—the process it's moving through right now, but also how we are trying to explode the model of exclusively moving the Claim through the Advocate's Office. We also want to use it as a tool for building grassroots power and movements.

You can access the [two claims that we submitted here for more information](#).

These Claims emerged from a partnership between WNNHN and the National Indigenous Women's Housing Network. We were trying to do this work, step-in-step together. On the WNHHN side, our Claim was based on the central argument that the housing system we're living in has a discriminatory impact on marginalized women and gender diverse folks, and that **we are making policy choices that are resulting in systemic inequity**. This is resulting in:

- A deep core housing need.
- Separation of children from families.
- Chronic poverty.
- Exploitation.
- Abuse.



Gender matters when it comes to housing and homelessness and that we have not been building a housing system that is deeply responsive to the unique needs and realities of women and gender-diverse folks.

In Claim #1, we were largely focused on three right to housing violations:

- **Violation 1:** Failure to provide adequate, accessible, and affordable housing.
- **Violation 2:** Failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people.
- **Violation 3:** Failure to regulate the financialization of housing (the way that profit from housing is prioritized over human rights) in alignment with the right to housing.

We analyzed international human rights law, looked through policy, reviewed research, and articulated what we see as key human rights violations, coupled with an assertion that the Government of Canada is responsible for immediately addressing these urgent human rights issues.

“We see no future for ourselves in the current housing regime. While our present circumstances have been determined for us, the future is not yet decided. We offer this claim as part of our efforts to author a future for ourselves, our communities, and our planet through which housing as a tool for inclusion, equity, dignity, and interdependence.”

The Crisis Ends with Us: Request for a Review into the Systemic Denial of the Equal Right to Housing of Women and Gender-Diverse People in Canada

I love the language used in the introduction to the Claim because it positions the human right to housing as central to agency and control over our own lives,

and our insistence on reclaiming that control. I wanted to highlight the process for developing this Claim. If you’re an individual, or a group or organization, you yourself can submit a Claim. You can [make a submission to the Federal Housing Advocate here](#).

It can be done pretty quickly, or more robustly, depending on your capacity.

In our case, we formed a Human Rights Task Force of about 30 women and gender-diverse folks from across the country, with a major focus on lived expertise, a diversity of skill sets, and representation from across the country. We would meet every two to three weeks, and we would talk about themes like:

- What are the key human rights issues we were seeing?
- What do those look like?
- How do we want to articulate these issues?
- What is the evidence for these issues?

We had real guidance from lived experts within the group in terms of how to think about the Claim, what we needed to prioritize, and how to frame it. We also had the benefit of having a number of international experts come in and support us in thinking this through, including Bruce Porter, who was really wonderful in lending his human rights expertise.

In reflecting on the process of developing this Claim, one of the things that that I would emphasize for folks who are considering doing this is the importance of having multiple avenues for participation. We had a numerous meetings, we had internal surveys, I did tons of phone calls, emails, shared documents, Slack, WhatsApp – you name it. The intersection of those ways of communication really increased the accessibility of participation for folks in a way that was very helpful. On the one side this can be labour intensive, but it is really critical.

As we moved along, we came to a place where we were agreeing on the key priorities, and we painstakingly wrote, with 30 people in a Zoom room, three paragraphs articulating, “this is the central

issue that we’re identifying,” and then did a lot of collaborative writing to develop the Claim and strategizing for the launch.

When I think about key takeaways for folks who might want to try to do this, think about diversifying the ways that you engage people, and bringing tons of folks in. One thing that is clear is that people’s voices often get missed for all kinds of reasons—for really violent and exclusionary reasons—but they also get missed in increments and small ways. This may be because they don’t have a Google Calendar alert, or because their internet is not as robust as other folks’. You should be building a process that attempts to diversify the ways you engage, and buildings in time to ensure that happens. This sounds quite banal, but it’s actually critical for making sure that there is space and prioritization of diverse voices.

I would also recommend, if you’re creating a claim, bring in any experts in your community or otherwise who have legal expertise, and expertise in the right to housing. The National Right to Housing Network is amazing in this regard, and there are lots of folks in the NRHN who can provide support. Central to this obviously is trust building. In part, what worked for us is that we’ve been a group that has been working together for many years. We are trying to grow and build trust, as we grow a social movement around this issue. That trust is foundational for having conversations about what is most important, how we focus on it, how we deal with conflict, all of those kinds of things.

Launching our Claim

We held [a press conference at Parliament Hill](#) to launch our Claim, which had a communications strategy—and over the subsequent months, we rolled out a communications strategy. What’s been wonderful is that we had a really positive response across the country.

“Folks reached out and said, ‘I see myself in this Claim,’ ‘I want to build a claim,’ ‘How do I get engaged, and how can I help support documenting what human rights violations are happening in my community?’ We had a strategy about rolling this out, but we also have seen it getting taken up at the grassroots level too, which has been really wonderful.”

Kaitlin Schwan, former Executive Director of the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network

What happens to a submitted Claim?

A claim goes through a standard process with the Advocate:

1. The Advocate receives the Claim, and makes a decision about whether she will review it, or whether she’ll send it to the National Housing Council.
2. The National Housing Council may review it with a Review Panel, or the Advocate could do it herself.
3. The Advocate will submit recommendations to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities.
4. The Government of Canada must then issue a response within 120 days to the House of Commons and the Senate.

This is the linear model of how accountability is structured under the legislation.

We are currently moving through that linear process, with the exciting announcement of a [review panel looking at homelessness as a violation of rights of women, girls, and gender diverse persons](#). This review panel is anticipated to begin in spring of 2024

At the same time, what I want to emphasize is that we are trying to explode this process in our organizing as well.

What’s next in moving this Claim forward?

“The legislation isn’t owned by the Advocate. It’s owned by the people that attended the 2022 Summit, by people who were turned away at shelters last night, by kids who are leaving child welfare with all of their possessions in a garbage bag—all of the folks that we are working in solidarity with across the country, those are the people who own this legislation.”

Kaitlin Schwan, former Executive Director of the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network

One of my fears about this legislation is that, in our organizing, we might think about it narrowly as only engaging with the Advocate, and the Advocate being the exclusive arbiter of what the law means, and whose systemic issues get seen, or how they’re understood. I want us to imagine how else we might actually take up this legislation, and map out what other accountability processes we can engage with.

What you see here is some of the work that we’re doing in this regard. At the community level, we’re going to be doing regional sharing circles, and People’s Tribunals where we’re hearing directly from

folks with lived expertise about the human rights violations they're experiencing. Part of that is also trying to add capacity to other groups on the ground who are developing their own claims, either under the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) or under the Charter, or other treaties (international or domestic). We are also working to leverage the Claims for local goals.

“We’ve had lots of activists in our networks who’ve taken the Claim and said, ‘Okay, we have this really specific problem in our municipality, and I can use this as a tool to be building power and movement, to be doing advocacy on this issue.’ Part of our work is supporting that.”

Kaitlin Schwan, former Executive Director of the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network

On the legal and international side, we’re also doing this evidence-gathering process where our hope is that in addition to collecting evidence on human rights violations we can provide to the Advocate, we can also use that evidence to look at what legal avenues we have. This gets to some of the questions around the “teeth” of the legislation that we were talking about earlier. Our hope is that we’ll be able to collect evidence that would also be useful in a legal challenge—whether that is a class action lawsuit or a legal challenge under the Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms. This evidence would also be useful to us in looking for accountability at the international level, through international human rights bodies. I’m going to leave it at that. The main takeaway for you folks is that this is a really wonderful and exciting piece of legislation that you can engage with, that we have found incredibly meaningful for our group, and if you are interested in doing it, and you think we would be of help in terms of supporting how you might build that out—please reach out.

I’ll invite us all to think about how we make this legislation owned by and work for us, not just through

the Advocate’s office, but more broadly through grassroots organizing.

Homeless on Homelands Human Rights Claim

“The work we been doing would not be possible without the energy and response that we received from advocates—it’s women, and queer and trans advocates all across Canada, because that’s really where the power was. That’s the power that the Claim hoped to harness. When advocates like Lisa and Janine talk, that’s really where you can see the actualization of the human rights process, what it means to communities on the ground—and how it adds power to an existing movement, or an existing advocacy campaign, or the work of organizing that they’re doing on the ground.”

Khulud Baig, Director of Policy and Community Engagement, Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network

Building on community momentum

Khulud: We started the process of building the Claim, [Homeless on Homelands: Upholding Housing as a Human Right for Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-diverse People](#), by bringing it to the [National Indigenous Women’s Housing Network](#) (formerly the National Indigenous Feminist Housing Working Group), which is a group of women that have been coming together for over a year now, thinking about:

- What does housing, the right to housing, and claiming that right to housing, mean to Indigenous women and gender-diverse people?
- How can we scrap all colonial understandings of housing?
- What does home mean to Indigenous women?
- How can it be articulated in ways that fall fully at peace with the way that Indigenous Peoples articulate home in their cultural understandings?

Building the conversation on from that point allowed us to look at the human rights process not just as an international or national instrument that can be utilized in the realization of housing rights, but also as a means through which Indigenous women can assert their own rights, their inherent rights, and connect the right to housing to pieces like right to land, right to practice culture, right to health, right to security—all of these critical and intrinsic rights that are indivisible from the right to housing for Indigenous women. When we took on the process, we started talking about how Indigenous communities are not in a position to ever demand rights from any sort of colonial body. Rather, our rights process identifies:

- How do we see the right to self-determination be asserted by Indigenous women and gender diverse people?
- How can colonial bodies and colonial governments take a step back from the realization of housing rights?
- What solution building are Indigenous communities doing?



Manufactured housing crisis for Indigenous communities

One of the biggest reasons we see the most disproportionate housing rights violations in Indigenous communities is that the reality is manufactured by the imposition of colonial policies. The kind of housing options that are made available to Indigenous communities are rooted in Indigenous Peoples not being able to practice their culture, not having rights to their lands, and not having rights to their cultural ways.

The working group articulated that it was really important for Indigenous women to not engage in housing as a human right processes just as a way of demanding rights from the Federal Housing Advocate, **it was a way for them to assert their right to self-determination and call on colonial policies to take a step back, and enable communities to create and build their own solutions.**

In asserting this, we highlighted four key violations in our Claim.

- **VIOLATION #1:**
Lack of Action on the Calls to Justice from the MMIWG Report and TRC Calls to Action
- **VIOLATION #2:**
Failure to provide safe, adequate, and culturally appropriate housing on our own terms
- **VIOLATION #3:**
Interjurisdictional neglect, multiple systems failure, and institutional betrayal
- **VIOLATION #4:**
Security of tenure under [NHSA](#) and secure Indigenous Land tenure

VIOLATION #1

Lack of Action on the Calls to Justice from the MMIWG Report and TRC Calls to Action

In the Claim, we talked about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) report. As a personal reflection, I truly feel like the MMIWG report is the most monumental documented work that has all of the information, hard work, and labor of Indigenous women. If the Canadian government was really invested in building solutions, the MMIWG report would have all the information they need on how they could build solutions. People on the ground have known this for the longest time, but there is a clear lack of will when it comes to the Canadian government, the federal government, and provincial and municipal governments being invested in creating safety and housing rights for Indigenous women.

VIOLATION #2

Failure to provide safe, adequate, and culturally appropriate housing on our own terms

We highlighted the violation around providing safe, adequate, culturally appropriate housing, that is on communities' own terms that meets their cultural ways, that allows them to practice their culture, and articulate the right in the way that they want it to be articulated.

Putting 20 apartment units in a northern community is not realizing the right to housing, because it does not meet the cultural, community, and family needs of Indigenous women. That's really what we mean by the right to housing being articulated in the community's own terms.

VIOLATION #3

Interjurisdictional neglect, multiple systems failure, and institutional betrayal

We also highlighted the violations created by multiple public systems, and how they impact the right to housing for Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

Everybody in the community, everybody in the working group, talked about the child welfare system. It is such a **huge** determinant of the kind of housing that folks have access to, because the child welfare system, completely strips individuals' abilities to be connected to their communities, their families and their cultures. Once kids turn 18, they really don't have anywhere to go, because all of those critical connections that would link someone to home, or that would link someone to a home community have been stripped. I've never heard a conversation about housing and Indigenous communities, without the child welfare system being brought up. It plays such an intrinsic role in housing outcomes for folks in the community.

Similarly, people talk about the healthcare system and criminal justice system – Janine has talked about how in her community, they have nurses on a monthly basis. Many people have to leave their home communities to access something as basic as healthcare, and that determines housing outcomes for people.

In Ottawa, the largest Indigenous population – the urban Indigenous population that we have – is Inuit peoples, largely **because they're here accessing services that are available in Ottawa that are not available in their home communities.** Talking about housing in isolation does nothing for communities, because it doesn't address their core needs and how those needs are interconnected to their housing outcomes. Interjurisdictional neglect and institutional failure to assure proper basic services in Indigenous communities has a huge impact on Indigenous women's housing.

VIOLATION #4

Security of tenure under [NHSA](#) and secure Indigenous Land tenure

Finally, we made a deep connection between land tenure and housing tenure, because colonial removal of Indigenous Peoples from their land, forced dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their lands is at the core of housing insecurity and homelessness being experienced by Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

“We would want to build housing, but where do we build housing? We build housing on land.”

Indigenous Knowledge Keeper and member of National Indigenous Women's Housing Network.

For many women and gender-diverse people in Indigenous communities, there isn't access to land to build, even when communities have their own solutions and they want to build, or they want to live off-grid, or they want to invest in other solutions. They can't, because there is no land to build, and that's where the colonial government extracts its power—keeping Indigenous communities dispossessed from the land. Indigenous Peoples are not interested in any right to housing that does not come with that core connection to right to land, and their right to secure land tenure on their homelands.

We made it very clear in our housing Claim that any sort of investigation the Federal Housing Advocate takes on that concerns Indigenous Peoples' right to housing should not be separated from their right to land, and their right to be on their lands through cultural ways that they've known for time immemorial.

In addition to the four key violations we identified, we built out recommendations, which are presented in much greater detail in the Claim itself.

The core recommendation that we made to the Federal Housing Advocate are:

- **Appointing a panel of knowledge keepers, Elders, and advocates to look at Indigenous housing rights claims that are coming through the Federal Housing Advocate as submissions.**
- **Centering co-governance at the core and the root of Federal Housing Advocate processes. Upholding key actions in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan**
- **Advocating for an Indigenous Human Rights Tribunal that can specifically look at the intersection of human rights violations for Indigenous Peoples, and the violations of inherent rights that Indigenous Peoples have as First Peoples on Turtle Island.**

Housing Advocacy in the North

We're using the housing rights Claims to create space for advocacy in the Northwest Territories through working together with advocates like Lisa and the co-chair of the National Indigenous Women's Housing Network, Katlia Lafferty, who is also an advocate from Yellowknife. Housing in the North has some very unique challenges due to geography of the North and the resources that are made available there, but also because of the extreme lack of political will of northern colonial governments to provide real solutions to people living there.



Katlia shared some of the pictures that she's taken being in people's homes – homes where people are paying upwards of \$2,000 in rent. This is housing provided by the government of Northwest Territories, as the main housing provider in the territory. Katlia couldn't be at the Summit, but she wanted the housing in these pictures to be shown, because of the extremely egregious rights violations that are happening in the North that nobody is talking about. Oftentimes advocates from the North do feel like they're absolutely missed or ignored in national conversations.

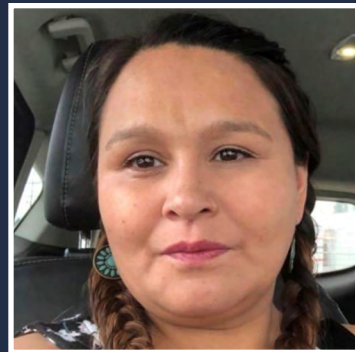
Get involved and collaborate with advocates in the North for Indigenous housing solutions

We want to highlight a process for other advocates from the North who want to take on this work..

The National Indigenous Women's Housing Network is really interested in lifting up voices from the North and creating capacity for them to do advocacy within their own contexts. Keepers of the Circle, which is also situated in Northern Ontario, is deeply interested in looking at incubating or creating capacity for northern-owned solutions and Indigenous women-led solutions in the North. I hope that we can connect with more advocates doing similar work and can build and connect with people to build power and organize ■

Janine Harvey and Lisa Thurber: An Indigenous-Led Process to Document Violations of the Right to Housing in the Northwest Territories to Claim the Human Right to Housing with the Federal Housing Advocate

Northwest Territories advocates [Janine Harvey](#) and [Lisa Thurber](#) have been hard at work trying to build understand around the scope and scale of a situation that has garnered little national attention: housing rights violations experienced by communities in Northern Canada.



Janine Harvey

I'm in my community of Ulukhaktok, Northwest Territories. Our population is mostly Inuit people, of about 450 people. I sit on the Steering Committee of the National Right to Housing Network, and I also sit on their First Voice Advocacy working group and sit on Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty.



Lisa Thurber

I am currently in High Prairie Alberta, four hours north of Edmonton. I'm originally from the Northwest Territories, born and raised in Hay River. My mother was a residential school survivor from the Hay River reserve, and I've been living in housing in the Northwest Territories all my life, so the stories are pretty much the same across Canada.

Their work highlights the fact that research must be identified and led by the community, and should be approached with a different community-based ethic.

The potential consequences of engaging in research is much higher in small communities in northern Canada than in bigger communities. In many places, there is one main housing provider, and there is very little chance of anonymity in being part of research studies—the nuances of which may not be visible to an outside researcher. The risk of being identified and facing repercussions is extreme, so people are afraid to speak out about their housing situation.

Only someone from the community has the right level of trust, and assurance that people's stories and information are treated with dignity and understanding. Northern Canadian populations are over-researched, but in an extractive and exploitative way, with methods that work in southern Canada applied haphazardly. This kind of work does harm.

Janine and Lisa are undertaking a thoughtful and important project to make change in a community-guided way.

Launching a Pilot Project: The Northwest Territories Housing Initiative Explained

Janine: I want to talk about a project I started—a 10-month pilot project in the Northwest Territories. With the help of the National Right to Housing Network, we were able to secure some funding from the [Catherine Donnelly Foundation](#). With this funding, what I'm going to be doing in the Northwest Territories is collecting people's stories of housing, collecting stories of how it's been for them, their experiences living under the NWT Housing Corporation, or under Northview rental. Those are the really only two cases you can rent in the Northwest Territories. In my community, we just have NWT housing, and they really work to exert control over the tenants.

I had worked for Housing First prior to moving back to my community. I left my community in 1996 to go to school, and then I lived in Yellowknife, where I started working for , and the [YWCA](#). I've been involved in housing and shelter work for the last 21 years prior to moving to my community of Ulukhaktok.

I grew up here, so I'm very familiar with housing. Before I moved to Yellowknife, I always thought what we were going through with housing and poverty was normal, until I got educated and realized the power and control that the government has over our people, and the control and power Housing has over our people too. It's similar to the Northwest Company with food prices, and the airlines with food prices, and I saw how much my people were being controlled—and yet, I saw how much we live in poverty whenever I came back home. I saw this happening with no resources no support, no advocacy, no mental health support, no healthcare. We live in a very unique place, and that's my drive— it's why I'm doing this work today.

I decided to sit on several steering committees throughout Canada to help people understand what we're facing up here in the Northwest Territories, because it's very unique.

A closer look at housing challenges in the North

We face different struggles with the cold climate and having no advocacy and no support. A lot of the work I do is volunteer, and I work from home. My people realized that I was doing some good work for our people and now I am the Deputy Mayor of our community. I'm driving to build a shelter in Ulukhaktok—a safe place for women and children, because right now we don't have anything. We absolutely have nothing—we don't have counsellors; we don't have social workers. We only have nurses that come in on a monthly basis. There is a lot of advocacy that needs to be done in the Northwest Territories. I always stress that, in the North, in the Arctic, we have a high rate of suicide.

I believe it's because we don't have these supports from the government. The government does say "yes, we will give you funding, yes we'll give you your money," but you need to have these specific things.

“With everything I had shared about wanting to do advocacy for my people in regard to housing, what I had seen in my community was people living with no windows, no doors, no bathroom doors. A lot of mold in people's houses. A lot of overcrowding and abuse, and addiction due to overcrowding.”

Janine Harvey, Executive Director of the Tahluqtiit Women's Society

Process – making sure people's stories are told safely

I have observed this for a couple of years now, and in this project that we undertook, with people's permission, I recorded these experiences. Because of the context, confidentiality is so important, and people had the choice to be anonymous when they shared their story. I really wanted to make sure that

it was culturally appropriate and safe for tenants to be speaking in regard to their housing, because a lot of our people are still afraid of being penalized because they're telling their story. I had to come up with a process for how to keep our people safe, and still get the stories out of how they were treated while living in housing, and how they're still treated today. We still have people in my community living in cabins, because of the shortage of housing, in -50-degree weather.

This project involved a lot of community engagement. We provided gift cards to participants who wanted to talk about housing or give their stories. With this research project in the NWT, I travelled to Yellowknife and Inuvik. I also engaged the community during a town hall, to share back all the information that I gathered.

The Critical Role of Government Funding

Since the Summit, we launched the report summarizing and sharing the stories we heard. This report is called [Stark Truths: Indigenous Housing Realities & Solutions in Northern, Remote Communities](#). I want the government to use this powerful report to see and hear stories from our people who are actually living in these states, and the conditions they're living in.

Bringing back to the government is important so we can make a plan of how to make things better for housing. That information and awareness is also for the rest of Canada to see how it really is in the Northwest Territories.

At the end, it is really about my people saying: “these are the solutions, and this is what we want to see in the NWT,” so that we could have an outcome where people feel like they're being heard, **because for many years, my people haven't been heard.**

I want to be able to tell them that, with this information, I'd like it to go to government—so we have confidentiality forms prior to anyone else getting

the information, and people get their say in who we're allowed to share their information with.

I'm going to be working with Housing First in Yellowknife to sit with some of the participants that are in the Housing First program, to see how that program has been running through the NWT, and also going to shelters Inuvik, and talking about housing in that community.

Without safe housing, we are going to keep having murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. We do not have safe housing in Canada. That's the reality—if women and children, women and girls don't have a safe home, this is going to keep happening. And that's the truth. Without advocacy, we have no voices in the North, because of our people being scared to speak up about housing.

Advocacy in communities is really important, so that people know they have support, and they do have somewhere to go to talk about housing issues. I'd really like to create a position, or for the government to create a position for advocacy in small communities so that people could have a voice and prevent eviction.

Without funding and money from the government, we will never be able to create safe housing because in the North, it's really expensive to build houses and to make sure they're sustainable for the cold climate. So, we have to make sure that this work happens in the right way.

Update: In December, 2022, Janine and her community were [awarded federal funding](#) to open the Tahiuqtiit Women's Society. The Tahiuqtiit Women's Society aims to create a family shelter in Ulukhaktok.

Our people in the Northwest Territories, in the Arctic, need to be able to do this work on our own, so that our people can feel safe. Time and time again, I hear that it's always people from Ottawa or people that don't know about our culture, they're coming up to the

Arctic, and then going back, and we don't hear from them. This will give you some accountability for our people, and for the government, to say we're taking a step in a different direction.

The best thing about this is that I have that connection with my people. I have that connection and that trust that I have built already. A lot of people are excited about this. I'll be doing some advertising through Facebook and through community meetings, and partnering with different organizations in the NWT. I also hired a community researcher to help me get this all up and running—so we've created a part-time job for someone.

You can read the Stark Truths report to read more about our findings about housing in the NWT, and read some of the stories that were shared with us.

Lisa Thurber's Advocacy Journey

“I took a lot of time for thought after the Summit. And I had to think, are we putting the cart before the horse again? We might have a right to housing, but if tenants don't have rights, are we any better off? And that's where I thought, yes, now we need tenants' rights. We need tenants' rights in the Northwest Territories, because there are absolutely none right now. Once you're evicted from public housing, you are officially homeless. There is no market rent. There's nowhere to go.”

Lisa Thurber, Right to housing advocate with lived experience.

And these are in the communities outside of Yellowknife and our larger hubs.

When I started this advocacy journey, it was just to help an Elder get her toilet unclogged, which became



The business of building houses

I'm a numbers person—I went to school for business administration, so numbers are my thing—and when I throw out some of these numbers, I can't understand how we have any homelessness in the Northwest Territories.

We only have slightly more than 40,000 people ([NWT Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census Population and Dwelling Counts; Statistics Canada, Quarterly population estimates](#)), and only approximately 15,205 households ([NWT Bureau of Statistics Housing 2021 Census](#)). That's like a small city — less than Grande Prairie, Alberta.

In 2021, 36% of the 15,205 houses in the province had either an affordability, adequacy or suitability problem ([NWT Bureau of Statistics Housing 2021 Census](#)).

We can't house everybody with a \$100 million a year housing budget? That's not only the housing budget—NWT was just given another \$16 million. Another \$50 million, another \$40 million. Through NWT territorial reporting, policies, and procedures, I'm starting to ask, why are houses costing us so much? As an individual, I can call and get a manufactured home into my home community of Port Simpson for \$260,000, but if I want to get the same home through the government of the Northwest Territories housing program, it's going to cost me \$800,000.

I'm having a hard time with that because government is in the business of **programs** and shouldn't be into **the business of building houses**.

But, I'm wondering where all of this is coming from, and all of this is coming from their own documents that have been tabled in their own government.

a huge journey. She ended up leaving the community, and after two years of fighting to get her bathroom fixed, we couldn't, and she left and went to Northern BC.

Advocacy has to start with that person—who needs a hot water tank. We had a family of five in Tuktoyaktuk with a child with autism, with no warm water heater for two months. According to [Goally \(2023\)](#) this can be challenging for autistic children. We finally got one for them via phone call, threatening to say, “sorry public housing, sorry government, but my next news article is going to read: ‘family of five with son with autism, without hot water in a government-funded program house.’” Poof—next thing you know, next week, they have a hot water tank.

I really feel like I don't have enough capacity to help everybody with every email and every phone call, but we have a right to at least adequate housing, and a right to be in the housing we're at.

We're unique in the Northwest Territories, because we really do only have two landlords—that's one large private landlord, and then we have public housing. So, we're able to compile all our housing stories and needs, and rights, and hopefully submit that as a claim to the Federal Housing Advocate. We need that picture as a whole, because often, Northwest Territories is totally and utterly forgotten about. So, trying to get us in our unique situation out there to say, “we need to take control of our own housing rights,” and people need to take control of what's theirs. Some people have been in their housing units for 10, 15, 20 years, and are still under the threat of eviction. We live with that threat of eviction every day, because we don't know from one year to the next whether or not our next lease is going to allow us to stay in that unit. Maybe I have an extra child, maybe my income went up, maybe something else has happened, but every year they're going to reassess whether or not I have a right to be in that public housing unit in communities.

And if your lease isn't renewed, where do you go? The majority of these people from the small communities leave to places like Yellowknife, which has the majority of our homeless population.

“According to the [Government of Northwest Territories \(2022, p. 14\)](#), ‘Based on prevailing pricing and expected market conditions in 2022-23, the maximum construction costs have been determined to be in the range of \$643/sq ft. - \$832/sq ft. across the NWT.’”

Lisa Thurber, Right to housing advocate with lived experience.

I mean, for that I should be living in a mansion.

I want a minimum of five bedrooms, three bathrooms, a garage—except we’re getting 600-square foot, two-bedroom, half-bath homes that are not going to last for a generation. It’s our own government that is putting this pricing on our houses and saying, if we’re going to build you the house, this is what it’s going to cost.

Sorry, give me \$200,000—I’ll cover the rest, thank you very much.

Part of my advocacy work, and what I’m doing in the NWT is saying, no, you don’t need to go through a housing program. Let’s try to be aware of some of those systemic issues that we’re running across—people aren’t aware of their rights, they’re not aware that they don’t have to live in this cycle of “who do I go to? Where do I go?”

We’re just getting the same response. Collectively, through the NWT, with Keepers of the Circle and advocates like Janine Harvey and Katlia Lafferty, we’re able to tell the government, “No more making money off of our public housing, it’s time to fix it, and put your money where your mouth is.”

So, in 2021, if you want to talk about money, NWT was talking about needing \$150 million in order to address our core housing need. That’s the spending for their department for a year and a half, and we have \$150 million. Maybe a non-profit organization like Keepers of the Circle can get some housing out there. At the cost of administering housing for a hundred million dollars a year, if we’re not getting any more than 10 to 20 units, we have a problem.

Next Steps

The next step is advocating to set up a Tenants’ Association in the Northwest Territories—we’re only going to have one, because we only have two landlords. We’re going to try to build one—the biggest being out of Yellowknife.

“We’re going to get the word out about the human rights Claim to let people know they have rights. Our tenants have rights. We have rights as human beings. Our children have rights. It’s time the government started listening to those rights, and if we have to stop and strike, and say, ‘you know what, no more. We’re all going to put posters outside of our houses and stand up against the government, and the fact that they’re wasting hundreds of millions of dollars a year and we’re not getting any further ahead,’ then that’s what I’m going to do. I will sleep on the steps of the Legislative Assembly if I have to.”

Lisa Thurber, Right to housing advocate with lived experience. ■



Victoria Levack and the Disability Rights Coalition Nova Scotia: A Story of Exercising Human Rights through the Courts

In a workshop held by the NRHN on International Human Rights Day 2020, panelist Victoria Levack, a claimant in a major systemic case before the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal on the right to supported housing for persons with disabilities, was asked what her claim meant to her: “It’s about dignity...I don’t think my government looks at me as a human being. I think they look at me as a problem. As something to be fixed. And that’s not the case... I just want my humanity please. And I want a home.”



Victoria Levack

In Nova Scotia, hundreds of people are involved in a massive human rights case against the provincial government. The case concerns people with disabilities being able to access housing in communities versus being institutionalized against their will. Victoria Levack is a fierce advocate for disability rights, and a rights claimant at the centre of this case. During the Strategic Advocacy Summit, Victoria spoke to the ways she shows up in solidarity with others experiencing housing rights violations in her community.

“It’s about dignity...I don’t think my government looks at me as a human being. I think they look at me as a problem. As something to be fixed. And that’s not the case... I just want my humanity please. And I want a home.”

Victoria Levack, Disability Rights Coalition of Nova Scotia.

Alex Nelson: As a rights claimant at the center of a major human rights case, and as an influential advocate in your community, what are some of the biggest areas of growth and learning from your work in the housing and homelessness sector, and what would you do differently if you could?

Victoria Levack: I’ve actually learned quite a bit. I used to be very naïve, because Nova Scotia in particular is known to be like “love thy neighbor,” “we help each other,” you know “solidarity of community,” and stuff. And so I thought, yes, we still have homelessness, but everybody’s basic needs are taken care of, you know they have access to food all the time, they have access to water, they have access to supports if they want them, and that’s just not the case at all.

I started getting into this housing work when I was forced to live in an institution against my will, because there were no supports in the community for me. So, I moved into a nursing home when I was 21—I am now 31.

I did finally get into a pilot program, to get me moved out of the facility, but that’s just me and there are thousands behind me. Then I realized, it’s not just people with disabilities being screwed, and not getting what they need—it’s everyone, regardless of ability

or race, although people of colour are, of course, generally more affected.

Basically, I learned that you have to be militant.

And that doesn’t mean violent. That means, instead of going. “Please, sir, may I have my rights,” I reason with them and make them see that I am in fact a human being. Asking nice got me nowhere—nowhere. Now I demand: these are my rights as a human being, and therefore you will give them to me, and the rest of us.

That’s when things started to change because being nice got me nowhere.

Alex Nelson: That’s such an important position to learn from—it takes a different kind of advocacy and persistence when your human rights are being violated. A lot of advocates at the grassroots level are learning that this is what it takes. The status quo is not working, so people are experimenting and unapologetically trying new and different ways of organizing and speaking back to power.

Victoria: And what I would change if I could have. I would just make people understand, we’re human beings. Many people who are not in the situation, says things like “people choose this. They want this, or this their own fault because they did drugs, or they engage in sex work,”—nobody chooses to have their rights denied. And one thing I would change about government—other than “hey stop doing this”—is, actually let them be honest about the fact that they do not care. Do not go around spreading your crap about “we believe in human rights” and then do nothing to follow through on it. Be honest, at the very least. Don’t lie to me and gaslight me.

Alex: And start talking about structural oppression and inequity as the route of these issues. ■



Aditya Rao and The New Brunswick Coalition for Tenants Rights

Mobilizing a Tenant Movement to assert the Right to Housing by Fighting Speculative, Predatory, and Exploitative Landlords

Tenants face steep challenges in the New Brunswick context: there are few tenant protections in the province, with no meaningful rent control. Landlord groups for a long time dominated the airwaves and policy tables. With the pandemic putting new pressures on an already exploitative rental market, tenants organized to change the conversation. Aditya Rao lived in New Brunswick from 2020 to 2022 and was involved in creating [The New Brunswick Coalition for Tenants Rights](#) working to push back against this immensely harmful system. He told us the story of how tenants successfully reclaimed space in the public conversation to win legislative change.



Aditya Rao

“In New Brunswick, the fact that the debate shifted from one where our landlords were considered the authority on housing, to one where our tenants have a voice in the public narrative – the fact that legislative change happened despite the best efforts of government; the fact that tenants are getting organized – is itself a success story.”

Aditya Rao, The New Brunswick Coalition for Tenants Rights.

TERM TO KNOW

Financialization of Housing

Financialization is when something that has not previously been seen as a tool for making profit, becomes part of making money – and when these systems are unchecked, exploitation of tenants (particularly those part of marginalized groups) runs out of control.

Alex Nelson: The financialization of housing is a growing concern in Canada, as housing costs continue to rise, putting more and more people at risk of losing their homes.

Landlords in New Brunswick have a virtually unlimited landscape for increasing the cost of rent. The result is the deepening of the financialization of housing – taking place in a context in which political figures explicitly say housing is a tool for investment and making profits (at the expense of renters)

Adi Rao: We organized the New Brunswick Coalition for Tenants Rights in an environment where landlords were used to having all the power. **There are many folks here from across the country, folks in different jurisdictions with different kinds of protections and different kinds of realities.**

Maybe to some of you, this will sound quite familiar: in 2020, in the throes of the pandemic, a landlord in New Brunswick increased the rent on a senior citizen in Fredericton, in one of the first major stories of the pandemic-era skyrocketing of rents. There was immediate outrage. The property manager, Canada Homes for Rent, simply called a radio station and asked to come on and defend their decision to raise



Mobilizing a Tenant Movement in New Brunswick

the rent on the Fredericton senior by 50%, which amounted to \$400 a month more in rent.

I’m sure for many of you, a 50% rent increase is completely unthinkable given protections that exist, perhaps, in some of your jurisdictions, but I cannot emphasize just how common it was to see some rent increases by those numbers.

I want to share with you a bit of what Mr. Jeff Murray, the CEO of Canada Homes for Rent, had to say on the air during the [CBC interview in December 2020](#):

Jeff Murray: “...for a lot of different people, however, this is a business and operating a property is a business. And we have to look out for what’s best for our owners and our owners really rely on us to give them the best advice possible. No different than, you know, people investing in stocks and talking to the stockbroker, you know, what is the best stocks to buy that’s going to increase their profits, you know, they really rely on us to give them that information.”

Terry Seguin, CBC: “Okay, so just, I don’t want to put too fine a point on it but let me ask you this directly: so, if you raise the rents and those people leave, you are then able to bring in tenants who will pay the higher rents.”

Jeff Murray: “Yeah, otherwise we wouldn’t be, you know, if we didn’t feel comfortable enough the fact that the units you know it doesn’t matter if it’s, if it’s Glacier we’re talking about or anywhere. If we didn’t feel comfortable enough that those units would not re-rent at a, at that particular price we would not be raising it there, like, again we’re, you know, we’re here. It’s a business we have to operate it as such.

And, you know, doesn’t matter if you’re renting apartments or if you’re selling apples.”

Terry Seguin, CBC: “Okay-”

Jeff Murray: “-if you’re going to price your apples above what anybody else is willing to pay you’re not going to sell any.”

Adi Rao: So there you have it, access to housing is the same as the buying and selling of apples, or stocks, for the folks that are running amok in our housing market across the country— especially in New Brunswick.

The CBC invited the Coalition to come on and respond to Mr. Murray's points, and I'm sure you can imagine how that went. The reason I wanted to share this clip with you is because this clip went right to the heart of the problem in New Brunswick. Our approach there, not just in New Brunswick, really, but nationwide, in terms of government policies disproportionately reliant on the private market to deliver affordable housing.

Our point was simple: relying on the benevolence of profit-seeking landlords to deliver affordable housing is a fool's errand. These are not objectives that can coexist.

In 2020, landlords could raise rents by any amount, except in very limited circumstances (when folks lived in a unit for five years or longer), but they could do so as many times as they wanted, so long as they met the very short notice period. This resulted in 20%, 30% rent increases. There was even a landlord who actually decided to try and raise rent on their tenant by \$2,000 a month. That's a \$2,000 a month increase, not a rent that already is \$2,000 a month, which is obviously commonplace now, but a \$2,000 a month increase. That landlord ended up backing off in Moncton, not because it was illegal, but because other landlords got worried that this landlord was going to kill the golden goose—that this move would have resulted in stronger tenant protections.

The only remedy we had in New Brunswick if you couldn't pay the rent, was that you could either try and negotiate it down with your landlord, or you could treat it as an eviction notice. The tribunal couldn't do much about it, and landlords could evict tenants for absolutely no reason at the end of a tenancy agreement, simply by saying that they did not want to renew the agreement.



Advocating for change

Over the last few years, the coalition was relentless. In partnership with groups like ACORN, we were continuously in the media pushing for change, and in two years the government was forced to change the law. Now all rent increases can be reviewed by the tribunal, the notice period for a rent increase was doubled to six months, and rents can only increase once a year. New legislation in 2022 brought in a temporary rent cap.

There are even new rules against arbitrary evictions, which brings us a step closer towards this idea of the right to maintain occupancy of one's unit, closer to our right to housing framework.

Now don't get me wrong, this is not enough. In fact, it's not even all good: the rent cap is temporary, the rent increases reviewed by the tribunal are only reviewed against each other based on what's "reasonable in the law", and so long as landlords collaborate to increase rents by similar amounts, they can still increase rents by however much they want. The regime actually depends on complaints, so if you complain, and win a reduction in rent, but your neighbor doesn't, then that rent increase on your neighbor still stays. Then, that will later be used as evidence that there's now a new reasonable rent, because someone else is paying it. So, that then has implications on calculations for affordability because, by some measures we use the average of the market rent and then charge 80% below that.

Never mind of course, that 80% of something that is 100% out of control, is still 80% out of control.

Looking to future advocacy

We've got to fight to take profit out of housing. We've got to fight to take down Real Estate Investment Trusts. We've got to address financialization of housing.

Let's legislate national minimum standards for tenancy protections, so it shouldn't matter where you live in Canada for you to be protected. Let's build cooperative and non-profit housing, and housing that is affordable and accessible.

So there's a long way to go. But we must claim our victories, and we must celebrate them.

That may mean different things in different provinces, but in New Brunswick, the fact that the debate shifted from one where our landlords were considered the authority on housing, to one where our tenants have a voice in the public narrative; the fact that legislative change happened despite the best efforts of government and their predatory investor friends; the fact that tenants are getting organized is itself a success story. But, onwards and upwards. ■

Laura Murphy and the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness: Building Spaces for Rights Claimants to Exercise their Human Rights through Co-Creation and Equity

In Edmonton, Alberta, housing advocates are working within a tense provincial political climate. Significant work is being undertaken to take federal legislation on housing—the [National Housing Strategy Act](#)—and translate it to make it work on the ground in Albertan communities.



Laura Murphy

Laura Murphy, is an advocate working at the Advocacy Centre for Tenants of Ontario, who has shared powerful lessons with our team about acknowledging the place for anger and frustration in this work, but also how to build a space that makes people feel seen and heard—and unsettle violent structures that can also creep into our advocacy spaces. These thoughts formed a large part of the intention and thought behind creating the space held during the Summit. In her panel discussion, Laura shared learnings from her time working at the [Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness](#), and the [Affordable Housing Solutions Lab](#). These learnings are vital for those who seek to create spaces without expanding the capacity of systems to harm people.

Laura Murphy: I wear two hats- I'm part of a coalition, called the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH). We're lucky to have a really diverse group of folks from all walks of life, as we have a wide range and also a depth of housing expertise. ECOHH is a true coalition and entirely member driven. When a member brings something up that is relevant to the issue of housing and homelessness in Edmonton, such as an upcoming motion being brought to City Hall, or there's a need or even a call for submissions to respond to something to do with housing policy in any order of government. Or a housing issue has caught the attention of the media and there's an opportunity for both education and advocacy, we work on a plan and a response together, and we decide collectively on a plan of action (what we are going to do, who best as the spokesperson). We do all sorts of education and advocacy efforts – we just did our annual Homeless Memorial this summer, and we've been doing a lot of press lately on landlord redlining and a number of other things. I'm also the research coordinator for the Affordable Housing Solutions Lab, and our role is to bring the right people together, at the right place, and right time to really rethink the status quo of housing, our assumptions behind housing. Really through the lens of the human right to housing.

Much of where we're at with our housing crisis now is really ahistorical and really acontextual so it's really easy to keep repeating these patterns. Part of our role is to kind of unearth some of that and usurp who experts are to really put rights holders at the center of actions and engagement about housing and bringing people together in the right way.

What is needed for housing reform?

Alex Nelson: I'm really interested in talking to you about resources and factors that would make change based on what you have learned in your work. What financial, social, political, environmental, or cultural factors were resources would make the biggest difference in terms of housing for you and your community?

Laura Murphy: I think the biggest thing is, we know that the status quo, the way that we do things, is just not working. We really need to do things in a different way—be brave to forge new ways of doing things together, and to really rethink who the people are at the center of this decision-making and where that expertise lies, and really doing things in a different way.

To me, this means being creative, committing to doing things differently, and really thinking about power and capacity, along with challenging what we often assume about 'expertise'.

A rights based approach is the game changer we need, but in order to really figure out how to co-create these mechanisms together (with or without orders of government with or without industry), pushing for that change in different ways.

We really have to build equity together. The same dynamics that create housing inadequacy often continue to be reflected and reinforced, even at tables and stakeholder sessions with best intentions, even with elected leaders with best intentions.

It is good to acknowledge and tackle the systemic factors, and see them reflected in how we come

together to co-create new mechanisms and solutions. That requires building trust and relationships, and being mindful of what we're giving up in those relationships—what's required of people in those relationships. Folks who are rights holders or living experience are exhausted. Many are advocates as well as just trying to deal with housing challenges, so we really have to build processes that start from that perspective and empower that perspective.

For folks that have a little more privilege, or have power to make change, committing to that process of learning and unlearning, and being willing to be humbled. Also, being willing to give up some of that power in that space. That's the only way we're going to turn this stuff around.

For example, in response to what a good process should and could look like, we collaborated with a number of disability and housing advocates to create our '[Access to Housing Choice](#)' series. Over 3 consecutive Friday afternoons, we went through a process of unlearning and (re)learning, driven by the expertise and knowledge of advocates and rights holders. For breakout sessions we low-key asked rights holders to respond to the discussion questions first and did our best so that each breakout group had at least 50% folks with first-hand knowledge of these issues. Even if that meant that some breakout groups did not have any representation for small group discussion, which was a gap we accepted and did our best to address through coming back together as a big group to share back from our breakout groups.

I'm excited to hear from other advocates, because a big game changer is the power that we actually do have. The way that things are set up right now is meant to divide and conquer.

It's a revolutionary act when we come together – like at the Strategic Advocacy Summit—to start to bridge those relationships, to learn from one another to get that information, and combine our limited capacity

None of us have enough time or resources, or capacity to deal with the things that are happening, especially when in housing crisis or dealing with challenges. So, looking forward to where this goes and unfolds from

here—I think that's going to be really useful. And being creative around some of the trappings that we might get caught in, that reinforce status quo

Again, just resetting how we come to this work, that works best for folks who are dealing with unmet housing needs and figuring out that way of imparting and influencing change. Being creative and thinking of things in a different way is also quite taxing and really quite tough if you're living in stress and crisis. So, figuring out a way where we can be clear on what our goals really are, and ways that we can work within the system—take pieces from the system, and kind of use them in different ways—or work outside of systems. Our approach needs to be multi-pronged, and done in a way that we're not leaving anybody behind.

About the Access to Housing Choice Series

I know others present at the Summit were also really key in helping us think about what it would look like to do a process to think about housing and solutions in a different way. Their expertise, along with the expertise of folks who are really living it and really have such a deep knowledge of the issues, gave a quick policy and program analysis: here's what's happening, here's where the solutions are, we need those resources and here's how we could do it. We could make these changes tomorrow, it could be done quite quickly. Again, it's just about having the right people at the right place, at the right time, and really coming together in a way that acknowledges these power differentials – and that we need to also be co-creating equity. To me, that's what it means to take up the right to housing in a meaningful way.

Alex Nelson: I think that is so beautiful and empowering. Relationship building is a radical act in a context where that labour is devalued and invisibilized. And building spaces where those relationships and that trust is front and centre is a huge part of the process and the puzzle, where we're all fumbling towards justice and transformative change. This resonates for me, as I'm sure it will for others. ■

Ambalika Roy and The Right to Housing Toronto: Building the Infrastructure to Claim the Right to Housing at a Municipal Level

Right to Housing Toronto (R2HTO) is a grassroots group of engaged citizens, rights claimants, and community advocates who mobilize to combat structures that oppress and violate the right to housing on a local scale. With chapters operating in places like Toronto, Peel, York, the Right to Housing municipal groups tackle local challenges and bylaws that fuel exclusion and housing insecurity, like championing inclusionary zoning, and the appointment of a housing commissioner in Toronto.



Laura Murphy

This work is a case study for other contexts—R2HTO is doing incredible work to advance the right to housing, and chart a path for what that means beyond the federal level. The advocates that form R2HTO have worked hard to build a framework for advancing the right to housing in municipal and sub-municipal contexts.

Their work at the municipal and sub-municipal levels sets an example for what right to housing work could look like. It really makes a difference for the communities that are trying this out—for example the success garnered by R2HTO in the affordable housing pledge for the 2022 municipal election. In a critical and responsive way, their work parallels national advocacy that is underway



Ambalika Roy: I work as a Senior Community Engagement Advisor at the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, or CCHR (formerly Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation—CERA), which is one of the oldest non-profit organizations working to advance right to housing also coordinate the right tools in Toronto network, and just let me introduce the network which is very important because I would be speaking about our advocacy work in the next section.

Right to Housing Toronto is a network of individuals and organizational supporters that came together to advocate for the City of Toronto to adopt a human rights-based approach to their housing in the temporary housing plan.

We continue to monitor the rights based plan. We make an effort to translate the key issues of the right to housing into policies, and also constantly advocate for as a city has already pertains to that housing is a human right in Toronto. We try to make sure that the plan is on track. And we are governed by a very powerful steering committee of organizations, and long-term housing advocates.

The Story of Right to Housing Toronto

Alex Nelson: I'm really interested to hear more about Right to Housing Toronto. How can other communities learn from and apply what you have learned in their own communities?

Ambalika Roy: Let me start by explaining why and how the group came together, which will actually take us to our takeaways, and what others can learn from our takeaways.

In January 2019, there was a vote at Toronto City Council where the question of whether to recognize housing as a human right was put to the Council, and it lost.

Groups and experts working on this issue came together to talk about what to do next, as we wanted the City to adopt housing as a human right. This was an important move, given that the federal government

had already committed to the right to housing at that point, and a meaningful implementation of the right to housing requires all levels of government to commit to advance the right to housing over time.

We found out that the City was about to start work on the 10-year housing plan for Toronto. We focused all our efforts on influencing that process in a few ways. We started developing capacity of the city staff, to understand and be able to develop rights-based housing policy. We also started garnering support among the political leaders – by that, I mainly mean the city councillors—for a rights based approach. Our ultimate goal was ensuring a successful vote, and demonstrating broad based public support for the human rights based approach.

I completely second what Sahar said in her takeaways about the NHSA—we needed to show that is was not just a handful of people who wanted this, we needed to show the public support was very important, which we were able to do.

How did we do this? We participated in formal policy process by showing up and deputing at city council meetings, we wrote submissions and deputations. We still continue to do this all for most of the important policy items taken up by the city committee, and also continue to push for rights based housing approaches and principles.

Then we also developed educational materials, explaining what right to housing is, and is not, answering common questions to make it more tangible, because it's a concept. So, we make it more tangible for people to understand, and we developed materials to achieve that.

Finally, the city wrapped up the 10-year rights based plan, recognizing housing as a human right in December 2019. The advocacy work of the group has been successful, to some extent, but we still have a long way to go as most of the panelists are mentioning. This is just the beginning.

Next Steps

Right to Housing TO continues our advocacy to ensure the proper implementation of this 10-year plan, and we are currently pushing for a mechanism to hold the government accountable in the form of a Housing Commissioner.

This all brings me to who we are—who is the steering committee that we are governed by? Right to Housing TO steering committee members are: ACORN; Advocacy Centre for Windsor, Ontario; ACTO; CCHR—formerly CERA (Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation), Centre for Independent Living; Color of Poverty; Federation of Metro Tenants Association (FMTA); the Jane and Finch Housing Coalition; Maytree; West Scarborough Community Legal Services; Women Act; and, we have long-standing housing advocates Joy Connelly and Ingrid Palmer on the Steering Committee as well. We have an intersectional group of advocates who work in different aspects of housing, who form the steering committee.

To ensure that the work is collaborative, and that we can bring our unique expertise to the table, we have established three subcommittees: policy monitoring; government relations; and outreach and community engagement. All of these committees work on focused activities, like regularly monitoring the development of policy in the city, and developing submissions and deputations. The committees also translate the right to housing into policy recommendations, and speak with city staff and councillors—especially to build or increase their knowledge on the right to housing, because some of them really don't really understand the entire concept so our steering committee members work to fill in that gap.

We engage with communities across the city, and raise awareness about what the right to housing could mean to communities and support their grassroots advocacy efforts.

This brings me to the key takeaways that I would like to share:

Finding the political opportunity or a political window was very important and that's what we realized while going through this entire process. Sometimes it could be just a news story, and sometimes it could be an election. For Right to Housing TO, it was the timing for the development of the National Housing Strategy Act, and capitalizing on the visit from the UN Special Rapporteur as well, to put the issue on the agenda for the Council. Also knowing which counselors are on board with particular housing policies, and reaching out to them to build that political support for our policy advocacy work.

Sometimes these councillors can build wider support with other councillors, and build an allyship amongst themselves which we might not be able to reach ourselves. Reaching out to one councillor and then getting to another, that's especially important for the policy advocacy boards that currently we are doing.

Elections are definitely helpful, but it is also difficult to capture the attention of politicians during the election period. R2HTO developed a municipal election campaign—Toronto held municipal elections in October, 2021. We developed a pledge for candidates to sign on to so that we can hold them accountable if elected. In the lead up to the election, our pledge was signed by 53 candidates in 22 wards in Toronto—there are 25 wards in total. Even a few mayoral candidates took the pledge. This election, several new faces have been elected to the Toronto Council, many of whom are from racialized communities. 11 elected councillors signed on to the Affordable Housing Pledge, which is little less than 50% of the council—the total council is made up of 25 members plus the mayor. Several new councillors took the pledge, and R2HTO will continue to engage with the council to advance the right to housing in the city.

We have developed some practical rights-based policy solutions—how the city can actually advance the right to housing. It's a multi-pronged approach—that's what I would say.

Education and policy recommendations are a major part of our work. We also develop a series of rights reviews every year. Last year we analyzed the city's housing solutions, and provided rights-based recommendations to help decision-makers identify what (or where) they can do better.

We also build support from within the government, as an important part of our government relations work. Positioning ourselves as a trusted partner and a resource—a space where the city, the staff, and decision-makers can ask questions whenever they need to, especially around implementing the right to housing.

At the same time, we work to build the public support to demonstrate that it wasn't just a handful of organizations and individuals who thought the right to housing was important. The group has several organizations and housing advocacy groups, and service providers who support our advocacy work. We constantly communicate with our supporters and the broader public—about key events through our Right to Housing Toronto website and newsletter and share updates about the relevant policy items on the housing front.

Alex Nelson: I especially like the idea of community engagement not being something completely separate from policy advocacy and government relations work—because who best to speak to power than folks who are embedded in their communities, on the ground? That is an exciting piece of this work that could be instructive for others who are interested in moving forward on the right to housing in their municipal contexts. ■



Conclusion

The strength in the space of the Summit was that we had powerful advocates from coast to coast to coast coming and sharing what they see happening in their communities, and identifying points of strategic opportunity for moving forward the right to housing. We are so regionally divided, and jurisdictionally divided, that it is sometimes hard to find ways to learn from other rights defenders.

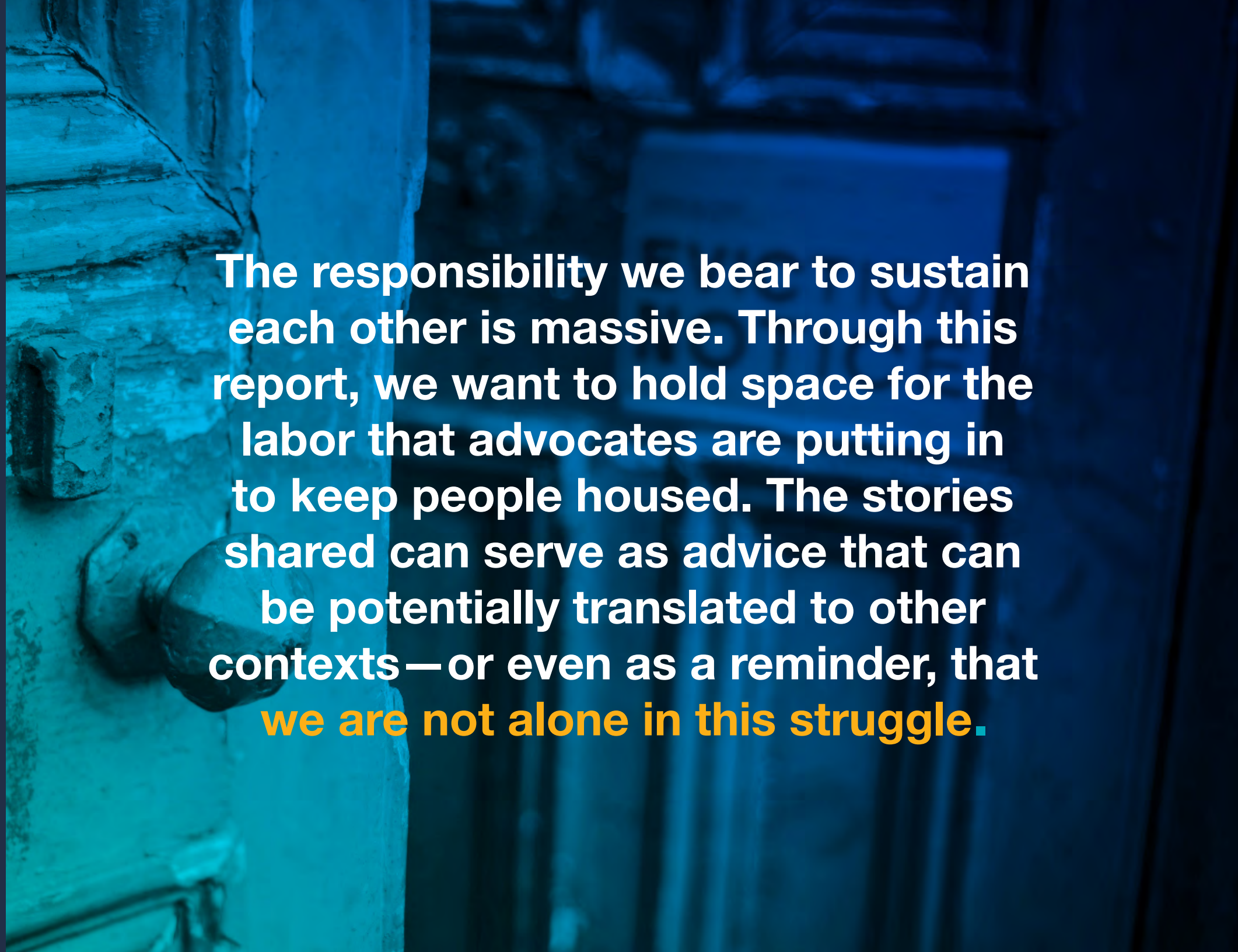
We're left with an important piece for perspective and reflection:

What action are we taking?

Part of our hope in bringing everyone together in this space was to see what is working, what actions are people taking that are making the most change, or are keeping people housed. This was the starting point for a bigger conversation about what advocates are doing that is enacting housing justice in their communities. Practically, we also need to reflect on what resources are needed to make those changes and sustain current right to housing movements. The conversation that attendees held—talking about being rebellious, being militant—was deeply eye-opening and galvanizing. In a lot of ways, the right to housing and Canada is a new opportunity for us to be rebellious against a system that is deeply broken and is harming our communities.

During the Summit, we saw how there are practical ways in which the right to housing is being made real. Right to housing work can only be what we, as the people fighting against the system, make it. The things we're fighting for are all so fundamental, and it is tragic that we don't all have our right to housing realized, but we're working on it. That is the power of this space, and this conversation.

Housing is not a privilege, it's a right, and the feeling of safety of security of yourself of your family of your community, is so important for us as human beings to survive in this world. It's not just about having a structure to live in. It's about what that means and what it makes possible for your life and your full existence as a human being.



The responsibility we bear to sustain each other is massive. Through this report, we want to hold space for the labor that advocates are putting in to keep people housed. The stories shared can serve as advice that can be potentially translated to other contexts—or even as a reminder, that **we are not alone in this struggle.**

Subscribe to our newsletter

Join the right to housing movement and get the latest updates on progress being made across the country as we collectively work towards implementing the human right to housing. You'll also receive information on upcoming events, advocacy efforts, and opportunities to get involved and support the movement.

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Thank you to all the advocates and organizations who contributed to this important work



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- [Respectful Space Agreement](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Our Team](#)
- [Review Panel Financialization](#)
- [Right to Housing Legislation in Canada](#)
- [Review of Women's Homelessness](#)
- [Stark Truths](#)

Find out more about our partners work:

[Community Housing Transformation Centre and the Community Based Tenant Initiative](#)

[Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network](#)

- [Human Rights Claims](#)
- [Claim Launch](#)

[National Indigenous Women's Housing Network](#)

- [Indigenous Housing Claim - June 15/2022](#)

[Keepers of the Circle](#)

[Janine Harvey](#)

- [Stark Truths: Indigenous Housing Realities & Solutions in Northern, Remote Communities](#)
- [Women's group in Ulukhaktok secures funding to work toward safe shelter](#)

[The New Brunswick Coalition for Tenants Rights](#)

[Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness \(ECOHH\)](#)

[Affordable Housing Solutions Lab](#)

- [Affordable Housing Solutions Lab's Access to Housing Choice Series](#)

[Canadian Centre for Housing Rights \(CCHR\)](#)

[Right to Housing Toronto \(R2HTO\)](#)

- [R2HTO Mailing list](#)
- [The Affordable Housing Pledge](#)
- [Toronto municipal election campaign](#)
- [10-year rights-based plan](#)
- [A rights-based approach to the HousingTO Plan 2020-2030](#)

Other Links:

Information on the rights of Indigenous Peoples

- [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action](#)
- [The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls to Justice](#)

Office of the Federal Housing Advocate

- [Website](#)
- [Housing Submission](#)
- [Canadian Human Rights Commission Article](#)

Other Partners:

- [Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario](#)
- [Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
- [Campaign 2000](#)
- [Maytree](#)
- [Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada](#)
- [Budget 2022](#)

Other:

- [Housing Rights Watch, 2023 article on housing rights](#)
- [National Housing Strategy Act, Department of Justice](#)
- [National Housing Strategy](#)
- [Bruce Porter and Elizabeth McIsaac, 2019 article on the right to housing](#)
- [Adam Vaughan](#)
- [Leilani Farha, former Special Rapporteur \(2014-2020\)](#)
- [Department of Finance – Making Housing More Affordable](#)
- [NWT renters have few protections but that may change](#)
- [Catherine Donnelly Foundation](#)
- [Arlene Hache](#)
- [YWCA Canada](#)
- [What Makes Autism and Showering So Challenging?](#)
- [NWT Bureau of Statistics: 2021 Census Population and Dwelling Counts](#)
- [Statistics Canada, Quarterly Population Estimates](#)
- [NWT Bureau of Statistics: Housing 2021 Census](#)
- [The Cost of Addressing Core Housing Need in the Northwest Territories](#)
- [\\$400 rent increase leaves Fredericton senior scrambling to find affordable apartment](#)