Regulations Reimagined

Implementing Culturally Appropriate Housing for Indigenous People Living in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Saskatooon

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Introduction

What is culturally appropriate housing?

Culturally appropriate (CA) housing is not simply about cosmetic features and decoration but is about different ways of inhabiting spaces informed by cultural factors. Cultural safety more broadly is about transferring decision-making power back to Indigenous people and recognizing power imbalances in the delivery of housing.

Significance of Research

Housing can be built to be culturally appropriate, safe, affordable and sustainable; however, there are often municipal barriers that make it difficult to create this type of housing. This research investigates what municipalities need to do to reduce the barriers to creating CA housing for Indigenous people in cities.

Research Questions

The following questions helped to guide this research:

- Q1. What is the current state of culturally appropriate housing for Indigenous peoples in Canadian prairie cities?
- Q2. How do development plans enable or block culturally appropriate housing?
- Q3. How can non-profits and municipalities work together to create culturally appropriate Indigenous housing?
- Q4. What needs to change at the municipal level to accommodate culturally appropriate housing?

Methods

1. Document Analysis

Analysed the development plans for Winnipeg, Edmonton and Saskatoon for policies related to Indigenous people and housing.

Edmonton City Plan | OurWinnipeg 2045 | Saskatoon OCP

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

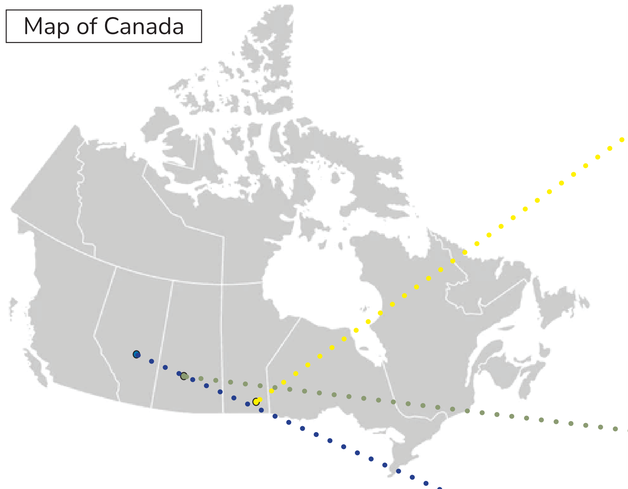
Interviewed professionals working for a municipality or non-profit organizations, with a focus on housing.

3. Precedent Analysis

Evaluated six examples of culturally appropriate non-profit Indigenous housing projects.

Precedent Findings

Map of Canada



Culturally Appropriate Elements Found:

- Firepit and common ceremonial spaces within the homes or provided in adjacent buildings
- Smudge-friendly spaces
- Courtyards, backyards, or rooftop gardens with traditional medicinal plants and fruit trees
- Large gathering spaces for guests, large kitchens
- Units with multiple bedrooms (some as large as 4 or 6 bedroom units)
- Extensive engagement with future residents
- On-site Elders to provide cultural support

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Figure 1: Astum Api Niikinaahk

Figure 2: Kinew Housing Inc

SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

Figure 3: Round Prairie Elders' Lodge

Figure 4: Central Urban Métis Federation Inc, Community Homes

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Figure 5: Ambrose Place

Figure 6: Omamoo Wango Gamik

Semi-Structured Interview Findings

Barriers to accessing housing

- Lack of affordable housing options and low vacancy rates
- Lack of culturally safe mental health supports
- Difficulty acquiring identification cards that are required to obtain housing

Barriers to CA housing

- Rezoning challenges for housing projects that wish to supply other supports such as dispensed medication
- Rules preventing cultural practices such as smudging
- Bureaucratic paralysis that comes from many different systems and siloed departments, ultimately slowing down projects

Solutions moving forward

- Revisiting housing projects and ensuring that they work for residents
- "For Indigenous, By Indigenous" housing projects and more support for Indigenous-led organizations
- Indigenous housing authorities to have more autonomy over where housing dollars are spent and allocated

Document Analysis

Each development plan provides different opportunities within their policies either through collaboration, recognition of Indigenous governance, or through specific policies.

OurWinnipeg 2045 highlights the importance of recognizing Indigenous governance; "Working with government bodies including, Indigenous, Federal, and Provincial governments and community partnerships"

The Edmonton City Plan contains specific policies related to Indigenous housing;"Policy 2.2.2.3: Increase access to social supports and resources including safe, clean and affordable housing options for the urban Indigenous population"

The Saskatoon OCP highlights the recognition of past harms and the need for reconciliation throughout the vision section of the document; "European settlement began in the 1880s, but Indigenous people have been living in and travelling through the Saskatoon area for thousands of years."

Conclusion

The topic of providing culturally appropriate housing is rooted both in upholding Indigenous self-determination and identifying and removing barriers present at the municipal level. Culturally appropriate housing must be created by Indigenous people and for Indigenous people, and the role for municipalities is to ensure that barriers created by zoning and policies can be removed.

Moving forward, municipalities should consider including clear and flexible zoning regulations to support the provision of culturally diverse housing. Municipalities should also work collaboratively with non-profit housing providers and across other levels of governments to break down the larger systematic barriers.

List of Figures:
Figure 1: CMHC: The Housing Observer (2024). Tiny home village creates space for healing. [Aerial View of Astum Api Niikinaahk and the courtyard, photograph]. https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/blog/stories/108-tiny-home-village-creates-space-for-healing
Figure 2: Kinew Housing Inc. (n.d.) Gallery. [Front view of a single detached home, photograph]. https://www.kinewhousing.ca/gallery
Figure 3: Big Block Construction (2022). Beyond Aesthetics: How the Round Prairie Elders' Lodge incorporates Métis traditions. [View of the shared garden space and centre courtyard, photograph]. https://www.bigblockconstruction.ca/post/how-the-round-prairie-elders-lodge-incorporates-metis-traditions
Figure 4: City of Saskatoon (2025). Rapid Housing Initiative – Round 2. [Outside view of CUMFI Community Homes, photograph]. https://www.saskatoon.ca/services-residents/housing-property/attainable-housing/rapid-housing-initiative
Figure 5: Rescom (n.d.) Ambrose Place. [Front view of the entrance of Ambrose Place, photograph]. https://www.rescombuilds.com/projects/ambrose-place/
Figure 6: NiGiNan Housing Ventures Inc. (2020). NiGiNan and Right at Home open 42 permanent, supportive housing units. [Street view of Omamoo Wango Gamik housing project, photograph]. https://www.niginan.ca/blog/belvedere