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## ***Investing in Indigenous Housing Strengthens Canada and the Solutions Are Ready through a National Network of Indigenous Housing Providers***

Across the country, momentum is building behind Indigenous-led approaches to housing, and at a capacity-building event hosted by NICHI (National Indigenous Collaborative Housing Inc.) in Vancouver in November, it was clearer than ever. Indigenous housing providers, leaders, and experts gathered from urban, rural, and Northern communities to share successful models, strengthen partnerships, and reaffirm a shared vision: housing as a foundation for wellness, opportunity, and self-determined community growth.

The gathering in Vancouver focused on the capacity needed to deliver homes and came at a time when public attention is focused on economic pressures and shifting government priorities. Yet in every conversation in Vancouver, one message rose above the rest: even in challenging times, Indigenous communities continue to lead with innovation, collaboration, and solutions-driven determination.

Across Canada, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples know what the impact of strong, stable housing on health and well-being could have. In Inuit Nunangat, ongoing work to reduce rates of tuberculosis demonstrates the importance of improving living conditions as part of broader public-health strategies. In Saskatchewan, community-led efforts to address HIV show how access to safe, secure housing strengthens prevention, care, and long-term health outcomes. For most of us, it is hard to get a job if we do not have a permanent residence; this will never change. These examples underscore a simple truth: when people have a safe place to live, communities thrive. Secure housing supports education, employment, cultural connection, and better health, and this is true in every major city, small town, village, and hamlet in the country.

NICHI and its member organizations are demonstrating what is possible when Indigenous communities lead the design and delivery of housing initiatives. To date, NICHI has invested \$281.5 million in 74 projects, creating a total of 3,800 housing, beds, and shelter units for Elders, women and children seeking safety, students, individuals transitioning from correctional systems, and families who have long needed stability. These projects succeed because they are grounded in community knowledge and guided by local leadership. They are efficient, transparent, culturally informed, and focused on long-term well-being; qualities that strengthen Canada's housing landscape.

The potential for continued progress is immense. Nearly \$200 million in shovel-ready projects are poised to move forward. With timely federal support, these initiatives can provide immediate benefits: good jobs, new construction, improved health outcomes, and strengthened community resilience. Supporting Indigenous-led housing is not simply the right thing to do, it is one of the smartest investments Canada can make. It advances economic participation, supports better health outcomes, and aligns with national goals on affordability, sustainability, and community development.

As Ron Lovett reminds us in his recently released book *VIDA; Empowering Residents, Transforming Communities*, when you build housing that honours dignity, belonging, and community ownership, you don't just create units, you create the conditions for people to thrive.

What we see across the country is still a crisis, yes, but it is a crisis that Indigenous communities are now meeting head-on, with effective, responsible, and community-driven solutions that are delivering real homes and much-needed shelter.

Parliament now has an opportunity to build on the momentum already underway. By unlocking funding for shovel-ready projects, supporting essential infrastructure, strengthening access to capital, and ensuring Indigenous leadership guides national programs, including Build Canada Homes and the Canada Rental Protection Fund, Canada can accelerate progress that is already proving effective.

At NICHI's gathering in Vancouver, the answer from Indigenous communities in urban, rural and Northern communities was clear: we are ready. Ready to build more, ready to continue to collaborate, and ready to deliver meaningful change for future generations. By choosing to invest in Indigenous-led housing now, Canada strengthens not just Indigenous communities, but the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the entire country.

*John Gordon is CEO of NICHI (National Indigenous Collaborative Housing Inc.) a national body that works with 110+ Indigenous housing providers and 70 wider support partners across the country in urban, rural, and Northern communities.*