

# A CALL TO ACTION:

## Surrey Needs More Indigenous Housing to Break the Cycle of Child Poverty

### Overview

Surrey is home to the largest urban Indigenous population in BC, yet has far fewer Indigenous housing options compared to other large cities. The lack of affordable housing is one of the key reasons 37% of Indigenous children in Surrey live in poverty.

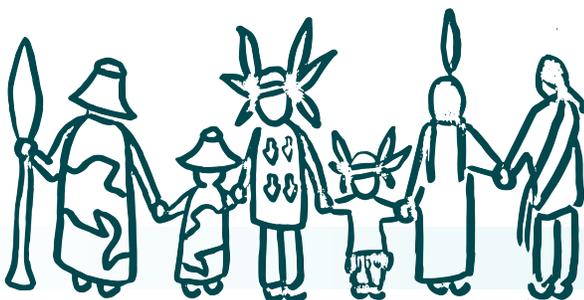
*Surrey needs*  
**1,880 units**  
*of deeply affordable rental housing for Indigenous households*

**Indigenous families face significant housing and related challenges:** unaffordability, low availability of larger units for families, limited services and supports for youth aging out of care, and few culturally-appropriate housing options.

Combined with experiences of racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, and the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous households, these conditions make it difficult for Indigenous families with low incomes to find safe and secure housing.

***A lack of affordable housing options perpetuates a cycle of child and youth poverty for urban Indigenous people living in Surrey.***

The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee is a voice for the more than 16,000 Indigenous people living in Surrey. We see urban Indigenous child poverty as one of the most pressing issues facing our community. In response, we convened Skookum Lab, a social innovation lab designed to intervene in the systems that create and sustain Indigenous child poverty, including a housing system that underserves our community. Our research confirms that the lack of affordable housing is a critical driver of Indigenous child poverty.



Action on just two housing priorities would make meaningful impact on Indigenous child and youth poverty in Surrey:

1. Affordable rental housing for families, especially single-parent families, with cultural and childcare supports.
2. Housing opportunities for young people, Elders, single adults and multi-generational families that is connected to culture and community.

This brief is a call to action to mobilize resources around these priorities to create new housing solutions for Surrey's Indigenous community and reduce Indigenous child poverty.

## THE DATA

There are an estimated 16,300 Indigenous people living in Surrey as of 2021, representing the largest urban Indigenous population in BC. This population is expected to grow to approximately 19,900 by 2026. Nearly 22% of Metro Vancouver's Indigenous residents live in Surrey.

Core housing need, a key national indicator of housing issues<sup>1</sup>, is far higher among Indigenous renter households than non-Indigenous households in Surrey.

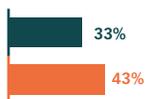
### Key Housing Stats (2016 Census):



**53%** of Indigenous households in Surrey rent, compared to **27%** of non-Indigenous households.



**88%** of Indigenous households in core housing need were renters.



**43%** of Indigenous renters (1,470 households) were in core housing need compared to **33%** of non-Indigenous renters. By 2026, this number is expected to grow to 2,200 Indigenous households in core housing need, and almost half of these will be single parent households.



**17%** of Indigenous renters are in extreme core housing need, meaning that they also spend more than 50% of their income on shelter and are at an increased risk of homelessness.



**59%** of renters in core housing need, or 850 households, were families with children, mostly single-parent families (635 households), followed by couples with children (215 households).



The number of households in core housing need has undoubtedly increased since 2016 due to Surrey's rapid population growth and the rising cost of housing in the region.

1. Core housing need tells us that a household is living in unaffordable, inadequate, and/or unsuitable housing AND their incomes prevent them from affording better options.

Despite significant housing challenges and barriers for Indigenous families in Surrey, there are only 270 non-market housing units dedicated to Indigenous households in Surrey as of 2020, compared to 1,471 units in Vancouver.

Our research confirmed that Surrey was under-served when it came to Indigenous housing and support services and identified two key priorities for housing investment.

## Key Priorities for Housing Investment

### PRIORITY #1: FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

59% of Indigenous renter households in core housing need were families with children (850 families).

Single-parent families, primarily led by mothers, face the most critical need with 61% of all Indigenous single-parent families in core housing need (635 families). Single-parent families typically have far lower household incomes than other family types and Indigenous single parents have even lower incomes. In 2016, the median income<sup>2</sup> for Indigenous single-parent renters was \$25,966 which means that half of these families would require a rent of \$649 per month or less to be affordable.

29% of Indigenous couples with children who rent were in core housing need. Couples with lower incomes face significant barriers in Surrey's housing market. The median household income for Indigenous couples with children who rent was \$38,181, meaning half of these families would require a rent of \$955 per month or less to be affordable.

**635** *single-parent families &*

**215** *couples with children*

**were in core housing need in 2016.**

**\$649** *per month or less:*

**The rent required for housing to be affordable for 50% of Indigenous single-parent renters in Surrey.**

<sup>2</sup>. Median income tells us the mid-point in income distribution for this family type: half of families earn less than the median income and half of families earn more.

### Implications

- Families with low incomes face poverty and housing insecurity.
- Indigenous-single-parent families face the greatest barriers in finding and maintaining safe and secure housing due to lower incomes.
- A lack of affordable units that can accommodate children and extended family is putting Indigenous households at risk of child separation, breaking critical family connections and creating cycles of trauma and stress.
- Increasing the supply of safe, secure, and deeply affordable housing for families is needed to create the stability required for parents and children to thrive and is a key leverage point for addressing child and youth poverty within families.

## PRIORITY #2: YOUTH, ELDERS, AND SINGLE ADULTS

43% of Indigenous renters who live alone or with roommates experienced core housing need. These households include youth, adults, and Elders. They may include future parents, young women who are pregnant and separated from their partners, fathers who are separated from their children, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. While people living alone may not have children living with them, they may have important connections with and influence on the lives of children – both their own and through other families they interact with.

The median income for Indigenous individuals who rent was \$18,840, meaning that half of these people need a rent of \$471 per month or less to be affordable.



## Implications

- Breaking the cycle of poverty means supporting Indigenous households at all stages of life.
- Without secure housing, youth and young adults are more likely to face barriers to education, employment, and cultural connections.
- When young people are supported in early adulthood, they are more able to become healthy parents. Housing precarity during pregnancy can contribute to family poverty.
- Parents with low incomes who have children in MCFD care or in the care of other relatives face barriers to family reunion because they can't afford homes with multiple bedrooms in the private market or do not qualify for non-market family housing.
- They say it takes a village to raise a child: when young people, Elders, and friends and relatives of families with children have safe and stable housing, they are more able to create linkages between family, culture, identity, and community belonging—core aspects of addressing poverty.

## Key Needs to Act on Now

- **Surrey needs 1,880 units of deeply affordable rental housing for Indigenous households to address underlying needs in the community.** This is the number of renter households who were estimated to be in core housing need as of 2021. Surrey has more Indigenous residents than Vancouver but only a fraction of the housing and services.
- **Single-parent families are facing a housing crisis.** 61% of Indigenous single parents are in core housing need. There is an urgent need for deeply affordable housing for families to break the cycle of child and youth poverty.
- **Deeply affordable rents are needed.** The existing housing market is not serving those with low incomes. There is an urgent need for more housing at rent levels accessible to those on Income Assistance, People with Disabilities Assistance, or earning very low incomes.
- **Supports and amenities are vital.** Housing should consider childcare, supports, and proximity to amenities, transit, and services.
- **Indigenous-led housing projects will create new opportunities.** Indigenous households face racism and discrimination in the housing market. Indigenous-led projects are needed that address the community and cultural needs of Indigenous households and create positive living environments that centre Indigenous worldviews.

## CONCLUSION

***37% of Indigenous children in Surrey live in poverty. The lack of deeply affordable and culturally-relevant housing keeps Indigenous families in poverty. This is an urgent call to mobilize partners and resources to improve housing and address Indigenous child and youth poverty in Surrey. By working together, we can create the conditions for future generations to thrive.***