

Housing Study

A Need and Demand Analysis for the Prince George
Metis Housing Society Spruce Street Development,
Prince George, BC

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Mis’Kow’ aao Development Society (MDS) is a member of the M’akola Group of Societies. Incorporated in 1988, Mis’Kow’ aao has provided development and project management services for over 30 affordable housing projects for aboriginal and non-aboriginal clients.

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Introduction

Increasing housing instability across Canada, in both rural and urban centers, can be associated with a variety of factors, including changes in the supply and availability of low-cost and affordable housing. Adequate housing as well as income are part of a stable foundation needed to address housing need. Without these, some people are more likely than others to be unstably housed, and many more are at risk of homelessness. The result of the cumulative impact of a number of factors, rather than one single cause, it is the economic and social conditions related to income and housing that interact with systemic factors and personal circumstances to create the unstable housing conditions that some individuals and families encounter.

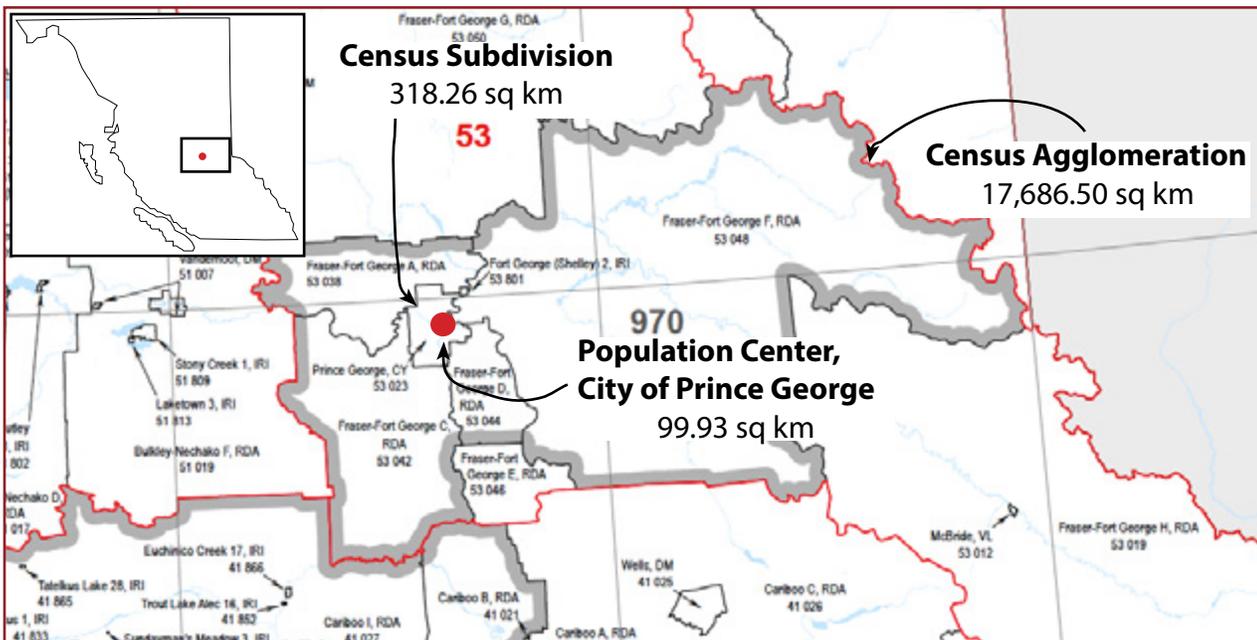
Over many years of providing affordable housing geared towards aboriginal people in Prince George, the Prince George Metis Housing Society (PGMHS) has seen a continuing housing need amongst individuals and seniors. These individuals are coming to Prince George to go to school or to access health services. In the past, housing in Prince George has been focused predominantly on single-family homes, which is not able to serve the large number of individuals who are looking for adequate housing, nor are these homes financially feasible for these individuals. It is the need for affordable housing in Prince George, specifically housing targeted at aboriginal individuals and seniors, that the Prince George Metis Housing Society is looking to help address with this proposed development.

In May of 2013, The Prince George Metis Housing Society successfully secured CMHC Seed Funding and obtained the services of the M'is Kow A Ao Development Society to understand the feasibility of a proposed new affordable housing development aimed at aboriginal singles with a focus on elders. This report is one of four components outlined in the CMHC Seed Funding agreement and acts as a companion piece to the Feasibility Analysis, Preliminary Business Plan, and Funding Exploration components of the Seed Funding submission.

Study Area

Located in the northern part of British Columbia on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh, the City of Prince George is intersected by Highway 97 (north-south) and Highway 16 (east-west), and sits at confluence of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers. Often referred to as BC's "northern capital," Prince George developed as a forestry town, which still largely drives the economy today, along with support from other sources of natural resource extraction (e.g. mining), and a highly developed education system including the University of Northern British Columbia. This study will use statistics gathered at the level of census subdivision for the City of Prince George, which includes the actual population center, and covers a total of 318.26 square kilometers (census subdivision as defined by StatsCan). Census agglomerations statistics will also be used, when relevant, in this study. The census agglomeration of Prince George covers a total of 17,686.50 sq km.

Figure 1: Map of Prince George, British Columbia
Census Subdivision and Census Agglomeration



Source: StatsCan, 2014

Population

The census subdivision of the City of Prince George had a total population of 71,965 as of the 2011 Census. It is important to note, however, that the census agglomeration of Prince George reported a population of 84,232 as of the 2011 Census, which is relevant when considering the City's draw as a regional center.

Aging Population

Since 1991, the population of those 65 and over has grown 51.3%, and between 2001 and 2011, those 65 and over was the only portion of the population that increased while the population aged 64 and under actually decreased over the same period of time (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Aging Population 1991 - 2011
Census Subdivision

Age	1991	2001	2011	Change 1991 to 2001	% Change 1991-2001	Change 2001 to 2011	% Change 2001-2011
0-14	17,605	15,430	12,945	-2,175	-12.4%	-2,485	-16.1%
15-64	48,490	51,435	50,645	2,945	6.1%	-790	-1.5%
65 and over	3,555	5,535	8,375	1,980	55.7%	2,840	51.3%
Total	69,665	72,400	71,965	2,735	3.3%	-435	-0.6%

Source: StatsCan Census of Population, 1991, 2001 and 2011

This indicates that there is a growing portion of the Prince George population that is choosing to retire and age in place in Price George. While the portion of the population 65 and over only represents 8,375 members of the total Prince George population of 71,965, it is a growing portion of the population that will need increased services and housing opportunities. Based on these population trends for the past 20 years, population projections show continued growth in the 65 and over population category as individuals continue to age in place and retire in Prince George, while the younger population (under 30) will likely continue to decline as it has over the past 20 years. The BC Non-Profit Housing Association study supports this with their study of the region encompassing Prince George, stating that "over the next 25 years Fraser-Fort George will age considerably, with a large increase in those aged 65 and over, and a decline in those under 30," (BCNPHA (2012) *Our Home, Our Future: Projections of Rental Housing Demand and Core Housing Need, Regional District of Frasier-Fort George to 2036*).

Aboriginal Population

In 2011, 12.8% (9,065) of the population of Prince George had an Aboriginal identity. Of those, 60.6% (5,490) reported a First Nations identity only, 36.4% (3,300) reported a Métis identity only, and 0.4% (35) reported an Inuit identity only. An additional 95, or 1.0%, reported other Aboriginal identities and 150, or 1.7%, reported more than one Aboriginal identity (see Figure 3 on page 4).

Figure 3: Prince George Aboriginal Identity, 2001 to 2011*
Census Agglomeration

Population	2001	% of Total	2006	% of Total	2011	% of Total	Change 2001 2006	% Change 2001 - 2006	Change 2006 2011	% Change 2006 - 2011
Total Population	84,610	100.0%	82,620	100.0%	82,865	100.0%	-1,990	-2.4%	245	0.3%
Aboriginal Identity	7,985	9.4%	8,850	10.7%	9,930	12.0%	890	11.1%	1,080	12.2%
Non-Aboriginal Identity	76,630	90.6%	73,765	89.3%	72,930	88.0%	-2,865	-3.7%	-835	-1.1%

*Table includes Greater Prince George (Census Agglomeration, which includes Lheidli T'enneh community in Shelley.

Source: StatsCan Census of Population, 2001 and 2011

Statistics indicate that the Aboriginal population is growing at a faster rate in the census agglomeration of Prince George than the non-aboriginal population over the past 10 years. Population projections show the Aboriginal population continuing to grow, increasing what is already a significant portion of the population of the City of Prince George and the surrounding areas.

Gender

Figure 4: Prince George Population by Gender, 1996 to 2011*
Census Subdivision

Gender	1996	2001	2011	Change 1996 to 2001	% Change 1991-2001	Change 2001 to 2011	% Change 2001-2011
Male	37,980	36,235	36,015	-1,745	-4.6%	-220	-0.6%
Female	37,170	36,170	35,960	-1,000	-2.7%	-210	-0.6%
Total	69,665	72,405	71,975	2,740	3.3%	-430	-0.6%

Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population, 1996, 2001 and 2011.

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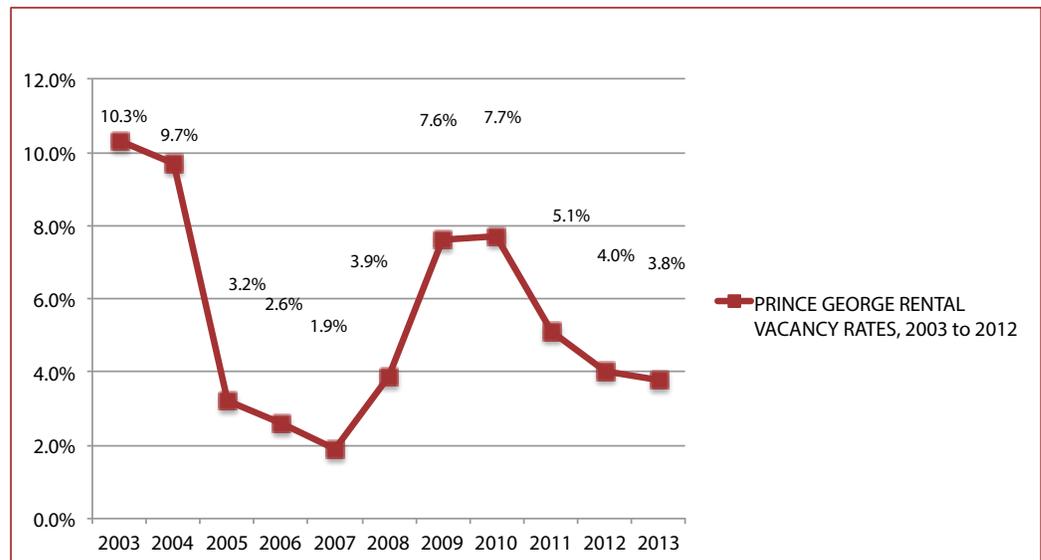
It is also useful to look at the gender breakdown of the population of Prince George over the past 15 years. The breakdown is close to 50/50 for males and females, with males making up 4.5% more of the population than females in 1996. This small gap is reduced to almost exactly 50% in 2001 and 2011, which indicates that the male population is shrinking faster than the female portion of the Prince George population. This may have to do with employment opportunities in other areas, which may encourage relocation.

Housing

The following figures give the numbers on available housing and rental rates in Prince George.

Vacancy Rate

Figure 5: Prince George Rental Vacancy Rates, 2003 - 2013*



* Rental data presented accounts for only purpose-built apartment stock, which is generally more affordable.

Source: CMHC Rental Market Reports 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012;

Prince George's average vacancy rate for all rental apartments has been steadily declining since 2010, reaching 3.8% in 2013. While 3.8% is still above the average provincial vacancy rate of 2.4%, and it is above what is defined as an equilibrium rate (3%) in Canada (Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2012) *No Vacancy: Trends in Rental Housing in Canada*), the general downward trend in vacancy rates indicates a general decrease in available rental units.

In addition, vacancy rates alone do not indicate total number of available units. For example, in 2013 there were only a total of 255 bachelor units in all of Prince George. With a bachelor apartment vacancy rate of 5.2%, this means that there are only 13 available bachelor units in all of the City of Prince George. It is also important to note that while the general vacancy rate may indicate that Prince George is above the 3% equilibrium rate, this does not mean that those apartments that are available are affordable.

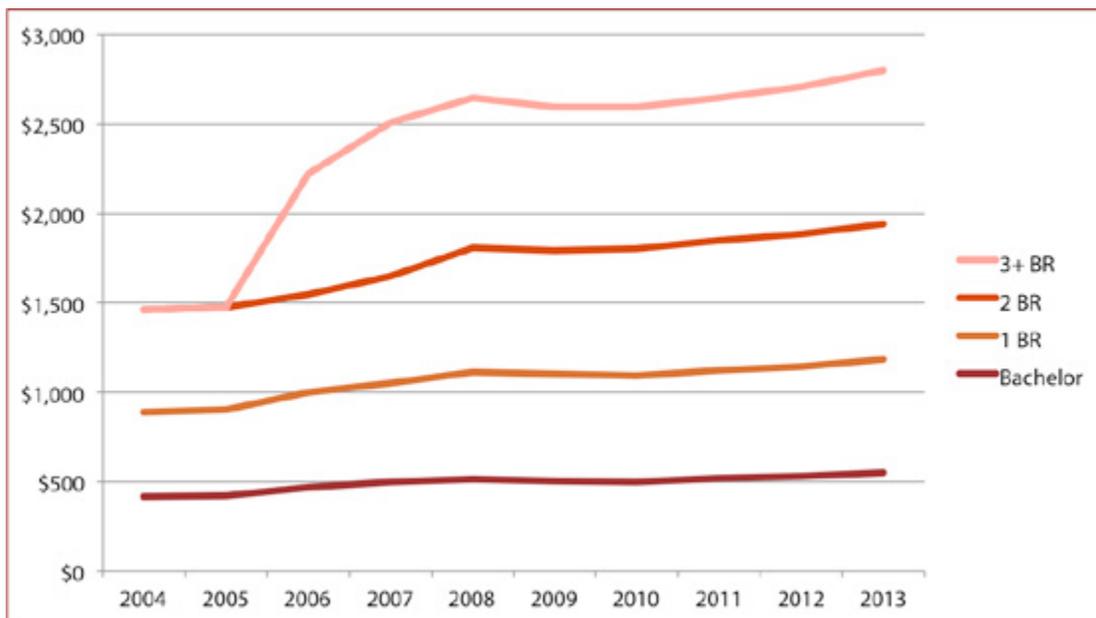
Rental Housing Demand

Rental housing demand in Fraser-Fort George is projected to increase by 14% over the next 25 years compared to population growth of 6% over the same period; these projections also indicate a large increase in demand by seniors for rental housing (BCNPHA (2012) *Our Home, Our Future: Projections of Rental Housing Demand and Core Housing Need, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George to 2036*).

Rental Costs

From 2004 to 2013, the average rent for all apartment types in Prince George increased by 25%. In 2013, the average apartment cost \$711 per month, with the bachelor unit rental average of \$553 per month, and a one-bedroom rent coming in at an average of \$634 per month.

Figure 6: Prince George Private Rental Apartments, Average Rents, 2004 to 2013



Source: CMHC Rental Market Reports 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012;

The statistics collected by CMHC indicates that market rental costs keep increasing, while at the same time there has been little change in the amount available for rent for those on social assistance or fixed incomes. Even with an increase in minimum wage in 2012, individual incomes do not keep up with what rent and other living expenses cost (please see following section for a discussion on the living wage).

Income

Unfortunately, the income data from 2011 census is not available, however, according to the 2006 data, the median after-tax income for an individual in Prince George was \$25,111, leaving \$7,533 (30% of income) of their income for housing-related costs.

Minimum Wage

An individual making the minimum wage of \$10.25 per hour, working 35 hours a week makes \$17,937.50 per year before taxes (Ministry of Labour, 2011). This leaves the minimum wage earning individual a before-tax total of \$5,381.25 (30% of income) available for housing-related costs, which works out to \$448 a month, which is well under the average monthly cost of \$553 for a bachelor in Prince George in 2013.

Living Wage

In 2013, the local United Way and UNBC calculated a living wage for a family of four with two working parents to be \$16.90, this would allow for a combined income of \$61,516 (CKPG TV, 2013).

Income Assistance and Seniors

Income Assistance is available for people who are out of work or earning very little, awaiting other income, unable to work, or in immediate need of food, shelter or urgent medical attention. For a single individual on income assistance, the government of British Columbia provides \$663.37 per month (Ministry of Social Development and Innovation, 2013). This goes up slightly to \$711.29 per month for Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers (identifying individuals who are unable to achieve financial independence because of specific barriers to employment), or persons with disabilities, who are allowed \$963.86 per month. A person on income assistance is provided a shelter allowance of \$375 per month. There are a limited number of shelter or social housing units that rent out at that rate (please see section on non-market housing on p. 11, which shows the number of social housing units that exist in Prince George).

Income assistance has essentially not increased since 2007 (Ministry of Social Development and Innovation, 2013). With the average bachelor renting at \$553 per month, a single person on income assistance cannot cover the costs of shelter and food. This often forces compromises on what food is eaten as well as on other necessities, such as clothing, personal hygiene items, transportation and health-related expenses. This situation is worsening as costs like rent continue to increase

and income/income assistance does not (Please see the following section for a discussion on homelessness and core housing need).

Senior's Assistance Rates

There are several sources of income available to seniors in Canada. The Old Age Security (OAS) pension is available to all Canadian seniors. The Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) is a non-taxable benefit to those who are low-income, and the Province of British Columbia provides a small supplement for low-income individuals as well (Please see figure 7 below). In addition, the Canadian Pension Plan is also a public source of senior income, but it is based on how much and how long an individual contributed to the CPP (Service Canada, 2014). This means that minimum-wage earners and those on income assistance will have small CPP contributions to their incomes. The other sources of income are private - investments, pensions or RRSPs, if an individual is living paycheck to paycheck in their working years, it is unlikely they would be able to privately save in any of these categories.

Figure 7: Senior's Public Assistance Rates

	Single or married to spouse not on OAS/GIS/Allowance	Married (both on OAS/GIS) x 2 = couple
Seniors Allowance		
OAS	\$551.54	\$551.54
GIS	\$747.86	\$495.89
Senior's Supplement	\$49.30	\$60.25
Guaranteed Totals	1348.7	2215.36

Source: BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, 2014

If an individual senior only has guaranteed government (public) assistance to live on, which is a monthly income of \$1348.70 (not including any CPP payments), they would have to spend over 40% of their income to live in a bachelor unit in the City of Prince George.

In 2006, there were 7,665 seniors in Prince George, 915, or 11.9% of those seniors were considered low income by Statistic Canada. In 2006, only 9% of all seniors in British Columbia were considered low income by Statistics Canada, indicating a proportionately high number of lower-income seniors are in Prince George (StatsCan, 2007). As the number of seniors increase, the number of seniors that are low income and in need of affordable housing will likely also increase, as will their need for affordable housing (StatsCan, 2007 and BCNPHA (2012) *Our Home, Our Future: Projections of Rental Housing Demand and Core Housing Need, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George to 2036*).

Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER)

SAFER is a BC Housing program that provides low-income senior households renting private apartments with a rental supplement. BC Housing currently supplies 16,000 senior households, including singles, couples, and people sharing a unit with SAFER funds. Eligibility includes individuals aged 60 or older, who pay rent, and who pay more than 30% of their gross (before tax) monthly income towards rent for their home.

Figure 8: Gross Monthly Income Limits for SAFER

Gross Monthly Incomes Cannot Exceed	
Singles	\$2,033
Couples	\$2,217
Shared	\$1,625

Source: BC Housing, 2013

Figure 9: Maximum Rents for SAFER

Maximum Rent Levels	
Singles	\$610
Couples	\$665
Shared*	\$975

*The max rental level is divided by the number of adults living in a home

Source: BC Housing, 2013

The average monthly payment to seniors accessing SAFER across British Columbia is \$158. Analyzing the regional breakdown of those accessing SAFER, 619 seniors in BC's north access SAFER. As Prince George is the "capital of the north," and likely possesses a large portion of the rental units in northern BC, it is likely a large percentage of the 619 seniors accessing SAFER are in Prince George.

Housing Need

Core Housing Need

In the section on income, we used the figure of 30% as an acceptable standard for household related expenses, this is related to a term known as core housing need. *Core Housing Need* is the national standard measuring housing need. Canadian households are considered to be in core housing need if their housing requires major repair, is overcrowded or requires more than 30% of the household's income for rent/mortgage costs (CMHC, 2009).

For this region, core housing need among renters in Fraser-Fort George is projected to increase by 18% to 20% over the next 25 years, significantly higher than population growth overall. Senior households in core housing need are projected to double by 2036 (StatsCan, 2007 and BCNPHA (2012) *Our Home, Our Future: Projections of Rental Housing Demand and Core Housing Need, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George to 2036*).

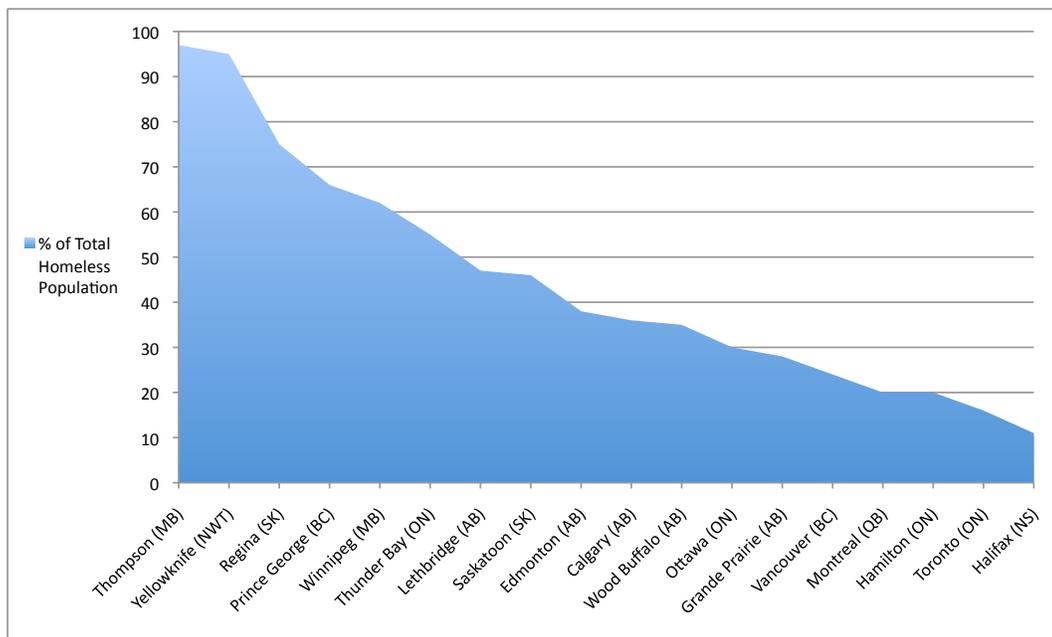
Aboriginal Housing Need

Although no comprehensive urban Aboriginal homeless count has been conducted in Canada, assorted homeless counts undertaken in cities across Canada provide evidence that Aboriginal peoples are overrepresented among those unstably housed. In 2010, the UNBC Computer-Assisted Survey Research Laboratory conducted a homeless count in Prince George (Kutzer, D. and Ameyew, S. (2010) Prince George Homeless Count Report 2010). The results showed that of the 361 participants, 66% of the participants self-identified as being of Aboriginal descent. In addition, Aboriginal participants were more likely to be younger than non-Aboriginal participants.

A 2012 graph produced by Belanger, Y., Head, G., Awosoga, O in *Assessing Urban Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness in Canada*, shows not only that aboriginals are overrepresented in urban centers across Canada, but also that of those cities with a homeless count in Canada, Prince George has one of the highest proportions of Aboriginal individuals as a percentage of the general homeless population (see figure 10 below). This demonstrates not only that there is a need for affordable housing in Prince George, but affordable housing that focuses on serving Aboriginal tenants is in need.

By increasing the affordable housing stock, especially affordable housing geared at serving aboriginal individuals, PGMHS can relieve some of the housing pressure in Prince George and provide appropriate housing for those in core housing need in Prince George.

Figure 10: Urban Aboriginal Homeless as a Percentage of Overall Homeless, Select Canadian Cities



Source: Belanger, Y., Head, G., Awosoga, O. (2012), *Assessing Urban Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness in Canada*

Affordable Housing Stock in PG

The University of Northern British Columbia Community Development Institute* collected the following preliminary list of non-market housing in Prince George:

** The UNBC Community Development Institute has a contract with the City of Prince George to collect housing need and demand information. Please note the this research is still on-going, therefore this is still preliminary data.*

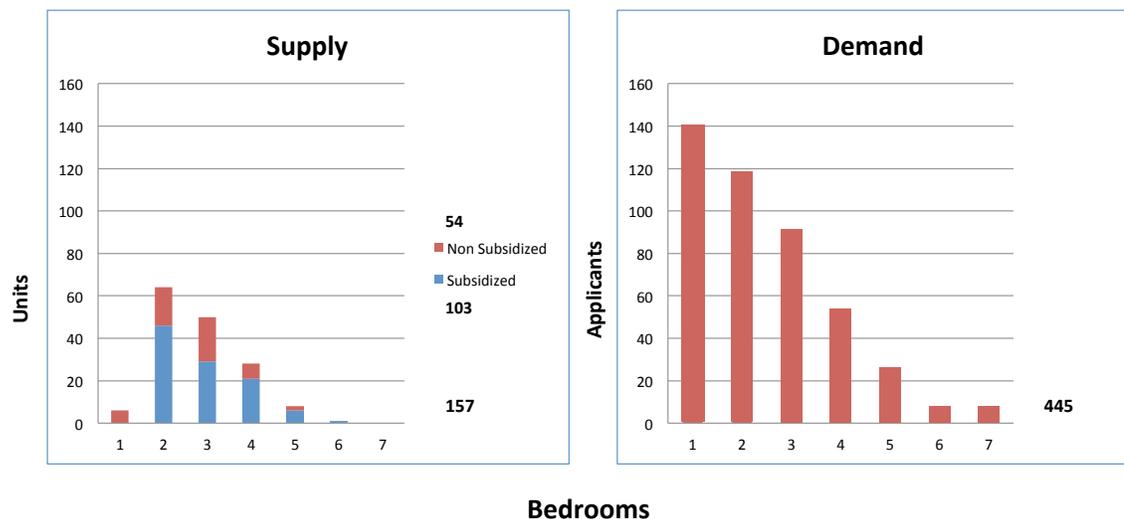
Figure 11: Prince George Non-Market Housing

Organization	Units
BC Housing, managed by	261
BC Housing/Managed by non-profit societies*	228
Northern Health seniors housing	205
PG Metis Housing Society	162
Seniors co-op	35
AIMHI group homes	31
Total	922

Source: BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, 2014

Anecdotally, these residences are generally full with long waiting lists. For example, the Prince George Metis Housing Society (PGMHS) has produced graphic comparing their current supply of affordable housing units to the demand for these units (please see figure 12 below).

Figure 12: Prince George Metis Housing Society Rental Supply and Demand



Source: Prince George Metis Housing Society, March 2013

When originally considering building a 7 unit development (which has since increased to a proposed 27 unit development when they procured additional land), PGMHS was able to identify 127 individuals suitable for this development. This demonstrates a clear demand for affordable housing units geared at Aboriginal individuals in Prince George.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, over many years of providing affordable housing geared towards aboriginal people in Prince George, the Prince George Metis Housing Society (PGMHS) has seen a continuing housing need amongst individuals and seniors, and it is the need for affordable housing in Prince George that the Prince George Metis Housing Society is looking to help address with this proposed development. This report provides the data to support what the Prince George Metis Housing Society has been tracking amongst its own clients for years.

The statistics, reports, and anecdotal evidence provided in this report supports the need for affordable housing in Prince George. As vacancy rates drop, rents continue to increase and incomes stagnate, finding affordable housing in Prince George is becoming increasingly difficult for those individuals and families living on a limited income, minimum wage, or seniors' fixed incomes. This has led to an increasing number of individuals in Prince George who are in core housing need. Individuals in core housing need are generally at greater risk of homelessness.

A fast-growing senior population and an over-representation of Aboriginal individuals amongst the population in Prince George that is unsuitably housed, suggests there is a need for affordable housing solutions focused on Aboriginal individuals, especially seniors. Not only is there a clear housing need in Prince George, but a limited supply of affordable housing in the city coupled with long waiting lists indicates a high demand for affordable units. While PGMHS is proposing a development that will help ease some of the housing demand, as an individual organization they cannot prevent homelessness in Prince George alone. We encourage other organizations to partner and find additional solutions.

