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National Indigenous
Collaborative Housing Inc.

Logement Coopératif
National Autochtone Inc.

2025

Membership Engagement Session

What we Heard Report

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

April 28th, 2025



NICHl

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT SESSION APRIL 28, 2025 | SASKATOON, SK



On April, 28, 2025, the National Indigenous Collaborative Housing Inc. (NICHl) hosted a membership engagement session in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, situated on Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. The event brought together Indigenous housing providers from across the country for a day of reflection, knowledge-sharing, and dialogue. This gathering was marked by a moment of national significance the, *Canadian Federal Election*, which added urgency and relevance to discussions on Indigenous housing. Throughout the day, members participated in interactive sessions, collaborative dialogue, and opportunities to share feedback and recommendations.

SESSION OPENING

The day was opened in a good way from Métis Nation–Saskatchewan Elder Norman Fleury, followed by a performance from the youth drum group from Prince Albert Métis Friendship Centre, grounding the event in local culture, and community. NICHl also acknowledges the facilitation of John Lagimodiere (Aboriginal Consulting Services) and Winston McLean (Iron Wolf Consulting), who helped guide rich and respectful dialogue throughout the session.

In addition to structured engagement activities, the event included organizational updates, an overview of NICHl’s past engagement efforts which have consistently surfaced common priorities shared across the membership and space for members to reflect on NICHl’s evolving role. The insights captured in this report highlight the shared challenges and priorities of NICHl’s members and will help to inform strategic direction and advocacy moving forward. This *What We Heard* report captures the key themes, feedback, and recommendations from the Saskatoon session, emphasizing the value of ongoing engagement and dialogue with membership.



What You Told Us: Virtual Polling Highlights

During the plenary session, members shared valuable insights through live polls, guiding how NICHI can improve communication and engagement. Most of you feel aware of NICHI’s work, though some highlighted the need for better orientation for newer members. We’re looking into addressing this with clearer onboarding resources.

You prefer updates via email newsletters, bulletins, webinars, and social media—brief, engaging, and regular formats we’ll continue to prioritize. You asked for monthly updates and expressed interest in contributing through features like “Member highlights” or sharing your stories. Your top content interests—policy, funding, training, member stories, and government announcements—are informing our future communications.

POLL

Yes

No

Other



Key Themes of Interactive Session

NICHI members took part in interactive exercises to spark dialogue, share ideas, and identify collective priorities. The Four Corners and Table Talk activities used prompts at stations throughout the room to guide focused discussions on pressing issues facing Indigenous housing providers. As members rotated through each station, they engaged in thoughtful conversations and shared reflections both in writing and as a group.

Together, these contributions painted a clear and compelling picture of where NICHI members are now and where they want to go. The following themes capture not only what was shared in Saskatoon, but also reflect a growing, shared vision for the future of Indigenous housing in urban, rural, and northern communities. They serve as both a summary of the day’s dialogue and a roadmap for collective action, advocacy, and Indigenous-led systems change.

Membership Portal

Many of you shared that you’re not yet using the NICHI Member Portal—and we appreciate your honesty. We’re actively improving the portal based on your feedback to make it more user-friendly and accessible.

Currently, members can access the project map, event calendar (NICHI-led, member-hosted, and related events), key documents, and project highlights. You’ve also asked for features like a searchable member database, and onboarding tools like a quick start guide or tutorial video—these are now in development. If you need help using the portal, feel free to reach out at info@nichihousing.com. We’re here to support you!



Funding Insecurity and Financial Limitations

Funding shortfalls were identified as the most pervasive issue impacting Indigenous housing providers. Limited and inconsistent core operational funding restricts long-term planning and undermines organizational stability. A lack of project-based funding creates administrative burden and uncertainty, while delays in disbursement often lead to cancelled programs and interrupted builds. Reporting frameworks are frequently misaligned with Indigenous community contexts, making it difficult to demonstrate impact or secure continued support. As operating agreements set to expire, continuity is threatened, leaving communities with fewer options and more pressure on already limited resources.

“Funding and having dedicated staff for funding opportunities. Very difficult pulling other staff off ‘real’ jobs to do this work” – NICHI Member

Existing funding programs often fail to cover even the basics—such as system upgrades, emergency repairs, or routine maintenance. Shelter allowances and social assistance rates do not reflect the true cost of repairs, and outdated program guidelines, combined with rigid internal policies, limit flexibility. The cumulative effect accelerates housing degradation, reduces livability, and increases long-term costs.

“Funding that is flexible rather than adhering to rigid program parameters. Meeting needs by region/community rather than criteria or stream dependant” – NICHI Member

“High competition for funding makes access difficult” – NICHI Member

Housing Stock Deterioration and Maintenance Barriers

Aging and inadequate infrastructure is a major concern across many Indigenous communities. Much of the existing housing stock is decades old and rapidly deteriorating, with limited resources available for proper upkeep. Overcrowding—driven by persistent shortages—places additional strain on units, accelerating wear and tear, especially to systems like plumbing and ventilation. Environmental and logistical challenges further compound the issue. Harsh climates and poor access to building materials delay repairs and inflate costs. In some cases, units that are no longer safe or habitable remain occupied out of necessity, reflecting the severity of the housing crisis and the lack of viable alternatives.

Northern communities face compounded environmental stressors such as permafrost thaw, rapid temperature shifts, and short construction windows. Transporting materials is further complicated by seasonal dependence on sea or ice roads. Additionally, applying green building codes without regional flexibility often drives costs beyond property values. These conditions require tailored climate-resilient design standards to maintain housing viability.



“The climate in the North is very harsh. We rely on ships for building materials, so we're planning months in advance” – NICHI Member

Land Access and Housing Development Challenges

Accessing land for housing development remains a significant barrier for many Indigenous housing providers. Challenges around land acquisition and tenure create uncertainty and delay progress on much-needed housing projects. Development is further hindered by high urban land costs and restrictive zoning regulations, which often prevent new builds from moving forward. Even when land is secured, bureaucratic delays in obtaining permits and approvals slow down construction timelines.

A lack of access to capital financing compounds these issues, forcing communities to rely on layered and often unstable funding sources. These challenges highlight the need for streamlined processes and more equitable access to land and financial tools for Indigenous housing initiatives.

"We're constantly navigating portfolio realignment, funding agreement restrictions, permitting, building codes, and new green laws" – NICHI Member



Capacity Gaps and Workforce Instability

Many Indigenous housing providers face persistent capacity challenges that hinder service delivery and long-term planning. High staff turnover contributes to service gaps and burnout, placing added strain on already limited teams. Smaller or remote communities often struggle to attract and retain skilled workers, particularly in specialized roles related to housing development and management. Professional development opportunities are limited, and training in housing-specific skills is often difficult to access.

These capacity gaps highlight the urgent need for stable staffing and accessible training programs to support daily operations, retain staff, and ensure continuity in service delivery.

"High turnover of staff makes it difficult to meet requirements" – NICHI Member

"Level of desperation, need wrap-around supports to help deal with it. We need blanketing services" – NICHI Member

"Recruitment, finding/retaining skilled employees - can't pay them enough" – NICHI Member

Tenant and Community Support Needs

Housing providers are increasingly tasked with addressing complex tenant needs that go far beyond housing. Many tenants rely solely on housing staff for support, leading workers to take on roles such as counselling, conflict mediation, and crisis response—often without adequate training or resources. There is a pressing need for increased funding to deliver coordinated, wrap-around supports.

Helpful ideas for exploration include centralized tenant training on landlord-tenant rights, home maintenance, and financial literacy to empower tenants and reduce pressure on housing staff. These strategies underscore the urgent need for integrated, well-resourced supports that connect housing with mental health and social services.

“Holistic, wrap-around supports are what really keep people housed” –NICHI Member

“Providing training to fill in the gaps for clients – meeting them where they’re at” –NICHI Member

“Tenants themselves do not have the tools or resources to maintain homes” –NICHI Member

Administrative Burden and Reporting Demands

Indigenous housing providers face complex, repetitive, and inflexible reporting requirements that consume significant time and resources while overlooking relationship-based, holistic approaches central to Indigenous housing.

Housing providers call for reporting frameworks designed by Indigenous people that reflect their values and accountability models, alongside better IT systems, training, and data sovereignty. These improvements would reduce administrative burdens and enhance daily operations.



“We have difficulty meeting a lot of the reporting requirements set out in funding agreements” –NICHI Member

“Keeping up with IT is difficult as it changes so fast” –NICHI Member

Policy Reform and Indigenous-Led Advocacy

Urban Indigenous housing remains poorly understood and underfunded, creating gaps in services and supports. Participants stressed the urgent need for Indigenous leadership in shaping housing policy to ensure it reflects community priorities and realities.

Communities also want structured opportunities to influence housing decisions at the national level, empowering Indigenous voices in policy reform and advocacy efforts.

“We’re dealing with racist communities — NIMBYism, racial slurs, and a lack of support for new builds or housing services” –NICHI Member

Holistic, Culturally Grounded Housing Approaches



Participants emphasized that housing is not just about shelter—it is deeply connected to health, safety, education, and cultural identity. Inadequate housing undermines overall well-being, disrupts traditions, and weakens community strength, making it a critical social determinant of health.

There is a strong desire for housing models that reflect Indigenous values and lived realities. Participants called for an Indigenous lens to be embedded across all areas of housing work—including funding agreements, program design, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and data collection.

“Colonial systems in terms of reporting, applications, data collection, and program design, delivery, and accreditation” –NICHI Member

Effective Outreach for Member Engagement

Participants shared insights on how to strengthen engagement within the Indigenous housing community, emphasizing that NICHI membership should go beyond transactional or funding-based relationships. Members should be actively engaged, aligned with NICHI’s vision, and feel a sense of connection and belonging.

Respondents proposed roles such as regional ambassadors, event co-hosts, peer recruiters, and storytellers to support network growth and local engagement. They recommended using social media for cultural storytelling rather than just announcements, along with infographics, quick facts, and testimonials to better communicate NICHI’s mission.



NICHI Membership

A regular spotlight on member contributions was suggested to maintain visibility and engagement. Participants also supported a NICHI-led membership drive and community events like conferences and listening circles as opportunities to build connection and cultural safety.

“Existing members spreading knowledge and awareness, sharing resources and programs to those who are not aware” – NICHI Member

Sharing member spotlights and successes through monthly testimonials” –NICHI Member

Elder and Youth Councils

Participants highlighted the importance of incorporating both Elders and youth into NICHI's structure to ensure cultural continuity and future-oriented thinking. Elders were seen as key advisors who can provide cultural grounding, guidance, and support to both leadership and youth.

Youth were recognized for their innovative perspectives and ability to represent the next generation's housing needs. Suggested roles included internships, project leadership, and mentorship opportunities to build capacity and long-term engagement.

Participants recommended the creation of peer-selected councils for both Elders and youth, with regional representation to ensure diverse voices and equitable involvement. Elders, in particular, were encouraged to serve in formal advisory roles to NICHI's board.

"Elders and youth have their ideas based on their truths, and I believe they can help us and guide us as we grow and move forward" – NICHI Member

"Elders are a huge asset as they are the ones with the knowledge of survival in a way people are unaware of. We need to spread that as much as possible, while they can. Pass on the knowledge. – NICHI Member

"They could serve as an advisory role to the board and members. They are [youth] our past, present, future, and they must be included" – NICHI Member



Conclusion

NICHI members continue to show strong leadership and unity across a range of complex housing issues. From funding challenges and workforce gaps to governance, policy development, and cultural integrity, members consistently express a shared commitment to Indigenous-led solutions that prioritize community well-being, dignity, and self-determination. This collective vision remains at the heart of NICHI's work.

We look forward to continuing these conversations and deepening our collective work at our upcoming events this fall. It will be an opportunity to reconnect, learn from one another, and build momentum toward stronger, more sustainable Indigenous housing solutions.



Appendix

TABLE 2

WHAT WE HEARD & HOW WE ARE RESPONDING

What we Heard	How We are Responding
Members Portal	Added a membership database with resources and will be exploring discussion forums, funding program listings, and accompanying training videos to enhance accessibility and ease of use for all portal users
Member Spotlights	We will begin rolling out Member Spotlights to showcase the impactful work and successes of your organizations across the network.
Attracting New Members	We are developing membership orientation tools and resources to support new members, along with clear guidance on how existing members can get involved in recruitment and outreach efforts.
Communications	We will continue to prioritize brief, engaging, and regular updates through email newsletters, bulletins, webinars, and social media to keep members informed and connected.
Elder & Youth Councils	You shared valuable feedback on what Elder and Youth Councils should look like, and we are actively developing ways to meaningfully incorporate both into NICHI's future structure and work.
NICHI Events	We appreciated your feedback on our events and are using it to plan future gatherings that maximize impact—through strong networking opportunities, knowledge-sharing, and meaningful collaboration.