Neha

Meeting Details

Event: Neha Decentralized Dialogue Session organized by Waskaa'igan Neegan Safe Warm Space
Date: August 21, 2025
Participants: Lived experts
Review Panel members: Sylvia Maracle

Waskaa'igan Neegan Safe Warm Space

The Neha Panel Review was established to examine the right to safe, adequate, and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit, Trans, and gender-diverse people, and the government's duty to uphold this right. The Panel was convened at the request of the Federal Housing Advocate in response to human rights claims submitted by the Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network (WNHHN) and the National Indigenous Women's Housing Network (NIWHN).

As part of this review, Neha worked with partners to hold three dialogues sessions to hear more about the experiences of specific communities. Participants in these sessions included Women,

Neha

Two Spirit, Trans, and gender diverse people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity, including refugees, asylum seekers and other newcomers.

Waskaa'igan Neegan Safe Warm Space is an overnight drop-in centre in Dauphin, Manitoba operated by the Manitoba Métis Federation and serving all people experiencing homelessness. Fifteen people from diverse background participated in this dialogue session.

Key themes from this dialogue are summarized below.

Vision for safe, affordable, adequate housing

Participants talked about housing that is stable and private, where they can be safe from violence and harm, where they can spend time together with their families, and where they are not subject to the constant fear of becoming homeless.

One said having safe, affordable, adequate housing "would feel like a relief."

Participants also talked about the important of a diversity of housing to meet the unique needs of each person and family. They said there needs to be greater embracing of innovative approaches to housing such as tiny homes, container homes, and group living. They said current housing options often feel too confined and inadequate for growing children.

Housing is more than shelter. Participants talked about the importance of amenities like landlines or affordable cell phones to stay connected, reliable internet access, and affordable and reliable washing machines.

Housing must be well maintained. When repairs are needed, they must be made quickly. Access to water, heat, and safety must be guaranteed. Waiting weeks for repairs is unacceptable. One person described waiting two weeks for their shower to be repaired.

For many, the freedom to have pets if they chose is a critical part of what defines a home.

Adequate housing is also part of a wider community. Participants said they wanted to live in spaces that include yards or green spaces where they can garden and where there are common areas for socializing and for group activities, including traditional food preparation. Essential amenities and supports should be onsite or readily accessible, including peer supports, childcare, transportation, and spiritual supports.

Participants underlined the importance of landlords who treat tenants fairly, and having access to effective mechanisms to hold them accountable if they don't. Participants talked about the importance of respectful relationships and clear communication, as well as landlords who follow up on complaints and maintain the property in good condition. They also talked about the need for

policies that prioritize dignity and long-term affordability. More than one said, “No more slumlords.”

Safety and belonging

Many participants said they want to live in spaces that are secure and private, but they also want the rules and policies to be supportive and fair.

Simply having a door that can be locked would be a major improvement for many. Participants said that it is important that common spaces are safe for children and that no one should be subjected to harassment or discrimination.

At the same time, participants also said that measures adopted in the name of security often make life worse for tenants. They described abusive security guards who don’t know how to work with people who have experienced trauma. Strict rules implemented in some transitional housing such as visitor bans make people feel isolated and can cut them off from the support of family and friends.

Being supported to succeed

Participants talked about ways in which past experiences, including trauma and addiction create barriers to finding housing and staying housed. Support workers are critical. A positive relationship with a support worker who is trusted and nonjudgmental can help rebuild confidence and skills.

Similarly, some participants talked about challenges in moving from rural areas to cities. Finding and retaining housing may require skills and knowledge they’ve not had the chance to develop before. Support from someone who appreciates these needs can be vital to success.

Positive experiences

Participants talked about the importance of having an advocate on your side, someone who can help navigate complex application processes or access emergency housing. One said, “Reliable, nonjudgmental support and workers made all the difference.”

Programs also talked about the value of programs like RESTART and Housing First that provide access to stable, permanent housing. They said that having a place to call their own teaches responsibility, improves well-being, and creates space for family and community connections. One said, “Steady housing has taught me a lot about how to take care of things on my own.” Another participant expressed appreciation to the Manitoba Métis Federation’s Housing First program which enabled her to move to a larger home when she was ready and needed the additional space.

Some participants shared that they valued the sense community created by the Safe and Warm space. Not only are there three meals a day, but people using the service encourage each other, try

to take care of one another, and work to stay positive. One said, “We need more places like Safe and Warm.”

The importance of non-judgemental supports

Participants emphasized the need to treat everyone with dignity and without judgement. “We are not bad people – we are just people.” All staff providing housing supports need to be trained in how to work with people in an empathetic, non-judgemental way.

Several participants talked about the importance of giving people a second chance. People change and grow. “Just because something didn’t work five years ago doesn’t mean it won’t now.”

Key messages for decision makers

One person said they would like to ask decision-makers, “What would you do in our shoes?”

Participants urged governments to invest in long term, sustainable solutions. This includes renovating and maintaining existing affordable housing. Governments should also look at how unused houses can be put back into use.

Participants also emphasized the importance of ongoing, wrap-around supports. This includes emotional and spiritual support as well as practical assistance.

Funding for community housing initiatives needs to be long-term. One and two-year funding cycles “make it hard to create stable programs. Longer-term funding would allow services to provide necessary supports in communities, instead of constantly scrambling for the next short-term grant.”