

## Canada's Urban Indigenous Populations: Comparing Policy Learning in Winnipeg and Edmonton

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*According to Census 2016 from Statistics Canada, Winnipeg and Edmonton have the largest Aboriginal populations among the census metropolitan areas (CMAs), which are areas with a total population of at least 100,000 people. Moreover, Aboriginal populations continues to grow in these metropolitan cities. However, city policies have not been adjusted accordingly to these changes, nor are they sufficient to address the Aboriginal community's vulnerability especially regarding lower-cost housing. Exploring the condition of low-cost housing in the context of Winnipeg and Edmonton is essential due to the fact that this sector is directly influenced by the intersecting factors that make Aboriginal populations vulnerable. In addition to examining the condition of lower-cost housing, evidence of policy learning will also be analyzed. Policy learning involves evaluating past practices, recognize past policies, and is also a crucial part to avoiding failures in future policies. Unfortunately, it seems that for Winnipeg and Edmonton, it is not possible for authorities to address insufficient low-cost housing for the Aboriginal community through adequate policies.*

### Introduction

According to Census 2016 from Statistics Canada, Winnipeg and Edmonton have the largest Aboriginal populations among the census metropolitan areas (CMA), with 92, 810 people and 76, 205 people respectively.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Aboriginal population continues to grow in metropolitan cities, and not just because First Nations populations are migrating to cities from reserves. Census 2016 stated that “in 2016, 867,415 Aboriginal people lived in a metropolitan area of at least 30,000 people...[and] from 2006 to 2016, the number of Aboriginal people living in a metropolitan area of this size increased by 59.7%.”<sup>2</sup> However, despite the growing populations, city policies have not adjusted accordingly to these changes. As Calvin Hanselmann said, “policy decisions by Canadian government have contributed to, if not created, the conditions faced by many Aboriginal people in such areas as domestic violence, education, employment, income, housing, criminal justice, and health”<sup>3</sup> and they continue to do so. Aboriginal populations continue

<sup>1</sup> “The Aboriginal Population Living in Metropolitan Areas is Growing,” Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Key Results from the 2016 Census, Statistics Canada, last modified October 25, 2017, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin Hanselmann, *Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada* (Calgary, AB: Canada West Foundation, 2001), 4.

to face an array of intersecting factors that play into the inequality they face in metropolitan areas, especially when compared to non-aboriginal populations. Their vulnerability is especially evident in the community's lack of adequate access to lower-cost housing. Given the sheer sizes of these populations, studying city politics and policies certainly cannot exclude them.

In this essay, I hope to analyze the condition low-cost housing in the context of Winnipeg and Edmonton. These two census metropolitan areas consistently have the largest Aboriginal populations, and low-cost housing is directly influenced by the intersecting factors that make the Aboriginal population vulnerable. This essay chose not to examine education and health policies regarding Aboriginal populations because they do not belong in the jurisdiction of municipal governments. In addition to a comparison of affordable housing in these two metropolitan areas, I would also like to see if there is evidence of policy learning. For this essay, it is essential to differentiate the difference between First Nations populations and Aboriginal population to ensure data is accurately understood; The term First Nations identifies Indigenous people in Canada who do not identify as Métis or Inuit, and Aboriginal Peoples encompasses First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

According to Hanselmann, the "Canadian government have historically been hesitant to create policies specific to urban Aboriginal people...[and] much of this hesitancy is related to disagreements over the unclear and controversial question of legislative authority, and therefore responsibility for urban Aboriginal people".<sup>4</sup> Referencing the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, he also states that provinces have been reluctant to serve the Aboriginal population on the basis of their lack of resources, [as] that it is a federal responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Municipalities also "have jurisdiction only in those areas delegated to them by their respective provincial government."<sup>6</sup> With the increasing population of urban Indigenous populations in municipalities, it is essential to ask if the municipalities are doing enough, or if they are given enough resources to carry out even existing responsibilities. However, while the reluctance from provinces to consider Aboriginal affairs can hinder the ability of the municipalities to take on these initiatives, municipalities often enact ad hoc programs and services even if it is not mandated under a policy framework.<sup>7</sup> Although, while municipalities should be applauded for taking the initiative to implement Aboriginal policies even when they are not specifically mandated to, clearly defined lines of responsibility can ensure a stable source of funding as well as mechanisms for accountability. According to Hanselmann, "no level of government in Western Canada is at present willing to assume sole responsibility for urban Aboriginal people."<sup>8</sup> Municipalities require sufficient support and resources from provincial and federal government to enact policies, and if this fundamental issue cannot be solved, "policies with respect to urban Aboriginal people will continue to be characterized by inconsistencies, overlaps, and gaps".<sup>9</sup>

### **Overview of Aboriginal policies in Winnipeg and Edmonton**

While Winnipeg and Edmonton consistently have the most Aboriginal people in Canada, the conditions the population faces, and the adequacy of the city's urban aboriginal policy coverage differs greatly. According to Hanselmann, "the City of Edmonton does not have a government-wide urban Aboriginal policy...and [while] an Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee exists, no policy

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 20.

initiatives were identified.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, in the City of Winnipeg’s framework *Plan Winnipeg...Toward 2010*, “specific policy statements for Aboriginal people are included in the fields of education, training, employment, economic development, housing and cultural support.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, Winnipeg also has an Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Affairs.

Hanselmann also includes in his article *Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies* a figure that illustrates the urban aboriginal policy landscape in the federal government, British Columbia (BC), Alberta (AB), Saskatchewan (SK), and Manitoba (MB). Western cities such as Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg were also analyzed. According to the figure, the province of Manitoba has no urban aboriginal policies that are government-wide, department-specific, or both.<sup>12</sup> In Alberta, there are government-wide urban aboriginal policies in the areas of education, employment, economic development, homelessness, urban transition, cultural support, and other.

As for the City of Edmonton, the figure only shows department-specific policy for the category of ‘other’. This policy referred to the FCSS program, which stands for Family and Community Support Services program.<sup>13</sup> However, this program is not specific to Aboriginal communities, as it is “a joint municipal/provincial partnership [that] works with not-for-profit organizations in Edmonton [to] deliver preventive social service programs to Edmontonians.”<sup>14</sup> As for the City of Winnipeg, government-wide urban Aboriginal policies exists for education, training, economic development, health, housing, and cultural support. In addition, government-wide and department-specific policy exists for employment. It is also important to note that Winnipeg has policies for sectors not within its jurisdiction as well, such as education and health. While it is interesting to note that Alberta as a province has more government-wide Aboriginal policies, Hanselmann’s figure clearly shows that the City of Winnipeg has more wide-ranging policies devoted to its urban Aboriginal populations than Edmonton.

According to Statistics Canada, “the average age of the Aboriginal population was 32.1 years in 2016- almost a decade younger than the non-Aboriginal population (40.9 years).”<sup>15</sup> With urban Aboriginal populations growing in numbers and having generally younger populations, having adequate municipal policies can assist Aboriginal peoples in area such as employment, income support, homelessness and urban transition to alleviate poverty and homelessness. This is especially important as “future labour supply shortages can be relieved through the younger, growing urban Aboriginal population.”<sup>16</sup>

The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study is a study “conducted by Environics Institute for Survey...to better understand and document the identities, experience, values and aspirations of urban Aboriginal Canadians”<sup>17</sup> in cities including Winnipeg and Edmonton. While these reports are exclusive from one another, some commonalities are noted between Winnipeg and Edmonton. Aboriginal peoples in both cities “agree that others behave in an unfair or negative way towards Aboriginal people.”<sup>18</sup> However, these

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>14</sup> “Family and Community Support Services Program (FCSS,” The City of Edmonton, last accessed November 25, 2017, [https://www.edmonton.ca/programs\\_services/for\\_communities/family-community-support-services-program.aspx](https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/for_communities/family-community-support-services-program.aspx).

<sup>15</sup> Statistics Canada, “The Aboriginal Population is Young but also Aging.”

<sup>16</sup> Hanselmann, *Urban Aboriginal People*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> “About,” Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, last accessed November 17, 2017, <https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/>.

<sup>18</sup> Environics Institute, *Urban Aboriginal People Study: Winnipeg Report* (Toronto, ON: Environics Institute, 2011). 36.

reports also found that Winnipeg is offering more culturally sensitive programs, a pattern reflected in Hanselmann's analysis of urban Aboriginal policies in Winnipeg and Edmonton. In Winnipeg, "many aspects of urban Aboriginal life are mediated through a vast array of Aboriginal cultural, artistic, heritage, educational, economic, community development, and political institutions,"<sup>19</sup> and "half of Aboriginal peoples in Winnipeg use and rely at least occasionally on Aboriginal services and organizations in the city."<sup>20</sup> As for Edmonton's Aboriginal population, while they feel the same level of discrimination in the city, they are less likely to participate in Aboriginal cultural activities even if they recognize them.<sup>21</sup> While a hostile urban environment deters the population from embracing their identity,<sup>22</sup> it is odd that participation in Aboriginal cultural events are lower in Edmonton, when the urban Aboriginal population feels the same level of discrimination as the population in Winnipeg. Perhaps Winnipeg's integration of Aboriginal culture into their wide-range of Aboriginal policies could be a plausible explanation.

### What is policy learning, and how will it be compared?

Andrew Stritch explains policy learning as "a process of evaluating new policy ideas, past practices, and foreign precedents in the context of dissatisfaction with the status quo."<sup>23</sup> Zachary Spicer reiterates a similar definition, saying policy learning depends on two factors: "a recognition of previous policy efforts in the field"<sup>24</sup>, and "a concerted effort to avoid the failures and emulate the successes of the past policy paradigm."<sup>25</sup> Analyzing housing and policing politics for the urban Aboriginal population requires the comparison of census data, past and current aboriginal policies, as well as current events that determine if effective policies have been implemented. Looking at official government and services webpages for Edmonton and Winnipeg can also offer a sense of what Aboriginal initiatives are already in place.

However, to determine *Aboriginal* policy learning, I propose that two components must be present; The first component entails what Stritch and Spicer require of policy learning, and the second being the recognition that Aboriginal populations often need a *combination* of adequate policies that complement each other to ensure housing needs are met. This is because "facilitating homeownership for low-to moderate income households requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, counselling, and support as well as financial assistance."<sup>26</sup> Aboriginal populations experience "discrimination based on race, age, gender, family size, and cultural practices"<sup>27</sup>, so programs and services should be integrated and address various levels of barriers and needs related to housing, either in steps or simultaneously.<sup>28</sup> That being said, Aboriginal policy areas should not be exclusive to one another, but rather be pursued in combinations to ensure intersecting discriminatory factors are addressed.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Environics Institute, *Urban Aboriginal People Study: Edmonton Report* (Toronto, ON: Environics Institute, 2010). 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Stritch, "Power Resources, Institutions and Policy Learning: The Origins of Works' Compensation in Quebec," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 3 (September 2005): 553.

<sup>24</sup> Zachary Spicer, "Institutional Policy Learning and Formal Federal-Urban Engagement in Canada," *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 7 (November 2010): 101.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Lesley Just, *Exploration of Housing Options for Aboriginal People in Edmonton, Alberta and Winnipeg, Manitoba* (Ottawa, ON: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2005), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Just, *Exploring of Housing*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 5.

## Comparing Affordable Housing in Winnipeg and Edmonton

Low-cost housing not only highlights the problem of constant poverty in Aboriginal populations, but it also illustrates the intersecting factors that make Aboriginal people a vulnerable population. When exploring options for subsidized housing, Aboriginal populations “require services that combine safe, appropriate housing along with employment, skills training, counseling, family support, and health care services.”<sup>29</sup> An absence of consideration for any of these factors can jeopardize Aboriginal populations’ right and ability to basic, adequate housing. According to Census 2016, the number of Aboriginal groups who are living a housing option that requires major repairs have decreased from 2011 to 2016.<sup>30</sup>

However, in 2016, approximately one-fifth of the Aboriginal population also lived in housing that was inadequate considering the number of occupants if the National Occupancy Standard.<sup>31</sup> One in ten Aboriginal peoples live in a dwelling with a one-bedroom shortfall, which meant “a single bedroom [is needed] to adequately house the number of people who live there.”<sup>32</sup> This figure of 19.4% translates into 324,900 individuals who live in sub-standard dwellings. Subsidized housing is often an option for Aboriginal populations due to lower income and higher poverty rates, but these options are rare for fixed or low-income families in Edmonton and Winnipeg.<sup>33</sup> Not only is there a long wait time with Aboriginal housing organizations and municipal housing corporations, but the wait is usually three years.<sup>34</sup>

According to the City of Edmonton’s *Edmonton and Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports*, as of 2015, there has been an “increase in housing and culturally appropriate support services for Edmonton’s Aboriginal population”, including cultural supports to housing, offering housing and support services, and building an understanding of Aboriginal peoples’ culture and history with these services.<sup>35</sup> However, according to a report completed in 2015 on urban Aboriginal strategy prepared for the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, the list of barriers that are continued to be faced by the Aboriginal community include low income housing, discrimination, lack of cooperation, high incarceration rates, funding cuts to cultural programming, increasing numbers entering the justice system, unique needs of Aboriginal people in housing, lack of relationships with the Aboriginal community.<sup>36</sup> The report also compared the priority areas of Edmonton with that of the UAS; Edmonton ranked housing as priority number three, while UAS ranked it as priority number one.<sup>37</sup> Respondents to the report also indicated that “long term planning with requisite funding attached is key to revitalizing existing housing stocks”, but coordinated funding may be out of reach due to the lack of coordination in Aboriginal initiatives between Alberta and Edmonton, as mentioned before.

Some of the housing aspects that are deemed necessary in the *Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports for 2011-2015* include being provided a chance to participate in traditional culture and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “Census in Brief: The Housing Conditions of Aboriginal People in Canada,” Analytical Products 2016 Census, Statistics Canada, last modified October 26, 2017, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016021/98-200-x2016021-eng.cfm>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Just, *Exploring of Housing*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Just, *Exploring of Housing*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Homeward Trust, *Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011-2015* (Edmonton, AB: Homeward Trust, 2011), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Shelly Anderson, *Edmonton Community Plan* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, 2015), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 36.

spiritual practices, suitable and affordable housing, and support with health care, transportation, child care, school and employment as part of the transition from settlement or reserves.<sup>38</sup> This plan was led by Homeward Trust Edmonton, “a non-profit organization that uses a community-based approach in pursuing the goal of ending homelessness in Edmonton”<sup>39</sup> and the plan was the product of a “very collaborative, community driven process...that engaged over 350 people with a broad range of perspectives.”<sup>40</sup> Participants of the report also emphasized the importance of having housing opportunities being managed by Aboriginal communities.<sup>41</sup>

However, in the *City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Strategy for 2016-2025*, there were no specific housing policies for urban Indigenous and it only reported that “a broad range of housing choice provided in all areas of the city helps to contribute to more inclusive communities, positive social outcomes, and the well-being of children, Aboriginal households and immigrants.”<sup>42</sup> While the new strategy recognizes past policies by in its section on alignment with other plans and initiatives by “[supporting] several goals identified in the Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011-2015,”<sup>43</sup> there is obviously still a lack of effort to adequately take past recommendations into account. The most recent plan developed by the City reduced the importance of Aboriginal affordable housing to one generalized sentence, saying “a broad range of housing choice [are] provided in all areas of the city helps to contribute to more inclusive communities, positive social outcomes, and the well-being of children, Aboriginal households, and immigrants.”<sup>44</sup>

Edmonton’s housing policies did not exemplify policy learning because while past policies were recognized, it did not incorporate the successes of the *Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports*, a well-executed and comprehensive plan with specific recommendations for meeting the housing needs for urban Aboriginal populations. There also seems to be a disconnection between different plans and policy proposals, which is an indication that Edmonton’s housing policies are neglecting the evaluation of past policies, and are not recreating past successes. On June 16, 2017, the Edmonton Journal reported that “Alberta will spend \$1.2 billion on affordable housing over the next five years”<sup>45</sup>, but are still “in consultations to develop off-reserve, non-market, affordable housing for Alberta’s Indigenous communities”.<sup>46</sup> Without referencing previous policies, this statement implies that affordable housing for the Aboriginal community have not been developed before, and that past policies are not being fully considered before a new policy is proposed; policy learning have not been implemented.

Compared to Edmonton, Winnipeg has more government-wide policies for its Aboriginal population. Moreover, Winnipeg has more policy statements devoted to housing, cultural support, and economic development. One example of this is the *Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative* (WHHI), an initiative headed by both the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg, and it deals with housing

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<sup>38</sup> Homeward Trust, *Edmonton Area*, 118.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>42</sup> The City of Edmonton, *Affordable Housing Strategy* (Edmonton, AB: The City of Edmonton, 2016), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Emma Graney, “Alberta to spend \$1.2 Billion on Affordable Housing Over Next Five Years,” *Edmonton Journal*, June 16, 2017, <http://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-to-spend-1-2-billion-on-affordable-housing>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



renovation and implements rental-to-ownership models.<sup>47</sup> Specific neighbourhoods, chosen through socio-economic and housing conditions, are selected to receive funds through housing and improvement corporations in the neighbourhood.<sup>48</sup> These corporations then draft a housing proposal and submit it to the WHHI for review by all levels of governments before funds are allocated.<sup>49</sup> According to Walker, the Memorandum of Understanding that ties together the responsibilities of federal, provincial, and municipal governments for the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative ignites macro-policy shifts (as cited in Hanselmann and Gibbins 2002).<sup>50</sup> In addition, due to the success of this initiative, “Canada, Manitoba, and the City of Winnipeg renewed the MOU in 2003 and again in 2008 to extend the mandate until 2013.”<sup>51</sup> Not only does this model provide enough funding for low-cost housing, but it also eliminates the problem of Aboriginal initiatives becoming a “hot potato” between the different levels of governments.

That said, it seems like Winnipeg achieved meaning policy change with just one model for housing policy. However, it is important to remember that Walker suggests that this housing policy is only a *model* for Aboriginal engagement. Just because the target neighbourhoods selected in this initiative consists of majority populations of Aboriginal populations, it is not what Walker would call “self-determined Aboriginal programs.”<sup>52</sup>, which ensures Aboriginal populations are involved in the creation of these programs. Walker also added that it is essential that “Aboriginal stakeholders...be engaged in housing policy and program design, including the setting of objectives, the implementation and delivery, and evaluation.”<sup>53</sup> In conclusion, Winnipeg’s housing policy has certainly exemplified meaningful policy learning by its evaluation of past policies, commitment to repeat successes, and concerted collaboration between all three levels of governments to avoid failures. However, Winnipeg housing policies have failed at Aboriginal policy learning because it did not integrate adequate Aboriginal participation, or consideration for the disadvantages they face. Looking at the *City of Winnipeg’s Housing Policy Implementation Plan*, although not specific to Aboriginal populations, an obvious difference between Edmonton’s policies is seen as well. While Edmonton’s *City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Strategy for 2016-2025* identified housing as priority, it made broad and vague statements at best, while the City of Winnipeg identified a lead, key partners, timeframe, and activities for each of its priorities.

## Conclusion

I conclude that Edmonton’s urban Aboriginal housing policies did not experience policy learning, and that while Winnipeg has demonstrated significant policy learning according to Stritch and Spicer’s criteria, it failed to direct its policies towards Aboriginal needs. Edmonton has shown in the *City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Strategy for 2016-2025* that it had not only failed to sufficiently recognize the collaborative work done in the *Edmonton and Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports*, but it also failed to emanate its successes. Moreover, the abundance of disjointed housing policies without proper consultations and evaluations of past policies throws the attempt to create adequate Aboriginal housing policies in a cyclical cycle, where successes and failures are not used for improvement. Edmonton must

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ryan C. Walker, “Engaging The Urban Aboriginal Population in Low-Cost Housing Initiatives: Lessons From Winnipeg,” *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 12, no. 1 (2003): 108.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> About WHHI (Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative,” Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, accessed November 19, 2017, <http://www.whhi.ca/about.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 104.

ensure they avoid disjointed housing policies that do not make use of successful plans and policies already in place.

On the other hand, Winnipeg has demonstrated to have a wider range of culturally appropriate policies, and its housing policy through the WHHI showed a much greater degree of policy learning, as it did only undergo re-evaluation and re-commitment of the mandate, but it also involved the concerted efforts of the federal, provincial, and local government to ensure success. However, while it did exemplify policy learning, it failed at Aboriginal engagement.

With more and more Aboriginal populations moving into census metropolitan areas, it is essential that municipalities have sufficient policies, and not just for affordable housing, to help alleviate the multitudes of disadvantages Aboriginal populations face. Aboriginal populations also require a *combination* of policies in areas such as income, housing, education, employment, economic development; singular policy units with no references to other policy areas cannot create a suitable environment for urban Aboriginal populations to acquire basic needs. Municipalities may be most familiar with housing needs of their local citizens, but collaboration with provincial and the federal government is needed, especially in Edmonton, starting with the recognition of formal jurisdictional lines around Aboriginal initiatives. Only through concerted efforts can there be proper funding and accountability for these programs. Winnipeg's affordable housing policy certainly gives a proper model for the development of Edmonton's affordable Aboriginal housing, but Edmonton should also ensure they have more unified housing policies, ones that builds upon past policies to allow policy learning to occur.

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