



Neha

Statement from Neha members

On March 7th, 2024, we, Sylvia Maracle, Marie Pascaline Menono, Pamela Glode-Desrochers, and, were named as members of the review panel¹ that will examine the right to safe, adequate and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit, and gender-diverse people, and the government’s duty to uphold this right based on the [request of the Federal Housing Advocate](#). The term women includes Indigenous women, women of color from different origins, and all other people who identify as women to ensure that one is left behind. You will hear us refer to this review panel as Neha (pronounced Neigh-ha). Directly translated to ‘our ways’, **Neha** is a Kanien'kéha-Mohawk word that describes a way of life that is open, peaceful, supportive and healing.



¹ Review panels are a participatory human-rights based accountability mechanism established under the [National Housing Strategy Act \(NHS Act\)](#) to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing in Canada, as recognized under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.



Seen as an ever-expanding circle² (see circle design above), Neha will be a place where there is space for all people to join and share their experiences, expertise and proposed solutions.

We want to start this process from a good place, and for people to feel welcome. Our space is one of open dialogue where a collective of people encourage each other and focus on finding solutions together.

We will honour your unique stories, hear your experience in your own words and ensure that what you share with us is reflected in our final recommendations.

We would like to thank the Federal Housing Advocate, the Indigenous Women's Housing Network and the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network, who have supported us in generating this novel approach and who will continue to play an important role in Neha.

We can and will do things differently. Thank you for joining us.

Respectfully,

Sylvia Maracle (Chair)
Pamela Glode-Desrochers
Marie Pascaline Menono

² The purple and cream colours of the circle are inspired by the colours of the wampum belt. Whenever possible gender-neutral language has been used to ensure the inclusion of all rights holders. It is recognized, however, that some of the terminology used in this circle design may still be limited by current language norms.



TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Background

Anchored in a human rights-based approach, review panels are a mechanism established under the [National Housing Strategy \(NHS\) Act](#) to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing. As per the NHS Act, the National Housing Council (the Council) must establish a review panel on a systemic housing issue under the jurisdiction of Parliament if requested to do so by the Federal Housing Advocate (the Advocate).

According to the NHS Act, a review panel is required to:

- a) Hold a hearing (referred to as a dialogue in Neha) to review the systemic housing issue in the respect of which it was established;
- b) Hold the hearing (referred to as a dialogue in Neha) in a manner that offers the public, particularly members of communities that are affected by the issue and groups that have expertise in human rights and housing, an opportunity to participate;
- c) Prepare a report that sets out the panel's opinion on the issue and any recommendations to take measures — respecting matters over which Parliament has jurisdiction — to address the issue; and;
- d) Submit the report to the Minister responsible for the NHS Act (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities).

Pursuant to Section 13.1 (2) of the NHS Act, the Advocate issued a request to the National Housing Council to establish a review panel on a systemic housing issue identified as: the failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people, particularly the disproportionate impact of the issue on Indigenous women, Two Spirit and gender-diverse people. In response to the Advocate's request, the Council passed a motion to proceed with a review panel on this systemic housing issue.

2. Scope of work

This review panel, entitled Neha, will examine: **The right to safe, adequate and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit, and gender-diverse people, and the government's duty to uphold this right.** As part of the hearing (referred to as a dialogue hereafter), participants will be called upon to share their knowledge and expertise on:



- a. The impact of the failure to uphold the right to safe, adequate and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit and gender-diverse people, including the impact that this issue has on the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing in Canada;
- b. The actions and inactions of the Government of Canada (e.g., laws, policies, programs, regulations, recommendations, commitments, action plans, strategies, etc.) that have led to the failure to uphold the right of women, Two Spirit and gender-diverse people to safe, adequate and affordable housing, including the impact that these actions and inactions have on the Government of Canada's national and international commitments to housing and human rights.
- c. Solutions within the jurisdiction of Parliament to address the issue and progressively realize the right to adequate housing in Canada.

Framing the scope of work

It is important that Neha does not repeat the fundamental work that has already been completed on this systemic housing issue or require people with living or lived experience to re-tell their stories if they do not want to or if doing so would cause them harm. Instead, Neha will call on all participants to share their vision and knowledge on **the way forward to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to accessing safe, affordable housing that meets their needs**. To do so, the Neha circle (see circle design below) will guide the focus of the work using four foundational elements:

1. **Vision** - refers to the way forward to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to accessing safe, affordable housing that meets their needs.
2. **Knowledge** - refers to the wisdom and information that is needed to inform or support this vision.
3. **Reason** - refers to the rationale for pursuing this vision, especially to uphold Canada's commitments to national and international housing and human rights.
4. **Action** - refers to the actions necessary to make this vision a reality.



This framing will provide the focus of the knowledge gathering that will be carried out during the dialogue as well as guide the report that will be submitted to the Minister.

3. Dialogue Plan

The panel will hold a dialogue which may include a written and an oral phase.

Framing the dialogue

The main objective of Neha is to ensure that **no one is left behind**. As such, the aim of the dialogue will be to ensure that there is room for all people within the Neha circle. This approach centralizes rights-holders and aims to create safe, inclusive, culturally-appropriate and supportive spaces for people with lived or living experience. We acknowledge that not all populations of women, Two Spirit and gender-diverse people are the same and as such participants may need different forums and supports to share their knowledge with us.



The dialogue will be guided by four guiding principles to ensure that all people are included in the Neha circle:

- I. *Create safe spaces for people with lived or living experience*
 - Create a safe, secure, healing and integrative space that supports participants to share their views.
 - Provide opportunities for participants to honour the land and their culture.
 - Establish small homogeneous groups to encourage participation.
- II. *Prioritize on-going participant & panel supports*
 - Ensure that support is made available to participants and panel members that attempts to reflect the diverse needs of participants (e.g., spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, etc.).
 - Ensure that those who may hold knowledge or who may provide support to people with living or lived experience are available to participants and panel members (e.g., Indigenous knowledge keepers, experts such as social workers for black immigrant communities).
- III. *Commit to rights-focused solutions*



- Commit to rights-focused solutions to ensure that people with living or lived experience are welcome to but not required to tell their stories if they do not want to or if doing so would cause them harm.

IV. *Foster inclusion & accessibility*

- Provide multiple forums to engage participants to foster inclusion, especially for populations that often face barriers to participation.
- Encompass flexibility in all aspects of the dialogue to adapt it to the individualized needs of participants (e.g., allow participants to take breaks and leave the space and come back when they are ready to do so).
- Use clear, plain, inclusive language to ensure the dialogue is accessible to everyone who wants to participate.
- Foster a culture that supports respectful dialogue and avoids requiring participants to compete for space.

Oral phase of the dialogue

The panel will have dialogue sessions, in select locations in-person and/or through a virtual format. This oral phase will aim to provide a safe, inclusive, culturally-appropriate and supportive space for the participants to share their knowledge and expertise on the issue.

Written phase of dialogue

The panel may conduct a written phase of the dialogue. This written phase would provide a forum for the participants to share their knowledge and expertise on the issue.

Dialogue participants

The Neha members may seek knowledge and expertise from:

- ✓ A range of individuals and communities affected by the issue as well as the organizations that represent and/or serve them, i.e. individuals with lived or living experience and the organizations that represent and/or serve them
- ✓ Experts on human rights
- ✓ Experts on housing and social inequality
- ✓ Any other group or person identified by the Neha members

4. Report with opinions and recommendations to the Minister

Based on the evidence provided during the dialogue, the Neha members will prepare a report for the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities outlining their opinions on the issue and their recommendations. Under the *National Housing Strategy Act*, the Minister is required to respond to the report submitted by the review panel (Neha members) within 120



days after the day on which it is received. The Minister must also table the response to each House of Parliament within 30 days of providing it to the review panel.

5. Miscellaneous

Members of Neha agree that:

- These terms of reference will be made public.
- These terms of reference represent a foundation for the development of all documents related to the right to safe, adequate and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit, and gender-diverse people, and the government's duty to uphold this right.