"THE HOUSING SITUATION IS HARDER FOR NATIVES:" AN ECOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF HOUSING ISSUES FOR OLDER INDIGENOUS ADULTS[1]

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Abstract

The rapidly growing older Indigenous adult population in Canada is creating an increasing need for housing and other services. In this study, we examined the characteristics of older Indigenous adults in Atlantic Canada, their current housing situations, and their housing needs from an ecological perspective. A total of 25 older Indigenous adults participated in focus groups. Our results highlight that the ecological model is useful in identifying various types of housing issues that exist and supports that are needed to meet the various individual, interpersonal, environmental, and cultural needs of older Indigenous adults. Many salient issues relevant to older Indigenous adults are located at the macrosystem level of the model. Additional resources should be made available to assist older Indigenous adults to remain living in their homes, to maintain and modify their homes, and to be contributing members of their communities. For those who wish to relocate, additional models of housing need to be made available that are designed to meet the diverse physical, social, and cultural needs of older Indigenous adults.

Key words: Atlantic Canada, ecological model, focus groups

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[1] When using the term Indigenous we refer to primarily people who are First Nations.

Résumé

La croissance rapide de la population autochtone adulte vieillissante au Canada nécessite des besoins de logement et d'autres services. Dans cette étude, nous examinons les caractéristiques des adultes autochtones vieillissant dans les provinces maritimes du Canada, leurs situations de logement actuelles et leurs besoins de logement selon une perspective écologique. Un total de vingt-cinq adultes autochtones plus âgés ont participé aux groupes de discussion ciblés. Nos résultats mettent en lumière l'utilité du modèle écologique pour identifier différents types d'enjeux de logement qui existent ainsi que le soutien nécessaire pour répondre aux besoins individuels, interpersonnels, environnementaux et culturels des adultes autochtones plus âgés. Plusieurs enjeux proéminents chez les adultes autochtones plus âgés se situent au niveau du macro système du modèle. Des ressources additionnelles doivent être offertes pour aider ces adultes à rester chez eux, à maintenir et à adapter leur chez-soi et à contribuer à leur communauté. Pour celles et ceux désirant se relocaliser, des modèles de logement additionnels doivent être disponibles afin de répondre à la diversité des besoins physiques, sociaux et culturels des adultes autochtones plus âgés.

Mots clés: le Canada atlantique, modèle écologique; groupes de discussion ciblés

"The housing situation is harder for Natives:"
An Ecological Examination of Housing Issues for Older Indigenous Adults

It is clear that Indigenous peoples in Canada experience vulnerabilities related to factors such as racism, high rates of disability and chronic disease, low income, isolation, social marginalization, and poor housing conditions (Cooke, Guimond, & McWhirter, 2008; FNIGC, 2018; Lange, Skelton, & Meade, 2010). People who are Indigenous are often identified as the most poorly housed people in Canada, and many health issues are a direct result of inadequate housing (O'Donnell & Tait, 2004; Shier et al., 2015). In this study, we focus on housing issues for older adults, particularly those who are Indigenous.

As researchers and policymakers often focus attention on the needs of Indigenous youth, the needs of older Indigenous adults are largely disregarded (Rosenberg et al., 2009). The number of Indigenous Canadians aged 65 and older has nearly doubled in the last 15 years (Wilson et al., 2010) and is predicted to double again by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017). In 2016, 6.4% of the Indigenous Canadian population was age 65 and older (Statistics Canada, 2017), while the number of people aged 65 and older in the non-Indigenous population currently represents approximately 15.9% of the Canadian population 24% (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Although many programs and policies for older adults include eligibility based on age, there is no agreed upon age at which one becomes a senior within Indigenous communities. Given the reduced life expectancy of older Indigenous adults (compared to non-Indigenous older adults in Canada) which is attributed to centuries of marginalization and abuses, it has been suggested that an earlier age should be considered when putting programs and policy into place (Wilson et al., 2010). The Assembly of First Nations suggests that due to the shorter lifespan of Indigenous peoples, an Indigenous senior is any person 55 years of age and older (Assembly of First Nations, 2007). In 2016, the median age of the Indigenous population in Canada was 32.1 years, compared to 40.9 years for the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Due to the biological traits associated with later age being discernable earlier, older Indigenous adults may require support several years earlier than other older adults in Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2007; Special Senate Committee on Aging, 2009). It does seem clear that a person should be defined as an older adult not at a specific age (i.e., age 65), but when that person is identified as an older adult in the community, or when they require additional supports due to age-associated issues. Thus, in this study, we focus on older Indigenous adults and their housing-related issues, but did not specify a minimum age requirement.

While the rapidly growing older Indigenous population in Canada has created an increasing need for housing (Bruce, Weatherston, Higham, & Reid, 1998; Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; MacTavish et al., 2012), research on housing issues for older Indigenous adults is relatively scarce in Canada. Housing programs are complicated, there is often a lack of control over housing, and the public funds that are available are inadequate (Lange et al., 2010; MacTavish et al., 2012; Neutze, 2000;). In addition, accessing programs and services can be challenging for older Indigenous adults who are at high risk of poverty and have low average educational levels (Bruce et al., 1998; Neutze, 2000). It is clear that housing in good physical condition is lacking for older Indigenous adults in Canada (Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; Lange et al., 2010).

While there are few models for Indigenous-specific housing in Canada (Chenew Holdings, Inc., 2004), there is a specific lack of research on housing for specific groups of older

Indigenous adults, such as those living on-reserve and those living off-reserve in various types of communities. Currently, 52% of Indigenous peoples in Canada live in cities (Statistics Canada, 2017). Older Indigenous adults who migrate to cities often experience difficult housing situations including low-quality housing, unaffordable housing, and even dangerous accommodation where they can be exposed to infectious diseases, violence, and substance abuse (Lange et al., 2010; Shier et al., 2015).

One key issue identified in the research is the need for consultation with the target population before housing is developed to ensure that culturally-appropriate housing designs are used, and that specific customs, culture, mores, traditions and physical needs are taken into consideration (Alaazi et al., 2015; Barker, 2008; Bruce, et al., 1998; Burns, 2005; Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; Go-Sam, 2008; Memmott, 2008; Morgan, 2004; Pecarski et al., 1989; Walker, 2006). Unfortunately, housing constructed for Winnipeg's inner city Indigenous population went forward with little consultation regarding the underlying cultural assumptions of the design of these homes, for example, no infrastructure was included to support sweats or smudging (Alaazi et al., 2015; Deane & Smoke, 2010). Dean and Smoke (2010) found that when consultation occurs, housing designs differ significantly from conventional designs.

While we believe that permitting older Indigenous adults, and/or their immediate family members, to plan and choose future housing is the best way to secure adequate housing for this population (Pecarski et al., 1989), we were able to draw on prior research to identify four general principles to help ensure that housing is more conducive to meeting the needs and preferences of the diverse needs of older Indigenous adults. The first principle is that housing should reflect the ability to live sustainably in a healthy environment (Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; Mackin & Nyce, 2005). Second, housing should allow for participation in culturally important activities, such as preferred cooking methods and techniques of food preservation and storage (Alaazi et al., 2015; Chenew Holdings Inc, 2004; Mackin & Nyce, 2005; Pecarski et al., 1989). Third, housing should be accommodating of various family structures and changing numbers of people living in the household at different times (Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; Deane & Smoke, 2010; Fuller-Thomson, 2005; Mackin & Nyce, 2005; Pecarski et al., 1989; Rosenberg, et al., 2009). Fourth, housing options need to be available that allow older adults to continue to be involved in community life and interact with younger generations (Deane & Smoke, 2010; Mackin & Nyce, 2005; Rosenberg et al., 2009).

From our review of the literature, it is evident that while there is a substantial body of research on housing in general, little is known about housing for older Indigenous adults, and even less is known about housing for specific subgroups in this population. In this study, we examine the characteristics of older Indigenous adults in Atlantic Canada, their current housing situations, and their housing needs from an ecological perspective. The ecological model is useful in conceptualizing how a person's housing situation is interwoven with, and influenced by, environmental systems that interact both with the person and with one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). The ecological model examines the relationship between the individual and the immediate surroundings as well as the outside environment. The four environmental systems in the ecological model can be used to describe and understand various human contexts and it can be used as a deductive framework for data analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Methods

Analysis of survey data collected in a previous phase of this program of research conducted by the Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance (ASHRA) revealed gaps in our knowledge about the housing concerns among distinct and under-represented groups of older adults. Therefore, an ASHRA team formed to oversee the implementation of focus groups with the intent of complementing and enhancing the survey data. Our purposive sampling strategy involved members of the ASHRA focus group team identifying specific groups of older adults in Atlantic Canada who may face particular challenges related to housing. While a total of 15 focus groups with 84 participants were conducted, this analysis is based on data collected in 3 focus groups with 25 older Indigenous adults who participated in focus groups in three different Atlantic Canadian provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

Prior to each focus group, potential participants received an information letter about the study and provided consent to participate. When necessary (i.e. due to low literacy levels), a graduate assistant read the information letter and consent form aloud to the participant before they signed the form. Participants received an honorarium of $25, reimbursement for any travel expenses, and refreshments during the focus group.

An Indigenous person, or a person familiar with older Indigenous adults, received training and moderated each focus group. A graduate assistant supported the moderator by audio-recording the sessions and writing detailed field notes. The moderator asked questions about each participant's current housing situation (i.e., type of housing, length of time lived in their home), influences on current housing decisions, ways in which housing influences well-being, changes they would like to make to their housing situation in the future, factors influencing their ability to make housing changes in the future, and recommendations to improve housing for older adults. In addition, the participants completed a demographic survey. The moderator and graduate assistant met at the end of the focus group to share thoughts, background information and observations and to offer further insights into the data collected (Krueger, 1998; Traulsen, Almarsdottir, & Bjornsdottir, 2004).

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and took place in an accessible building. A partner organization conducted one of the focus groups, as they had already arranged to conduct a focus group on another topic with our target population, and they agreed to include our questions and provide a transcript. In one group, the participants did not agree to having their voices recorded. In this case, the graduate assistant and an additional note-taker took detailed notes of the conversation. In accordance with Krueger (1998), the graduate assistants thoroughly reviewed and compared each transcript to the audio recording for accuracy. By noting pauses, overlaps, and the exact way each participant spoke during the focus group, and including this information in the transcripts, analysis was bolstered. The analysis incorporated the facilitator's observations and field notes, along with the notes taken from discussions with each moderator. Data reliability was strengthened, in addition, by comparing the transcripts to the field notes (Silverman, 2005).

We used a thematic analysis approach to the data, which is a form of pattern recognition allowing for themes to emerge directly using inductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This process involved generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes that resulted in thematic codes that represented patterned responses within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly useful in understanding influences and motivations related to how people respond to events (Luborsky,

1994) and thus lent itself to developing a greater understanding of the housing issues of older Indigenous adults. We used the qualitative data analysis program NVivo to aid in data organization and analysis. A qualitative approach allowed us to gain in-depth knowledge about the housing concerns of vulnerable older adults, and about what can be done to ensure that appropriate housing is developed to meet the needs of older Indigenous adults.

Results
We first present a description of the socio-demographic characteristics of the older Indigenous adults who participated in the focus groups and then the results that are organized by level of the ecological model.

Socio-demographic Characteristics
When the 25 focus participants were asked which ethnic or cultural group(s) do your ancestors belong to on a demographic survey, 40% (n=10) self-identified as Mi'kmaq, 24% (n=6) as Cree, 16% (n=4) as Inuit, and the remaining 20% (n=5) as a combination of Indigenous ancestry, or used a word or phrase such as Native or First Nations to describe themselves. Of the 3 focus groups, one was held in a city and all 6 participants identified as living off-reserve in or near the city. One of these participants lived in a subsidized home for Indigenous peoples operated by a non-profit organization. The second focus group took place in a small town in a remote location. All 9 participants lived in the town, but most had moved there from a rural location at some point in their lives. The final focus group consisted of 10 people, 7 of whom identified as currently living on-reserve, and the remaining two currently lived in a town but lived on-reserve earlier in their lives.
Additional socio-demographic characteristics of the focus group participants are included in Table 1. The majority of focus group participants identified as women, and most participants were either married or widowed. While we specified no minimum age for participation in the focus groups, participants either self-identified as a senior, or others identified them as a senior within their communities, which resulted in 36% of the focus group participants being under age 65. Most participants spoke only English at home presently and during childhood. However, many participants also spoke Indigenous languages during childhood and at the present, such as Cree and Mi'kmaq. Many of the focus group participants continued to work either full or part-time. Half of the participants who responded to the question about formal educational attainment had completed high school. Though many participants reported good or excellent health, 40% of focus group participants did not report any health status information. Many participants earned less than $25,000 per year, but almost half of the total sample did not respond to the question about annual income.

Results by Level of the Ecological Model
In this section, we present the analysis of the focus groups by level of the ecological model.
Microsystem
The microsystem includes the immediate environment, and as our focus is on housing issues, we included variables pertaining to the current housing situation in this section. The length of time that participants lived in their present home ranged from 3.5 to 53 years. The majority of the 25 focus group participants had lived in their homes for over 30 years. Most

participants owned a single-family dwelling, while others rented a mini-home or lived in a boarding house. Feelings of apprehension often emerged regarding their current housing situations. Downsizing, renting, and/or having to move to a different area can also be very upsetting to many individuals, and some find it difficult to adjust to a change. *"Sometimes Elders don't want to tell anyone about their problems because someone might change their situation against their will."* One participant succinctly said, *"People have the right to secure, accessible, and acceptable housing."* Many additional issues related to the microsystem are presented within the themes of financial concerns and having an appropriate in-home environment.

Financial concerns.

The participants expressed concern and fear regarding situations which were out of their control, such as paying for necessary housing repairs while living on a fixed income.

> *You're on a pension; you're on a fixed income, so those things are frightening   sometimes. It may not seem like much to you people who are so much younger, but to a person my age, you know it is frightening sometimes.*

In addition, participants spoke about paying for tasks and services that they used to provide for themselves. These costs were rising at a much faster rate than their fixed incomes, and there was a continuous need for funds to pay for yard work.

> *If your roof leaks to a point where you have to replace the shingles or put on a metal roof, you're looking at anywhere from 5 to 7 or $8,000. It's not every day seniors can come up with that kind of money.*

Some participants found it helpful to reside with at least one other person in order to share living expenses. When costs were referred to in a specific manner, the items named were maintenance, repairs, or renovations needed for the home; modifying the home to be more energy efficient; the rising cost of food; and the high cost of assistive devices such as wheelchairs and walkers. Some participants mentioned that they needed financial assistance to afford their homes and other housing-related costs. *"I worked long enough to be lucky enough to get a reasonably good pension, but my wife naturally doesn't. She gets her old age pension and that's it and we know what that amounts to."*

Appropriate in-home environment.

At the microsystem level, in addition to financial concerns, much of the discussion revolved around having, or desiring, an appropriate in-home living environment. Having a warm, comfortable and accessible home was imperative the participants. In addressing what older Indigenous adults wanted in housing, one participant stated, *"They don't want big fancy houses, they just want a comfortable place to live with all the necessities that they need."* Many participants reported living in older homes with energy inefficiencies while needing more heat to stay warm as they age. *"Right now it's not energy efficient, and I supplement the heat with a woodstove while I can still get wood."*

Participants were often unable to access the funds for home renovation, including adding necessary safety features. There were many conversations regarding the need for sufficient ramps, grab bars or railings, and wider doorways to accommodate wheelchairs. *"Wider doors are $15, what's $15? They should go in every home."* Many participants also expressed a desire for a one-level home and an accessible washer and dryer. Falling up and down stairs was a concern, emphasizing the necessity of handrails and ramps. Even though many participants were still

independent and very active, the mobility issues mentioned were walking, driving, and wheelchair accessibility. If mobility was not currently a concern, the participants recognized that realistically it would be in the future, but they expressed a desire to continue living independently for as long as possible.

In addition, some participants preferred to have a landlord care for regular maintenance. *We chose to rent when we came up here because if we need the roof fixed, if we need some painting, if the water freezes we have the landlord and he'll come fix it, but the rent is not cheap either, we pay $600.00 a month.*

The majority of participants enjoyed their homes even though the size of some homes was either too large or too small, but despite some less than ideal situations and/or repair needs, most focus group participants did not want to relocate.

Mesosystem

We included results on social interactions and relationships at the mesosystem level. Those who needed assistance required many different types of support, and many participants recognized that they would need a greater amount of assistance in the future. Apart from assistance, our results indicate the importance of maintaining relationships and providing opportunities for socialization.

Required assistance.

Some participants expressed that they receive help from family and friends for transportation, daily living tasks and yard maintenance, but they also expressed a yearning to continue to help their adult children. Even though they received help, participants did not want to rely on, impose on, or otherwise bother relatives and friends. *"I will not impose myself on my children or grandchildren unless it's absolutely necessary..."*

The necessity for assistance often precipitated relocation, such as choosing to rent so that a landlord could complete any necessary repairs, or moving closer family members or friends for support. Some participants identified that living with family members as their only housing option. Additionally, one participant desired a skill bank so that individuals could draw on the gifts and abilities of others. *"I had eye surgery three times...and you can't see to do anything and then you get older, you can't bend over, you can't lift. You need help. You need someone to do things for you."*

Relationships and socialization.

Family emerged as an important component of the support network for the focus group participants, such as relying on a family member for transportation. One participant expressed the desire to move on-reserve so that friends and family were in closer proximity. *"I want to be around people so that means...when I do take senior housing, I will be around people."* Some participants preferred living in an intergenerational home and others desired an extra bedroom in their home for when family members or guests wished to visit. They identified that accessible common areas should be incorporated in all seniors' buildings as they promote much-needed socialization with other seniors ~~and~~ as well as youth. *"So sometimes I don't see anybody for three or four days."* The companionship of a pet was of great importance to a number of participants. *"The heck with the china cabinet, I won't leave my dog behind."*

Exosystem

There were two focus group themes that emerged at the exosystem level of the ecological model: community supports and safety issues in the community.

Community supports

Affordable and accessible housing, adequate transportation, and senior advocacy are imperative in supporting older Indigenous adults and promoting long-term independence. Numerous participants mentioned that while accessible senior housing is important, it is unavailable in many communities. Most participants lived in their preferred location, but some moved to be close to amenities. *"I moved here because I really needed to be closer to the hospital ... medical reasons, so I'm not really here by choice."* Many rural communities did not have a transit system or did not have adequate transportation on the weekends.

> *It costs a lot if you go in a taxi, and we have no transit system, no bus system in the town, so we're really at a disadvantage if you don't drive or if you can't drive...If you don't have a large extended family to help you get where you need to go, what do you do?*

If a participant did not have someone to drive them, it often resulted in a diminished social life, since many social events occur on the weekends. For drivers, driving-related costs such as the driver's license fee, medical certificates, and eye exams are high and difficult to afford. Some participants were intimidated to stand up to authorities so having an advocate available can effect real change in obtaining community supports.

Safety in the community.

The focus group participants expressed safety concerns in their communities, such as noise, personal safety, a lack of secure doors on their homes, and not having someone to check up on them, particularly at night. *"The fact that if you call the RCMP, the call goes into [name of place] or [name of place] and that can be a long wait when you have an issue that needs to be dealt with right away. Things can happen fast you know."*

Macrosystem

The conditions we identified in the focus groups relevant to the macrosystem included social standards and policies, culture, and disrespect and discrimination.

Social standards and policies.

This theme included societal regulations, policies, and decisions that compel the participants to behave in a particular way, to make specific decisions, or to be indecisive. The lack of accessible and/or senior housing, no newly built homes for decades, and no available land resulted in some participants having to move outside their desired community, having no choice of residence, or being required to live with relatives. *"Since I left the reserve...it seems like you're just moving from house to house...there's nothing stable for me anymore, because I'm moving from one child to another."* Many participants felt helpless with their housing situation as making repeated requests to the Chief and Council proved ineffectual, and petitions were often made to leaders who did not successfully lead.

> *All you have to do is go to your Chief and Council and bring in a request saying that these Elders need this. This is the type of place they need, it's time that they start considering Elders, and build Elder's homes to their satisfaction. Other than that, I don't see anything I can influence on my end. You just send a request.*

Many focus group participants expressed that they did not want self-government, and they were 'surveyed out' as they expressed their needs and desires in various ways for several years, yet they perceived that government officials have neither listened nor responded to their requests. For some, self-government was not desired, and past experience has taught them to be doubtful that anything can be done for Indigenous communities. *"With the self-government, that scares*

the heck out of me because the rich will still keep on getting richer and the little people, the Elders, will get forgotten."
        Culture.
        One of the most important themes in the macrosystem for older Indigenous adults was the desire to live a traditional lifestyle that included hunting, fishing, berry picking, boat building, and camping. Equally as important was the desire to pass traditions on to younger generations.

> *Now I'm over 70 years old and I lived a traditional lifestyle and I like to carry on that tradition. Not only me but a lot of people feel the same way, especially older people think we need to get our young people out on the land.*

For these individuals, home is the place where they were born and if they have since moved away from home, they felt the need to return home as often as possible. However, returning home was difficult due to distance, decreased mobility, and sometimes the loss of a driver's license. "*I can see the change in my Dad when he goes home in the summer. He's like shedding ten or twenty years. He feels rejuvenated, renewed again.*" Living on the land was believed to have a healing effect on health problems and was therefore a daily practice for many. Preserving the environment was also a cultural practice, and many participants spoke of their needs to connect with nature to feel comfortable. Even though participants indicated the desire to live on the land, some expressed concern regarding the difficulty in accessing land and/or a home on-reserve. Viewing a natural environment from their home, and water in particular, was identified as important by several participants.
        Disrespect and discrimination.
        Even though preserving culture was important, it was acknowledged that many practices and traditions have changed for older Indigenous adults. Participants stated that there are problems with current disciplinary practices of children who have little adult guidance. They felt that children no longer have appropriate role models, and this results in a general disrespect for older adults. Some participants felt that adult children were not compelled to care for their aging parents.

> *It's not the same as it was sixty, seventy years ago when one looked after the other, you know, that doesn't happen. Everyone is looking after themselves now and got a battle   even doing that.*

The participants felt that non-traditional and self-centered attitudes caused societal breakdown, generational divides, and disrespect of older Indigenous adults. Many participants reported feeling generally disrespected and felt that the tradition of reverence has not been passed on to youth as it was in the past. They believed that older people used to have more control over the young, but now older Indigenous adults sense they no longer have a place in society.

> *I've noticed a lot, though, that seniors are not respected by young people...They look at you and talk to you as if to say, you've lived your day and we don't want you around   anymore. It's time you get the blazes out of here.*

        Participants felt insecure in their communities because of younger individuals, and it was believed by some participants that older adults needed to be educated on safety issues. Participants further felt that youth should be educated regarding the issues that older adults face, and that there ought to be greater respect for older Indigenous adults.

> *I think it would be nice if younger people showed a little more respect for seniors because I've been walking by the side of the road and some young person came along on a pedal bike, or even a motor bike, and it seems like they aim straight for you.*

Participants were not only disrespected by younger people, but also by the government when their requests for mobility aids were denied based on advanced age. *"I think the government is saying, well let's just stall long enough, they'll all die anyway. We won't have to worry about that."*

Though many participants discussed the issue of ageism, only a few expressed that they overtly experienced racism. Several participants explained that the Indian Act discriminated based on race, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Veterans were not equally treated, and some people in the community were intolerant towards Indigenous peoples. *"...There's so many of my neighbours that are still racist, they're very racist. If you go to them for help, you know, they want nothing to do with you."*

Discussion

Results at the microsystem level focused on issues in the immediate housing environment, such as accessibility, and the inability to continue to repair and maintain a home due to declining health. Financial concerns were an undercurrent in many issues identified in the microsystem. The increasing cost of housing over time, and expensive home modifications, results in many older Indigenous adults spending a high proportion of their income on housing. There was a definite fear expressed by many focus group participants about possibly not being able to afford to remain living in their homes in the future. Carter and Polevychol (2004) argue that the lack of a national Canadian housing policy historically has resulted in an inadequate continuum of housing to meet the needs of low-income and marginalized groups, and Christenson (2016) points out key concepts related to home and health are specifically missing for housing policies pertaining to Indigenous peoples. Canada's National Housing Strategy that was launched in 2017 is designed to address diverse needs across wide variety of forms of housing, and Indigenous housing is identified as priority area for action (Government of Canada, 2018). While additional resources for housing for Indigenous peoples have been allocated, it is unclear what resources have been allocated for older adults (National Housing Strategy, 2024). Financial supports are needed to help older Indigenous adults remain in their homes through providing assistance with basic housing costs, and the costs of home modifications, maintenance, and housekeeping. These supports could help to alleviate the fear of rising housing costs and make the immediate housing environment more safe and conducive to aging-in-place.

The participants expressed a desire to be contributing members of their communities, yet they faced great obstacles in accomplishing this, including poor health, few financial resources, and a lack of programs to assist them. It is possible that the forms of housing that would provide for the particular needs of older Indigenous adults do not exist, given the housing shortage faced by all demographics of Indigenous peoples, not just older adults (Webber, 2015). It is clear that more creative housing options are needed to ensure that we meet the healthcare, physical, and cultural needs of older Indigenous adults. As 56% of Indigenous peoples in Canadians live off-reserve (Statistics Canada, 2017), older Indigenous adults need opportunities to continue to contribute to their communities.

Many of the participants discussed having both financial challenges and health problems, and these two factors are frequently used to define vulnerability (Buijis, Ross-Kerr, Cousins, & Wilson, 2003; Keiser, Farris, Stoupa, & Agrawal, 2009). These two issues appear to serve a mediating role in current housing satisfaction, and will continue to do so in the future, especially when combined with additional factors such as advanced age or a lack of social support. Our results help to reinforce that the intersection of several types of vulnerability can place older Indigenous adults at an increased risk for a variety of problems. Additional research is needed in order to understand more fully the impact of multiple types of vulnerability on the lives of older Indigenous adults.

An examination of the focus group results at the macrosystem level indicated many issues of concern. It is evident from our results that it is the housing related-issues identified at this level of the ecological model that highlight the great differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous older adults. Unfortunately, many participants seemed resigned to living in inadequate housing due to a lack of inaction or change over long periods of time. It is clear that older Indigenous adults should be consulted (AAEDIRP, n.d.; Barker, 2008; Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; Go-Sam, 2008; Morgan, 2004) but that their input also needs to be acted upon. They desired the opportunity to be an integral part of all aspects of housing development designed for them, including policy change, funding programs, development of community-based services, evaluation of projects and research.

Also, at the macrosystem level, our results revealed a desire to retain a traditional lifestyle and the ability to pass along their knowledge to younger generations. They are important issues identified in prior research (AAEDIRP, n.d.; Chenew Holdings Inc., 2004; Mackin & Nyce, 2005). Our results point to the necessity of retaining older Indigenous adults as a focal point in the community and not segregating them from their communities and from younger generations. They felt strongly that young people need to have opportunities to engage with older adults, and the design and location of housing is a key factor in facilitating these relationships.

As relatively little literature is available that focuses on the specific housing needs of older Indigenous adults (Chenew Holdings, Inc., 2004), our results make a valuable contribution to our knowledge. However, as a relatively small number of older Indigenous adults participated in this study, our results should not be generalized to the population of older Indigenous adults across Canada or in other regions. Additional research on housing needs for older Indigenous adults in Atlantic Canada, and elsewhere, is warranted. Research examining specific groups of older Indigenous adults in Canada is needed, for example. One limitation of our study is that we did not specifically ask each focus group participant about whether they lived on-reserve or are 'Status Indians.' In the future, researchers should include this information as it has great relevance for the types of housing-related benefits and services available to older people.

Participants had the opportunity in the focus groups to share their housing concerns with the other members of the group. Often, this method of data collection can spark ideas that would not have emerged using other methods, such as individual interviews. However, some participants may not have been comfortable sharing their concerns with other participants present. For example, one participant said, "*My story is too painful to share in an open discussion.*" Other methods of data collection, such as one-on-one interviews or other participatory data collection methods (for example, photovoice) may provide additional insight, especially for particularly marginalized older adults.

In conclusion, our results contribute to our scant understanding of the housing needs of older Indigenous adults in Canada. Our results highlight that the ecological model is useful in identifying various types of housing issues that exist and supports that are needed to meet the various individual, interpersonal, environmental, and cultural needs of older Indigenous adults. It is clear that the housing needs of older Indigenous adults requires more knowledge and more research that examines housing needs in for specific groups of Indigenous older adults is warranted. Due to the growth in the older Indigenous population (Rosenberg et al., 2009; Statistics Canada, 2017; Walker, 2006), it is imperative that additional resources are made available to assist them to remain living in their homes, to maintain and modify their homes, and to be active and contributing members of their communities. For those who wish to relocate, additional models of housing need to be made available that are designed to meet their physical, social, and cultural needs.

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Table 1

Socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristic	n=25	%
Sex		
Male	6	24
Female	19	76
Marital Status		
Married/partner	11	44
Widowed	9	36
Other	4	16
No response	1	4
Age		
Under age 65	9	36
65-74	14	56
75 and older	2	8
Language spoken at home		
English only	17	68
Other/combination	7	28
No response	1	4
Language spoken during childhood		
English only	12	48
Other/combination	12	48
No response	1	4
Employment status		
No paid work	15	60
Works part or full-time	10	40
Education		
Less than high school	8	32
High school or beyond	8	32
No response	9	36
Self-reported health status		
Very poor, poor	2	8
Fair	3	12
Good	8	32
Excellent	2	8
No response	10	40
Income		
Less than $25,000	7	28
$25,000-$49,000	2	8
More than $49,000	4	16
No response	12	48