

# News Release

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First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey



## **“Worst Case” On-Reserve Housing Conditions Confirmed, according to RHS report**

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**Ottawa, ON** – Results from the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002/03 confirm the Auditor General’s grim assessment of the on-reserve housing situation and provide additional reasons for concern.

The RHS is administered through the First Nations Centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization. Jane Gray, RHS National Coordinator, had this to say: “The RHS findings paint the bleakest picture of First Nations housing conditions to date. Canadians now realize that the on-reserve housing situation is ‘unacceptable’ as politicians of all stripes and levels have been saying. The RHS reinforces that First Nations have endured ‘unacceptable’ housing conditions for decades. In fact, ‘unacceptable’ is quite an understatement of our housing situation.”

The existence of wide and unacceptable gaps between housing on and off reserves has been well documented. In 1992 the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs reported that only half of the 70,000 on-reserve housing units were fit to live in. In 2003 the Auditor General observed that around 44 percent of existing units required renovations. Estimates of the backlog in units vary; e.g., Indian and Northern Affairs estimates the backlog at 35,000 units, while the Assembly of First Nations estimates it at 80,000 units. Few would dispute that the backlog is in the tens of thousands.

The RHS adds significantly to our understanding of the housing situation, including:

- Two thirds (61.9%) of families on reserves depend on social housing. This high figure is explained by factors like: extreme poverty; banks not giving mortgages without a federal guarantee; and geography-related construction costs which can be prohibitive.
- Of First Nations situated in the provinces, no less than 74.1% of households reporting under-\$10,000 income live in social housing, as do two thirds (64.4%) of families with under \$30,000 income.
- One third (33.6%) of First Nations homes need major repairs, up from the one quarter figure cited in 1985 by the Neilson Task Force. Another third (31.7%) need minor repairs. These are higher rates for necessary repairs than the Auditor General estimated in 2003.
- The RHS reveals a mean room density rate in FN communities of 0.76 persons per room – almost double the national rate of 0.4 persons per room.
- The number of occupants in the average Canadian house is 2.6 persons. The RHS shows that the occupant density of on-reserve houses is 4.2 persons, almost double the national rate.
- The occupant density in the First Nation context appears to be increasing, while in the general population the density has declined over two decades.
- 17.2% of First Nations houses meet the accepted definition of “overcrowded” (i.e., they have more than 1 person per room).
- In some instances the number of occupants in First Nations houses can be extreme. The largest number of occupants recorded by the RHS is 18 persons.

- First Nations adults are pessimistic about progress in improving the quality of their housing: 40.3% report there has been ‘no progress’; 46.2% report ‘some progress’; and only 13.5% report ‘good progress’.

“We all knew that First Nations housing conditions are bad. What we see now is our worst case scenario. And our preliminary analyses suggest that the health implications of this situation are very serious,” added Ms. Gray.

“We will be releasing the final national results in the RHS 2002/03 *Peoples’ Report* at our upcoming conference in two weeks. The report will address many more determinants impacting our people, including housing, education, language and the residential school experience. We are optimistic, given the RHS objectives—to collect information about the health of First Nations as a means of improving their own health and living conditions - the Peoples’ Report will be promising.”

The survey was conducted in 238 First Nations on-reserve and other communities between August 2002 and November 2003, with more than 22, 000 participants across the country. The RHS includes three questionnaires designed for adults (18 years and over), youth (12 to 17 years), and children (0 to 11 years).

The RHS final national report and regional preliminary reports will be released in Ottawa on November 13–15, 2005 at the upcoming First Nations Research Conference, “Doing Research Our Way—Celebrating 10 Years of RHS.”

([http://www.naho.ca/firstnations/english/regional\\_health.php](http://www.naho.ca/firstnations/english/regional_health.php))

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