

Housing needs and preferences of Indigenous people using community resources in Montreal

– *Abridged version* –

The full report can be found at <http://reseaumtlnetwork.com/network-documents-and-reports/?lang=en>

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous people, particularly Inuit, are over-represented among homeless people in Montreal: on March 24, 2015, about 10% of the 3016 homeless persons who were surveyed were Indigenous, while they represent only 0.6% of Montreal's overall population. Of this 10%, about 40% were Inuit, while Inuit represent only 10% of the Indigenous population in Montreal.

In order to better understand the housing needs and preferences of this population, the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy NETWORK, in collaboration with the Movement to End Homelessness in Montreal, commissioned a survey of the users of 8 community organizations providing services for Indigenous people. The study was conducted by Eric Latimer, Ph.D., of the Douglas Hospital Research Center and McGill University, and two members of his team, François Bordeleau and Christian Méthot.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The overall goal of this study was to answer the following question:

"What are the housing needs and preferences of Aboriginal people who use the services of the following community organizations: (1) Chez Doris, (2) Face à Face, (3) Ivirtivik, (4) The Open Door, (5) The Montreal Native Friendship Center, (6) Montreal Native Women's Shelter, (7) Plein Milieu and (8) Projets autochtones du Québec? "

METHODS

The project was divided into three phases: (1) development of a questionnaire; (2) administration of the questionnaire; (3) data analysis.

Development of a questionnaire. With the help of staff from 5 community-based Aboriginal service organizations (PAQ, the Montreal Native Friendship Center, the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, Chez Doris and The Open Door), we held 5 focus groups in succession, with users of each organization. The purpose of the

focus groups was to develop a questionnaire on the housing needs and preferences of Indigenous people. The questionnaire evolved over the course of the meetings, and the final version was agreed upon with the project sponsors. It was produced in two languages, English and French.

Administration of the questionnaire. From mid-February to April 2017, staff and, in a few cases, trained volunteers, administered the questionnaire to users of the 5 organizations just mentioned, as well as *Face à Face*, *Plein Milieu* and *Ivirtivik*.

Data analysis. The data was analyzed by the research team. The detailed report describing the results was commented on and modified following feedback from members of the NETWORK.

Research ethics approval. The Research Ethics Board of the Douglas Mental Health University Institute reviewed and approved this project.

RESULTS

We obtained 134 questionnaires. These corresponded to 19 Inuit men, 30 Inuit women, 43 First Nations men (including 5 Métis) and 27 First Nations women (including 3 Métis). An additional 15 questionnaires could not be classified into any of these categories. Métis were grouped within the First Nations category.

Age and spoken languages

Table 1 shows the age distribution of respondents, by sex and Indigenous group. Depending on the group, 50% to 77% of the respondents were between 31 and 49 years old.

This table also shows languages spoken by respondents. Many, especially among the Inuit, did not speak French: 50% of First Nations women, 37% of First Nations men, 66% of Inuit women and 73% of Inuit men.

Table 1 – Respondents’ age and spoken languages

		First Nations - Women (N=27)	First Nations - Men (N=43)	Inuit - Women (N=30)	Inuit - Men (N=19)
Age Groups	18-30	15%	12%	23%	11%
	31-39	50%	41%	30%	26%
	40-49	27%	26%	20%	37%
	50-64	8%	19%	23%	21%
	65 and more	0%	2%	3%	5%
Spoken Languages	English only	23%	28%	3%	5%
	French only	0%	19%	0%	0%
	Aboriginal language only	0%	0%	13%	0%
	English and French	23%	26%	0%	5%
	English and Aboriginal language	27%	9%	50%	68%
	French and Aboriginal language	0%	7%	0%	0%
	English, French and Aboriginal language	27%	12%	33%	21%

Income

More than two-thirds of respondents said they received less than \$ 750 a month. Although almost all respondents (between 88% and 96%, depending on the group) said they received social assistance benefits, Inuit women stood out in this respect: only 52% of them reported receiving this type of assistance.

Table 2 – Respondents’ Income

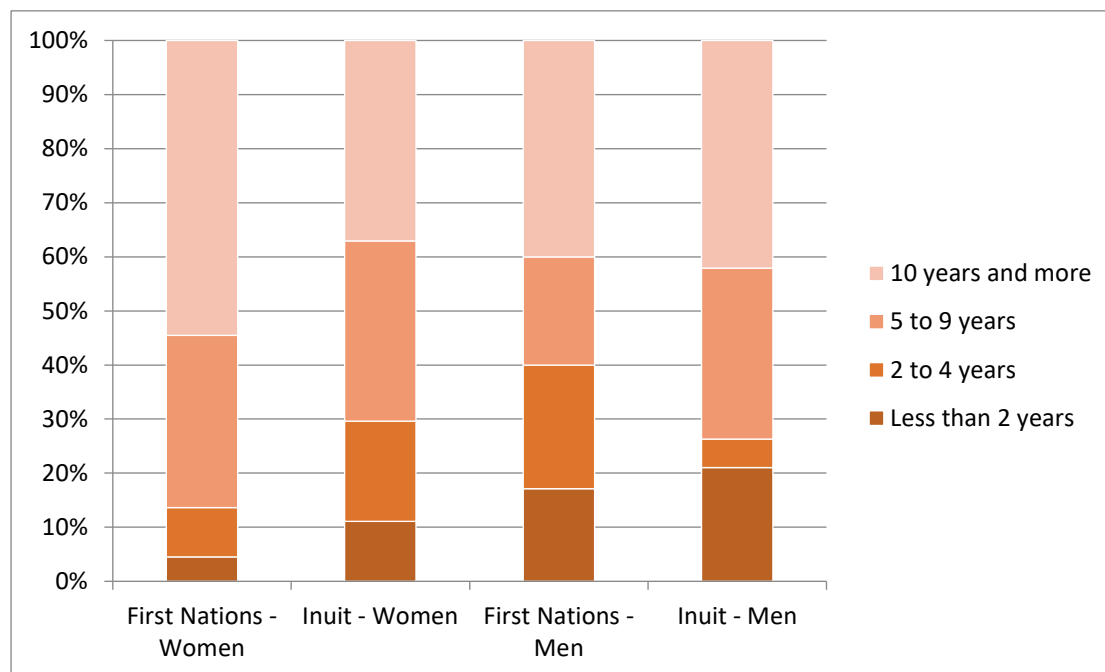
		First Nations – Women (N=27)	First Nations - Men (N=43)	Inuit - Women (N=30)	Inuit - Men (N=19)
Monthly income	Less than \$500	17%	8%	27%	18%
	Between \$500 and \$750	52%	72%	50%	53%
	Between \$750 and \$1000	22%	8%	8%	12%
	More than \$1000	8%	13%	16%	18%
Income sources	Welfare or disability insurance	96%	95%	52%	88%
	Panhandling	31%	38%	21%	70%
	Employment	7%	27%	24%	10%
	Employment insurance	8%	10%	4%	9%
	Old age pension	0%	9%	8%	0%

Duration of residence in Montreal

Figure 1 represents the distribution of respondents based on their duration of residence in Montreal. A large number of respondents reported having lived in Montreal for several years. This is particularly true of First Nations women : about 55% of them had been living in Montreal for 10 years or more, and more than 85%

had been living here for 5 years or more. A substantial proportion of all groups – at least 60%, in the case of Inuit men – had been living in Montreal for 5 or more years.

Figure 1 - Duration of residence in Montreal



Types of places where respondents spent the night

In general, First Nations women and men were more likely to have used the emergency shelter network. The vast majority of First Nations men and women used a shelter at least once in the last 6 months (84% and 75% respectively). These proportions were lower among Inuit (67% and 58% respectively).

Figures 2 and 3 describe the types of places in which respondents from each group had spent at least one night during the last 6 months. Overall, Inuit women seemed to have slept in fewer different types of places than First Nations women, or than men in general. The types of places they most often mentioned were shelters, couch-surfing and their own apartment.

Figure 2 – Types of places where women spent the night

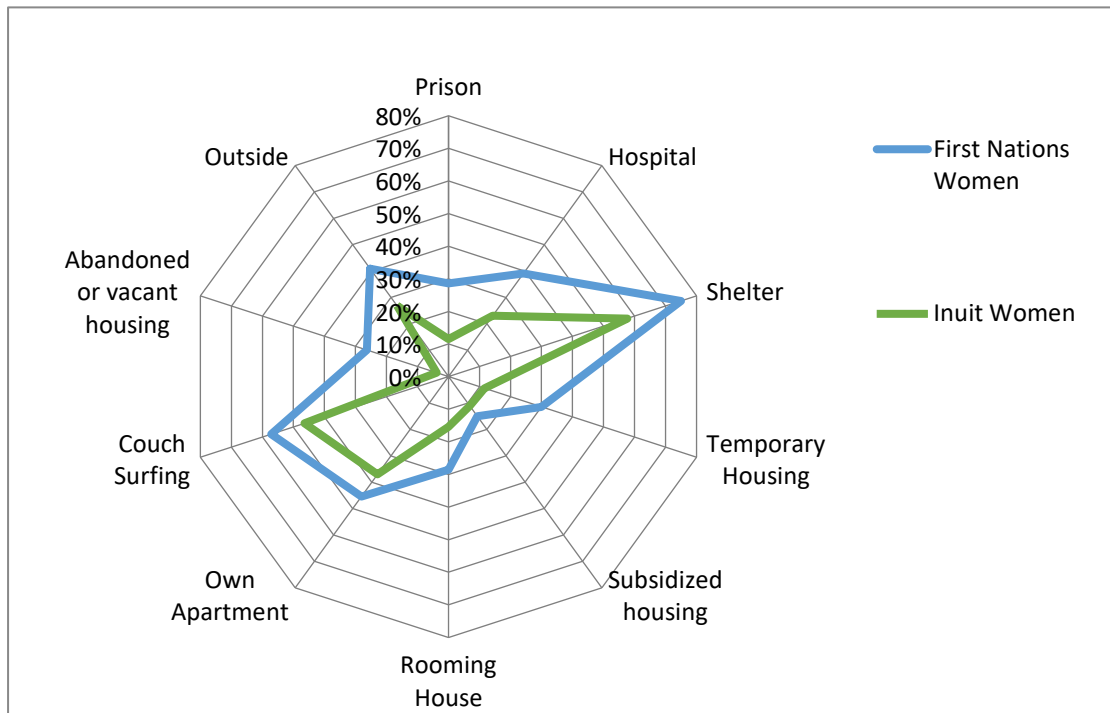
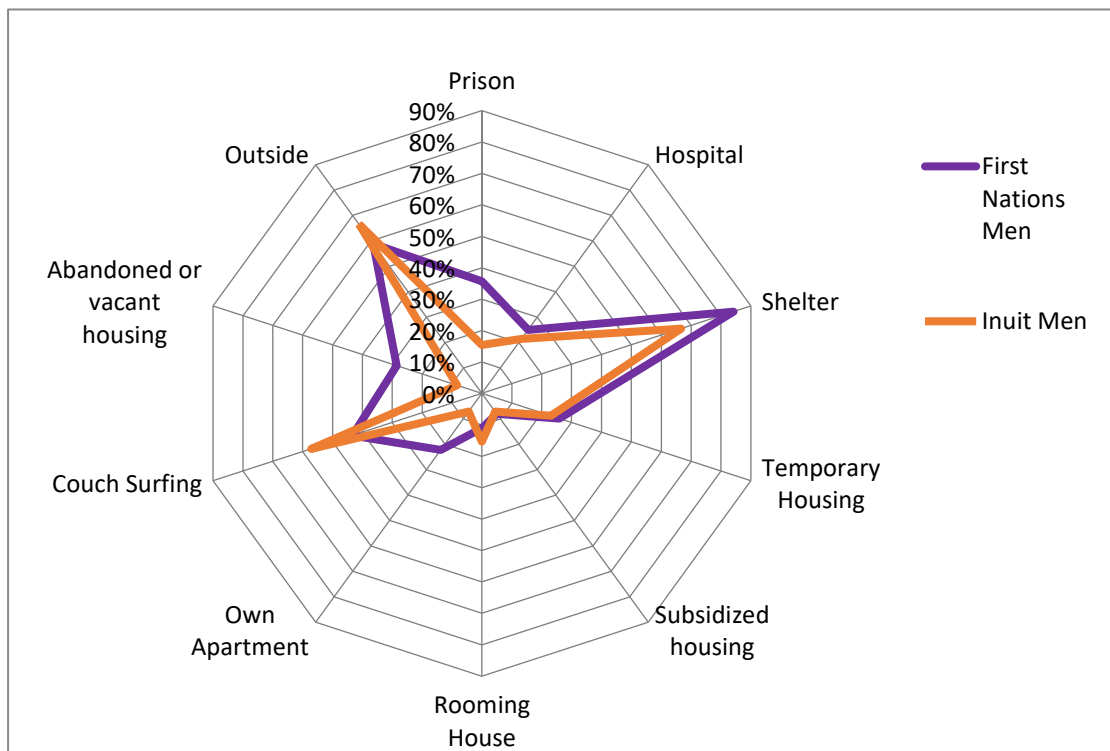


Figure 3 – Types of places where men spent the night



Over half of male respondents (67% among Inuit and 59% among First Nations) reported having slept outside at least once in the last 6 months. These percentages were lower, but still significant, for women: 27% and 41%, respectively.

About half of the respondents declared having spent at least one night couch-surfing. For both First Nations women and Inuit men, the proportion reached 57%, while it was somewhat lower for First Nations men and for Inuit women (43% and 46%).

About half of respondents reported having spent one night or more couch-surfing in the past 6 months.

More than two-thirds of respondents who lived in their own home on a regular basis said they were living with at least one other person, not counting people staying with them temporarily. About half of respondents reported that at least one person was staying with them temporarily at the time of data collection.

Respondents who were stably housed at the time of data collection were less frequently hospitalized (14%) than those who were not (31%). A similar association emerged for incarcerations: only 10% of participants in a stable housing situation reported having been incarcerated for at least one night, compared to 34% for those who were not stably housed.

Housing preferences

When asked what type of accommodation they would ideally want, a majority of respondents chose the option "Your own apartment or house with a rent subsidy". About 60% of Inuit respondents (both sexes combined) and First Nations women indicated they would like to live in this type of housing, compared to 44% of First Nations men.

The second most frequently selected type of housing was "Permanent housing in a building reserved for Inuit or First Nations people, with culturally sensitive supports". (As shown in the full report, the third most frequently chosen option was

“Subsidized housing”, which about 20% to 40% of respondents selected. Other housing options – temporary housing, rooming houses, Aboriginal shelters and non-Aboriginal shelters – were selected much less often.)

Figure 4 shows how preferences were distributed between the top two options, comparing percentages who selected one of the two options only, or who selected both. (The minority who did not select any of these options are not included here.) The difference in preferences between these two options was

particularly pronounced among women, especially Inuit women: while 62% of those who had chosen one of these options indicated they would like to live in their own subsidized apartment, only 28% expressed a desire to live in Aboriginal congregate housing.

Furthermore, results shown in the full report indicate that the preference for Aboriginal congregate housing was stronger among respondents 50 – 64 years old (all groups combined): it was the exclusive choice of 35% of respondents, whereas fewer than 10% chose having their own apartment or house with a subsidy exclusively.

Service needs

Respondents were asked if they had access to different services, and whether they wanted to access these services. Figure 5 indicates how frequently respondents from each group expressed a desire for different types of services.

We asked respondents the type of accommodation they would prefer. The two most frequent choices were “Your own apartment or house with a rent subsidy” and “Permanent housing in an Aboriginal building with culturally appropriate supports”. Women, especially Inuit women, expressed a strong preference for the former.

Figure 4 - Housing Preferences, focusing on 2 main options

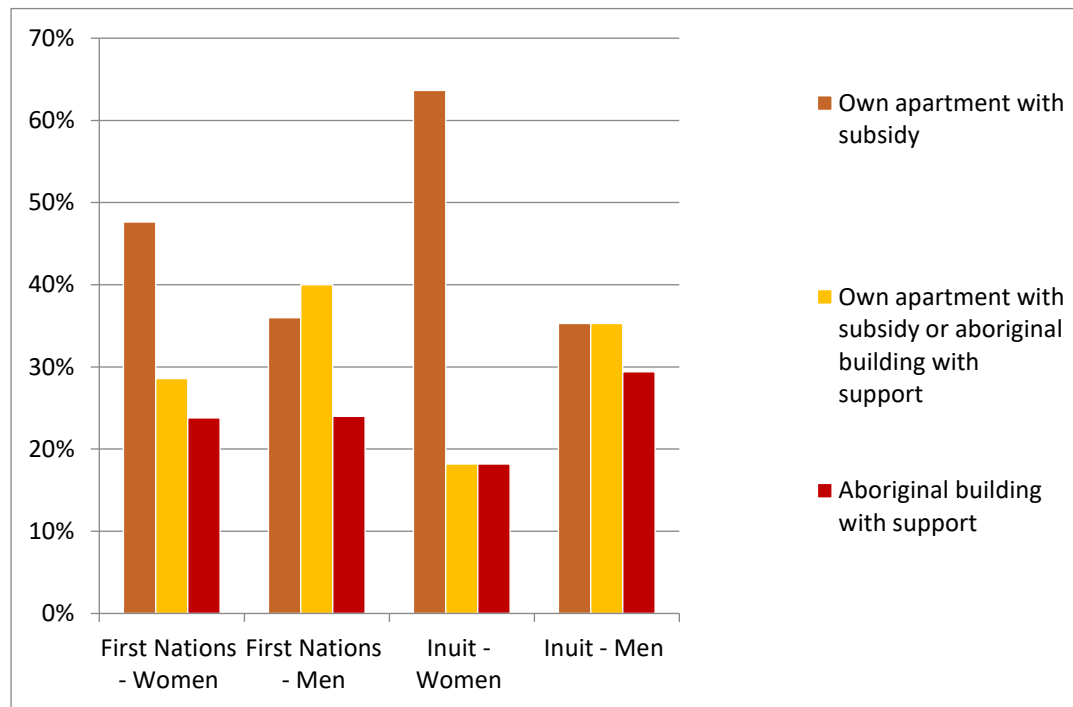
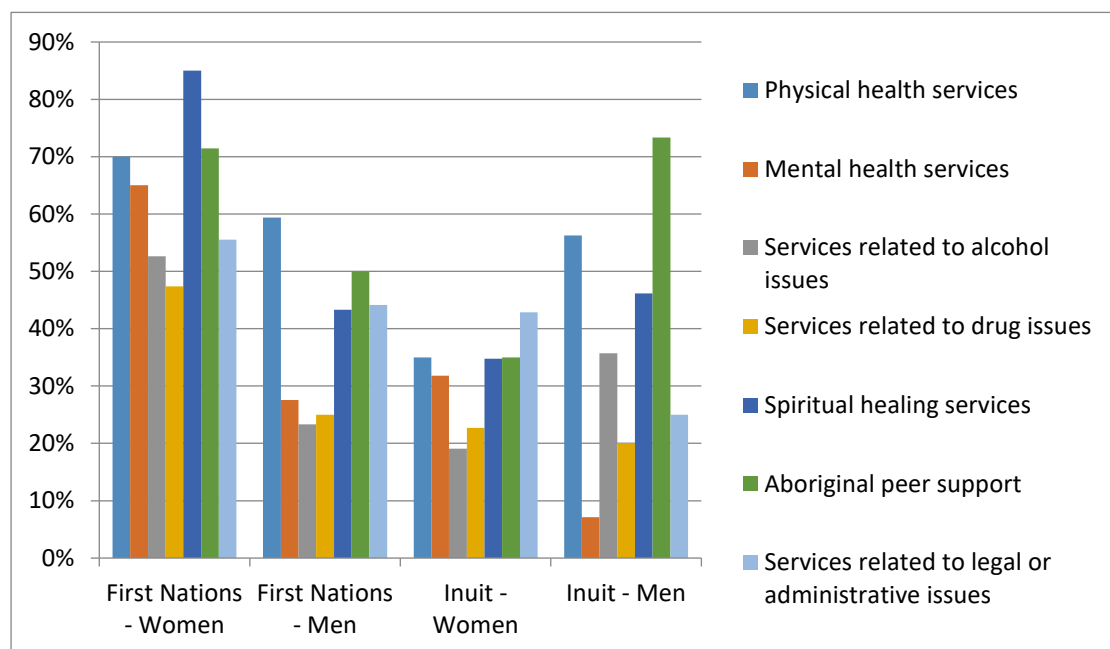


Figure 5 - Desired Services



Three results concerning Indigenous-specific services merit highlighting:

- Substantial minorities of respondents expressed a desire for community or cultural spaces suitable for Inuit or First Nations people: from 23% for Inuit men to 36% of First Nations women (see full report).
- Inuit men (73%) and First Nations women (71%), in particular, expressed a desire for Aboriginal peer support services
- For 3 of the groups, between 35% and 46% of respondents reported wanting access to spiritual healing services, but this proportion reached 85% for First Nations women.

Desire to return to the community of origin

The majority of respondents from 3 of the groups answered “Not really” or “Not at all” when asked if they wanted to return to their Aboriginal community: 79% of First Nations women, 73% of First Nations men, and 72% of Inuit women. Inuit men, in contrast, were more likely to report wanting to return to their community: 45% “would like” or “would very much like” to return live in their home community, and only 39% answered “not really” or “not at all”.

CONCLUSIONS

In all identified groups, a significant proportion of individuals were in precarious residential situations, did not work in paid jobs and reported low incomes. These unfortunate realities persisted even though about half of the respondents had been in Montreal for five years or more.

Women, whether First Nations or Inuit, tended to be younger and poorer. They were more likely to live in their own home, and a smaller proportion reported having spent one or more nights in the last 6 months in an emergency shelter.

First Nations people appear to be more socially integrated in many ways than Inuit, even though their dates of arrival in Montreal, for both genders, are comparable. Their incomes are higher because they receive more social assistance income, but they are not more likely to have employment income. They are more likely to have spent at least one night in their own apartment or in a rooming house during the last 6 months. If we do not see a difference between First Nations and Inuit men as to the proportion who currently live in their own home, First Nations women are almost twice as likely to be in this situation as Inuit men and women. On the other hand, First Nations people, both men and women, are more likely to report having spent a night in a shelter or in prison during the last six months.

Overall, the Inuit we interviewed, isolated in part by language, seem more likely to form a separate community within Montreal, less connected to the public service



Overall, the Inuit we interviewed, isolated in part by language, seem more likely to form a separate community within Montreal, less connected to the public service network, and less attracted by this network, than First Nations people.

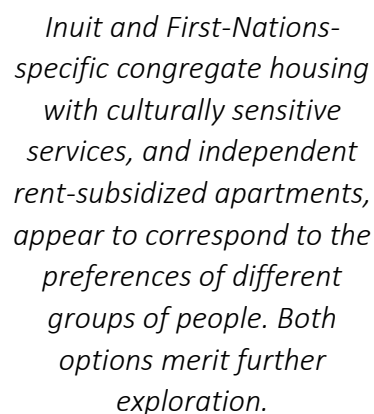
network, and less attracted by this network, than First Nations people. It is also a more vulnerable community, poorer, and less likely to live in their own home.



Two housing options emerged as particularly attractive: having one's own apartment or house with a rent subsidy, or living in an Aboriginal building with culturally appropriate services. Some staff who helped complete the questionnaire reported that

respondents did not necessarily see the distinction between their own rented apartment or house and subsidized housing. It is therefore necessary to interpret the distinctions reported between these categories with some caution. In addition, the option of having one's own apartment or house with rent subsidy was

presented without reference to the support of a case manager who would be associated with it, as would be the case in a “SRA” housing program (*Stabilité résidentielle avec accompagnement*), or Housing First. Nevertheless, these results suggest that the SRA approach could correspond to the preferences of many people. The experiences of SRA programs for Indigenous people already present in Montreal, at Chez Doris and The Open Door, suggest that such programs can often meet the needs of both Inuit and members of First Nations.



Inuit and First-Nations-specific congregate housing with culturally sensitive services, and independent rent-subsidized apartments, appear to correspond to the preferences of different groups of people. Both options merit further exploration.

The results also indicate that congregate housing designed for Aboriginal people, with culturally sensitive services, also merits exploration. Our results suggest that this may be of particular interest to Inuit men, and to adults 50 years and older in general. Considering the cultural differences between Inuit and First Nations, residential projects adapted to each of these groups also deserve to be explored.

Finally, we must make note of some limitations of this study. First, the small number of respondents makes the percentages reported subject to a certain margin of error. Second, we do not know to what extent the First Nations and Inuit women and men that we interviewed are representative of all users of the resources who collaborated with this study.

Nevertheless, the results suggest the need to carry out pilot projects to test the various service and housing options highlighted here. Only then will it be possible to conclude more definitively what programs and types of housing will best meet the needs and preferences of Inuit and First Nations men and women in Montreal.