



Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

Background Paper 1

Findings from consultations



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1. Interviews and Consultations were designed to identify issues and options. Steering committee agreed on interview questions. Focus group discussions customised to cohorts and locations.

Interview outline

- What is the value proposition of an Aboriginal Housing sector?
- How should an Aboriginal housing and homelessness framework intersect with Aboriginal policy frameworks?
- What role should government play?
- Is the regulatory environment culturally appropriate for both Aboriginal and mainstream housing providers? If not, what needs to be changed?
- What are the opportunities that come from living on country? Can housing contribute to these opportunities and does land justice provide housing opportunities?
- What is your assessment of the capacity of the Aboriginal housing sector?
- What does a culturally safe mainstream housing sector look like?
- Is the data adequate, are there additional data sets needed?

Focus groups - consultation was customised to locations and cohorts and concentrated on housing issues, housing supply and opportunities.

Consultations

- Aboriginal Housing sector forum ie co-ops providing housing
- VACCA
- VACSAL
- Council to Homeless Persons
- Aboriginal Victoria
- Department Premier and Cabinet- Aboriginal policy
- DHHS – Social Housing; Aboriginal Outcomes
- CHIAVic
- CHIA NSW – CEO and Aboriginal Specialist
- VALS
- Public Tenants Union
- Elders group- Shepparton
- Young people – KGI
- AHV More than a landlord clients
- Windamara community meeting
- CEO - Federation of Traditional Owners – separate discussions to occur



2. Value Proposition of an Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness sector

- Advances Aboriginal **self determination** – designed for and delivered by Aboriginal people.
- **Connects** with and understands:
 - Cultural needs, importance of housing and connection to land and culture.
 - Impact of colonialism, dispossession and inter-generational trauma.
 - Community, family and kinship networks.
- An Aboriginal led **integrated and holistic** approach to housing and related health, well-being and safety needs. Housing is a platform for other services and outcomes that break the cycle of disadvantage.
- **Builds capacity** of ACCOs, upskills, creates critical mass.
- **Generates economic opportunities** for organisations, communities and people; enables development of other local enterprises associated with land and culture; commercial opportunities.
 - Builds the capability to manage wealth not poverty
- Influences **housing design** and infrastructure.
 - What does a home look like to you?
- Base for effective **advocacy** – organisations, community, individuals.
- Builds the **evidence** base.
- Promotes **right to land use** on and off country including native title, land quotas, inclusionary zoning.



3. **Minimum Expectation** is that an Aboriginal housing and homelessness framework:

- ▶ Integrates housing and homelessness responses.
- ▶ Is embedded in broader policy frameworks-
 - ▶ Close the Gap
 - ▶ VAAF
 - ▶ Korin Korin Balit Djak
- ▶ Builds on strengths of mainstream policies systems and processes.
- ▶ Is people centred and provides holistic, case managed, wrap around services.
- ▶ Builds cultural strength.
- ▶ Addresses the need for a culturally appropriate mainstream.



4. Some cohorts have special needs

- ▶ Children in care
 - ▶ Kinship care creates need for extended housing, service support, consideration of rental arrangements when household numbers increase, provision for family members with criminal convictions who may need to leave the household if there is a child under a protection order.
 - ▶ Leaving care – immaturity of 18 year olds and their need for ongoing emotional support, education and training. Shortage of housing for 18-21 year olds where there may be funding support but few housing options.
 - ▶ Housing stress can precipitate child protection interventions and be a barrier to reunification.
- ▶ Single mothers who are homeless.
- ▶ Extended families –
 - ▶ Overcrowding.
 - ▶ Impact when required to take in family members affected by substance abuse and related complex and challenging behaviours.
- ▶ Family violence victims and perpetrators have housing needs; lack of alternative housing can stop women leaving violent relationships. Focus on family violence has helped.
- ▶ Those in contact with the justice system – unstable housing can precipitate offending, housing is often a condition of bail, parole, corrections orders. Youth justice programs need as a priority to link with housing.
- ▶ Older people
 - ▶ Aboriginal people age earlier, acute and chronic conditions hit earlier and often need support earlier to live independently.
 - ▶ Aboriginal families are more likely to care for elders at home.
 - ▶ Supported care is needed that is culturally appropriate and options for support to live on country.
- ▶ Disability and NDIS –Very high area of need, better understanding and advocacy required.
- ▶ The lack of mainstream and specialist alcohol and other drug services - is having a very big impact on sustainable housing tenure.
- ▶ Aboriginal households are generally more open and flexible - they are more likely to care for elders, be kinship carers and cater for large extended and mobile families.
- ▶ *Housing and tenancy policies should be designed to support and enable Aboriginal approaches to caring for family.*



5. The mainstream housing and homelessness systems need reform

- ▶ Disjuncture between general housing and homelessness responses
 - ▶ Aboriginal homelessness sector is not systems based and needs particular attention (see later)
- ▶ Victorian Housing Register (common statewide waiting list)
 - ▶ shows signs of improving housing options for homeless Aboriginal people;
 - ▶ in NSW the common housing register highlighted Aboriginal applicants and improved take up;
 - ▶ culling of the waiting list must be sensitive to Aboriginal culture and lifestyles, otherwise people drop off or are pushed to the back of the waiting list.
- ▶ Need an Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector **and** a culturally sensitive mainstream -
 - ▶ How does mainstream work with Aboriginal providers?
 - ▶ What models work?
 - ▶ Systems need to value diversity and differentiate services for individual and cohort needs.
- ▶ Mainstream is not culturally competent.
 - ▶ Currently no requirement for mainstream housing providers and homelessness workers to demonstrate cultural competence, nor any validation.
 - ▶ An inclusion framework could improve cultural sensitivity of mainstream.
 - ▶ Inclusion of Aboriginal people on mainstream governance structures would strengthen outcomes.



5. (continued) The mainstream housing and homelessness systems need reform

- ▶ Registration and housing guidelines and procedures are generally not responsive to Aboriginal needs.
 - ▶ The regulatory environment should require all providers to demonstrate that they are culturally appropriate.
 - ▶ System wide special needs provisions should be designed and developed to optimise housing outcomes for Aboriginal people including subsidies or incentives and these should translate through to individual providers.
 - ▶ The regulatory system is not suitable for smaller Aboriginal housing providers creating a flow on impact on funding and other opportunities.
 - ▶ For Aboriginal people the aim of regulation should be safe, affordable, long term housing solutions .
- ▶ Open Accountability is needed including
 - ▶ Accountability back to the Aboriginal community
 - ▶ For designated Aboriginal funds that go to mainstream (*comment – all providers?*).
 - ▶ Performance and outcomes.
 - ▶ Idea of **Culturally acceptable service charters**.
- ▶ Data and evidence
 - ▶ More specificity in Housing Registrar public performance reporting.
 - ▶ Data sets that allow government and community to know how the system, sectors and providers perform.
 - ▶ Overall poor data – ROGs, DHHS – housing data, ABS. Inhibits identification of need, development of funding bids, business cases etc.
 - ▶ ACCOs could be resourced to own, use and analyse data.
 - ▶ Need state wide, regional, LGA and provider data that identify numbers, forms of homelessness, services.
 - ▶ Idea of an **Aboriginal housing heat map**.



6. Role of government should be to:

- Ensure funding goes to providers who offer person centred services and are outcomes focussed.
- Prioritise self determination.
- Specify Aboriginal needs in contractual obligations and monitor accordingly.
- Define industry standards, guiding principles and accountabilities.
- Set expectations and accountabilities for embedding cultural competence; invest in cultural competence across the housing and homelessness sector.
- Monitor and report on Aboriginal housing and homelessness outcomes.
- Fund leading edge Aboriginal initiatives; carve off social housing funding.
- Take a systems based approach to housing and homelessness.



7. Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector

a. Access and information:

- ▶ Not knowing where to start – common theme across homelessness, social housing, private rental and private ownership.
 - ▶ Need entry points, eg common websites, information packs, skilled and knowledgeable Aboriginal organisations.
- ▶ Rights need to be clearly communicated including tenancy rights.
- ▶ Practical guides outlining steps to accessing housing and setting up a household eg power, communications, maintenance and care.
 - ▶ 24 hour telephone help line.
- ▶ Financial support to get started.
- ▶ Mainstream that understands Aboriginal culture and needs.



7. Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector

b. Aboriginal homelessness needs particular attention

- Aboriginal homelessness has its own characteristics; nature of it has changed over last 30 years. Factors such as drugs and FV create risks when taking in kin. Middle aged people often overlooked.
- Private rental market throws up barriers including racism, lack of rental history, big families, pets.
- Service responses are patchy and unintegrated.
- Homelessness providers work together strongly but there is no SYSTEM.
- Access points are ill defined, front line services don't work.
 - Aboriginal agencies have the knowledge, understanding and range of services to become an entry and referral point.
- Once in transitional housing, pathways to permanent housing are reasonably good in some areas. Other providers say people get stuck in transitional housing (which is confirmed in national data collections).
- Pathways out of homelessness are weak.
- Other supports such as mental health and D&A do not intersect with homelessness services.
- **Severe lack of emergency accommodation.**
- Open Door Services example of a service provider that identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and refers them to Aboriginal services.
- ATAR workers are critical.
- VISHN provides collegiate support.
- Lack of advocacy.
- *Aboriginal people have been homeless 'without their land' for over 230 years*



7. Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector

c. Housing supply

- Transitional housing shortage exacerbated by closure of Aboriginal hostels.
 - Develop or purchase facilities for emergency and transitional housing?
- Shortage of social housing stock particularly for:
 - Single and young parents including young fathers
 - Those exiting care and correctional facilities.
- In some locations there is shortage of housing across the market which impacts on attraction and retention of workers in turn limiting other developments. eg Heywood/Budj Bim.
- Appropriate stock- Aboriginal providers can develop housing stock that reflects needs and intrinsic requirements of an Aboriginal household. In turn significant social and economic benefits.
- Increase supply through:
 - Joint housing development ventures with mainstream social and private providers
 - Inclusionary zoning – up front agreements with developers for a proportion of stock for affordable Aboriginal housing.
 - Government agreement to designate a proportion of Aboriginal housing when selling vacant land to developers etc.
 - Increase in independent living stock, which requires access to and/or purchase of vacant land, access to capital or individual financing.
 - Recognising that in some regional areas local job opportunities and relative housing affordability make private ownership more feasible.
- House v home – change Aboriginal community mindset about home ownership and/or long term tenancy and what it means.
- Recognise that most Aboriginal organisations lack the scale to become housing developers.



7. Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector

d. Aboriginal housing provider viability

- AHV has critical mass and a strong skills base. Co-ops are of varying size with relatively small portfolios.
- Loss of NPARIH funds has removed source of funds for renewals.
- Smaller providers would find it difficult to meet Housing Registration standards even at the Housing Provider level. NSW has a third tier for these groups.
- Tenancy management is expensive particularly with small portfolios and low rental income.
- DHHS wants us to articulate the value of an Aboriginal housing provider sector and advise on how to deal with the co-ops so they are financially viable.
- How can the sector own, manage and grow stock?
- If co-ops turnover stock through a program of community members purchasing stock, how do they maintain stock levels? Generally in regional areas sale of two existing houses translates into one replacement house.
- Upskilling and career paths needed for housing staff based on professionalization and recognition of skills.



7. Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector

e. Is an Industry peak body needed?

An Aboriginal housing industry peak could provide:

- Advocacy and a voice.
- Integrated approach to housing and homelessness?
- Sector wide support eg training, internal policy and administrative tools, advice line, day to day advice.
- Example: CHIANSW has been funded by NSW AHO to provide Aboriginal sector peak body services.
 - CHIAVIC willing to do the same. CHIAVIC could also lead improvement of mainstream provider cultural capacity in conjunction with AHV, ACCOs.
 - Explore partnerships and other models?



8. Aboriginal housing and homelessness - people and communities

a. Sustaining tenancies and a voice for tenants

- It costs money to successfully house disadvantaged people and a rent model alone is insufficient. AHURI estimates that sustaining tenancies saves governments about \$28,000 per household per annum.
- More support with arrears recognising that -
 - Levels of disadvantage, community relationships and family crises impact on income.
 - Rent affordability is affected by increasing prices, utilities and living expenses.
 - Practical difficulty in going from Centrepay to paying rent manually.
- Introduction to tenancy and home ownership very important. What are the necessary life skills?
- Aboriginal housing officers and Aboriginal landlords can improve rent collections and sustain tenancies through cultural and community links and knowledge.
- Voice for tenants. Aboriginal tenants union? Mirror Public Tenants Union?
- Tenant policies and allocations must be clear, consistent and publicly available. Thought needs to be given to handling temporary absences in a culturally appropriate way and managing absences due to incarceration, family violence debt waivers, disability modifications, ensuring formal orders for kinship care so government payments occur. Develop model Aboriginal tenancy policies.
- Tenant support for VCAT appearances - A VCAT Koorie list?
- Change in role of housing officers – proactive and a life coach.
- AHV's More than a Landlord program highly regarded. Housing is a basis for life planning. Life changing experience for some.



8. Aboriginal housing and homelessness - people and communities

b. Home ownership and private rental

Home ownership barriers

- Lack of intergenerational home ownership, bank of mum and dad does not exist, lack of confidence.
- Even with IBA funding community generally can't raise the deposit nor meet repayments.
 - Deposit and repayments require full time ongoing employment
 - Many Aboriginal people employed in short term positions driven by fixed term Government funding contracts.
- Inexperience, lack of awareness and lack of confidence are a barrier to getting started.
- Need to change community mindset on home ownership.

BUT opportunities in some locations where there are jobs and houses are more affordable. Local solutions are needed.

Private rental

- Priced out of the market. Need help with raising money for bond.
- Certain amount of racism.
- Need to change perceptions –
 - Aboriginal people ARE good tenants.
 - Build confidence amongst Aboriginal people.
 - *Why do some real estate agencies work well with Aboriginal people? Build on the positives.*

Lower levels of home ownership and private rental create heavy reliance on social housing.



9. Native title and access to crown land

Note separate consultations will occur with the Federation of Traditional Owners

- Housing on country needs facilitating, may require planning system changes, ILUAs. US and Canada have examples of special forms of title for housing on treaty land.
- Building wealth through share of tax payments related to traditional owner land.
- Living on country provides spiritual well being and builds protective factors. Spaces for healing, ceremony and connection.
- Tension in managing development on traditional land.
- Government can keep people on country through infrastructure, growth and opportunities.
- Designated spaces for elders who want to come home. Negotiate through public and community housing and Aboriginal Housing organisations.
- Increasing numbers of young people want to work on country and bring up their families there.
- Treaty representatives will need to advocate for housing.



10. It matters!

- Some comments..

- *A home gives safety and happiness, especially for the kids.*
- *Stable housing meant safety for himself and the kids. Without it he would have had to put his kids in foster care. Opened up a whole new world.*
- *I moved around a lot between Mum and Dad's house, always renting. Only recently has there been stability with my living arrangement.*
- *From ages 3-9, I had moved across 3 States, experienced homelessness multiple times. From the age of 16 I've moved about 9 times with my siblings.*
- *I have only lived in 2 houses around the corner from each other.*
- *We have always lived in community housing, have been homeless and forced to live with other family members.*
- *We have always rented. I moved every year until I was 16.*
- *Always rented – moved around all the time.*
- *This is the first time I have been able to celebrate Christmas with my kids in my own safe home.*



10. (continued) Comment from a service provider

A sector where all staff and all organisations take responsibility and work together to provide culturally responsive and safe housing services.

This means individuals and organisations collectively recognise the diversity of Aboriginal people and their lived experiences; and where there is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity.

For the mainstream housing sector to become culturally safe, the sector must commit to redesigning its policies, practices and services to reduce racism and discrimination while also removing barriers to optimal housing outcomes.

This would also include Aboriginal people in governance structures, decision making and choice.