

# ABC NEWS

## Aboriginal Victorians closer to self-determination as Department of Housing hands over properties

By Joanna Crothers

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PHOTO: Sonya Singh says her two nieces love their cubby house. (ABC News: Joanna Crothers)

**Aboriginal people in Victoria are one step closer to self-determination, after the State Government transferred 470 properties from the Department of Housing into the hands of Aboriginal Housing Victoria.**

MAP: Melbourne 3000

The move means Aboriginal Housing Victoria will have full financial control over the houses, and be responsible for the maintenance of the properties.

Minister for Housing Martin Foley said Aboriginal people in the state had been calling for self-determination for years.

"A lynch pin for that is to make sure that they've got accessible, appropriate managed housing and the elders of that community have been calling for that for many years," he said.

Foster parent Sonya Singh has recently moved into one of Aboriginal Housing Victoria's properties in Boronia, in Melbourne's east.

Before that, she had been living in emergency accommodation in Mt Waverley, looking after her two nieces to whom she fosters.

"It wasn't very secure, you didn't know when you had to move out. So we were you know kind of on edge all the time there," she said.

"The girls were worrying all the time. But then when this place came up it was like a sigh of relief. We're happy here."

She said dealing with Aboriginal people instead of the Housing Department made her feel more comfortable, and she believes maintenance issues are sorted out more quickly.



PHOTO: Sonya Singh's family feels safe and secure in their new home. (ABC News: Joanna Crothers)

## Giving families their own 'little castle'

Across regional and suburban Victoria, 1,448 properties are being transferred from the Department of Housing in stages.

Ms Singh said prior to settling into the Boronia house, the family was living in cramped conditions.

"It's hard to find a house big enough for all the kids. So we were sharing with people. Which makes it difficult," she said.

She said her favourite thing to do was sit out the back around the fire pit and toast marshmallows with the girls.

"We've got a cubby house, you know the trampoline. We've got a little fire pit, and we spend a lot of time out there," she said.

"It was up and down there for a little while, but now we're secure."

Aboriginal Housing CEO Darren Smith said the transfer of properties was a strong symbolic gesture.

"The housing needs of Aboriginal people aren't just about providing a safety net for the Aboriginal community," he said.

"It should be a part of how the Aboriginal community can actually move forward and improve their circumstances.

"There's a lot of evidence that self-determination delivers results for Aboriginal people. That it's actually the best way to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people."

Ms Singh said being secure in the property had certainly improved her life.

"I feel really comfortable here, it's my little castle."



PHOTO: Aboriginal Housing Victoria has been able to buy more properties like Sonya's. (ABC News: Joanna Crothers)

## Victoria's Aboriginal population on the rise

Aboriginal Housing Victoria's ownership of the properties will be equal to about \$400 million once the transfer is complete.

"It allows us the ability to actually think into the future, [in] 10, 20 and 30 years, about what the housing needs are for the Victorian Aboriginal community. And what we are going to do to meet those needs," Mr Smith said.

As part of the title transfer the organisation has become a housing association and could apply for capital grants from the Government.

"As a result of that, we've been able to buy 14 new properties," Mr Smith said.

He said the organisation now had a 15 year asset management plan.

"Over the last few years we've started our own building program, we've got a number of properties under construction and we have nine properties that are in town planning," he said.

"We're hoping to start building those properties this year."

But Mr Smith said with more than 1,000 people on the waiting list, growth would be incremental.

"The Aboriginal population in Victoria is young and it's growing rapidly. It's growing faster than what the population is in the broader community. The housing need is higher than what we can meet," he said.

**Topics:** housing, government-and-politics, state-parliament, aboriginal, indigenous-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander, community-and-society, melbourne-3000, vic, boronia-3155