



ABORIGINAL HOUSING VICTORIA

06 November 2023

National Housing and Homelessness Plan
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Sent via e-mail: HousingandHomelessnessPlan@dss.gov.au

Dear National Housing and Homelessness Plan Team

We welcome the opportunity to put forward a submission in response to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan being developed by the Department of Social Services on behalf of The Hon. Julie Collins MP.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) is the largest Aboriginal tier one registered housing provider nation-wide, with over 1,700 properties housing 4,500 Aboriginal Victorians.

AHV is recognised as the policy lead and auspicing body for the Aboriginal¹ Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF), which comprises 38 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal Trusts who are either delivering housing and homelessness services in Victoria or who are interested in becoming registered housing providers. This submission is made on behalf of the AHHF and its 38 members.

In response to the importance of safe, secure, and long-term housing and the ongoing disadvantage that so many Aboriginal people experience in relation to housing and homelessness, Aboriginal communities across the nation have worked tirelessly to advocate for improved housing outcomes. The AHHF welcome the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan and commends the Federal Government for taking the initiative to address this critical issue. However, given the challenges faced by Aboriginal communities in relation to housing and homelessness are largely unique, a dedicated and specific approach to overcoming these challenges is required. In recognition of this, we are calling for the development of an aligned, Aboriginal National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

¹ Throughout this document the term “Aboriginal” is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



ABORIGINAL HOUSING VICTORIA

In 2019 the AHHF developed [*Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person has a Home*](#), the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (the 'Framework'). The Framework was developed and implemented *by* community, *for* community. This is its strength. The Victorian Government have participated in the process, provided guidance and direction, but have importantly recognised the power of a community-led response in its development. We encourage the Federal Government to utilise *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* as a blueprint for how a National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework can be developed and how we can advance the objective of obtaining safe, secure and affordable housing for all Aboriginal people.

We look forward to working with the Federal Government in advancing this important reform.

Yours sincerely

Darren Smith
Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Housing Victoria
and
Chair, Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

Enclosed:

- National Housing and Homelessness Plan submission
 - Attachment A – Aboriginal Justice Caucus – Information for Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission – National Housing and Homelessness Plan
 - Attachment B - Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission 11 January 2023
 - Attachment C – Draft: Aboriginal Community Housing Capacity Building Plan Outline

MANA-NA WOORN-TYEEN MAAR-TAKOORT: EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum
National Housing and Homelessness Plan - Submission
September 2023

1. Required Questions

1. I have read and agree to the privacy notice (required)

Yes

2. The Government may choose to publish submissions. As such, please specify whether you would like your submission to be published on the department's website and if you would like your input to be anonymous: (required)

I consent to the publication of my feedback with my name or, if applicable, my organisation

3. Are you responding as an individual or as a representative of an organisation? (required)

I'm representing an organisation.

4. If you are answering on behalf of an organisation, which organisation are you representing and how can we contact you about your submission?

Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

5. Contact person for this submission

Lisa Briggs, Lead Secretariat – Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

Email address: lisa.briggs@ahvic.org.au

6. What state or territory does your organisation operate in? Please select all that apply.

Victoria (VIC)

7. Which aspect/s of housing and homelessness does your organisation work within? Please select all that apply.

- Housing and/or Homelessness Services
- Peaks/representative bodies
- Property Management (social housing)
- Construction

8. Does your organisation directly support any of the following population groups that may be more vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness? Please select all that apply.

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- Aboriginal People experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion.

2. Who we are –Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF)

The Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF) in Victoria is unique in Australia. It's where 38 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) Traditional Owner Groups (TOs) who provide, or have an interest in, housing and homelessness services, come together on a regular basis

to progress the strategic work of the [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person has a home](#) the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (the 'Framework').

The Framework has been designed with the aim of meeting the diverse needs of the Victorian Aboriginal community. It has been developed *by* the community *for* the community. It is self-determination in action, which is its strength. Government partners have participated in the process, provided guidance and direction, but have recognised the power that has come from a community led response.

The Framework shows what's possible when solutions to Aboriginal homelessness and housing exclusion are designed, developed, and implemented *by* community *for* community, in partnership with government.

In no other portfolio is the moral imperative to restore rights more compelling for First Australians than in housing. Despite the hardships and injustice endured, Aboriginal people have more than survived, we are growing rapidly as a population.

3. Introduction

The (Victorian) Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF) welcomes this opportunity to provide our recommendations on the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

We believe access to safe, affordable housing is *central* to closing the gap and therefore we must take action now.

The contemporary housing experiences of Aboriginal¹ people cannot be decoupled from the historical experience of Aboriginal dispossession and dislocation. Deprived of our land, excluded from the fruits of the economy and our traditional authority, lore and customs undermined, Aboriginal people have been homeless in our own land for the past two centuries.

Our sustained economic exclusion has left a lasting legacy of housing insecurity and homelessness. This legacy is starkly obvious in the rates in which Aboriginal people experience homelessness, housing exclusion, incarceration, family violence and in the number of Aboriginal children in Child Protection services. Time and time again at the epicentre of these rates is the fundamental absence of safe, affordable housing.

There is clear evidence demonstrating that the human cost of homelessness and housing exclusion is immense and profound for Aboriginal communities.

Firstly, the ongoing Australian housing crisis disrupts, damages, and shortens Aboriginal people's lives. Secondly, without a home, our people struggle to remain in employment, their health and mental health suffers, and children's participation in education is compromised. Thirdly, research shows that vulnerable families in housing crisis are more likely to come into contact with the Child Protection system. Finally, we know that contact with the justice system and recidivism rates increase exponentially when people are not stably housed.

Aside from the impact on individuals and families, research by Swinburne University shows that the social and economic costs of Australia's underinvestment in social housing to the community, amount to \$676.5 million per annum currently, rising to \$1,286 million in 2036. These costs are the consequence of having to respond to increasing rates of homelessness, mental health distress, domestic violence, alcohol/substance abuse and lower community wellbeing.

¹ Throughout this document the term "Aboriginal" is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Having a home is as vital as safe roads, hospitals, and schools. But, if you are Aboriginal, you are ten times more likely to experience homelessness, as compared to any other population group in Australia. This should be a national source of shame.

The housing inequality experienced by Aboriginal people can be seen in the statistics below:

Homelessness

- Approximately 25% of all people experiencing homelessness across the country are Aboriginal.²
- About 4 in 10 (42%) of the Indigenous homeless population were aged 18 or under, compared with 23% of non-Indigenous homeless people.³
- Domestic and family violence is the most common reason Aboriginal people report seeking assistance from homelessness services.⁴
- 62% of all Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness are female.⁵

Social Housing

- Almost one in five Aboriginal Australians are living in social housing, compared to just 4.1% of non-Aboriginal Australians.⁶
- Only 69% of Aboriginal social housing tenants were happy and comfortable in their properties. Many citing issues of safety and security, lack of bedrooms and capacity to accommodate family as per cultural obligations and insufficient heating or cooling.⁷

Home ownership

- 28% of Aboriginal households in Australia own their own homes (with, or without a mortgage), compared with 64% of the general population.⁸

Private Renting

- 35% of Aboriginal Australians are living in a private rental property, compared with 31% of non-Aboriginal Australians.⁹
- Aboriginal Australians are significant more likely to experience racism and discrimination from property managers and landlords whilst they are living in a private rental or trying to break into the private rental market.¹⁰

Australian property markets are failing everyone, but none more so than Aboriginal people. With home ownership more difficult to attain than ever, skyrocketing rents, plummeting vacancies, and stagnant social housing growth, Aboriginal people are being challenged at every level of the housing market.

Aboriginal people, communities and organisations do not have the resources or capacity to address the need alone. The Aboriginal community-controlled sector is fragmented, dispersed, chronically underfunded and different in each jurisdiction. The Aboriginal community housing and homelessness sector is a reflection of the piecemeal and uncoordinated historical investments by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments.

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/homelessness-among-indigenous-australians/summary>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://chp.org.au/article/new-figures-reveal-victorias-social-housing-crisis/>.

⁷ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

It is clear a different approach to housing Aboriginal people is needed.

A new approach is required that involves action across the full spectrum of housing from crisis and emergency accommodation, social housing, private rental through to home ownership. This new approach will require leadership from government and active participation by all players in the Australian housing system including the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, mainstream community housing providers and homelessness services, State and Territory public housing providers and the private sector.

The scale of the Aboriginal housing and homelessness crisis is vast and can only be resolved through a significant nationally coordinated response. A mainstream approach is destined to fail. The Commonwealth reforms and funding provide an opportunity for action, but history tells us that without direct involvement with Aboriginal organisations and communities the housing benefits will not trickle down and be enjoyed by Aboriginal people.

While a nationally coordinated response is required, to be effective, housing solutions must be underpinned by Aboriginal self-determination. A national approach must drive culturally safety in mainstream housing and homelessness services and the building of effective, capable Aboriginal housing and homelessness services operating at scale. The approach must also ensure housing and homelessness service delivery accommodates local and regional differences taking account of the unique and different cultural values, beliefs and practices in Aboriginal communities and responding to the specific needs of Aboriginal people.

4. Suggested Recommendations

We believe that the following recommendations provide the essential governance for a coordinated national approach that in the longer term will be capable of resolving the crisis of Aboriginal housing and homelessness in Australia:

- 1. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should include an objective to improve Aboriginal housing and homelessness outcomes.**
- 2. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should include Aboriginal housing and homelessness targets to drive concerted national action.**
- 3. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should commit to a specific dedicated approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and homelessness through a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan.**
- 4. The Commonwealth should commit to negotiating a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan with Aboriginal people led by NATSIHA.**
- 5. The Commonwealth should commit to developing Aboriginal led governance arrangements to oversight and drive delivery of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan**
- 6. These governance arrangements should provide transparency, accountability, and effective oversight as well as coordinate, focus and drive an integrated national Aboriginal housing agenda across Commonwealth reforms, programs and agreements and into States and Territories.**
- 7. That the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement should include investments, strategic actions including governance requirements, performance measures and targets to drive delivery and oversight into States and Territories through jurisdictional schedules.**

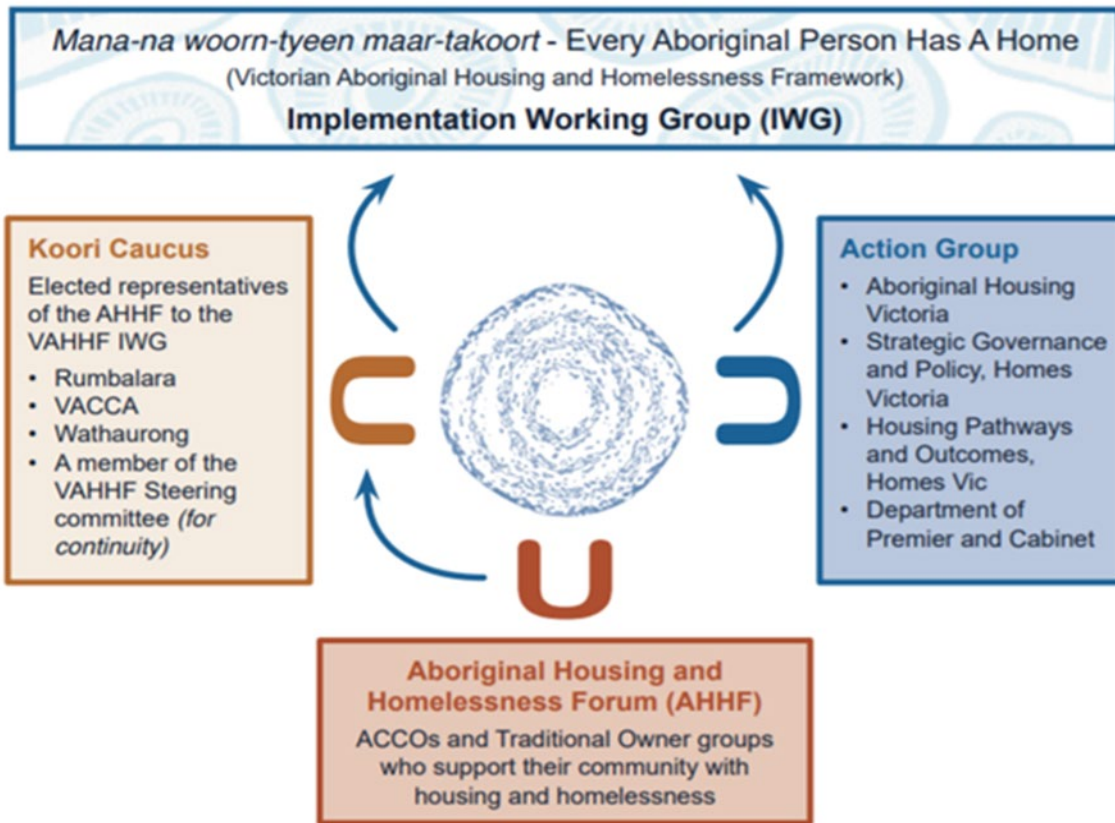
[Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework](#) provides a clear and comprehensive example of what the **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan** could look like. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, sets out an approach to reform the housing and homelessness system for Aboriginal people in Victoria through five key objectives:

- Objective 1: Secure housing improves life outcomes.
- Objective 2: Build supply to meet the needs of a growing Aboriginal population.
- Objective 3: Open doors to home ownership and private rental.
- Objective 4: An Aboriginal focused homelessness system.
- Objective 5: Capable system that delivers Aboriginal housing needs.

Implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* is supported by governance arrangements which provide drive and focus for reforms and important transparency, accountability and oversight of progress. The governance structure brings together Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Traditional Owner Groups and the Victorian State Government in formal partnerships, shared decision-making structures enabling transformation of government organisations in line with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It provides the platform for real and lasting change.

We recognise that Aboriginal housing and homelessness needs vary greatly across Australia, but we also understand that what does not vary, is the urgent need for partnerships that will work on tangible actions to end Aboriginal homelessness and housing exclusion. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* governance is an example of how governments can work better with industry, community services and other organisations to improve housing outcomes for all Aboriginal Australians. See below the *Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Governance Framework*.

Figure 1: Governance for Implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*



5. Responses to guided questions

1. What are the main cultural, social and economic factors that must be considered by governments and providers (including ATSICCHOs) when considering how to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

1. *Housing Insecurity and the National Housing Crisis*

Australia is experiencing a national housing crisis as housing markets are increasingly unable to house low-income people. Housing market failure is particularly acute for the Aboriginal people. Housing is unaffordable to buy for Aboriginal people on middle incomes, rental properties are unaffordable for those on income support and lower incomes. Compounding these issues is a social housing market that continues to shrink relative to the population. Poverty of household materials mean that Aboriginal people therefore, are disproportionately adversely impacted by stressors including the fracturing effects of major life transitions including family violence, relationships and family breakdown, leaving home early and transition between institutional settings. In facing these challenges, Aboriginal people are forced to rely on a mainstream housing and homeless assistance system that lacks cultural accreditation and is frequently experienced by Aboriginal people as a series of closed doors and waiting rooms.

2. *Self-determination*

The evolution of Aboriginal housing deprivation in Australia makes it distinctive. The solutions must also be different. They will not be realised without a determined commitment by Governments to support self-determination, the wresting back of agency and control by Aboriginal people. The development of a highly capable, culturally fit Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector is essential to changing the trajectory away from housing stress and homelessness towards collective and individual ownership of land and housing. [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#) is an example of a framework that was created by community for community. Its implementation is also led by community for community. This is self-determination in action. We do not want a national plan imposed on community by government, we want a plan that is designed and implemented by community in an authentic and respectful partnership with all levels of government.

The best way to ensure the economic, cultural and social factors impacting on improving housing outcomes are addressed is to involve and provide agency to the recipients of the housing. Safe, secure and affordable housing is the platform from which broader outcomes are achieved without it there is no realistic hope of overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage.

3. *Diversity*

It must be recognised that Aboriginal housing and homelessness needs vary greatly across Australia. For more than 60,000 years Aboriginal people have come together to co-exist and co-operate in unity to create a strong and diverse community. The approach by governments and providers to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal people must be informed by local voices and guided by the needs and aspirations from the various communities that exist across Australia. [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#) has been designed with the aim of meeting the diverse and particular needs of distinct groups of Aboriginal people and therefore provides the best pathway forward for government in creating a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan.

4. *Location*

Whilst over 80% of Australia's Aboriginal population live in urban and regional areas, time and time again we see national housing initiatives and investments that only target remote or very remote communities.¹¹ Efforts to improve Aboriginal housing outcomes must consider the needs of urban, regional, remote, and very remote. The best way to do this is by listening to the communities in these areas.

5. *Economic disadvantage*

The median household incomes of Aboriginal Victorians are lower than the general population. The median weekly personal income of Aboriginal Victorians was \$479 in 2016, representing 74 per cent of the median weekly personal income for the Victorian population as a whole (\$646).¹² Furthermore, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal Victorians was 14 per cent compared to 6.6 per cent for the total Victorian population.¹³ This pattern is repeated across the country and translates to Aboriginal people having limited access to secure and affordable housing options leaving them at increased risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. It also means that the options available for improving housing outcomes are more limited than they would be for communities of higher income.

6. *Intergenerational Trauma*

Housing outcomes for Aboriginal people are a significant part of the enduring legacy of an extensive colonisation process characterised by waves of dispossession. Aboriginal people have been homeless in their own nation for over 200 years. We are witnessing the continuing impact of these colonialist policies, which saw the deliberate exclusion of Aboriginal people from the economy, systematic dispossession of land, and the disorientation of forced relocation. Removal of children from their families, and institutionalisation have set in train intergenerational trauma which continues to play out in the experience of homelessness and fracturing transitions. Policy development, and service design and delivery must therefore be trauma-informed at all stages.¹⁴

7. *Child Removal*

Aboriginal children are highly over-represented in the out-of-home-care system. For example in Victoria, Aboriginal young people are 16 times more likely to be part of this cohort (a rate of 88.8 per 1,000 children and young people in out of home care).¹⁵ More than one in three children and young people will be homelessness within one year of leaving out-of-home-care.¹⁶ This helps explain why more than half of the Aboriginal people in contact with homelessness services in Australia are under the age of 25. The absence of stable housing acts as a barrier to reunification with children, keeping children and parents apart as children are left languishing in child protection and out-of-home-care services.¹⁷ Government and policy makers must be highly attuned to the unique needs of young people coming out of care.

8. *Over-incarceration*

¹¹ Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/38>

¹² <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/IQS2>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Aboriginal Justice Caucus, Information for Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission: National Housing and Homelessness Plan, see attachment A.

The chronic over-representation of Aboriginal people in custodial settings across Australia is well known. For example, in Victoria the rate of Aboriginal prisoners in our state has doubled over the past decade from 989 per 100,000 in 2008-09 to 1,898 per 100,000 in 2017.¹⁸ Without a vast improvement in housing provision for Aboriginal families and former prisoners - rates of remand will continue to rise; rates of recidivism will continue to deteriorate; children will continue to move into child protection as their parents are incarcerated; and the harmful impacts on families of prisoners returning to their communities with unresolved trauma will continue unabated.”

Lack of long-term, stable housing contributes to the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people. This occurs in several ways – tenancy matters can quickly escalate to homelessness in the absence of early, culturally-safe legal assistance and support; fleeing family violence often results in homelessness; homelessness increases the likelihood of criminalisation for poverty and/or public order related offences; refusal of bail due to absence of suitable accommodation increases the number of people on remand, and time spent in custody; lack of housing reduces the likelihood of people being granted parole and extends periods of incarceration; exiting prison to homelessness/unstable housing significantly inhibits successful reintegration and increases the likelihood of a rapid return to the system.¹⁹ In 2018, the AIHW found that one-third (33 per cent) of people entering prison were homeless in the four weeks prior, and over half of people in prison expected to be homeless upon release.²⁰ Nationally, Aboriginal people (37 per cent) were more likely than non-Aboriginal people entering prison (23 per cent) to be in short-term or emergency accommodation. Upon exit, Aboriginal people were more likely than non-Aboriginal people to expect being homeless on release. Over half of all Aboriginal people exiting prison expected to be homeless.²¹ People exiting prison now made up 12 per cent of all Aboriginal Specialist Homeless Support clients (935 people in 2020-21). More than double the 2011-12 figure of 5 per cent. These people have literally nowhere to go. Failing to house people who have been incarcerated also ignores the needs of their families and wider communities. Lack of appropriate housing after prison drives reoffending as prisoners who are homeless upon exiting prison return in greater numbers. Like young people leaving out-of-home-care, government and policy makers must give consideration to the unique needs of this cohort and their pathways out of custody.

9. Youthful population

The Aboriginal population in Australia is increasingly younger than the general population. The average age within the Aboriginal community is just under 24 years of age.²² We also know that this younger cohort are more mobile than other cohorts having a preference to move around properties until they find the right place. The needs of different age cohorts must be considered.

10. Cultural preferences

It is essential that Australia builds a housing system and dwellings that meet household size, demographic demand, and cultural preferences. For example, Aboriginal Australians express a

¹⁸ Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services, 2019.

¹⁹ Lack of housing and accommodation is raised regularly in RAJAC Chairperson reports to the AJF. While the situation is particularly dire in regional Victoria where it has persisted for years, it is an issue commonly reported by all RAJACs. See for example Loddon Mallee and Grampians RAJAC reports to AJF 62 and RAJAC Chairperson reports to previous AJFs.

²⁰ AIHW, (2019), The health of Australia’s prisoners 2018

²¹ *ibid*

²² <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australian>

preference for multigenerational or multi-family households.²³ It must be acknowledged that irrespective of whether a property provides for such an arrangement, cultural responsibility will be such that households will make room for family. Therefore, housing must be built, and housing regulations reforms in such a way that is cognisant of these cultural preferences.

11. Elders

Just 5 per cent of the Aboriginal population is aged over 65 in Victoria, compared with around 15 per cent in the mainstream community.²⁴ However, as a consequence of the extraordinary socioeconomic disadvantage they experience, Aboriginal people carry a burden of disease 2.3 times greater than the rest of the population.²⁵ This is evident in the fact that Aboriginal people aged 45-64 are three times more likely to require assistance with core activities than other Australians.²⁶ Census data suggests that 28 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 65 years and over have a core activity need for assistance.²⁷ Higher rates of disability, greater early onset of dementia, rates of blindness and vision impairment three times greater than the mainstream and a lack of culturally safe aged care for the increasing numbers of Aboriginal people reaching older age, all present significant challenges.²⁸

Victoria faces real challenges in providing decent, secure housing for a growing number of older Aboriginal people, many with significant support needs. Of course, many Elders have the desire to return to country towards the end of their lives and have the capacity to maintain family connections. Adding further complexity to the space is the fact that 100 per cent of the Stolen Generation will be at least 50 years old by 2023, i.e., eligible for aged care, This group will require sensitive, trauma-informed care that does not re-traumatise them.²⁹

More work is needed to identify the characteristics and features of culturally safe aged care, and to begin to build culturally specific aged care facilities. Policy settings need to recognise that old age may come earlier for some Aboriginal people and housing policy must reflect this understanding. More work is required to understand the needs of older age members of the Stolen Generations and to support their particular aged care needs and those of other Elders and Traditional Owners.

2. How can governments best work with communities and the Aboriginal community controlled housing sector to support better housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including embedding the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and promoting self-determination?

Aboriginal self-determination is fundamental to achieving progress on improving Aboriginal housing outcomes and must be embedded in a national approach as a foundational principle.

Aboriginal self-determination obliges that to the maximum extent possible authority, control and resources must be vested in Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal Community Housing Providers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Traditional Owners, and Aboriginal Trusts are best placed to deliver improved housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Their

²³ *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ [Indigenous health and wellbeing - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au)

²⁶ *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ [15.-pm-session-b_discussion-paper-8.pdf \(ahvic.org.au\)](#)

work and relationship to community is underpinned by self-determination, cultural knowledge, and comprehensive understanding of the needs of Aboriginal people. Governments must respect this knowledge and understanding and engage meaningfully these groups, provide for their participation in policy development and service design, and enable the development of localised approaches to the delivery of housing and support.

Governments should ensure that ownership of housing goes into the hands of Aboriginal communities. Governments should develop regional and localised approaches to planning for new social and affordable housing supply; developing these will require collaboration and coordination between public housing, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community and affordable housing sectors, local governments, and the broader community.

There is an undeniable and urgent need for coordinated national action and investments to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal people. This can be achieved by developing a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan to accompany the broader national plan that has targets against each of its strategies and performance measures. It is suggested that this plan could be based on [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#).

[Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#) sets out a 20-year agenda to ensure every Aboriginal person has a home, covering short, medium and long-term policies and programs that governments have begun to implement. The following is a summary of the goals and strategic actions from [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#):

1. Secure housing improves life outcomes.
 - 1.1 Embed housing goals and targets in major Government strategic frameworks for Aboriginal people and mainstream policies where relevant.
 - 1.2 Establish secure, affordable housing as the foundation for breaking cycles of disadvantage and homelessness.
 - 1.3 Make housing the platform for fulfilment of life aspirations and successful education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.
 - 1.4 Sustain tenancies through culturally strong, Aboriginal focused systems and practices.
2. Build supply to meet the needs of a growing Aboriginal population.
 - 2.1 Build the supply of homes owned by Aboriginal people and community.
 - 2.2 Build 5,000+ social housing properties by 2036; 300 houses p.a. to meet future demand.
 - 2.3 Meet supply needs for transitional and (crisis) short term and special needs housing.
 - 2.4 Support Native Title and Treaty to grow affordable housing.
3. Open doors to home ownership and private rental
 - 3.1 Increase uptake of private rental.
 - 3.2 Support to get established in your home.
 - 3.3 Create opportunity for ethical investment in affordable rental.
 - 3.4 Make home ownership available to more people.
4. An Aboriginal focused homelessness system
 - 4.1 Rebuild an Aboriginal homeless service system from the ground up. 4
 - 4.2 Provide tailored support for those at high risk.
 - 4.3 Increase supply of crisis and transitional housing.
5. A capable system that delivers Aboriginal housing needs
 - 5.1 Create a strong and viable Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector.

- 5.2 Make the mainstream housing and homelessness system culturally safe.
- 5.3 Build a systems-based partnership between the mainstream and Aboriginal housing and homeless systems.

[Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#) sets out a comprehensive roadmap on how Government can partner with the Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector, and community, to achieve outcomes across the full spectrum of housing from homelessness to home ownership.

The same themes and logic reflected in the goals of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are relevant to national action. It is a priority to ensure Aboriginal people have a strong safety net of social housing and homelessness services that provides safe, secure and affordable housing and accommodation. This safety net provides a foundation for later work to achieve autonomy and housing independence for Aboriginal people and communities.

SHORT TERM PRIORITIES

Creating a strong safety net for Aboriginal people

Homelessness services systems need reform to better house and support Aboriginal people. The [Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific Homelessness System in Victoria](#), speaks to how the management, funding and monitoring of the homelessness service system in any state across the country can be shared with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and the Aboriginal community. These documents should be the starting point for governments in trying to achieve this objective. Urgent investments to fund social housing growth such as the Housing Australia Future Fund are required to meet overwhelming Aboriginal demand. In order that Aboriginal housing providers can access these funding opportunities Governments must address barriers and enablers to Aboriginal participation.

Homelessness reforms and investments in social housing must be accompanied by dedicated investment in building the capacity of Aboriginal housing and homelessness providers. This is recognised in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap Sector Strengthening Plan*.

A lack of sustainable, long-term funding for Aboriginal organisations undermines Aboriginal self-determination. The Aboriginal Justice Caucus argues that Aboriginal people have the right to autonomy of self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.³⁰ A strong and reliable Aboriginal community-controlled sector requires sustained capacity building and investment, dedicated and identified Aboriginal workforce, a Peak Body with strong governance, policy development and influencing capacity and a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities.³¹

The Aboriginal housing sector requires a housing workforce plan that is resourced to build long term capacity and growth. This will drive the upskilling and career paths for housing staff, based on professionalisation and recognition of skills.³² While many Royal Commissions and inquiries have made recommendations to build the Aboriginal workforce, responses are typically program or sector specific and have resulted in movement of staff between sectors rather than significant increases in the available Aboriginal workforce. Aboriginal staff who are known in the community are, respected and trusted by service users, highly motivated, well-trained, and skilled at providing cultural support to

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

clients. These workers ‘walk between the two worlds’ of community and government and act as a mediator and sometimes translator for both. Successful programs resource workers adequately and provide supports to manage cultural loads and vicarious trauma.³³

MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES

Better housing support for Aboriginal people is required to achieve better housing outcomes. This includes investments in programs to better sustain tenancies, to provide pathways into private rental and home ownership and to provide referrals and linkages into much needed supports for vulnerable people.

It is important to recognise the intersectional nature of housing and homelessness with family violence, the justice and custodial system, child protection systems and issues relating to health and mental health.³⁴ The Aboriginal Justice Caucus highlights this issue stating that “being unable to access housing at key points of transition into and out of the criminal justice system, increases the likelihood of continued and/or repeat involvement with the system.”³⁵ The intersectional nature of housing and homelessness therefore requires comprehensive and complementary actions across departments, governments and agreements. Too often government and service systems operate in silo and this lack of coordination results in sub-optimal outcomes. In the same way that governments must operate and govern in a way that is cognisant of the intersectional nature of housing and homelessness, so too must the Aboriginal community-controlled sector be funded and supported to have coordinated service provision across all service systems including housing, homelessness, health, justice and family violence.³⁶

In the medium to long term, it is important that programs to increase Aboriginal participation in private rentals and home ownership are developed and delivered. In developing [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#) Aboriginal Victorians were clear that housing independence is important and that they aspire to a future less reliant on social housing.

Reforms to be underpinned by data sovereignty

Under Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Governments committed to: share disaggregated regional data with Aboriginal communities; work with Aboriginal partners to guide improved collection, access, management and use of data; be transparent about what data is held and how Aboriginal people can access it; and build capacity in Aboriginal organisations and Communities to collect and use data.³⁷ There needs to be an acknowledgement of data sovereignty, a recognition that Aboriginal people have inherent and inalienable rights relating to the collection, ownership and application of data about them.³⁸ Access to data and information that reflects Aboriginal realities is critical for advocacy, planning and decision-making. The Aboriginal Justice Caucus have long-held concerns in relation to the collection, use and transparency of data and information reflecting Aboriginal people’s interactions with government services and systems. Data is often deficit-based, and serves government needs rather than those of the Aboriginal Communities. The Victorian Government recognises ‘Aboriginal ownership and control of data is a key enabler of self-determination’ and that ‘Aboriginal communities and organisations should have governance, choice

³³ Aboriginal Justice Caucus, Information for Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission: National Housing and Homelessness Plan, see attachment A.

³⁴ Aboriginal Justice Caucus, Information for Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission: National Housing and Homelessness Plan, see attachment A.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority Reform Four 6. Priority Reform Four - Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level | Closing the Gap

³⁸ [Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort](#) Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home: The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

and control over data collected from and about their communities.’ The Commonwealth Government should follow suit.

3. How can governments ensure diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are included in the development of housing and homelessness policies and programs?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not homogenous, they are unique and what works well in one community will often not work in another. This means that the solutions to these problems need to be different and tailored to the needs of the community. It’s not a one size fits all proposition. Furthermore, each State and Territory has a unique way of delivering programs and services to their citizens and consequently the way that services are delivered to Aboriginal people will vary from across jurisdictions. Insufficient consultation with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal involvement in providing housing leads to misunderstanding and consequences such as unsuitable housing due to poor design, location, or materials used.³⁹ We need a National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan that reflects the contemporary experiences of Aboriginal housing exclusion and homelessness, informed, designed, and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across all States and Territories. We suggest that in negotiating the National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Commonwealth must be led by NATSIHA.

4. What are the ideal short, medium and long-term policies and programs government can pursue to improve the supply of housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including increasing the capacity and capability of ATSIHCOs?

In order for Aboriginal housing providers to access these funding opportunities, Governments must address barriers and enablers to Aboriginal participation.

Investment targets to drive action to increase Aboriginal housing

In the short to medium term, it is absolutely necessary that all Government funding programs for social and affordable housing growth (at both the state and federal level, including the Housing Australia Future Fund), have a ‘quarantined’ portion of at least 10% of funding allocated to Aboriginal housing. Although capable and sophisticated for its size, the Aboriginal sector is not as large, well-resourced, or mature as the mainstream sector and therefore cannot mobilise as readily to access all the various funding streams available, as well as meet their often-tight submission deadlines. So that the Aboriginal sector does not ‘miss out’, it is vital that such quarantining is in place.

Address barriers to Aboriginal housing providers accessing housing growth funding

Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments should work together in each jurisdiction to remove barriers to Aboriginal housing providers accessing housing growth. Service delivery funding agreements should be reviewed and amended if they prevent Aboriginal housing providers from borrowing or using their equity for housing growth. Similarly, fast track caveat removal processes should be introduced to ensure they no longer restrict use of the lands for new housing developments where eligible.

A key outcome from the various funding programs must be to increase housing ownership by Aboriginal community housing providers. A significant barrier to this is that many are not yet registered, are small in scale and may not be able to, or are not experienced in, borrowing to finance acquisitions or developments.

³⁹ Aboriginal Justice Caucus, Information for Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission: National Housing and Homelessness Plan, see attachment A.

Unregistered housing providers are generally excluded from accessing capital grant funding for housing growth. Barriers to registration for Aboriginal housing providers should also be directly addressed. National housing registration requirements should be reviewed, and registration processes simplified and streamlined. Governments should make available funding programs to assist Aboriginal housing providers to prepare and submit registration applications.

Currently, under the Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round of the Big housing Build in Victoria, unregistered Aboriginal housing providers can participate and own the developed assets by either:

- committing to becoming registered prior to undertaking housing developments
- partnering with registered housing agencies who undertake the development and transfer ownership of the completed housing to the Aboriginal housing provider; the housing association then becomes the tenancy and property manager on behalf of the Aboriginal organisation.

Similar opportunities should be explored by the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments.

Federal and State Governments can assist in capacity building by providing gap funding to assist with construction financing, as well as providing a capital co-contribution to projects. Without this, the sector will struggle to grow and develop. Government can enable Aboriginal housing providers to participate in housing growth by investing in building their capacity and through delivery of initiatives which increase their scale. Capacity building initiatives could include investing and supporting the development of housing financial models, asset management plans and investment and growth strategies for Aboriginal housing providers. State led development with asset transfers to ACCOs, including management arrangements with registered housing agencies. This initiative would require considering the optimal mechanism(s) to achieve this (i.e., suitable partnering agreements, SPVs, etc.) and that would achieve the desired growth and ownership outcomes; increasing the capability, experience and sophistication of Aboriginal CHOs as housing providers is also critical (so that, one day, Aboriginal CHOs are undertaking their own developments).

More efficient procurement

Moving from 'rounds based' funding to a form of 'programmatic' funding is necessary to increase the housing sector's ability to engage efficiently and effectively with the private market and to secure opportunities when they become available. This increased agility will improve the sophistication, and further drive the overall growth, of the sector. For example, an initial assessment and approval of an organisation's capability, and agreeing a governance framework and development methodology, could make possible programmatic funding for the Aboriginal housing sector.

In the medium to longer term, it will be necessary for all levels of government to mandate a requirement for all housing developments on government land (being divested or acquired), or on rezoned land where the owner receives a monetary benefit from the rezoning, to include a component of Aboriginal housing. This is the only way to increase the volume of housing to the level needed to 'close the gap' in relation to housing disadvantage for Aboriginal people. Ideally, some form of inclusionary zoning for social and affordable housing should be introduced with a component of Aboriginal housing (say, 10%). Initially, there would be resistance to this from landowners, but the market would adjust over time, especially with some Government incentives for existing landowners to develop their land in the short term (e.g., greater density, financial incentives).

The Commonwealth government must seek commitment and investment from the Australia Local Government Association that provides for 10% of land to be set aside for Aboriginal Social Housing within new developments. The Commonwealth must also negotiate with State and Territory

governments for 10% of government lands releases or leases, to go to Aboriginal Social Housing developments.

Reducing costs and maximising housing growth

Governments should identify initiatives to reduce housing costs to support the emerging Aboriginal community housing sector while it is building to scale. The Commonwealth should explore whether the Commonwealth Rental Assistance Scheme can be paid directly to Aboriginal Housing Providers to reduce rental arrears pressure. Similarly, initiatives to exempt or reduce council and water rates on properties owned by Aboriginal housing providers will provide more cash for investing in renter support and for contributions to housing growth.

Objective 1: Secure housing improves life outcomes

Questions from focus area: 3.4 Social Housing

1. What are the key short-term and/or long-term social and economic issues in social housing?
2. What changes can be made to the current social housing system to improve outcomes for tenants and/or improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the social housing sector?
3. What are the most-effective wrap-around supports required to support Australians in social housing to maintain their tenancies? Are there existing effective models that could be scaled up?

There is a need for Aboriginal-led strengths-based models of support for Aboriginal renters in social housing to overcome elevated levels of trauma and vulnerability, to encourage empowerment among renters, and support them to self-determine their livelihoods and achieve their aspirations.

We know that people who have stable, secure and high-quality housing are less likely to experience life event crises and are better placed to weather them when they occur. In contrast, significant life course events can have a major effect on housing stability and security. Aboriginal people experience many of the events that impel people simultaneously towards housing distress and mental health crisis more frequently and more acutely.

Aboriginal people are at least ten times more likely to be homeless and at least three times as likely to experience a significant mental health issue compared to non-Indigenous People.

Aboriginal People also experience greater levels of housing inequity and insecurity than non-Aboriginal people. Due to greater vulnerability, Aboriginal renters require support to sustain their tenancies and reach their life goals. Many Aboriginal People in social and community housing experience social isolation, poorer mental health, and face difficulties navigating and accessing appropriate supports.

We suggest that all Governments invest in strengths based primary prevention and early intervention approach that provides holistic, culturally appropriate supports to vulnerable Aboriginal social housing renters.

The key features of a renter support program include:

1. Engaging with social housing renters by running community activities to communicate and promote and build trust in the service.
2. Connecting and sustaining relationships with renters by building ongoing culturally safe relationships that foster social connection and are founded in trust and mutual respect through yarning.
3. Identifying and addressing immediate needs of renters, including through material aid, and referring clients to specialist services.
4. Supporting clients to build renters' life skills through staff support and referrals to services to develop greater capacity and capability to manage their daily life. Skills may include money,

property or time management. Or, building know how to use apps, navigate the support services system and assistance to access preventative health and wellbeing support.

5. Life coaching to provide strengths based structured coaching to help renters identify goals. Identify opportunities, capabilities and assets that foster progress and growth, and continuously examine what is going well and how to build on it.

Reduced transfer of inter-generational wealth, lower rates of economic participation and higher reliance on income support means that many Aboriginal Victorians (and similarly Aboriginal people throughout Australia) cannot afford private rentals and/or purchase a property. Current inflationary pressures and housing unaffordability have further amplified pre-existing inequity. Consequently, Aboriginal Victorians rely more heavily than non-Aboriginal people on the safety net of social housing. Approximately 13,909 Aboriginal Victorians (4,051 AHV; 7,926 HV; 1,932 Community Housing) reside in around 5,6311 households in social housing (1,640 AHV; 3,209 HV; 782 Community Housing), which is around 8 times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians (16% vs 2%). This demand for social housing is currently outstripping the supply.

As of 14 October 2022, 6,596 Victorian Aboriginal households were on the Victorian Housing Register waiting for placement. Further, rates of Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services, rose by 34% rise from 2014-2018.

Due to greater vulnerability, Aboriginal renters require support to sustain their tenancies and reach their life goals. While the provision of social housing provides the necessary foundations for improved stability and greater housing equity, many new and established Aboriginal renters struggle to maintain their tenancy due to unaddressed personal and/or social issues. The average annual turnover (those vacating tenancies) is 7% for AHV renters and 8% for Aboriginal Homes Victoria renters. For many Aboriginal social housing renters, their vulnerability is compounded and amplified by broader social issues, including family violence and breakdown, child removal, poverty of household material resources, and reliance on minimal income support or insecure employment.

Many Aboriginal People in social and community housing experience social isolation, poorer mental health, and face difficulties navigating and accessing appropriate supports. This is demonstrated through the evaluation of AHV's Aboriginal Home Connect program, which found that COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing problems faced by renters, including social isolation, financial vulnerability and poor service knowledge and access amongst clients. More broadly, Aboriginal Victorians are likely to experience poorer mental health, being three times more likely to have "high or very high" levels of psychological and psychosocial distress compared to non-Aboriginal Victorians (36% compared to 12.8% respectively).

To help overcome this, Aboriginal renters in social housing **need culturally safe housing and access to cultural safe tenancy** support if and when they need it. The Aboriginal population is the most disadvantaged in Victoria and the most disadvantaged 20% of the Victorian Aboriginal population live in social housing. It can be very difficult for Aboriginal renters in mainstream social housing to access culturally safe support when they are having issues that may put their tenancy is at risk. In response, Aboriginal Housing Victoria has a strength based, fully evaluated, outreach program called - More than

a Landlord.⁴⁰ In this program, renters are supported to set life aspirations and achieve goals with an aim of becoming more independent and self-reliant. The program is flexible, holistic and can be scaled up and down depending on needs. When help is needed, renters have a trusted, culturally safe professional to call on. Program staff help renters identify needs and then actively link in the supports and services that can meet those needs.

We believe all Aboriginal renters in social housing across Australia should have access to programs like these and for a relatively small investment, the returns are significant in terms of the personal and social benefits of maintaining and sustaining healthy tenancies.

For a modest investment, we know positive outcomes could be possible for many, for example, expanding the **More than a Landlord** program so it can respond to all Aboriginal households in Victoria would require an investment of approximately \$7.7 million per year.

Overall, specific focus must be given to cohorts in the Aboriginal community who are most vulnerable to homelessness and housing exclusion; young people, people experiencing family violence, children leaving child protection services, vulnerable families, people entering and exiting prison (see **attachment A**) and Elders. **Government must also build and invest in culturally safe, trauma informed accommodation facilities that provide safe places to stay and get support to secure longer term housing.** We need Aboriginal youth refuges, Aboriginal women's refuges, Aboriginal youth foyers and options for Aboriginal families and Elders. Thirdly, Government must invest in an expansion of culturally safe tenancy support programs like [Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program](#), [Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk](#), [More Than a Landlord](#) in all States and Territories with sufficient scale to meet demand. Aboriginal people should be able to access tenancy support regardless of the type of home they live in, social, private or community. Sustaining and maintaining successful tenancies is crucial to preventing homelessness and the trauma this causes. These programs should be delivered by Aboriginal organisations. Finally, culturally safe training must be made mandatory for all mainstream housing and homelessness organisations.

⁴⁰ <https://ahvic.org.au/about/more-than-a-landlord>

Objective 2: Build supply to meet the needs of a growing Aboriginal population

Questions from focus area: 3.6 The importance of planning, zoning and development

1. To what extent is the supply, affordability and diversity of houses affected by planning and zoning regulations and administrative processes?
2. How can planning and zoning regulations effectively increase the supply of land in well-located areas taking into consideration current and future hazard risk?
3. How can governments work together to be more responsive and flexible to housing demand pressures, both now and in the future?

Responding more effectively to Aboriginal social housing demand

Population projections prepared in the development of *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort* identified that over 20 years the projected growth in Aboriginal social housing households is 5086 over 20 years. The Big Housing Build target of 10% of new social housing for Aboriginal Victorians is 820 units. However, this is counter balanced by years of failing to close the gap in the social housing need. These projections do not take account of the current demand on the Victorian Housing Register of approximately 4,000 Aboriginal priority applicants.

It is estimated that over the next 5 years a further 300 new Aboriginal social housing dwellings a year are required at a minimum. It is recommended that the Commonwealth and State Government invest a minimum of \$800M in Victoria over the next 5 years to deliver an additional 1,500 Aboriginal social housing units through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

There must be a national target on new investments that apportion 10% of investments or 10% of all new dwellings for Aboriginal people.

1. All new government funded social housing must include a percentage of Aboriginal people that is equal to the needs of the Aboriginal community in which it is built. For example, in Victoria, the State Government has committed to dedicating 10% of all new stock built through the Big Housing Build to the Aboriginal community in recognition that the fact that 10% of the people experiencing housing crisis in Victoria are Aboriginal (see **Attachment B**). This should be replicated nationally.
2. A minimum of 10 per cent of The Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) funding should be directed to building homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; this should be in addition to the \$200 million already committed to for repairs, upgrades, and improvements to remote Indigenous Housing. This housing must be built where Aboriginal people are located and want to live. Therefore, communities must be consulted about what kind of housing they want and need.
3. 10% of the \$1 billion HAFF investments must be spent on new housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in urban, regional, and remote areas (minimum of 3000 new Aboriginal social housing dwellings).

We need better planning to meet Aboriginal housing demand, freeing up land for more housing and reducing waste and inefficiency and more effective procurement.

4. As a priority, more active stewardship of the social and affordable housing sectors by all levels of Government, acting collaboratively, is required. Government engaging constantly and meaningfully with the sector is also critical, as is Government retaining a flexible approach so that issues/ blockages are resolved expeditiously to allow supply to grow.
5. A national focus on inclusionary zoning for all new developments to encourage both more social and affordable housing. We recommend that⁴¹:
 - All jurisdictions mandate inclusionary zoning.
 - Inclusionary zoning to include options for social rental housing in all States and Territories.
 - Incentives for inclusionary zoning to be provided by governments.
 - Mandated levels of social housing redeveloped social housing estates.
 - Properties provided under inclusionary zoning must be at a standard making them indistinguishable from other property in their local area.
6. Governments should develop regional and localised approaches to planning for new social and affordable housing supply; developing these will require collaboration and coordination between public housing, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community and affordable housing sectors, local governments and the broader community. The scope for this would include identifying and evaluating land supply opportunities and the planning reforms necessary to enable the required increase in housing supply.
7. Moving from 'rounds based' funding to a form of 'programmatic' funding is necessary to increase the housing sector's ability to engage efficiently and effectively with the private market and to secure opportunities when they become available. This increased agility will increase the sophistication and overall growth of the sector. The current, rounds based, competitive procurement approach has proven to be inefficient and wasteful.

Governments need to directly invest in building a capable, national Aboriginal Community Housing Sector to deliver new social housing.

Question from focus area: 3.5 Housing costs, home ownership and the private rental market in Australia

1. What should the most important (long-term) and/or immediate (short-term) housing market policy focus be, across all levels of government, over the next 10 years?

Firstly, all levels of government should identify underutilised or surplus land and develop a divestment strategy for the land and what economic and social outcomes are required from the divestment. Consideration should also be given to targeted acquisitions for social and affordable housing

⁴¹ <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/housing-strategy/inclusionary-housing-pilot#:~:text=The%20pilot%20will%20deliver%20100,available%20to%20the%20private%20market.>

development (either public only or in partnership with the private sector) where social housing supply does not meet demand, especially from Aboriginal people, and other mechanisms cannot address the gap. Finally, all levels of government should mandate a requirement for all housing developments on government land (being divested or acquired), or on rezoned land where the owner receives a monetary benefit from the rezoning), to include a component of Aboriginal housing. This is the only way to increase the volume of housing to the level needed to ‘close the gap’ in relation to housing disadvantage for Aboriginal people.

Ideally, some form of inclusionary zoning for social and affordable housing should be introduced with a component of Aboriginal housing (for example, 10%). Initially, there would be resistance to this from landowners but the market would adjust over time, especially with some Government incentives for existing landowners to develop their land in the short term (e.g. greater density, financial incentives).

Question from focus area: 3.5 Housing costs, home ownership and the private rental market in Australia

1. How can the utilisation of existing properties be improved? How can governments incentivise improved utilisation of existing properties?

As the question suggests, currently there is a ‘misalignment’ between the demand for 1- and 2-bedroom social housing and existing social housing supply – i.e., there is much higher demand for 1- and 2-bedroom properties than for 3/ 3+ bedroom ones. However, there is still **an insufficient supply of ALL types of social housing (1, 2, 3 and 3+ bedroom homes) in ALL locations**. As suggested, there is certainly a prevalence of underutilised properties within existing social and community housing portfolios. Notwithstanding this, the problem is complex as many Aboriginal people would prefer to stay in a 3-bedroom detached house then move to a 1- or 2-bedroom townhouse/ apartment for the same rent. In the Aboriginal community, the extra bedrooms are often used when family return home to stay for a period, or visit. There is also a concerted effort currently being made within the community housing sector to improve the efficiency of relocations within social and community housing to better match needs and life circumstances. Without doubt, various forms of incentives (especially financial) from Government for people to move to more suitable accommodation would greatly assist in convincing people to do so.

Questions from focus area: 3.5 Housing costs, home ownership and the private rental market in Australia

1. How do supply, demand and affordability challenges differ in urban and regional/remote areas?
2. How could these differences be taken into account when designing policy?
3. How can the use and release of land encourage residential growth in well located areas (i.e. close to infrastructure, jobs and services, and resilient to natural hazards) in the short, medium and long-term?

All levels of government should identify underutilised or surplus land and develop a divestment strategy for the land and what economic and social outcomes are required from the divestment, including social housing. This should especially be the case for well-located government land (this land should potentially have a higher percentage of social and affordable housing, including Aboriginal housing).

Federal and State Governments should also consider targeted acquisitions for social and affordable housing development (either public only or in partnership with the private sector) where social housing supply does not meet demand and other mechanisms cannot address the gap, especially for Aboriginal people.

It should also be a requirement for all housing developments on government land (being divested or acquired), or on rezoned land where the owner receives a monetary benefit from the rezoning), to include a component of Aboriginal housing. This is the only way to increase the volume of housing to the level needed to 'close the gap' in relation to housing disadvantage for Aboriginal people. Finally, some form of inclusionary zoning for social and affordable housing should be introduced with a component of Aboriginal housing (say,10%).

Objective 3: Open doors to home ownership and private rental

Questions from focus area: 3.5 Housing costs, home ownership and the rental market in Australia

1. How can flexibility, accessibility (particularly in the physical environment), affordability and security be improved in the rental private market, particularly for low-income earners?
2. Are further wrap-around supports required to support vulnerable Australians in the private rental market to maintain their tenancies? Are there any examples of effective models that could be scaled up?

There are two key drivers of the increase in Aboriginal households living in private rental. At one end is the impact of chronic under investment in social housing resulting in ever shrinking availability of stock and at the other end, house prices have skyrocketed, making home ownership out of reach for many. For more and more Aboriginal households, precarious and often unaffordable private rental is their only housing option. ABS 2021 Census data shows that approximately one third of Australians rent their home with Aboriginal people renting privately at higher rates than non-Aboriginal households. 38.8% vs 26.5 % respectively. ⁴²

This overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in private rental and in social housing is a consequence of a significant underrepresentation of Aboriginal people in home ownership. Despite this, the number of social housing households as a proportion of Australian households has seen a steady decline since 2011, from 4.8% to 4.4% in 2020.

The Productivity Commission found an increasing trend across the last two decades of low to middle-income households entering the private rental market. It found that a decrease in owner-occupation was a contributor however the decline of social housing availability had a more significant contribution to, particularly low-income households, entering the private rental market.

This trend has been greatest in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households demonstrating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on low incomes experience a greater negative impact of the underinvestment in social housing. ⁴³

A report into the experiences of Aboriginal people and the private rental market in Victoria was released in October 2022.

The report, [Excluded from the Start](#), prompted by the *Mana na woorn tyeen maar takoort* framework, was commissioned by the Consumer Policy Research Centre and conducted by researchers at Swinburne University of Technology, on behalf of the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies, Aboriginal Housing Victoria and Victorian Legal Aid.

⁴² <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/AUS>

⁴³ [Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options - Commission Research Paper \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

We are currently working through addressing the report's 14 recommendations for action.⁴⁴ We recommend similar reports are conducted in all States and Territories to explore, assess, and seek action on specific state, regional and local needs, barriers, and gaps.

Rates of home ownerships have fallen across all sections of the Australian population. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data suggests that home ownership rates for Aboriginal Australians have consistently remained 20 percentage points lower than home ownership rates for non-Aboriginal Australians across all birth cohorts and age groups since reporting began in 1981⁴⁵. This necessitates dedicated investment in policies and programs that are able to improve Aboriginal home ownership and promote better access to the transformative generation wealth it can create.

Housing is central to closing the gap and demands a dedicated response that is able to meet the needs of Aboriginal Australians in the short, medium, and long-term. The development of the 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan would be incomplete without consideration of the increasingly complex Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector that has emerged in Victoria and the expansion of programs like the [Victorian Home Buyer Fund](#).

This program promotes and supports mainstream home ownership by requiring only a 5% deposit and Government contributing up to 25% of the purchase price in exchange for an equivalent share in the property. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants only require a 3.5% deposit and are eligible for a 35% shared equity contribution.

The Victorian Home Buyer Fund provides an example for improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal People across the nation that is informed by a commitment to shared decision making and building the community-controlled sector in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

⁴⁴ <https://files.rentingcommissioner.vic.gov.au/2022-10/APRAP%20-%20Policy%20Report.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/home-ownership-and-housing-tenure>

Objective 4: An Aboriginal focused homelessness system

Questions from focus area: 3.1 Homelessness

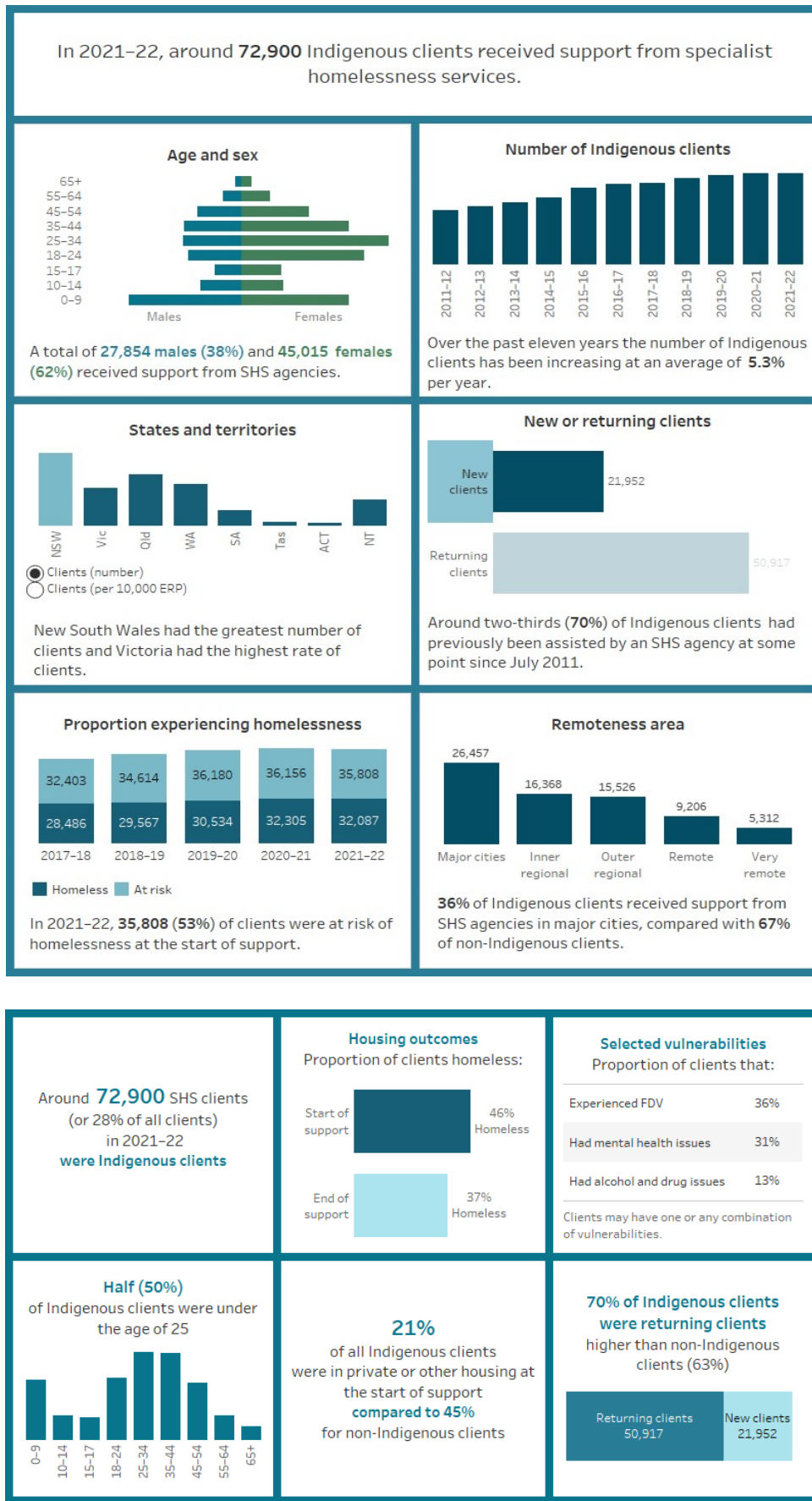
1. What are the different challenges for people experiencing homelessness in urban, regional, and rural areas?
2. What short, medium, and long-term actions can governments take to help prevent homelessness or to support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless?
3. How can the homelessness system more effectively respond to those at risk of, or already experiencing homelessness?
 - How can the homelessness system ensure those at risk of homelessness or in crisis receive appropriate support to avoid homelessness or so they are less likely to fall back into homelessness?
 - What actions can governments take to facilitate early intervention and preventative responses?
4. How can governments capture better evidence on 'hidden' or 'invisible' homelessness (e.g. couch surfing, living in a car and overcrowding)?
5. Is the Canadian National Occupancy Standard measure of overcrowding, and the way it is applied in Australia to define homelessness, suitable for the Australian context?

Homelessness and Aboriginal Australians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up around 3.2% of the Australian population yet they made up over **one-quarter or 28% of the clients** (an estimated 72,900 clients) assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2021–22.^[1] The below figure reflects the chronic disproportionality of Aboriginal peoples experiencing housing crisis in Australia.

^[1] <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview>

Figure 1 – Snapshot of the AIHW homelessness data – 2021 – 2022



A National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan must have a strong focus on prevention and early intervention and a specific focus on preventing homelessness for young Aboriginal people. As the data above shows, 50% of Aboriginal Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) clients in 2021 – 2022 were under 25 years old.

Throughout our consultation sessions for this submission, Aboriginal staff described their deep despair and demoralisation in finding themselves supporting the children and grandchildren of past clients. They bear witness in their day-to-day work, to the traumatic impacts that persistent housing exclusion and the systemic racism that underpins it, wreaks on families over generations.

That the current systems and policy settings are not working for Aboriginal households is clearly reflected in the SHS Returning Clients data, with 70% of Aboriginal clients coming back to the SHS for support again and again after experiencing further crisis and housing breakdown. This data demonstrates the urgent need for a new approach and investment in culturally safe, trauma informed, effective responses, providing ongoing stability, and preventing future housing crisis.

The chronic lack of support services and affordable housing options for Aboriginal Australians experiencing homelessness in urban and regional areas is fuelling the crisis we see in our communities every day. The chronic absence of housing and support resources combined with other systemic barriers; explains the acute overrepresentation of Aboriginal people accessing specialist homelessness services every day in Australia. ^[2]

Whilst over 80% of Australia's Aboriginal population live in urban and regional areas, time and time again we see national housing initiatives and investments that only target remote or very remote communities. Whilst we are not arguing that investment isn't urgently needed in remote and very remote areas, we *are* arguing that ignoring the needs of urban and regional Aboriginal peoples is having a devastating impact.

Reforming of the Homelessness System

What is clear is that the current homelessness service systems across each state and territory in Australia is not meeting the needs of Aboriginal people that experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. Whilst this is likely due to insufficient funding, the downstream impacts of the national housing crisis, and stagnant social housing growth, at its core, the homelessness service systems are not culturally safe nor fit for purpose.

In general, Aboriginal services are underfunded and under-resourced and consequently they are unable to deliver the capable system that Aboriginal people need. For example, in Victoria Aboriginal people make up 13% of all people accessing the specialist homelessness service system, however only 3% of homelessness funding goes to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. More broadly, the homelessness service systems across the country are fragmented. This includes mainstream and Aboriginal services.

^[2] Tuall, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/38>

Towards an Aboriginal Homelessness System

In advancing one of the key objectives of [*Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*](#), namely, the need for an Aboriginal Homelessness Service System, the Aboriginal Homelessness Forum commissioned The [*Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific Homelessness System in Victoria*](#) ('Blueprint'). The Blueprint was developed through a mixed method approach, including a cross-jurisdictional scan of Aboriginal-specific approaches to homelessness, one-on-one consultations with stakeholders across the homelessness sector and people with lived experience, and co-design workshops with stakeholders from across the service system. Following on from this, an issues report was developed which outlined the key challenges facing Aboriginal people in the current homelessness system and an outline of the options for rebuilding an Aboriginal homelessness service system from the ground up which forms the basis of the Blueprint.

The Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum in partnership with Homes Victoria are already advancing the implementation of the Blueprint. Two new homelessness entry points have been commissioned to be based, in a state first, at Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Work is underway, co-designing an enhanced service model for the entry point to ensure that it is culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal Victorians that are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. Analysis of meaningful, functional, and localised data coming out of the pilot entry points, will drive an iterative process for the building of the Aboriginal homelessness system. Under this process, demand and supply analysis will guide the development of regional plans for ending homelessness. Based on this analysis, cohort and region-specific model for housing and support delivery will be co-designed funding will be allocated against these models and local community plans.

The Blueprint provides a way forward for all governments on how to comprehensively respond to homelessness in a way that is culturally safe and responsive and respects the principles of self-determination.

What needs to be reformed.

Homelessness is the most acute and tangible aspect of the housing market failure in Australia. The solution will require actions from Commonwealth, State and Territory, and Local Governments, as well as the mainstream and Aboriginal Community Controlled sector.

The following key areas of reform:

- **Housing First:** addressing homelessness requires broad system reform where Housing First programs are not merely provided as an addendum to existing systems that are struggling to address homelessness. This entails the implementation of Housing First, translated as appropriate to the broader policy context, and transformation of the housing and homelessness system coupled with adequate income support and social welfare that moves beyond providing intermittent or crisis support. Such system reform is required for both Housing First to operate as intended, and for systems to respond adequately to the wider population experiencing homelessness.
- Each State and Territory must adopt a plan to reform their homelessness system to ensure that all aspects of the service system are properly resourced, funded and capable of meeting the needs of all service users. Fundamental to these reforms must be a commitment to ensuring all housing and support services are culturally safe and responsive. This involves

engaging and co-design with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations already in the sector.

- National Housing and Homelessness Agreement to include new funding and strategic actions in State and Territory Schedules, focussed on the Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to drive reform.
- All policies, programs and interventions across Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Government levels must contain targets to drive investments, reforms, capacity building and outcomes. For example, a target might be to reduce the rates of Aboriginal people using homelessness services by 10% a year embedded in NATSIHHP, NHHA and in State and Territory Schedules under the NHHA.
- For a functional and effective Aboriginal homelessness system to operate across the country requires a strong and capable Aboriginal workforce. Governments at all levels should invest in the education, training and upskilling of Aboriginal staff to ensure that mob can support mob, and that services can be delivered in culturally safe and effective ways.

Objective 5: A capable system that delivers Aboriginal housing needs

Questions from focus area: 3.4 Social housing

1. Are there any capacity and capability constraints impacting on future growth of the community housing sector?
2. What changes to community housing regulation could improve outcomes for tenants, the community housing sector, governments and investors?
3. Do current regulatory approaches support future growth in the community housing sector?
4. How can governments and their partners best grow social housing stock?
5. How can social housing providers better support people with complex needs (such as people with disability, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and people with mental health, alcohol and other drug issues)?
6. In a multi-provider system which includes public and community housing, how can governments and housing organisations ensure that people in most housing need or with complex needs can access housing?
7. What significant issues within the social housing sector lack sufficient quality data to inform decision-making?

It would be a travesty if collectively we have not made progress towards reducing homelessness and housing insecurity for Aboriginal People and are instead in the same position in five years' time. To help avoid this, it is crucial that we develop the capacity of the Aboriginal community housing sector both throughout Victoria and across the nation (see **Attachment C**- the Community Housing Capacity Building Plan). The ACCO sector must lead the provision of housing and homelessness services to Aboriginal communities.

We take this submission as an opportunity to advocate for **an expansion in housing owned and controlled by ACCOs** and further as an opportunity to advocate for **the use of the available growth funding coupled with additional capacity building investments to build a capable Aboriginal housing sector**.

While there are a number of medium sized registered Aboriginal housing providers throughout the country, we acknowledge that in other states and territories, the sector is similar if not more fragmented and smaller in scale than in Victoria. Therefore, the points below (summarised from the agenda items of [Man-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort's 20 Year Vision](#)) can be adopted and/or adapted nationally, to help support the development, capacity building, and expansion of the community housing sector across the country.

The Aboriginal community housing sector agenda:

- Working effectively with government and providing leadership in implementing elements of the VAHMF.
- Helping to meet anticipated state-wide demand for 27,000 additional Aboriginal household dwellings by 2036, of which 5000 are social/community housing.

- Transforming community housing into a foundation for breaking cycles of disadvantage and homelessness, a platform to delivery wraparound social and economic programs, and one that also supports education and employment opportunities.
- Transforming community housing into a pathway to housing independence that includes private rental and home ownership.
- Otherwise shaping the sector to maximise social benefit from its housing pool through engaging continuous quality improvement cycles.
- Working in partnership with mainstream social housing to ensure it is culturally safe for, and otherwise contributes effectively to meeting the housing needs of, Aboriginal people.

The outcomes that have been achieved throughout Victoria via the direction of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are an example of what can be achieved with targets and dedicated investments in the housing and homelessness sectors. The targets have resulted in a number of Aboriginal housing providers progressing well down the path to becoming registered and a number of social housing growth proposals submitted by ACCOs, individually, and in partnerships with mainstream registered housing agencies.

There are two key arguments why priority capacity building activities should be brought forward. Firstly, a number of ACCOs are well advanced on becoming registered and supports should be provided in a timely way as they register and secondly, there is a risk that ACCOs may miss out on Government investments in social and affordable housing that will be available over the next five years unless barriers to accessing the funding are addressed.

There is significant opportunity for Aboriginal social and affordable housing growth assuming a 10% Aboriginal target across the following:

1. Commonwealth's \$2billion social housing accelerator.
2. Commonwealth's \$10billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) to build 30,000 new social and affordable housing units.

Additional investments need to be made into the capacity and capability of Victorian Aboriginal housing providers in order to maximise the new housing investments and ensure that investments result in Aboriginal ownership.

We recommend that all Commonwealth State and Territory Government invest in the following Aboriginal housing and homelessness capacity building activities:

1. Develop and implement a long-term workforce strategy to recruit, develop and retain Aboriginal people in the future housing and homelessness roles that the Aboriginal community housing and homelessness sector will require. Key actions might include:
 - Promoting housing and related careers as meaningful and rewarding careers in Aboriginal communities.
 - Targeted strategies to attract Aboriginal people to the range of homelessness and community housing industry roles and professions through scholarships and employer subsidies.
 - Professional development and training of staff across core housing and homelessness roles to build maturity and capability.

- Next generation senior executive development program – growing community housing leadership by working with CEOs and senior managers to enhance leadership, business, finance and people management skills.
2. Supporting housing agencies to build key housing capabilities including tenancy, property, asset management and development capability as well as core governance, management and financial capability.
 3. Establish communities of practice to support continuous improvement and capacity building within Aboriginal housing providers through:
 - Targeted professional development of housing staff.
 - Sharing of information, knowledge, resources and good practice.
 - Providing assistance, sourcing housing professionals, technical experts, consultants and contractors and developing networks with housing professionals.
 - Developing and sharing template libraries of model policies, procedures and guidance materials including contracts, agreements and scopes of works for procurement of maintenance and development contractors.
 - Providing guidance and assistance on property condition assessments, producing maintenance/capital forecasts and management of portfolio condition.
 - Aiding establishment of systems and processes to strengthen complaints management and management of tenancy breaches and VCAT representation.
 - Assisting staff in business case development to support capital grant applications.
 - Building financial capacity to financially model, develop the capital structure and assess development projects in order to access capital grants and raise finance for housing developments.
 4. Explore governance and partnership models to create scale and capacity in Aboriginal housing providers. Investigate and develop governance and partnership models to minimise barriers and maximise access to capital funding and finance for Aboriginal housing providers to grow the supply of social and affordable housing for the Aboriginal community. In particular investigate governance models for joint planning, joint developments, collective and shared service delivery, joint goods/services procurement and shared back office services.
 5. Improve access to philanthropic resources to support Aboriginal housing developments.
 6. Resource the VAHHF Secretariat in AHV to strengthen the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum governance, to lead and support development of the emerging Aboriginal community housing sector as a step toward an Aboriginal housing and homelessness peak capable of facilitating collective impact. Other states and territories may benefit from a similar structure, whereby Aboriginal organisations providing housing and/or homelessness services, meet to collectively resolve challenges and support the development of the service system.
 7. Embed Aboriginal data sovereignty in the AHHF and across the housing and homelessness sector. This is in line with Closing the Gap priority reform 4: Shared access to data and information at a Regional Level. This priority highlights the importance of Aboriginal People collecting, analysing and using locally relevant data to meet the priorities of Aboriginal communities and to drive development.
 8. Undertake a feasibility assessment of the costs of establishing and resourcing an Aboriginal system steward to maintain a systems monitoring role and oversee sharing of housing and homelessness data with the Aboriginal community. The feasibility study would consider the

costs to develop and implement protocols for sharing government and community housing and homelessness key data including demand and operational data and to establish systems and software to facilitate data sharing, and supporting collective analysis, evaluation, planning and advocacy.

We also advocate for an investment in an Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Workforce Strategy. Aboriginal staff working in this space are under significant pressure, hold a great deal of responsibility and are required to work across many intersections of the social services system. Recruiting and retaining Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector staff is a major challenge across all Aboriginal organisations. Better specialist training, better on the job support and higher remuneration is urgently required to build and maintain a skilled, capable Aboriginal housing and homelessness workforce.

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum’s vision is for a unified, strong, financially viable, and self-determining Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector that, over the next 20 years, is a significant contributor to ensuring every Aboriginal Victorian has a home. This will be achieved in part through providing community housing as a pathway out of homelessness and housing exclusion.

Management transfers, which give Aboriginal renters the choice to be housed by an Aboriginal provider, can accelerate operational efficiencies, and create a larger scale Aboriginal Community Housing Sector, while also offering an Aboriginal rental housing provider for Aboriginal renters. For example, in 2016, the Director of Housing in Victoria signed an Asset Conversion Deed transferring ownership of all the departmental social housing properties that Aboriginal Housing Victoria had been managing. This paved the way for 1,448 properties to come under the direct management of Victoria’s first registered Aboriginal Housing provider.

Finally, we implore the government to invest in capacity building for Aboriginal organisations who want to become housing providers. This should include identifying opportunities across Australia for stock transfers as well as building new stock for Aboriginal housing providers to own, manage and leverage. ACCOs and TOs want a reduction in “red tape” and the systemic barriers that make it very difficult to become a housing provider. Current regulatory frameworks are overly onerous, complex, and difficult to navigate. For more detail, see *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* – every Aboriginal Person Has a Home [20 Year Vision](#).

Questions from focus area: 3.7 The impact of climate change and disasters on housing security, sustainability and health

1. How can governments improve housing and accommodation service coordination to better support individuals affected by hazards?
2. How can governments support hazard resilient housing and housing modifications for new and existing housing, in particular within rural and remote locations that are more likely to be impacted by extreme weather events?
3. How can governments better encourage the uptake of energy efficient housing modifications and design?
4. How can housing policies and programs support people who have been displaced due to climate disasters?
5. What options should be explored for improving the energy efficiency of rental properties?
6. How can hazard resilience and thermal performance of housing in regional and remote locations be improved?

Over tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal People have built a deep connection to the Australian environment, climate, and land. This connection can be seen through dreamtime stories and the development of Aboriginal fire and land management groups. While this connection has led to a wealth of knowledge and understanding, it has also meant that climate change is increasingly impacting the cultural, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal People.

For people experiencing homelessness, climate change increases exposure to extreme weather including colder winters, warmer summers, and a greater number of climate-change induced hazards and disasters. These extreme temperatures and weather events can all impact vulnerability to health conditions, food security and mortality rates.

While impacts of climate change for all households include rising insurance premiums and increasing energy consumption, **for those living in poor quality housing** (including those in insecure, unsafe, unstable, and social housing) the running costs including the cost to heat and cool the home is exacerbated. Thermal regulation (heating and cooling) is also lacking in many of these homes resulting in poorer mental and physical health outcomes. Given rates of housing insecurity are higher among Aboriginal People, specific strategies that reduce the harm of climate change for Aboriginal People living in insecure housing and social housing are required. With this being exemplified by the fact that during the 2019-2020 bushfires, that destroyed approximately 300 houses and covered 326,000 hectares, one quarter of the Victorian Aboriginal population lived in areas affected by these fires.

Despite the complex challenges that climate change pose for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and unstable housing, **there is a paucity of research that offers strategies and recommendations to overcome these challenges**. Therefore, research that is geared towards better understanding the ongoing impact of climate change (particularly persistent exposure to heat) and also the strategies to minimise the damage for Aboriginal communities is required. Greater funding is required to conduct more research, to develop new programs that support the utilisation of Aboriginal knowledge, and to determine responses to the impact of climate on housing and homelessness. This requires that **we work alongside specific communities to develop specific strategies and solutions**

based on their experiences, their knowledge, and the climate. For example, Dhelkunya Dja (a Traditional Owner Land Management Board) have a healing country plan, outlining their aspirations to care for country and determine the future of their people. Governments at all levels must work with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Trusts to determine how plans like the one developed by Dhelkunya Dja can help to find housing solutions in a changing climate. Local, state and the federal government must Listen and empower Aboriginal communities to develop and implement their own solutions.

Expanding the [First Nations Clean Energy Network](#) to help develop solutions to the impact of climate change on housing insecurity should be a matter of urgency to address this. The network aims to build community-led renewable energy projects and deliver cheap and reliable power to Aboriginal communities across the country. The Network does this through collaborating with communities, industry, and governments.

There is an urgent need to better acknowledge and **utilise the biocultural knowledge of Aboriginal People in climate action.** The knowledge that Aboriginal People have accumulated regarding the climate and how to live in hot and/or flood-prone climates should be applied to strategies within the housing and homelessness space. This knowledge can be seen through the development of climate plans and strategies by Aboriginal land management organisations. However, there remains a need to decipher how we can implement these plans and strategies to improve housing outcomes and mitigate the impacts of climate change on housing for Aboriginal People.

New social housing should be built with reference to specific design strategies that can reduce the impact of climate change and extreme weather. To make these changes, both responsive maintenance and planned maintenance needs to take place. This might include retrofitting old homes with cooling and heating systems and building new homes that meet a higher level of construction standards. Increasing housing stock overall will also minimise the impact of climate change by reducing rates of overcrowding experienced by Aboriginal People.

Finally, much of the current discussion regarding housing and climate change focuses on the need to support people through the process of relocation and displacement. However, we must acknowledge that some community members may wish not to be relocated. Therefore, before we ask the question “how do we support people who have been displaced” perhaps we should be asking “is there an alternative to displacement”. Where displacement remains the sole option, the needs and priorities of community should be adhered to. This might include placing families together, implementing programs that reflect the cultures, languages, and values of those who have been displaced, and placing people in suburbs, towns, or cities that to an extent mimic the places where they have been displaced from.

We suggest that:

- The Government fund and coordinate hazard mapping for existing social housing, including for CHP owned and managed housing. Once properties exposed to unacceptable risks are identified, Government and CHPs could together investigate options to dispose of housing exposed to unacceptable risks or, alternatively, explore ways to minimise or mitigate risks (through, for example, earthworks, land clearing, etc.).

- The Government should invest in updating planning schemes to reduce or eliminate building in areas exposed to unacceptable risks (e.g. flooding, bushfires, etc.), and/or strengthen the building code for these areas to reduce the risk as much as possible.

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum welcomes this opportunity to provide our recommendations on the development of a national housing and homelessness plan.

We urge the Federal Government to commit to developing a standalone national Aboriginal housing and homelessness plan. We strongly recommend that its work should be underpinned by cultural principles and include an Aboriginal schedule that establishes policy and investment priorities, actions, indicators, and targets.

The exclusion of Aboriginal people from full economic participation until 1967 has today resulted in lower rates of home ownership in comparison to the mainstream population, an overreliance on public, social and community housing and disproportionate rates of homelessness. With this exclusion being perpetuated by the ongoing effects of structural racism that exacerbate the inability of Aboriginal Australians to access a housing and homelessness system that is not designed to meet their needs.

The limited understanding of government at all levels of the complex causes and drivers of the contemporary experiences of Aboriginal people in relation to housing and homelessness has resulted in an almost exclusive national policy focus on the experience of Aboriginal people in regional and remote communities and the effects of chronic overcrowding.

Whilst we are not arguing that investment isn't urgently needed in remote and very remote areas, we *are* arguing that ignoring the needs of urban and regional Aboriginal peoples is having a devastating impact.

All Aboriginal people deserve safe, secure, and affordable housing. 'More of the same' housing responses will mean Aboriginal housing outcomes will continue to fall further behind the rest of the community. A National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan would ensure that government are accountable for achieving the housing stability that underpins all the target areas in Closing the Gap.

We believe access to safe, affordable housing is *central* to closing the gap.

We look forward to working with the Federal Government on this important step forward.

Aboriginal Justice Caucus

Information for Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission

National Housing and Homelessness Plan

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways upon which our lives depend. We pay our respects to our Ancestors and Elders – past, present and emerging. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the leadership of Aboriginal Communities across Victoria in pursuing true justice for our people.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AJF	Aboriginal Justice Forum
ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
AHV	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
AJA	Aboriginal Justice Agreement
AJA1	Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement
AJA2	Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement: Phase 2
AJA3	Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 3
AJA4	Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4
AJA5	Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 5
AJC	Aboriginal Justice Caucus
ASJC	Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner
DJCS	Department of Justice and Community Safety
Djirra	Djirra (formerly the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service)
JIER	Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney
IPV	Independent Prison Visitor
KYC	Koorie Youth Council
LAJAC	Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committee
LSIC Inquiry	Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System
NHHP	National Housing and Homelessness Plan
RAJAC	Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
VAAF	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VACSAL	Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VALS	Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Yoorrook	Yoo-rrook Justice Commission

Advice to readers

To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers, we advise that this document may include quotations and/or names of people who are deceased.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria and involved in the justice sector have diverse cultures. Throughout this document 'Aboriginal' refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People, communities and organisations. The Aboriginal Justice Caucus acknowledge that there are many Aboriginal people in Victoria who have Torres Strait Islander heritage, and many Torres Strait Islander people who now call Victoria home.

The terms 'Koori', 'Koorie' and 'Indigenous' are retained in the names of programs, initiatives, direct quotations, publication titles and in reference to published data.

The word family has many different meanings. Use of the words 'family' and 'families' is all encompassing and acknowledges the variety of relationships and structures that can make up a family unit, including family-like or care relationships and extended kinship structures.

Contents

Aboriginal Justice Caucus	5
Introduction.....	6
Self-determination.....	7
Sustainable, long-term funding for Aboriginal organisations	8
Supporting the Aboriginal workforce	9
Advance Aboriginal data sovereignty and governance	9
Housing and post-release support	11

Aboriginal Justice Caucus

The Aboriginal Justice Caucus (**AJC**) is made up of all the Aboriginal signatories¹ to the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (**AJA**) and includes Chairpersons of each of the nine Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (**RAJACs**), representatives from statewide Aboriginal justice programs, Aboriginal peak bodies and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (**ACCOs**).

The AJC provides statewide representation and leadership to amplify Community voices in all areas relating to justice. The AJC are a crucial conduit between Aboriginal Communities and the Victorian 'justice' system. We are privileged to work with and listen to our communities, colleagues and clients and seek to ensure their voices are heard by government, and those responsible for the day-to-day operation of police, corrections, courts and other 'justice' services.

The AJC acknowledge the enormous contributions of Aboriginal leaders, Elders and knowledge holders who have gone before us, and fought tirelessly for our rights. Their efforts paved the way for us to continue the fight for justice for our people.

Aboriginal self-determination has always been central to the AJA, and as partners to successive phases of the Agreement the AJC have been instrumental in the creation of numerous positions, programs, policies and plans² to prevent our people coming into contact with the system, and to ensure that, for those caught up in the system, it is more responsive to their needs.

As the AJA has evolved, so too has the role of the AJC. We participate in a growing number of advisory and governance mechanisms to change laws, develop new strategies,³ procure programs and services, inform responses to justice issues and reform systems. However, to move beyond reform and *transform* systems into ones that can truly deliver justice for our mob requires true self-determination.

This necessitates new and greater responsibilities for the AJC, Aboriginal Communities and Organisations to determine, design and deliver services that reflect Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

¹ Signatories to Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja, the fourth phase of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, are listed at the back of this submission.

² While not an exhaustive list, positions, programs, policies and plans established under the first three phases of the AJA are outlined in *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja – Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4*, p.12

³ Like Wirkara Kulpa – Victoria's first Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy

Introduction

The Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) has worked in partnership with Victorian governments for over 23 years, with the aim of preventing the incarceration of Aboriginal people and deaths in custody; and improving the lives of Aboriginal people, families and communities across Victoria. The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) is the longest-running agreement of its kind in Australia and has enabled the establishment of significant Aboriginal programs, positions, plans and business units that operate specifically to address the needs of the Victorian Aboriginal Community.

The AJA's wide-reaching impacts, along with its strong local, regional and statewide partnerships, are a great strength. However, there remain significant unresolved issues that undermine the effectiveness of our efforts, one of the most fundamental of these is the lack of housing for our mob.

Housing issues are regularly raised through community forums, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJACs) and discussed at Aboriginal Justice Forums (AJFs). While the numbers of people in our communities experiencing these issues have changed over time, the nature of the issues have not:

- Homelessness increases the risk of people becoming criminalised.
- The absence of affordable, secure and appropriate accommodation restricts opportunities for diversion and bail and leads to people becoming more deeply entrenched in the criminal justice system more quickly.
- Being unable to access housing at key points of transition into and out of the criminal justice system, increases the likelihood of continued and/or repeat involvement with the system.

These issues arise against a backdrop of broader Aboriginal housing inequality, the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the homeless population and racism and discrimination in private housing markets.

While efforts have been made to address these issues over the years, government responses have typically been too small, poorly designed and piecemeal in their implementation. Addressing these issues requires investment commensurate with Community need, and consistent effort over time and across regions.

The AJC are pleased to provide this information, in the hope that it may be incorporated into the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF) submission for consideration in the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

We understand the Australian Government is developing a National Housing and Homelessness Plan with state and territory governments. The Plan will be a 10-year strategy to help more people access safe and affordable housing. It will set out a shared vision across all levels of government to inform future housing and homelessness policy in Australia, and key short, medium and longer-term reforms needed to address housing and homelessness challenges.

The AJC want to see housing issues addressed with comprehensive responses, and complementary actions across departments, governments and Agreements. It is critically important that this work is done in a consistent way, with Aboriginal self-determination at its core.

We believe there needs to be a national approach which articulates the housing needs and priorities of Aboriginal people, provides principles to guide housing assistance for Aboriginal people including consideration of intersecting housing-justice issues, and sets targets to drive improvements in housing outcomes for, and led by, Aboriginal people and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs).

Self-determination

“Our people have long called for self-determination and, in recent times, the notion of self-determination has gained traction with governments. I believe, however, that many are grappling with the true meaning of self-determination.” Dr Lois Peeler AM⁴

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (**RCIADIC**) stressed the significance of empowerment and self-determination as a means of addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in criminal legal systems. The principles of the right to self-determination are central to the report and its 339 recommendations.⁵

Many of the recommendations, including those related to housing, either implicitly or explicitly refer to the need for negotiation and decision-making with Aboriginal people and organisations, resourcing ACCOs, and support for Aboriginal governance mechanisms. This is succinctly captured in Recommendation 188:

That governments negotiate with appropriate Aboriginal organisations and communities to determine guidelines as to the procedures and processes which should be followed to ensure that the self-determination principle is applied in the design and implementation of any policy or program or the substantial modification of any policy or program which will particularly affect Aboriginal people. (Johnston, 1991, vol 5, p111).

The Victorian Government committed to self-determination as the primary driver of Aboriginal affairs policy in 2015.⁶ This commitment is guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (**UNDRIP**), which defines self-determination as a collective right enabling a group of people to freely determine their political status and economic, social and cultural development:

*Article 3: Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*⁷

While the definition provides guidance, Indigenous peoples must determine the scope and shape of self-determination in practice.⁸

Progressing Aboriginal self-determination must be at the heart of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, embedded in its principles and the actions that flow from it. The Plan should support local and jurisdictional governance mechanisms that bring together Aboriginal organisations and communities on housing matters. Resources need to be provided to ensure Aboriginal organisations can meaningfully engage in the design and delivery of solutions as collaborators and decision-makers.

⁴ Dr Lois Peeler AM was Principal of Worawa Aboriginal College and is now an Elder in residence. She is also Chairperson, Eastern Metropolitan RAJAC. Quote from *Dungala Kaiela Oration*, 9 September 2020.

⁵ Behrendt, L. Jorgensen, M. and Vivian, A. (2017), *Self-Determination within the Justice Context*, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney

⁶ Victorian Government, *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*

⁷ United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Geneva, 2008. Available at: [DRIPS_en.pdf \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/development/dmpr/doh/indigenousandlocalpeoples/)

⁸ Behrendt, L. Jorgensen, M. and Vivian, A. (2017), *Self-Determination within the Justice Context*, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney, p.3

Sustainable, long-term funding for Aboriginal organisations

“We should move to a system that transfers the authority and resources to ACCOs to provide culturally appropriate community responses. We need appropriate and sustainable long-term funding models and investment in our workforce and to work independently under true self-determination.” Linda Bamblett⁹

The lack of sustainable, long-term funding for Aboriginal organisations undermines Aboriginal self-determination. The UNDRIP outlines Indigenous peoples ‘have the right to autonomy of self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions’.¹⁰

Building the community-controlled sector is a priority reform area under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. As partners to that Agreement the Australian and Victorian Governments have committed to building a strong Aboriginal community-controlled sector and organisations in line with the strong sector elements:

- Sustained capacity building and investment
- Dedicated and identified Aboriginal workforce
- ACCOs supported by a Peak Body with strong governance, policy development and influencing capacity
- ACCOs have a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities.¹¹

Government partners to the National Agreement also committed to increasing the amount of government funding for Aboriginal programs and services that is provided to ACCOs and to increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs.¹² The AJC urges the Australian Government to progress with these reforms across the housing and justice sectors in alignment with recommendations from several inquiries and reviews including the RCIADIC.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Criminal Justice System recommended ‘long-term funding arrangements which support the expansion of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations’ leadership and service provision with the justice and social services sectors and diversify and expand the social, health, forensic and legal services provided by these organisations to the Aboriginal community.’¹³

Fulfilment of these will enable the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to deliver high quality services to Aboriginal people; provide flexibility for organisations to adapt and continuously improve service delivery to meet Community needs; deliver outcomes prioritised by Community; and collect data and other information to demonstrate impact.

⁹ Linda Bamblett is CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) and Chairperson, Northern Metropolitan RAJAC. Quote from transcript of Public Hearing, Inquiry into Victoria’s Criminal Justice System, Melbourne, 21 September 2021.

¹⁰ Article 4, UNDRIP

¹¹ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority Reform Area 2 [Priority Reforms | Closing the Gap](#)

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Parliament of Victoria, Legal and Social Issues Committee, Inquiry into Victoria’s Criminal Justice System (2022) Recommendation 14

Supporting the Aboriginal workforce

There needs to be concerted whole-of-government approaches to building and sustaining an Aboriginal workforce across the housing and justice sectors. Challenges in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff in roles and being unable to fill positions, is one of the most persistent issues raised in reports to the Aboriginal Justice Forum.

While many Royal Commissions and inquiries have made recommendations to build the Aboriginal workforce, responses are typically program or sector specific and have resulted in movement of staff between sectors rather than significant increases in the available Aboriginal workforce.

The evaluation of AJA3 found successful initiatives under the AJA employ Aboriginal staff who are known in the community, respected and trusted by program participants, highly motivated, well-trained, and skilled at providing cultural support to clients. These workers ‘walk between the two worlds’ of community and government and act as a mediator and sometimes translator for both. Successful programs resource workers adequately and provide supports to manage cultural loads and vicarious trauma.¹⁴

In the context of the NHHP, there needs to be support for Aboriginal workforces involved in the construction of houses, as well as those involved in managing tenancies and a broad range of Aboriginal Community liaison, engagement and case management roles that operate to support Aboriginal people and their families navigate intersecting government systems and services like justice and housing.

Advance Aboriginal data sovereignty and governance¹⁵

“Data sovereignty needs to be advanced. Research, evidence and data should be community owned and controlled. This is a key mechanism for community decision-making.” VACCHO¹⁶

Access to data and information that reflects Aboriginal realities is critical for advocacy, planning and decision-making. The AJC have long-held concerns in relation to the collection, use and transparency of data and information reflecting Aboriginal people’s interactions with government services and systems. Data is often deficit-based, and serves government needs rather than those of the Aboriginal Communities¹⁷.

The Victorian Government recognises ‘Aboriginal ownership and control of data is a key enabler of self-determination’¹⁸ and that ‘Aboriginal communities and organisations should have governance, choice and control over data collected from and about their communities.’¹⁹

The AJA4 includes a commitment to ‘improve collection and availability of Aboriginal justice data’. While efforts have been made across justice agencies to improve Aboriginal identification in data, there are still areas, where it is almost impossible to get any data disaggregated by Aboriginal status, particularly in relation to the

¹⁴ [Evaluation of AJA3 | Aboriginal Justice](#), see the AJA3 – Evaluation synthesis and AJA3 Evaluation – summary of findings.

¹⁵ The Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit, Communique, 20 June 2018, provides these definitions: Indigenous Data Sovereignty is defined as: ‘the right of Indigenous peoples to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data.’ Indigenous Data Governance is ‘the right of Indigenous Peoples to autonomously decide what, how and why Indigenous Data are collected, accessed and used. It ensures that data on or about Indigenous peoples reflects our priorities, values, cultures, worldviews and diversity.’

¹⁶ Quoted in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023

¹⁷ Kukutai, T., & Taylor, J (Eds), 2016, Indigenous Data Sovereignty – Toward an Agenda

¹⁸ Victorian Government 2018, Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, p.59

¹⁹ Victorian State Government, Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021-2023, p. 46.

housing circumstances and needs of people entering and exiting the justice system. The data that is available rarely reflects the outcomes Aboriginal Communities and organisations are most interested in.

To provide services that meet the needs of Aboriginal people, and support meaningful self-determination, we need better access to data collected about us and greater control over determining what data is collected, and how it is used to construct narratives about Aboriginal experiences and needs.

Under Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Governments committed to: share disaggregated regional data with Aboriginal communities; work with Aboriginal partners to guide improved collection, access, management and use of data; be transparent about what data is held and how Aboriginal people can access it; and build capacity in Aboriginal organisations and Communities to collect and use data.²⁰

These commitments need to be fulfilled and inform the development of the NHHP, and any data collection, monitoring or evaluation plans developed to support its implementation. In doing so governments should develop sector-wide data access and data sharing agreements with and for ACCOs and Traditional Owners in their sector (local, state-wide and peak) with advice and input from the appropriate Aboriginal governance mechanism, and prioritise additional investment in ACCO data management and analytics as a core function.

To enable the Aboriginal Community to hold government to account, greater transparency of and access to data is of paramount importance.

The **AJC recommend** that the Australian Government:

1. Enshrine the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.
2. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy the right to meaningful and effective engagement in decision-making processes on matters that affect us.
3. Reform funding arrangements with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide sustainable, and ongoing support for all aspects of Aboriginal-led service delivery (from design to implementation, workforce development, data collection, and evaluation).
4. Develop and implement a cross-government strategy to build, support and maintain a strong, sustainable and cross-disciplinary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce (employed across the housing and justice sectors), supported by a clear and consistent model of resourcing.
5. Enshrine the *Maiam nayri Wingara* Indigenous Data Sovereignty protocols and principles in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and any associated guidance that governs data collection, storage and use for government departments and other public sector agencies.
6. Ensure Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are sufficiently resourced to support Indigenous Data Governance.

²⁰ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority Reform Four [6. Priority Reform Four - Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level | Closing the Gap](#)

Housing and the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) highlighted the relationships that exist between poor and inappropriate housing, poor health and the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody²¹. A central theme of the housing chapter is that colonisation and policies of assimilation denied Aboriginal people legitimate control over the 'location, design and functions of their living spaces, with serious adverse consequences.'²² Welfare presumptions about what constituted a 'good home' served to undermine family structures and identity. Separation of children from their families in response to housing conditions was destructive of Aboriginal identity and frequently led to a cycle of institutionalisation²³

The RCIADIC summarised a range of problems confronting Aboriginal communities in their efforts to access adequate housing. Sadly, those issues persist to this day:

- **Insufficient consultation**, misunderstanding and limited involvement of tenants and local Aboriginal communities in providing housing. Communication failures led to unsuitable housing because of poor design, location or the materials used.
- Aboriginal people living in urban areas are unable to obtain suitable housing through the private rental market due to **low incomes, racism and discrimination**.
- **Accommodating temporary visitors** can strain household resources, particularly in urban centres where people must visit to access medical, legal and other services. While not confined to Aboriginal households, the disruptive effects of visitors with drug and alcohol, mental health or other issues may be exacerbated by kinship ties.
- **Insufficient permanent housing** in areas preferred by Aboriginal people.
- **Bureaucratic control** of Aboriginal housing programs with poorly designed projects pushed through to completion to conform with funding cycles.
- The **variety of Aboriginal housing schemes and multiplicity of agencies** can hamper project development and deny Aboriginal people a knowledge of relevant procedures and processes.
- **Unmet expectations and needs of Aboriginal communities**. Some Aboriginal communities have all the skills necessary to obtain and manage their own housing and simply need a secure title and income; others need more intensive support.²⁴

The RCIADIC outlined possible responses to these programs which share common characteristics of increasing Aboriginal control of housing and infrastructure through Aboriginal housing organisations and consultative mechanisms.²⁵

Importantly, any response required more than just physical infrastructure to ensure related resources were provided for housing management and administration and support services for newly housed individuals and families.

²¹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (National Report, 1991) vol 2, p 425 ('National Report').

²² *ibid*

²³ *ibid*, p 425

²⁴ *ibid*, pp 426-427

²⁵ *ibid*, p 425

Housing policy and better justice outcomes

“Without a vast improvement in housing provision for Aboriginal families and former prisoners - rates of remand will continue to rise; rates of recidivism will continue to deteriorate; children will continue to move into child protection as their parents are incarcerated; and the harmful impacts on families of prisoners returning to their communities with unresolved trauma will continue unabated.” Darren Smith²⁶

Lack of long-term, stable housing contributes to the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people. This occurs in several ways – tenancy matters can quickly escalate to homelessness in the absence of early, culturally-safe legal assistance and support; fleeing family violence often results in homelessness; homelessness increases the likelihood of criminalisation for poverty and/or public order related offences; refusal of bail due to absence of suitable accommodation increases the number of people on remand, and time spent in custody; lack of housing reduces the likelihood of people being granted parole and extends periods of incarceration; exiting prison to homelessness/unstable housing significantly inhibits successful reintegration and increases the likelihood of a rapid return to the system²⁷.

In 2018, the AIHW found that one-third (33 per cent) of people entering prison were homeless in the four weeks prior, and over half of people in prison expected to be homeless upon release²⁸. Nationally, Aboriginal people (37 per cent) were more likely than non-Aboriginal people entering prison (23 per cent) to be in short-term or emergency accommodation. Upon exit, Aboriginal people were more likely than non-Aboriginal people to expect being homeless on release. Over half of all Aboriginal people exiting prison expected to be homeless²⁹.

People exiting prison now made up 12 per cent of all Aboriginal Specialist Homeless Support clients (935 people in 2020-21). More than double the 2011-12 figure of 5 per cent³⁰. These people have literally nowhere to go.

Failing to house people who have been incarcerated also ignores the needs of their families and wider communities. Lack of appropriate housing after prison drives reoffending as prisoners who are homeless upon exiting prison return in greater numbers. Upon release, the absence of stable housing acts as a barrier to reunification with children, keeping children and parents apart as children are left languishing in child protection and out-of-home-care (OOHC) services.

A significant proportion of people in contact with the criminal legal system require specialist support to access and maintain housing. Too often government silos and a lack of coordination results in sub-optimal outcomes. One department may provide funding for infrastructure, but not for operational costs and another may provide grants to operate programs but no capital funding. Targeted, timely services that provide accommodation *and* support can improve individual outcomes, increase the likelihood of successful reintegration and reduce recidivism. This requires simultaneous consideration of housing *and* justice policy and programs.

Given the close relationship between housing policy and justice outcomes, the AJC believe the National Housing and Homelessness Plan must have a strategic focus on improving housing for Aboriginal people at-risk of, involved in, or exiting the criminal justice system.

²⁶ Darren Smith is CEO of Aboriginal Housing Victoria and a member of the AJC. Quote from AHV submission to Yoorrook, November 2022.

²⁷ Lack of housing and accommodation is raised regularly in RAJAC Chairperson reports to the AJF. While the situation is particularly dire in regional Victoria where it has persisted for years, it is an issue commonly reported by all RAJACs. See for example Loddon Mallee and Grampians RAJAC reports to AJF 62 and RAJAC Chairperson reports to previous AJFs.

²⁸ AIHW, (2019), *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018*

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ AHV submission to Yoorrook

The **AJC recommend** that the National Housing and Homelessness plan:

1. Include a strategic focus on improving housing for Aboriginal people at-risk of, involved in, or exiting the criminal justice system.
2. Support the design of new investment models, which bring together capital investment in accommodation and culturally appropriate, structured service supports that can make the accommodation for people with complex needs sustainable.
3. Support increased provision of, and access to housing for Aboriginal justice-involved people at various points (diversion, bail, community orders, parole, post-release) through a 'housing first' approach with support services to enable viable tenancy.
4. Improve holistic services while in custody in preparation for managing the transition out, including access to housing and require that each person exiting has a plan in place providing for several months of transitional accommodation.
5. Look to innovative ways to encourage provision of self-contained, supported accommodation i.e. dedicate prison industries to the construction of tiny homes to be occupied by Aboriginal people fleeing family violence; on community-based orders, exiting prison, ageing out of residential care or exiting youth detention.
6. Make available data and evidence describing: the housing needs of Aboriginal people involved in the criminal legal system; the impact of stable, secure and affordable housing on key justice objectives including reducing offending and improving reintegration; and justice housing solutions for Aboriginal people involved in the justice system.

Aboriginal Justice Caucus – Signatories to Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja

Organisation	Signatory to AJA4
ACJP	Chairperson, Aboriginal Community Justice Panel
AHV	Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Housing Victoria
Dhelk Dja	Koori Caucus representative, Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum
Djirra	Chief Executive Officer, Djirra
IPV	Koori Independent Prison Visitor, Independent Prison Visitor Scheme
KYC	Executive Officer, Koorie Youth Council
RAJAC - BSW	Chairperson, Barwon South West Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Eastern Metropolitan	Chairperson, Eastern Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Gippsland	Chairperson, Gippsland Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Grampians	Chairperson, Grampians Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Hume	Chairperson, Hume Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Loddon Mallee	Chairperson, Loddon Mallee Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Northern Metropolitan	Chairperson, Northern Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Southern Metropolitan	Chairperson, Southern Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RAJAC - Western Metropolitan	Chairperson, Western Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
VACCA	Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAEAI	President, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VAJAC	Chairperson, Victorian Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
VALS	Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

Submission

January 11th 2023

1. Background

The purpose of this submission is to provide a response to the Housing Legislative package; two new Bills to establish the Housing Australia Future Fund and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council as well as an Amendment Bill to support the new legislation. ¹ We understand that the Future Fund and the Council will enable two of the Labor Government's key election commitments in relation to housing:

- The establishment of the 10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund.
- The establishment of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council via legislation.

The contemporary housing experience of Aboriginal ² people cannot be decoupled from the historical experience of Aboriginal dispossession and dislocation. Deprived of our land, excluded from the fruits of the economy and our traditional authority, lore and customs undermined, Aboriginal people have been homeless in our own land for the past two centuries. Our sustained economic exclusion has left a lasting legacy of housing poverty and deprivation.

We welcome this opportunity to provide our views on this significant step towards an Australia where every Aboriginal person has a home.



¹ <https://treasury.gov.au/consultation/c2022-343652>

² Throughout this document the term "Aboriginal" is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

2. Who we are – Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (VAHFF)

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum is unique in Australia. It's where every Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) who provide housing and homelessness services come together on a regular basis to progress the strategic work of the *Mana - Na Woorn -Tyeen Maar -Takoort* (Every Aboriginal Person has a home) Framework.³ (See Appendix two for an overview of the goals and principles of the Framework).

The *Mana-Na Woorn -Tyeen Maar-Takoort* Framework⁴ has been designed with the aim of meeting the diverse and particular needs of distinct groups of Aboriginal people. It has been developed *by* the community *for* the community. This is self-determination in action and its strength. Government partners have participated in the process, provided guidance and direction, but have recognised the power that has come from a community led response. Its implementation builds on the momentum that we have created, it will require all of our good will, application and innovation, and with the right resources we are sure that we can end Aboriginal homelessness and housing exclusion in Victoria.

In no other portfolio is the moral imperative to restore rights more compelling for First Australians than in housing. Despite the hardships and injustice endured, the Aboriginal people have more than survived, we are growing rapidly as a population. Demographic projections commissioned for the Framework have demonstrated that the number of Aboriginal households in Victoria will grow from around 23,000 (in 2016) to more than 50,000 by 2036. This means we need to find a further 27,000 homes over the next 20 years to 2036.

We therefore warmly welcome the commitment by the Federal Labor Government to establishing the Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Supply and Affordability Council.

3. National Leadership and national targets

For decades, housing and homelessness have not been priority areas for governments at either state or federal levels. For too long, housing has been seen as a “commodity” rather than essential infrastructure; a foundational basis that provides safety, promotes participation and sustains connections to community.

Decades of under investment in social housing by Governments has seen social housing stocks dwindle and the safety net erode. Having a home is as vital as safe roads, hospitals and schools. Yet if you are Aboriginal, you are ten times more likely to experience homelessness, as compared to any other population group. This is a national source of shame. It is time to turn around decades of under investment in social and affordable housing.

Victoria has the highest rate of Aboriginal people seeking specialist homelessness services in Australia. Establishing an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system that responds to the Aboriginal homelessness crisis, is trauma informed and built on the principles of self-determination, is a key goal of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home*. The objective is a redesigned Aboriginal homelessness service system that:

- Is accessible to Aboriginal people;
- Provides pathways through homelessness; and
- Improves long term sustainable post homelessness housing outcomes.

After extensive consultation with the community, and under the guidance of a Steering Committee of Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum members, Homes Victoria, and the Council to Homeless Persons, the Final Report: *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific Homelessness System in Victoria*⁵ (the Blueprint) was launched at the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit 2022.

³ See Appendix 1 for a full list of member agencies

⁴ <https://vahhf.org.au/>

⁵ <https://ahvic.org.au/cms/uploads/docs/aboriginal-housing-vic-4.pdf>

The Blueprint provides a design of an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system and a plan to practically implement each of the system building blocks for a future focussed, connected and culturally safe Aboriginal homelessness system.

Recommendation 1: We ask the Federal Government to commit to a 10 per cent funding target for Aboriginal people, through the Housing Australia Future Fund - 1 billion dollars (consistent with the Victorian Government’s target to commit 10 per cent of all new social housing created through the Big Housing Build to meet the needs of Aboriginal Victorians ⁶). We recommend that this commitment is linked to a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement schedule for housing and homelessness responses for Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that two seats on the Council are designated for two Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people who have extensive experience and understanding of Aboriginal housing and homelessness issues, (we recommend a gender balance) on an ongoing basis in recognition of Aboriginal people’s chronic overrepresentation in experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion and to further embed the Government’s commitment to self-determination and the Voice to Parliament.

Recommendation 3: That a specific Aboriginal schedule of works is developed so the impacts and outcomes of investments via the Housing Future Fund can be tracked, monitored and evaluated. We also recommend that a schedule of works is developed for the Council to ensure that contemporary experiences of Aboriginal housing and homelessness are adequately researched and consulted upon.

4. National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and Closing the Gap

Whilst the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is the driving investment platform for all housing and homelessness services nationally, there are other national agreements such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) that have a housing focus. Our position is that the CTG Agreement should **not replace** the overall responsibilities of the NHHA given its very narrow focus. Currently the sole CTG housing target is as follows:

“By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent.” ⁷

Whilst we recognise the need for work on addressing the pressing issue of overcrowding, we urge the Federal Labor Government to commit to measures that reflect a broader understanding of contemporary housing and homelessness issues for Aboriginal Australians. Overcrowding is in many ways, just the tip of the iceberg.

In 2007, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing visited Australia, Dr Kothari noted:

“While the Special Rapporteur is satisfied that the Government is envisaging to enhance the funds for rural and remote communities indigenous housing and recognizing the urgency of it, this should not be done at the expense of indigenous Australians who live in urban areas, who also suffer inadequate housing and living conditions.”

⁶ <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/all-victorians-have-stable-affordable-and-appropriate-housing>

⁷ <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area9>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up around 3.2% of the Australian population yet they made up over one-quarter or 28% of the clients (an estimated 72,900 clients) assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2021–22.⁸

There is a significant lack of dedicated services for Aboriginal Australians experiencing homelessness in urban areas, despite the acute over-representation. This combines with other systemic barriers to explain the acute overrepresentation of Aboriginal people accessing specialist homelessness services every day in Australia.⁹

To effectively meet the targeted outcomes of a new NHHA, appropriate resourcing is required and a move away from population based funding to a Fair Share approach. The new NHHA should devote a share of all mainstream social and affordable housing for Aboriginal projects equal to the proportion of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

These resources should include social housing investments, land concessions, inclusionary zoning allocations, shared equity programs, tax concessions and all other housing related commitments. Where mainstream social housing funding can be readily adapted to Aboriginal needs and where there is capacity for take up, the Aboriginal share should be equivalent to the proportion of Aboriginal people seeking homelessness assistance compared to all homelessness clients, for Victoria this equates to 10%.

A new NHHA should include a cultural statement underpinned by cultural principles. (See Appendix 2) Cultural performance indicators should also be applied. The cultural statement should recognise self-determination and the Victorian Treaty process. CHIA Victoria in partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria has developed the Community Housing Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework, supported by ten principles which could be applied to the new NHHA thereby embedding culturally appropriate systematic reform and practice. The framework can be found here:

<https://chiavic.com.au/resources/aboriginal-cultural-safety-framework/>

Recommendation 4: We recommend that a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is developed that reflects the diverse range of Aboriginal housing experiences – high rates of rough sleeping; inability to access social housing due to lengthy waiting lists and lack of available stock; lack of culturally safe tenancy support; and being locked out of private rental and home ownership. Furthermore we recommend future NHHA resourcing is allocated using a Fair Share approach.

Recommendation 5: The narrow scope of the current CTG housing target needs urgent review. It is itself an impediment to addressing the much broader issues of Aboriginal homelessness and housing exclusion.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Council commits to biannual consultation sessions in all States and Territories to ensure the Council is fully briefed on the full, current and contemporary extent of the housing and homelessness needs of Aboriginal communities. This will also ensure that the Council's annual report is truly reflective of the housing needs of the Aboriginal communities across Australia.

5. Aboriginal renters want Aboriginal landlords and culturally safe support

The Victorian Aboriginal community housing sector's vision is for a unified, strong, financially viable, self-determining Aboriginal housing sector that, over the next 20 years, is a significant contributor to

⁸ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview>

⁹ Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/38>

ensuring every Aboriginal Victorian has a home. This will be achieved through providing community housing as a pathway out of homelessness and housing exclusion.

Management transfers, which give Aboriginal renters the choice to be housed by an Aboriginal provider, can accelerate creation of scale and operational efficiencies in the Aboriginal Community Housing Sector, while also providing an Aboriginal rental housing provider for Aboriginal renters.

In 2016, the Director of Housing in Victoria signed an Asset Conversion Deed transferring ownership of all the departmental social housing properties that Aboriginal Housing Victoria had been managing. This paved the way for over 1500 properties to come under the direct management of Victoria's first registered Aboriginal Housing provider.

The Aboriginal population is the most disadvantaged in Victoria and the most disadvantaged 20% of the Victorian Aboriginal population live in social housing. It can be very difficult for Aboriginal renters in mainstream social housing to access culturally safe support when they are having difficulties that may put their tenancy at risk.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria has a strengths based, fully evaluated, outreach program called - More than a Landlord¹⁰. In this program, renters are supported to set life aspirations and achieve goals with an aim of becoming more independent and self-reliant. The program is flexible, holistic and can scale up and down depending on needs. When help is needed, renters have a trusted, culturally safe professional to call on. Program staff help renters identify needs and then actively link in the supports and services that can meet those needs. We believe all Aboriginal renters in social housing across Australia should have access to this program if and when they need it. (Note: Expanding this program so it can respond to all Aboriginal households in Victoria would require an investment of approximately \$7.7 million per year).

Recommendation 7: We recommend that the Housing Fund commits to prioritising investment in capacity building for Aboriginal organisations who want to become housing providers, and identifies opportunities across Australia for stock transfers as well as building new stock for Aboriginal housing providers to own, manage and leverage.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that the Housing Fund commits to investing in culturally safe tenancy support programs like *More Than a Landlord* in all States and Territories with sufficient scale to meet demand.

6. Conclusion

The Housing Australia Future Fund and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council have the ability to significantly contribute to addressing Aboriginal housing and homelessness. We strongly recommend that its work should be underpinned by cultural principles and include an Aboriginal schedule that raises awareness and establishes priorities, actions, indicators and targets. Data sovereignty is an essential element to achieve the Aboriginal housing and homelessness targeted outcomes and requires the establishment of a new Aboriginal-led oversight committee. Resource allocations need to change to a Fair Share approach equal to the Aboriginal homelessness client rate of 10% across the whole housing and homelessness spectrum, if we genuinely want to see the reduction in Aboriginal homelessness.

Ultimately, a national Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework needs to be developed and *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort* provides an excellent starting point.

We look forward to working with the Federal Government on this important step forward.

¹⁰ <https://ahvic.org.au/about/more-than-a-landlord>

Appendix One – List of AHHF member organisations (as of January 2023) *in alphabetical order:*

1. Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) <https://aal.org.au/>
2. Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) <https://acesinc.org.au/>
3. Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) <https://ahvic.org.au/>
4. Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative <https://www.badac.net.au/>
5. Bendigo and District BudjaBudja Aboriginal Cooperative <https://budjabudjacoop.org.au/>
6. Bendigo Aboriginal Co – Operative (BDAC) <https://www.bdac.com.au/>
7. Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation <https://www.bunuronglc.org/>
8. Dandenong and District Aborigines Cooperative Limited <https://ddacl.org.au/>
9. Dhauwurd – Wurrung Elder and Community Health Service <https://www.dwech.com.au/>
10. Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA) <https://djadjawurrung.com.au/>
11. Djirra <https://djirra.org.au/>
12. Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation <https://easternmaar.com.au/>
13. Elizabeth Morgan House (EMH) <https://www.emhaws.org.au/>
14. Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporations <https://www.fvtoc.com.au/>
15. First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation <https://fpmmac.com.au/>
16. Framlingham Trust
17. Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) <https://www.gegac.org.au/>
18. Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative <https://www.goolumgoolum.org.au/>
19. Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLAWAC) <https://gunaikurnai.org/>
20. Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation <https://www.gunditjmirring.com/>
21. Kirrae Health Service <https://www.kirraehealth.com/>
22. Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association (LEAHA)
<https://www.djillayngalu.org.au/leaha.html>
23. Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS) <https://www.mdas.org.au/>
24. Margaret Tucker Hostel <https://www.margarettuckerhostel.org.au/>
25. Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative <https://www.mvac.org.au/>
26. Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation <https://mungabareena.org.au/>
27. Ngwala Willumbong (NGWALA) <https://www.ngwala.org.au/>
28. Njernda Aboriginal Corporation <https://www.njernda.com.au/>
29. Oonah Belonging Place <https://oonah.org.au/>
30. Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative <https://rumbalara.org.au/>
31. Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation <https://www.vaccho.org.au/>
32. Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) <https://www.vacca.org/>
33. Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL)
<http://www.vacsal.org.au/>
34. Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) <https://www.vals.org.au/>
35. Wathaurong <https://www.wathaurong.org.au/>
36. Windamara Aboriginal Corporation <https://www.windamara.com.au/>
37. Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation <https://yynac.com.au/>

The Framework

Vision

Every Aboriginal person has a home.

Purpose

Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation.

Challenge

To meet demand for 27,000 additional Aboriginal households by 2036.

Principles

Aboriginal self determination – housing responses are designed for and delivered by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are the arbiters of good practice.

Rights based – Aboriginal people have the right to adequate housing.

Housing First – the housing and homelessness safety net provides Aboriginal clients with dignity, respect and quality of life.

Outcome driven – the critical mass of Aboriginal people shift from marginal housing to home ownership.

Transparency and accountability – the housing and homelessness system is accountable to the Aboriginal community through transparent, disaggregated public reporting of outcomes for people who seek assistance.

Cultural safety and access – Aboriginal people can access a system which is responsive to their housing needs and understands their connection to land, culture and family networks.

Strengths based and people centred – Housing is a platform for other services, building on individuals' community strengths to deliver people-centred outcomes that break the cycle of disadvantage.

Capacity – the Framework builds the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled organisations to upskill, create critical mass for development and engage in productive partnerships with the mainstream.

Economic opportunity and innovation – the Framework provides structures for development of local enterprises associated with land and culture; builds commercial opportunities; and delivers greater wealth to the community.

Culturally safe tenancy management – Housing and tenancy policies support and enable Aboriginal approaches to caring for family.

DRAFT:

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY HOUSING CAPACITY BUILDING PLAN OUTLINE

Supporting Aboriginal community housing owners self-determination

- 1) Building senior managers' and Board directors' awareness and understanding of community housing regulatory requirements through a combination of joint sessions and one-on-one engagements supported by the Housing Registrar.
- 2) Develop an organisational understanding of the housing market Aboriginal housing providers intend to enter and operate in, eg private, community or affordable housing rental markets and build to rent and build to own.
- 3) Support Aboriginal housing providers to identify their community housing aspirations and integrate them into organisational strategic, business and operational plans

Pathways to registration - Supporting Aboriginal housing providers to register

- 4) Supporting Aboriginal housing providers to develop an Aboriginal housing provider registration action plan
 - a) by provision of an Aboriginal interpreter linked into the Housing Registrar's regulatory teams
- 5) Providing a small grants program to Aboriginal housing providers to be used to implement their registration action plan

Building organisational capacity

Supporting Aboriginal housing providers to build housing governance capacity

- 6) Housing Registrar to establish an Aboriginal registration team, update and amend guidance materials and processes to support Aboriginal housing providers through the registration process
- 7) Develop housing and governance model policies and procedures for Aboriginal housing providers to adapt
- 8) Providing tools to assist Aboriginal housing providers to improve IT infrastructure and systems
 - a) Toolkit and resources to assist with IT planning, IT strategy development and IT security
 - b) Guidance on purchasing of housing management software systems to support critical competencies, including:
 - i) Asset, property and vacant unit management
 - ii) Rent collection and tenancy management
 - iii) Finance modules to support housing management and administration
 - iv) Ensuring transactional banking facilities, overdraft and loan facilities are fit-for-purpose for housing
- 9) Assistance to engage insurance brokers to provide appropriate levels of cover e.g. property insurance

Building property and tenancy management capacity

- 10) Strengthening asset management
 - a) assist Aboriginal housing providers to establish asset management fundamentals
 - b) provide guidance and assistance on property condition assessments, producing maintenance/capital forecasts and managing portfolio condition
 - c) provide assistance to source asset management professionals
- 11) Strengthening maintenance and works procurement
 - a) developing procurement and contract management guidance templates
 - b) developing contract templates and works scopes
 - c) Provide assistance to source maintenance and building contractors,
- 12) Strengthening tenancy management
 - a) Working with Aboriginal housing providers to
 - b) Provide access to specialist advice in relation to tenancy management
 - c) Support Aboriginal housing providers to access technical consultants and specialists to advise on establishment of systems and processes to
 - i) manage tenancy breaches and VCAT representation
 - ii) complaints management

Growing the supply of Aboriginal community housing

- 13) Supporting Aboriginal housing providers to understand the development potential of property holdings
 - a) Feasibility assessment of potential developments on land and housing owned by Aboriginal housing providers
- 14) Support Aboriginal housing providers to assess their readiness for development by providing a self-assessment tool and training key staff in how to undertake the assessment
- 15) Develop guidance materials for Aboriginal housing owners and assist them to access development experts who can assist with decision making on whether to partner with registered housing agencies to build new housing or to go it alone

Building capacity to partner in development

- 16) Promoting partnerships between Aboriginal housing owners and registered housing agencies to build new Aboriginal community housing dwellings
 - a) Develop template partnership and leasing agreements and guidance materials that outline available funding streams
 - b) Developing fair, equal and mature partnerships between Aboriginal and registered housing agencies (Aboriginal and mainstream) that promote two way learning, skill development and reciprocal benefits

Building development capacity of organisations

- 17) Improving access to development consultants by establishing contractor lists
- 18) Strengthening building and construction procurement through provision of procurement guidance materials and template agreements and scopes
- 19) Building the understanding and skills of key staff involved in managing organisational interests in development projects including through project and contract management training
- 20) Supporting staff in business case development to support capital grant applications
- 21) Build financial capacity to financially model, develop the capital structure and assess development projects in order to access capital grants and raise finance for housing developments

- 22) Finding ways to embed local Aboriginal cultural design into community housing built form
- 23) Improving access to philanthropic resources to support Aboriginal housing developments

Strengthening the Aboriginal housing workforce

- 24) Promoting housing and related careers as meaningful and rewarding careers in Aboriginal communities
- 25) Supporting housing tenancy managers to access training and obtain formal qualifications
- 26) Upskilling finance staff to strengthen housing financial reporting and produce long term financial projections and modelling
- 27) Working with corporate services managers, facilities managers and asset managers to build asset and maintenance management capability
- 28) Next generation senior executive development program – growing community housing leadership by working with CEOs and senior managers to enhance leadership, business, finance and people management skills
- 29) Strengthening the workforce
 - a) Establish finance, property and tenancy networks for senior managers and key staff to build technical capability
- 30) Develop opportunities to enhance skill sharing between Aboriginal and mainstream housing providers by embedding Aboriginal staff in mainstream providers and vice-versa.

Strong Partnerships

Building strength through collaboration

- 31) Explore governance models and partnerships to create scale and capacity
 - a) Collective and shared service delivery
 - b) joint goods/services procurement
 - c) shared back office services
 - d) joint planning
 - e) joint developments
- 32) Shared legal advice, agreement templates and guidance materials

Partnering with local government to strengthen local housing delivery

- 33) Reducing the cost of local housing service delivery for Aboriginal housing providers through council rates and exemptions
- 34) Improving access for Aboriginal renters to local government services and increasing renters civic participation
- 35) Streamlining planning processes and considering procurement mechanisms to encourage Aboriginal housing in developments
- 36) Accessing local government land to grow Aboriginal community housing

Shaping the Aboriginal community housing sector

Improve communication and access to information across the Aboriginal community housing sector

- 37) Develop an online web portal to provide AHHF members with improved access to policy and practice resources, improve AHHF member participation in policy development and sector decision-making

38) Sharing information, knowledge, resources and training to promote best practice community housing operational models, policies and practices

Strengthen Aboriginal community housing leadership

39) Resource the VAHMF Secretariat in AHV to strengthen the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum governance, to lead and support development of the emerging Aboriginal community housing sector as a step toward an Aboriginal housing and homelessness peak capable of facilitating collective impact

40) Embed Aboriginal data sovereignty in the AHMF

- a) develop protocols for sharing government and community housing and homelessness key data including demand and operational data,
- b) establish systems and software to facilitate data sharing, and supporting collective analysis, evaluation, planning and advocacy.
- c) Develop an Aboriginal led housing research capacity

A strong Aboriginal voice: advocacy and policy

41) Appropriately resource Aboriginal community housing sector development

42) Continue to resource the VAHMF Secretariat to support the AHMF's leadership of policy and program reform and advocacy

- a) An Aboriginal voice in the development of local government mechanisms to encourage social housing growth
- b) development of housing and support models that meet the crisis, transitional and long term housing and support needs of key Aboriginal cohorts
- c) promoting Aboriginal housing procurement to advance Aboriginal employment and business objectives
- d) Management and stock transfers to build scale in the Aboriginal community housing sector
- e) Supporting Aboriginal applicants on the Victorian Housing Register
- f) etc

Leading Aboriginal community housing capacity building

43) Lead and oversight delivery of the Aboriginal community housing sector capacity building through the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum and coordinate through the Big Housing Build Reference Group

44) Develop a Steering Committee led by the VAHMF Secretariat and comprising Homes Victoria the Housing Registrar and CHIA Vic to oversee and coordinate development of guidance materials and capacity building activities.