



6 June 2024

Commissioner Travis Lovett  
Yoorrook Justice Commission  
Level 8, 54 Wellington Street  
COLLINGWOOD VIC 3066

Dear Commissioner Lovett

**Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Supplementary Submission**

The following submission is provided to supplement the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF) submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission's Education, Health and Housing Inquiry, and oral evidence provided to the Commission on June 5, 2024.

The AHHF comprises thirty-eight Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Traditional Owner groups (TOs) and Aboriginal Trusts who are either delivering housing and homelessness services in Victoria, or who have an interest in housing and homelessness services and outcomes.

This supplementary submission as well as the oral evidence tendered on June 5, 2024 is made on behalf of the AHHF and its thirty-eight member organisations.

We look forward to working with the Yoorrook Justice Commission in advancing this critical work.

Yours sincerely,

Darren Smith,

**Chair, Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum**



## Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

### *Supplementary Submission*

*Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*: the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework<sup>1</sup> was launched 26 February 2020 by the Minister for Housing and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in Queens Hall Parliament. As the lead policy framework for Aboriginal housing and homelessness reform in Victoria, *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* was developed for community, by community and to be implemented by community in partnership with government.

The Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF) brings together the knowledge and expertise of Victorian Aboriginal communities to oversee the delivery of the housing and homelessness reforms identified in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Implementation Working Group (VAHHF-IWG) is the key partnership mechanism between the Aboriginal community and government in advancing implementation of the strategic objectives of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* to achieve the long-term vision of ensuring that every Aboriginal person has a home.

There has been significant progress made in the last four years in the implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* with key reform work still in progress. A summary of key achievements, as tabled at the most recent AHHF and VAHHF-IWG meetings can be found in **Attachment 1**.

#### **The crisis of housing insecurity and homelessness in the Aboriginal community.**

Notwithstanding the progress made in implementing *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, housing for the Victorian Aboriginal community remains in a state of crisis. Even on the most optimistic assessment of outcomes for the Aboriginal community there has been little to no improvement in housing insecurity and homelessness of Aboriginal Victorians. The number of new applications made by Aboriginal Victorians to the Victorian Housing Register have marginally reduced from its peak two years ago,<sup>2</sup> and ABS Census data points to 2% increase in the rate of Aboriginal home ownership between 2016 and 2021.<sup>3</sup> However, in the five years since 2018/19, the number of Aboriginal Victorians accessing specialist homelessness services increased by approximately 14%, whilst the number of non-Aboriginal Victorians accessing specialist homelessness services decreased by 14%

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<sup>1</sup> *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*: the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, <https://vahhf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/victorian-aboriginal-housing-and-homelessness-framework-complete-26-02-20-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Applications on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR), <https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/applications-victorian-housing-register-vhr#:~:text=About%20this%20data,-Homes%20Victoria%20is&text=The%20VHR%20application%20data%20summarises,and%20Data%20Protection%20Act%202014.>

<sup>3</sup> AIHW analysis of customised ABS Census data, 2023  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/housing-census/2021>





over the same period.<sup>4</sup> Across the twelve months of 2022/23, nearly one in five Aboriginal Victorian's accessed specialist homelessness services.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note the challenges with respect to the accuracy and reliability of data that makes it difficult to confidently assess performance where changes are small.

We have hardly turned the tide. The crisis persists.

There is however, some cause for optimism.

There have been state budget investments into the initial stages of the implementation of the *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system in Victoria* ('Blueprint').<sup>6</sup> The Blueprint set's out a road map for developing an Aboriginal homelessness system that is culturally safe and meets the unique and specific needs of Aboriginal Victorians who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness. This investment has seen the establishment of two pilot Aboriginal homelessness entry points at Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative and Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation. Work is also underway to co-design an Aboriginal-specific service model and system for stewardship of the Aboriginal homelessness system, under which management, funding and decision-making is shared between government and community. Overall, there has been a genuine commitment to reform and improvement of the broad homelessness service system. This will make a difference, but without investment and expansion of the Aboriginal homelessness system, the rates of Aboriginal homelessness will continue to increase.

We have seen an increase in the number of Aboriginal people housed by the community housing sector recently, which could perhaps be attributed to a commitment from the sector to allocate 10% of new housing to Aboriginal people. With Aboriginal Housing Victoria and Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, being the only Aboriginal community housings provider in Victoria and current combined stock of around 1700 properties, the state continues to carry the primary responsibility for housing Aboriginal people.

We understand there are announcements of new Aboriginal housing funded through the 'Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round' of the Social Housing Growth Fund under the Big Housing Build. In addition, the Aboriginal Victorian share of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF), will see somewhere in the order of 750 to 1000 new social and affordable housing properties coming online.

However, there is a genuine uncertainty around how much funding is available from the Victorian Government and whether smaller aspiring Aboriginal housing providers will be able to access HAFF funding due to the seemingly insurmountable barriers in the procurement and funding process.

### Closing the gap in housing outcomes

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 22 January 2024; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3e8872c8-a0a5-4440-bd64-fe8af2b3be06/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2022-23.pdf?v=20231219110336&inline=true>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 22 January 2024; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3e8872c8-a0a5-4440-bd64-fe8af2b3be06/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2022-23.pdf?v=20231219110336&inline=true>

<sup>6</sup> *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system in Victoria*, <https://vahhf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Blueprint.pdf>



The challenge is clear. The Aboriginal population in Victoria is projected to grow from approximately 66,000 in 2024 to over 95,000 by 2036. The number of Aboriginal households will grow to around 50,000 in that time. These numbers crystallise the scale of the challenge we face – the supply of 27,000 more homes by 2036.

Aboriginal people are reasonable and do not expect the gap in housing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians can be closed in the next five years. However, it is reasonable to ask that we work together to plan and resource the collective action that we all agree can contribute to a significant change in outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians and put in place the building blocks to close the gap in housing within 20 years.

It is time for a down payment by government on closing the housing gap for Aboriginal people. A commitment to action accompanied by the investments that will in the medium term - the next five years - make a measurable and real difference at the scale of the crisis.

### **Moving forward: *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort***

The goals of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are as relevant as they were when they were committed to paper in 2020.

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

We should be working together to develop a significant investment strategy to deliver on implementation of the goals and objectives of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* over the medium-term.

There are important principles that underpin how “we” - community and government - go about delivering on *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*. The most important of these is Aboriginal self-determination. If there is a choice in how we take action, preference should be given to the approach that advances Aboriginal self-determination, that puts ownership, control and funding in the hands of the Aboriginal community through community-controlled organisations.

It is important to stress, that the development of an Aboriginal housing and homelessness system that is appropriately resourced to adequately meet the needs of the Aboriginal community, must not come at the expense of choice for Aboriginal people. It is true that there are circumstances in which Aboriginal Victorians will not want to access support from community-controlled organisations. Therefore, Government and mainstream housing and homelessness providers must be responsible for providing services to Aboriginal people. Indeed, as things currently stand, a significant proportion of the Aboriginal community in Victoria are dependent on mainstream and Government systems to access housing and homelessness supports.

### **What is needed**

To provide clarity, the following are the investments and actions that we believe are necessary in the next five years:

**Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort** Every Aboriginal Person has a home





1. Deliver significant improvements in the policy and funding mechanisms that enable growth in social and affordable housing for Aboriginal people.
2. Build the scale and capability of Aboriginal housing providers, so that they are effective and well positioned to continue to grow to meet the longer term challenges.
3. Growth in the stock of social and affordable housing owned and managed by Aboriginal community controlled organisations. A minimum of 1,500 additional homes over the next five years.
4. Resource the capability of the Aboriginal homelessness system so that it can provide effective and targeted support to all Aboriginal Victoria experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness.
5. Mandated culturally safety standards and an accreditation system with inbuilt accountability mechanisms for the mainstream community housing and homelessness sectors.
6. Addressing the intersectionality of the housing and homelessness needs of Aboriginal Victorians, for example through dedicated housing and support models for vulnerable Aboriginal people including Elders, young people, those experiencing family violence, and those engaged with the justice system.
7. Delivery of the types of programs providing support to Aboriginal renters living in social housing, that are available in every other jurisdiction in Australia. Renters will be supported to sustain their tenancies, access pathways out of disadvantage and receive referrals to access services to meet their support needs.
8. Implementation of the Blueprint in full, providing statewide Aboriginal entry point coverage and embedding the Aboriginal homelessness system steward.
9. Establish a target for reducing homelessness in the Aboriginal community. Deliver on the target through preventative and early intervention services to ensure that homelessness is rare and brief, and sufficient intensive case management support to meet the needs of Aboriginal Victorians with a history of chronic homelessness and complex support needs.
10. Delivery of a Victorian Aboriginal Housing First policy.
11. Lay the foundations for programs to create and enhance pathways for Aboriginal people into private rental tenancies and home ownership.
12. Establishment of an independent, financially viable, capable and effective Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector with providers that are operating at scale and are well positioned to grow and innovate to meet future challenges and demand.

*"A home is somewhere I can feel a sense of stability; something I wasn't used to, while living in foster care and on the streets. It's somewhere I can put up my feet up and can call my own. A stable home has helped me to improve other areas of my life."<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Sharyn Lovett, AHV Tenant, *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*: the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework.