

# Aboriginal Housing & Homelessness

## Culturally informed and culturally led housing and services are the key to change.

Shelter WA's vision is for all Aboriginal people to have access to a safe, affordable and appropriate home that enables them to thrive. **We believe that the principle of self-determination must underpin the delivery of housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal people.**

Research shows that Aboriginal people face significant disadvantage in housing markets. For example, compared to other Australians, Aboriginal people are less likely to own their own home and ten times more likely to live in social housing or to experience homelessness.<sup>1</sup> **In WA, while Aboriginal people represent 3.3 percent of the WA population, they represented 50.5 percent of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients in 2020-21.**<sup>2</sup> These figures have been worsening over the last five years.

The quality and availability of housing is particularly poor for the 15,000 Aboriginal people living in remote and town-based communities in WA.<sup>3</sup> **Researchers have found that the current stock of regional and remote Aboriginal housing is unable to provide healthy and comfortable indoor environments, with significant health and wellbeing impacts.**<sup>4</sup> This is being exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, especially extreme heat, and by the persistent issue of overcrowding.<sup>5</sup>

**The ongoing costs of remote housing are significant and require long-term sustainable funding commitments from the Commonwealth with co-investment from state governments.**

Shelter WA supports National Shelter's position that state and territory governments should develop specific Aboriginal housing strategies as part of their bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (currently under review). This is an important step in realising Target 9 (reducing overcrowding) of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

Shelter WA is also advocating for reform of the head maintenance contract for the maintenance of housing on remote Aboriginal communities to reduce inefficient costs and processes and create localised maintenance services that support regional and Aboriginal employment.

The WA Government's *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030* has a significant and welcomed focus on reducing barriers faced by Aboriginal people in accessing housing, and empowering Aboriginal people and organisations to design and deliver services and accommodation that meet their needs.

Given only 1% of the current WA budget for homelessness services is allocated for Aboriginal led services<sup>6</sup>, realising this commitment requires additional resources, investment and commitment to ensure housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal people are culturally led and culturally informed.

**Shelter WA advocates for greater resourcing and commitment to enable the growth of a strong and diverse Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations (ACHO) sector in WA that can provide culturally safe and informed support for Aboriginal people.**

<sup>1</sup> AIHW (2021) Indigenous Housing (data from 2018-19).

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission (2022) Report on Government Services. Part G: Housing and Homelessness. Table 19A.4.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Communities (2022) Remote Aboriginal Communities. Retrieved from: <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/remote-aboriginal-communities#:~:text=About%2012%2C000%20people%20live%20in,Aboriginal%20communities%20throughout%20Western%20Australia>.

<sup>4</sup> Lea, T. et al (2021) Sustainable Indigenous housing in regional and remote Australia, AHURI, Final Report no.386.

<sup>5</sup> Arabena, K. Holland, C. and Hamilton, S. (2021) Reimagining Indigenous housing, health and wealth: the necessary economic response to unlock the potential in the Indigenous Estate. NATSIHA, National Shelter and Shelter WA.

<sup>6</sup> Flatau, P. et al (2022) The funding of Western Australian homelessness services, Centre for Social Impact, UWA.

## Shelter WA Policy Position

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Significant reform is also urgently needed in the management of public housing including ending evictions into homelessness. This requires increased prevention and tenancy support, and greater cultural competency of staff and practice in the Department of Communities.

Finally, there is a current lack of low barrier and culturally safe service and housing options for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness. Greater investment is needed to expand Housing First programs for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, drawing on the Housing First practice principles developed by Noongar Mia Mia.<sup>7</sup>

### Shelter WA recommendations:

- That the Commonwealth Government and WA State Government adopt a principle of self-determination and embed this principle across housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal people.
- That the Commonwealth Government and WA State Government provide increased new investment to ensure that housing and homelessness services are culturally informed and culturally led.
- That the Commonwealth Government and WA State Government address overcrowding as a priority through co-investment for new supply and ongoing maintenance of remote housing.
- That the WA State Government work with local Aboriginal communities to reform remote housing maintenance contracts to ensure they meet need and are culturally designed and delivered.
- That the Commonwealth and WA State Government provides new investment to support and grow the Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations (ACHO) sector, including through the transfer of income generating public housing stock.
- That the WA State Government increase investment in tenant advocacy services for Aboriginal tenants to sustain tenancies and prevent evictions, including in the regions.
- That the WA State Government introduce enhanced and transparent minimum standards for social housing, especially in relation to energy efficiency, thermal comfort and accessibility (universal design). At a minimum all new properties should meet Gold Standard accessibility standards.
- That the Department of Communities work with Aboriginal service providers and Aboriginal people with lived experience of homelessness to review current operational policies and practice – with an objective of reducing evictions and barriers to Aboriginal people’s access to social housing (for example debt policies and identification requirements). This should include the establishment of an ACHO peak body.

<sup>7</sup> <https://noongarmiamia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NHEP-Report.pdf>