

Reimagining Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth: Summary Report

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The report on which this Summary is based – *Reimagining Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth: The Necessary Ecological Response to Unlock the Potential in the Indigenous Estate* – proposes an ecological approach to realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' aspirations for a high standard of health and housing, and of personal and collective wealth.* In doing so, it not only recognises that improvements in these areas – health, housing and wealth – can be powerful agents of population-level betterment, but that they are inextricably part of a larger ecology. As such, the report proposes that simultaneous improvements in all three areas must be the goal of those seeking sustainable change for the better.

Implementing an ecological approach

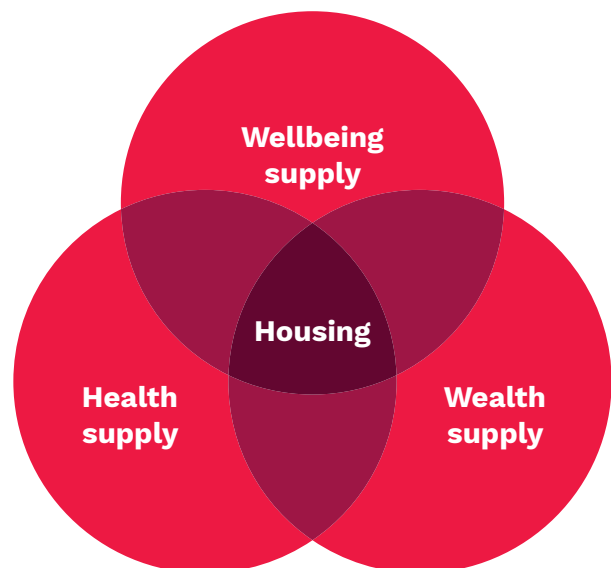
While this ecological approach may be implemented independently, it could also be a strong foundation for the wider implementation of the July 2020 *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*,¹ particularly re projected outcomes for Indigenous health, housing and economic participation. It could also be pertinent to the further expansion of the **Indigenous Estate** – the sum of Indigenous rights and interests in Australian land and waters – especially Targets 15a and 15b. However, the way in which the elements of the National Agreement can be integrated into an overarching strategic and ecological approach is not currently clear. What is proposed in this report could make a significant contribution to thinking around this challenge.

The three-part ecology

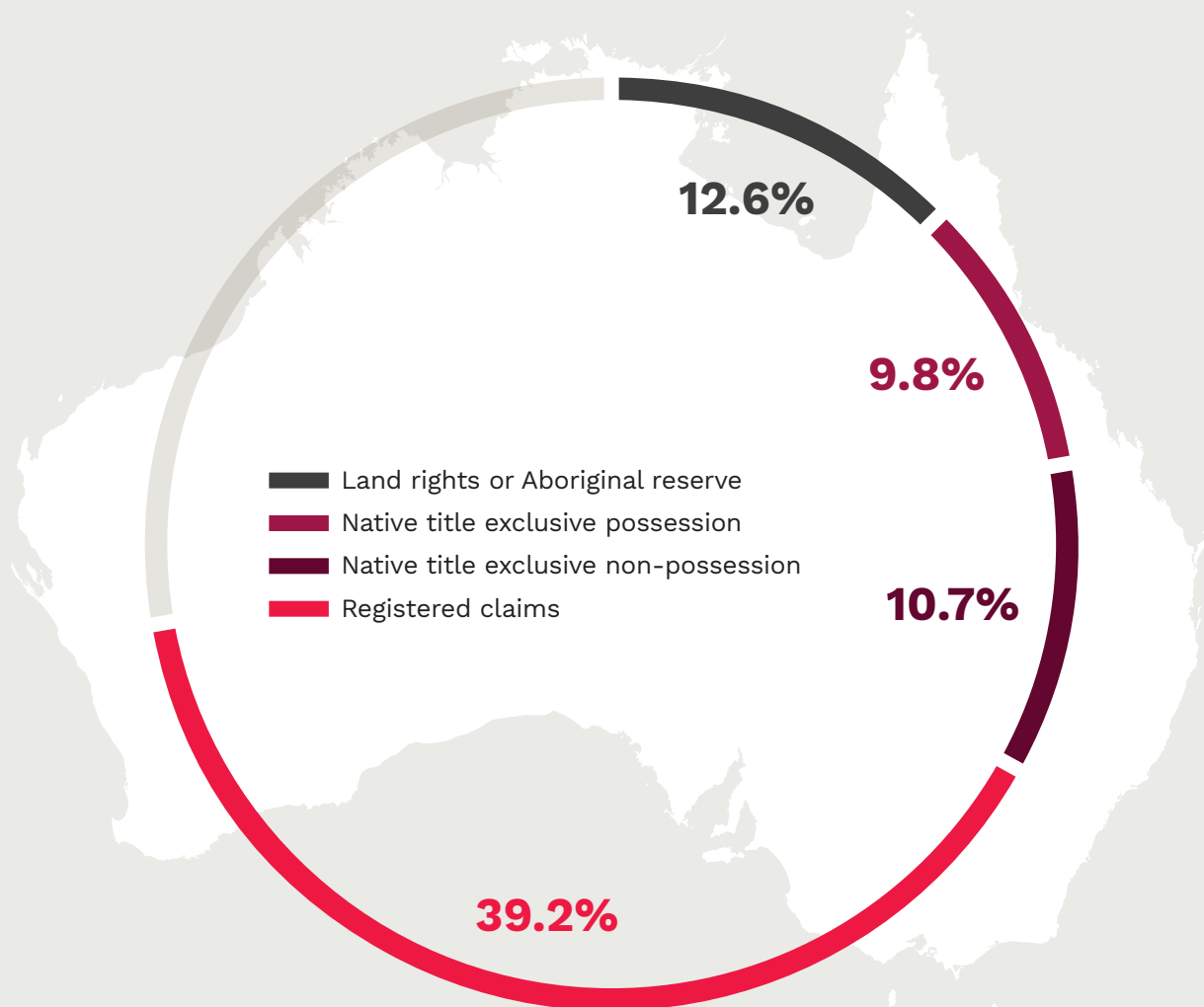


The three-part ecology supports a re-think as to what a dwelling or an Indigenous community actually is. While it is commonly accepted that contemporary Australian dwellings and communities should be connected to both a water and electricity supply, the report recommends that three further connections are also deemed non-negotiable when considering Indigenous dwellings or communities:

- + Connection to a wellbeing supply – family, kin, culture.
- + Connection to a health supply – health services, food, recreational facilities.
- + Connection to a wealth supply – Internet, employment, training, enterprise.



*The term 'Indigenous' is also used when referring to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples | Photo by Harry Cunningham on Unsplash



The Indigenous Estate as a fraction of Australian continental land mass²

Based on figures provided by the Australian Law Reform Commission (2015).

National Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth Authority



It is proposed that this model of housing and community be implemented by an Indigenous leadership mechanism able:

- + to harness the wealth-creating potential of the Indigenous Estate; and
- + to introduce a new Indigenous housing system, including within the Indigenous Estate.

This would not only meet the aspirations of Indigenous people for a high standard of culturally appropriate housing, but also connect Indigenous households and communities to improved wealth, health and wellbeing.

The Indigenous leadership mechanism is referred to as the **National Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth Authority** (Authority), and it is intended to generate and implement two connected national strategic responses – a **National Indigenous Wealth Strategy** and a **National Indigenous Housing and Health Strategy**. The Figure on p. 4 shows the bridging role of the Authority in the generation and implementation of these two strategies.

The **National Indigenous Wealth Strategy** aims to unlock the overall potential of the Indigenous Estate, which currently covers an estimated 40 per cent of the continent,³ and connect Indigenous households and communities to it. The Figure above expresses these interests (at 2015) as fractions of the continent.

The Indigenous Estate includes tangible assets – land, waters, resources and fixtures located on or within it – and intangible assets – cultural and intellectual property rights. As such, different strategic approaches are needed to realise potential wealth generation from each. While the Indigenous Estate could potentially grow to 60 per cent of the continent once a backlog of registered native title claims are resolved,⁴ it will certainly increase by at least 15 per cent in the next decade.⁵ The National Native Title Tribunal's [Map of the Indigenous Estate at 1 July 2020](#) shows a patchwork of 'estates' that currently comprise legally established interests and registered claims.⁶

Indigenous Housing Pool



The **National Indigenous Housing and Health Strategy** utilises the economic potential of the Indigenous Estate to implement a new national Indigenous housing system focused on increasing housing through an **Indigenous Housing Pool (IHP)**. This is defined as the sum of dwellings:

- + on Indigenous communal title land;
- + held in trust by Indigenous Community Housing Organisations; and
- + in State-owned and managed dedicated Indigenous housing.

The **National IHP Strategy** will connect Indigenous households and communities to place-based primary and mental health care, provided by or through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) or appropriate health services, and, where required, targeted community-based communicable disease elimination programs, particularly those relating to poor quality housing and overcrowded conditions.

The IHP Strategy contains the following program elements:

- + Maintaining existing stock.
- + Increasing the supply of housing by (a) maximising the transition of housing from mainstream social and community housing to the IHP; and (b) increasing new builds for the IHP.
- + Maximising the transition of Indigenous households from the IHP to private rental and home ownership including by home ownership equivalence on communal land title. The idea is to generate surplus housing within the IHP and use this to house homeless Indigenous people and re-house those experiencing severe overcrowding.
- + A trauma-informed Indigenous housing sector that can connect people challenged by homelessness with mental health and other services to help them stay housed and act as a gateway for healing.
- + Aligning IHP housing design with Indigenous cultural and usage practices and norms.

Regional Housing and Health



The final elements of the proposed approach are **Regional Housing and Health Boards** under the oversight of the Authority and with regional adaptation and implementation responsibilities. These will include developing **Regional Indigenous Housing and Health Plans** in partnership with ACCHSs, appropriate services and housing stakeholders.

This proposal does not require or support the vesting of existing housing or land titles, rights or interests in the Authority. Rather, it proposes an Indigenous-controlled mechanism that overlays existing arrangements to harness economies of scale. It does not settle for 'whole-of-government' approaches as a solution, but rather *whole new ways of system operation* by purposefully bridging and connecting the Indigenous Estate and the IHP.

This proposal intends to establish a significantly less precarious nation-wide Indigenous-controlled housing 'system' that does not tolerate, and responds effectively to prevent, homelessness or severe overcrowding. Households of the Indigenous Estate and the IHP will benefit the most from this proposal, but Indigenous populations overall should enjoy many other benefits.

These include the following:

- + the closure of socio-economic equality gaps relative to the non-Indigenous population;
- + improved mental health and reduced incidence of behaviours associated with untreated trauma that can affect all Indigenous families and communities;
- + greater financial independence, collective self-determination and multiple-level life control;
- + community enhancements including access to community-based health and wellbeing services;
- + elimination of racism in the private rental market;
- + significant training, education, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities; and
- + collective wellbeing engendered by a confidence in a powerful, wealthy and healthy Indigenous Australia.

Housing has provided the foundations for living on this continent for millennia and will be important in guiding 21st-century living so we can all thrive, flourish and prosper. Re-engaging with housing, health and wealth creation is essential for the acquisition of skills, ecological sustainability and building technologies that are likely to greatly impact the future wellbeing not only of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but of all Australians.

References



- 1 National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) 2020, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Australian Government, Canberra. Available at: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf>.
- 2 Based on figures in Australian Law Reform Commission 2015, *Connection to Country – Review of the Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), ALRC Report 126, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney.
- 3 E. Fry & J. Taylor 2016, Unlocking the economic potential of the Indigenous Estate, in KPMG, *Collaborative Ideas for Igniting the Indigenous Economy*, KPMG, Sydney. Available at: <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2016/igniting-indigenous-economy-australia.pdf>.
- 4 Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) 2019, *Annual Report 2018–19*, ILSC, Adelaide. Available at: https://www.ilsc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ILSC_Annual_Report_2018-19.pdf.
- 5 NIAA 2020, op. cit
- 6 National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) 2020, Indigenous Estates map (as at 1 July 2020), NNTT, Brisbane. Available at: http://www.nntt.gov.au/Maps/Indigenous_Estates_and_Determinations_A1L.pdf.

The bridging role of a National Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth Authority

This Figure shows how the Authority purposefully connects the Indigenous Estate and the Indigenous Housing Pool.

Indigenous Estate

National Indigenous Wealth Strategy

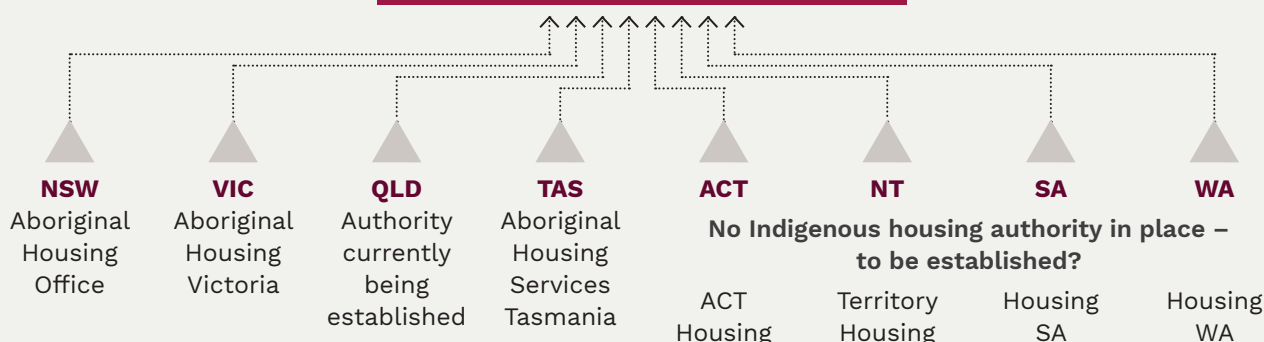
- Authority wealth-generating enterprises for independence, sustainability
- Investment in community health services in partnership with the ACCHSs sector
 - Investment in community infrastructure
- Business and entrepreneurial support/synergies with housing role
- Stakeholder-supported process to extend equal access to home ownership on commune land

National Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth Authority

National Indigenous Housing and Health Strategy

- Indigenous Estate generated wealth investment in Indigenous Housing Pool/economies of scale
- Households connected to place-based primary health and mental health care (preferably ACCHSs)
 - Targeted community-based communicable disease elimination programs
 - Innovative new Indigenous housing and community design code
 - A National Indigenous Housing Pool Strategy

Indigenous Housing Pool



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A copy of the full report, *Reimagining Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth: The Necessary Ecological Response to Unlock the Potential in the Indigenous Estate* by Kerry Arabena, Chris Holland and Shane Hamilton, can be found at:

W <https://www.karabenaconsulting.com/resources>

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