



3 November 2023

Developing the National Housing and Homelessness Plan - Issues Paper

The Central Land Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission on the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Issues Paper.

This submission will primarily address the focus area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing.

About the Central Land Council

The Central Land Council (CLC) is a Commonwealth corporate entity established under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (ALRA), with statutory responsibilities for Aboriginal land acquisition and land management in the southern half of the Northern Territory (NT). The CLC is also a Native Title Representative Body established under the Native Title Act 1993 (NTA).

Through its elected representative Council of 90 community delegates, the CLC represents the interests and aspirations of approximately 20,000 traditional landowners and other Aboriginal people resident in its region. We advocate for our people on a wide range of land-based, economic and socio-political issues to ensure that our families can continue to survive and thrive on their land.

The CLC's response to the Issues Paper

Housing is a well-established social determinant of health and a fundamental human right. Aboriginal people living in remote communities and homelands in the Northern Territory continue to live in housing conditions that would not be accepted by other Australians.

Despite significant investment by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments under the current National Partnership for Remote Housing in the NT (NPRHNT), there remains a substantial shortfall in housing supply in our remote communities. Over the course of the current agreement, overcrowding has dropped by just 3.4 per cent from 58.1 per cent to 54.7 per cent – leaving the NT a long way from achieving the Closing the Gap target of reducing overcrowding to 18 per cent. This small improvement is unsurprising when compared with demand: in 2020 the NT Government estimated 8,000-12,000 additional homes were needed across the NT to reduce overcrowding and meet the demand through population growth.¹

The CLC acknowledges the challenges and effort required to build a large number of new houses and bedrooms quickly however, the experience of our constituents is that the current housing situation has not improved over this period.

Most residents have concerns about the quality of their houses. Some houses with new bedrooms are still in very bad condition. The designs don't reflect Aboriginal ways of living. They aren't keeping people cool in summer and warm in winter. This is becoming more and more concerning as climate change is making the weather more extreme.

There were only limited opportunities for tenants to have a say about the design of new homes.

¹ Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, 'A Home for all Territorians: NT Housing Strategy 2020-2025' 2019, 11 ([weblink](#)).



Housing construction and repairs and maintenance should provide jobs for local Aboriginal people. There are targets for Aboriginal employment and procurement in the current National Partnership for Remote Housing NT and a number of these targets were met, but more needs to be done to make sure that local people are in a position to get these jobs and contracts.

The best way to achieve these outcomes is to see the gradual transition of the housing system back to Aboriginal control. This needs to be done slowly and carefully, building capacity and setting the new system up for success.

With a homelessness rate 12 times the national average and, as noted above, more than half of Aboriginal people living in overcrowded conditions, the remote housing need in the NT is far greater than any other jurisdiction in Australia. Importantly, the poor condition of much of the housing stock in our remote communities highlights the desperate need for increased, sustained investment in ongoing repairs and maintenance.

Overcrowded and poorly maintained houses make it hard for residents to keep their families healthy, impact children's schooling and make it harder to maintain employment.

A renewed and extended commitment of Federal support for remote housing in the NT is therefore of paramount importance, and the CLC has therefore welcomed the Federal Government's willingness to negotiate a renewed National Partnership Agreement.

The CLC urges commitment by the Federal and NT Governments to a 10-year agreement, developed with the NT land councils and other Indigenous housing stakeholders, including Aboriginal Housing NT (AHNT). The agreement must be of sufficient scale to meet the housing shortfall, ensure quality, climate and culturally-appropriate builds, provide sustained investment in ongoing preventative and responsive repairs and maintenance, and provide for the development and implementation of a comprehensive Aboriginal Housing Industry Development Plan.

This Industry Development Plan is a critical step in the gradual transition of remote Aboriginal housing back to Aboriginal community control. The Federal and NT Governments have both committed to this transition through the Joint Steering Committee for the current NPRHNT and through the NT Community Housing Strategy and Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. The Industry Development Plan would aim to build the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and position them to tender successfully for property and tenancy management and repairs and maintenance contracts, and over time becoming registered as Community Housing Providers, and developing the local workforce necessary to support this. This planning must be adequately funded under the proposed new NPRHNT.

The agreement must also include further investment in homelands. Commonwealth funding for remote outstation and municipal and essential services ended in 2015-16 with a one-off final payment of \$154.8 million in 2015-16 to the NT Government. Since that time, the NT Government has run a Homelands program for the provision of those services through contracted providers, and the level of funding available to individual homelands has been small, and eligibility for investment restricted. In some instances, the lack of a funded service provider means many homelands, even if eligible for funding, are unable to access the service. The CLC has welcomed the Federal Government's commitment of \$100 million for homelands, but the need is far greater than can be met with those funds. A commitment to long-term funding of homelands, including for new houses on homelands is fundamental to Aboriginal people's ability to live well on country.