

**MANA-NA WOORN-TYEEN MAAR-TAKOORT:
EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME**
The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

25 March 2022

Mr Romlie Mokak
Commissioner
Productivity Commission
Email: housing.agreement@pc.gov.au

Dear Commissioner Mokak,

RE: National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review

Aboriginal Housing Victoria on behalf of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF) which comprises 18 Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations who provide housing and homelessness services, welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review. We also thank you for providing time to speak with us as part of the Commission's initial consultation process.

The initial consultation highlighted these key points:

- Aboriginal Housing Victoria has with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and in partnership with the Victorian Government, led the development of Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. It is the foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and homelessness reform in our jurisdiction and could provide the principles and objectives to guide national commitment to improved housing and homelessness outcomes.
- It is not clear, in terms of the mechanisms in the NHA, what are the respective roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. Accountability for agreed Aboriginal housing objectives and outcomes, including monitoring and evaluation, needs to be strengthened under the NHA.
- A possibility moving forward is including a schedule on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing in a new NHA. This would elevate the awareness of need and provide for priority setting. The schedule should not be just a couple of principles but definite actions, indicators and targets.
- The NHA should be aligned with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap for housing and homelessness outcomes.
- The NHA should lean more on bilateral agreements that address specific issues and targets in each of the States and Territories, given their individual systems and the needs of their communities.

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- Targets around social housing share for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should form part of the NHHA with jurisdictional targets forming part of bilateral agreements’.
- Data Sovereignty principles should be identified and accounted for.

Should you have any further queries please feel free to contact Lisa Briggs Director Strategy and Performance

Regards

Darren Smith
Chair, Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

**Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum
(AHHF)**

Submission

**National Housing and Homelessness
Agreement**

Productivity Review 2022

March 2022

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Background:

Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), which owns and manages over 1,500 rental properties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria. Our vision is to ensure that Aboriginal Victorians secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives and stronger communities.

In addition to being the largest and only equivalent Tier 1 registered Aboriginal Housing Agency in Australia, AHV is the lead agency for Victoria's Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness policy, Mana-na-worn-tyeen maar-takoort Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home – The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHMF). The VAHMF, generates an Annual Report Card with 20 key outcome measures, which report on progress in implementation of the VAHMF, and the housing and homelessness outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

The inaugural report launched in 2021 stated that Aboriginal homelessness was a humanitarian crisis as Aboriginal Victorians were presenting at 10 times the rate of other Victorians to specialist homelessness services with 43% who presenting as homeless are left homeless at the end of the support. Exacerbating this is that three in four had who presented in the last year had been in the system before. These numbers partly draw on and are consistent with the findings from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's national report (AIHW, 2022) – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: A focus report on housing and homelessness.

In particular:

- 22% of Aboriginal Victorians requiring short-term accommodation did not receive it.
- Transitional housing was provided to 29%
- Fewer than 6% of Aboriginal Victorians who were assessed as requiring and ready for long-term accommodation directly received it during 2019/2021.

The unmet housing need of some groups is stark:

- With the over-representation of Aboriginal people within the justice system, specialist housing is a priority. 1,797 Aboriginal prisoners were released in 2019/20 with one in six requiring homeless support services.
- Family violence is the leading cause for an Aboriginal child entering the Child Protection system. In Victoria, priority is given to people experiencing family violence with more than 90% of Aboriginal Victorians provided assistance. However, one in six young people in the Child Protection system are presenting to the homeless system upon exit.

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- Aboriginal people are twice as likely to be affected by mental health issues and distress, with 11.4% of Aboriginal Australians presenting to homeless services for assistance. Forty-eight (48) Aboriginal Victorians were discharged from clinical psychiatric settings into the specialist homelessness services system and one in three specialist homelessness services Aboriginal clients requiring Drug and Alcohol counselling are unable to access these essential services.

There are barriers for Aboriginal Victorians accessing the private rental markets as a result of systematic racism, affordability and ineligibility in meeting criteria requirements. The Annual Report Card showed that only one in four Aboriginal Victorians enter into the private rental market following their transition from the homeless support system. Aboriginal Victorians exposed to the private rental market are characterised by high rental stress while the home ownership gap between Aboriginal and other Victorians is 25 percentage points.

Rebuild an Aboriginal homeless service system from the ground up

Aboriginal homelessness has its own characteristics and the nature of it has changed over the last 30 years. It is characterised by increasing complications and challenges, compounding rising volumes of homeless people. Factors such as drug use and family violence create risks that can challenge the deeply ingrained tradition to take in kin. The loss of Aboriginal hostels has removed a central plank in the system's structure. If it was ever fit for purpose, the Aboriginal homeless support system ceased to exist long ago. The mainstream system has proven to be a poor substitute.

To address the current Aboriginal homelessness humanitarian crisis, drivers of change are needed such as:

- A Housing First approach that provides safe and secure housing quickly and is not conditional on other health and well-being issues;
- Targets to reduce Aboriginal homelessness by 10% per annum compounding for 10 years;
- Open access points to facilitate Aboriginal entry and referral points into the system;
- Homelessness services that flow seamlessly through to long term housing;
- Mainstream and Aboriginal sectors that work together for the benefit of clients and are accountable to them;
- Wrap around service support provided to clients to achieve housing sustainability;
- Targeting those at high risk with housing, support and pathways eg: mental health, drug and alcohol, leaving out of home care and justice system

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THE REVIEW

Aboriginal population growth in Victoria places increasing pressure on public, social and community housing requiring specific and targeted responses.

Increasing Aboriginal demand for social and affordable housing is attributable to Aboriginal population growth. The Aboriginal population in Victoria is growing at a significantly greater rate than the non-Aboriginal population. Importantly, parents of Aboriginal children are generally younger, Aboriginal mothers tend to have more children and children are more often raised in single parent families. Aboriginal people generally are on lower incomes and the Aboriginal community experiences comparatively higher rates of disadvantage. As Aboriginal population growth is concentrated in families with lower socio-economic status, who meet eligibility requirements for social and community housing, it translates almost directly into increased demand.

Over the last decade there has not been any planned policy response to meeting increasing Aboriginal demand for housing. This is unlike any other social policy area, such as health, community services, education or justice where there has been real and substantive policy and program effort. Over this period the Commonwealth has vacated the space of urban and regional Aboriginal housing. The Community Housing Infrastructure Program was wound up and the ten year National Partnership Agreement of Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) provided only marginal recognition of urban and regional housing.

Over the last decade increasing Aboriginal demand for social and affordable housing in Victoria has translated into significant growth in tenancy numbers in public housing and the community housing sector. The number of Aboriginal tenancies in public housing has grown from 1335 in 2007 to 2268 in 2016, an increase of 933 tenancies or 69.9%. In the corresponding period Aboriginal Housing Victoria's properties under management and ownership increased from 1345 to 1537, an increase of 192. The majority of this increase is due to a one off allocation of national building properties to AHV prior to title transfer. There has also been growth in Aboriginal tenancies in community housing (+51 households between 2012 to 2016), and, no apparent growth in the number of houses owned by Indigenous Community Housing organisations.

Aboriginal community housing sector

The Aboriginal community housing sector in Victoria is comprised of Aboriginal Housing Victoria and a number of other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) who have, by registered housing agencies standards, relatively small housing portfolios. The service delivery models of these ACCOs vary due to the size and funding allocations within the ACCO sector.

Apart from AHV, housing is not the core business of all other ACCOs with housing portfolios. ACCOs within Victoria are defined as small, medium and large delivering a range of services. ACCOs overwhelmingly demonstrate commitment to the provision of holistic, wrap around

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services for Aboriginal people, and are the best way to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, often offering a wide variety of services in one place. For example, larger Aboriginal housing providers are likely to provide a broad range of funded services including tenancy support, homelessness services, AOD services, primary and maternal health services, social emotional wellbeing, mental health community and family services, child protection, justice and family violence services, emergency relief, cultural, support and coordination services and more. As a result, each ACCO is unique, the Aboriginal community they serve is unique, they have a unique housing portfolio and they provide a unique and different mix of funded and unfunded services. One of the key reform areas should be about directing separate resources to programs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rather than to mainstream programs.

The Review provides a timely opportunity to address and strengthen the shortfalls of the current National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). The current objectives are to improve access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing including preventing or providing services that address homelessness. Within the agreement are the terms, roles and responsibilities for the provision of housing and homelessness services between the Commonwealth, states, and territory governments.

New National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

To date the NHHA has not effectively addressed Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness needs, which is supported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW, 2019) "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness" reporting that although there has been improvements Aboriginal homelessness is still 10 times the rate of other Australians, with one in 28 Aboriginal people homeless on the 2016 Census night.

A new NHHA should reflect the policy drive for Housing and Homelessness reform, supporting national coordination that is measurable, appropriately resourced and outcome focused. The NHHA has joint responsibility with State and Territory governments and should provide flexibility to align with current State and Territory accountability mechanisms.

Given the neglect of the Commonwealth to respond appropriately to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and homelessness, a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schedule should be included to lock in priority settings and actions, indicators and targets.

The housing needs of remote, regional and urban Aboriginal people must be specified in a national housing agreement between the Commonwealth, State and Territories. The Commonwealth should resume Aboriginal housing funding to all States with urban and regional Aboriginal communities. Over 91% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in urban and regional areas, they suffer profound disadvantage, are the fast growing sector of the population and experience comparatively poor housing outcomes. Close the Gap targets will not be met if their housing needs are not addressed.

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This should be underpinned by the development of a new National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework provides a very solid framework with ten guiding principles which could be elevated on a national basis to achieve national commitment to housing and homelessness outcomes.

These principles have been adopted by the Victorian Government, the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria and are a key recommendation within the Victorian Social Housing Regulatory Review. These principles should apply to all social housing systems and providers and deserve consideration in the new NHHA, and not just within the Aboriginal Schedule, as the majority of Aboriginal housing and homelessness services are provided by mainstream providers.

Resource Allocations

To effectively meet the targeted outcomes of a new NHHA, appropriate resourcing is required moving away from population based funding to a Fair Share approach. The new NHHA should hypothecate a share of all mainstream social and affordable housing for Aboriginal projects equal to the proportion of Aboriginal homeless clients. In Victoria the rate is at 10% which is equal to the national rate of Aboriginal homelessness.

These resources would include social housing investments, land concessions, inclusionary zoning allocations, shared equity places, 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 homeless clients as a proportions of all homeless clients (Victoria at 10%).

National Agreement for Closing the Gap

NHHA is the anchor for all housing and homelessness services nationally, however cross cutting national agreements such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) must be recognised and acknowledged into the new NHHA to streamline national, state and territory coordination, accountability mechanisms and reporting requirements to avoid duplication. In addition, the CTG Agreement should **not replace** the overall responsibilities of the NHHA as the new CTG agreement has only one housing target and is not reflective of housing and homelessness conditions across jurisdictions.

Governance and Oversight

The new NHHA will require the establishment of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Oversight Committee which is Aboriginal led and has representation from each jurisdiction including representation from government agencies. The oversight committee Chair could then have a representative seat at the Coalition of Peaks to enable consistency across all national portfolios. It is imperative that data be readily

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available for the oversight committee to effectively monitoring existing Aboriginal housing and homelessness issues that require systematic leadership and reform.

Data and Performance

Clear, transparent and accessible performance data must be provided at the national and jurisdictional level. Our proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Oversight Committee would be a key point for discussion and recommendations arising from data trends.

Data Sovereignty

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples argues that Indigenous peoples have the right to data that is about them to assist with informed decision making, co-design planning, implementation, monitoring and accountability (CAEPR, 2016). Furthermore, the national CTG agreement priority reform four – shared access to data and information at a regional level will enable informed decision making on the design, implementation and outcomes of policies for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people. The new NHHA should align with CTG reform priority four and ensure this is included as part of oversight, monitoring and accountability processes making data readily available and accessible to Aboriginal people supporting self-determination.

Cultural Safety

A new NHHA should include a cultural statement which can then be underpinned by cultural principles. In turn audited cultural performance indicators should also be applied. The cultural statement should recognise self-determination and the Treaty process which is relevant to Victoria and current national conversations. CHIA Victoria in partnership with AHV has developed the Community Housing Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework and supported by ten principles which could be elevated to a new NHHA embedding culturally appropriate systematic reform and practice.

Conclusion

The NHHA has the ability to significantly contribute to the required changes leading to improved outcomes of Aboriginal housing and homelessness. This can be achieved by including the VAHMF principles within the overall NHHA, along with an Aboriginal schedule that raises awareness, sets out the 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.

A national Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework needs to be developed and Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort provides a starting point.



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Resource allocations need to change to a Fair Share approach equal to the Aboriginal homeless client rate of 10% across the whole housing and homelessness spectrum if we genuinely want to see the reduction in Aboriginal homelessness.

Furthermore, one of the key reform areas should be about directing separate resources to programs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations are the best way to deliver services, however funding is typically rolled out to mainstream programs.

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REFERENCES:

- 2022 Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) Response National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Productivity Review 2022
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