

19 November 2019

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry: Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory

We welcome this Inquiry and support its efforts to identify how improvements to government funding arrangements can address problems of siloing and inadequate co-ordination of children and family services aimed at preventing harm to children.

The report acknowledges the contribution of overcrowded or unstable housing on the incidence of child abuse and neglect, but ignores the role of poor co-ordination between child protection, domestic and family violence, and housing services on high rates of Indigenous child removal in the Northern Territory and nationally. Our research on service co-ordination between housing and Indigenous domestic and family violence ([Cripps and Habibis 2019](#)) found that:

- Shortages in crisis and long-term housing in the Northern Territory directly impact on high rates of child protection notifications and the removal of Aboriginal children to out-of-home care. This is because under current legislation, inadequate or insecure housing, or unsafe homes including exposure to domestic violence, are reasons for removal of children.
- If a child is removed, long delays in accessing appropriate housing away from the perpetrator can prevent children from ever being returned to their parent as child protection timelines generally allow only 12 months before removal becomes permanent.

Despite the significance of this issue, it is not recognised in current policy frameworks, including funding arrangements. We submit that funding arrangements for child and family services in the Northern Territory and nationally, should address this. Some examples of how this might be done include:

- Improved data collection on the contribution of inappropriate, unstable or overcrowded housing on (1) the removal of children to out-of-home care, and on (2) family reunification.

- Community plans to include current levels of access to crisis, transitional and long-term housing with targets to improve supply where needed.
- Funding targets that include the development of strategies which specifically addressing improved co-ordination between housing and other services implicated in the removal of children for example, fast-tracking of priority housing in DFV where children are identified as at risk, improved information sharing between key services.
- Improved targeting of funds to improve access to crisis, transitional and long-term housing. As well increasing supply, this could include, for example, dedicated funding for housing safety upgrades, support to reduce housing debt, and the employment of housing liaison officer within women's shelters.

Further analysis and policy recommendations are available at https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320?utm_source=website&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=featurepanel.

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References

Cripps, K. and Habibis, D. 2019 Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families, AHURI Final Report No. 320, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320?utm_source=website&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=featurepanel