National Shelter
Submission to Close the Gap Refresh: The Next Phase

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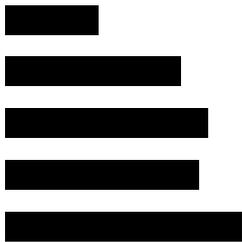
Introduction

National Shelter is a non-government peak organisation that aims to improve housing access, affordability, appropriateness, safety and security for people on low incomes.

Since 1976, National Shelter has worked towards this goal by influencing government policy and action, and by raising public awareness about housing issues.

National Shelter's aim is to work towards every Australian having access to housing that is:

- **affordable** — people should not be left in poverty after they have met their housing costs
- **adequate** — everybody is entitled to housing that meets basic standards of decency and their own basic needs
- **secure** — people should not live under threat of loss of home and shelter
- **accessible** — access to housing should be free from discrimination
- **in the right place** — housing should be located close to transport, services and support networks, job opportunities, and social and leisure activities
- **able to meet their lifecycle needs** — people have different housing needs at different stages of their lives, and housing should be available to meet these changing needs.

National Shelter draws and is supported by the work of State Shelters in all jurisdictions (apart from Victoria) and its national member organisations, sponsors and associate members. This submission is supported by: Shelter NSW, Shelter S.A., Shelter W.A., QShelter, Shelter Tas, Shelter ACT and NT Shelter.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Housing and Close the Gap

The current targets for Close the Gap are focused on:

1. Life Expectancy
2. Child Mortality
3. Early Childhood Education
4. School attendance
5. Literacy and Numeracy
6. Year 12 completion or equivalency
7. Employment

National Shelter submits that none of the above may be achieved while so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander households experience poor housing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households are half as likely to own, or be buying, their own homes as non-Indigenous Australians and twice as likely to be renting.[i]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 3% of the general population but hold 18.3% of social housing tenancies[ii] and constitute 25% of the clients accessing specialist homelessness services in 2016–17: an estimated 64,644 clients[iii]. In 2016 15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in rural areas were deemed to be overcrowded, compared to 9.0% in urban areas.[iv] Indigenous Australians face complex struggles in all jurisdictions and without trying to over simplify those complexities there are two key areas that must be addressed by national policy – urban housing and rural/remote housing. The majority (79%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households are urban and the focus of much policy and program development is on housing for people in remote communities.

National Shelter acknowledges the depth of housing shortage in remote communities and the success of the Remote Partnership on Housing. We consider it to be a major infrastructure program,

mainly across the remote north of Australia which should link to the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility and policy.

Health and Housing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience poor health relative to non-Indigenous Australians. Since the 1980's poor housing has been associated with poor health outcomes. Paul Pholeros et al in the book Housing for health : towards a healthy living environment for Aboriginal Australia[v] identified the improved health benefits from improving basic housing conditions and went on to demonstrate that poorly designed, maintained and overcrowded properties contribute greatly to poor health and education outcomes.

In their 2011 examination of non shelter outcomes of housing Phibbs et al[vi] found:

"The study also suggested that:

- Evidence suggests that overcrowded dwellings are associated with greater risk of infectious disease and poor mental health.
- People who are living in dwellings that are damp, cold or mouldy are at greater risk of respiratory conditions, meningococcal infection and asthma."

In a recent study[vii] examining the measures of Housing Affordability Stress (HAS), Daniel, Baker and Lester found, while looking at gradients of material deprivation associated with HAS that, "In addition, these observed gradients suggest that, for the HAS and deprivation cohort in particular, they are exposed to cumulative vulnerabilities across multiple dimensions of housing, employment and health."

NSW health has, since 2000 operated the *Housing for Health* program: a health and safety focussed repair and maintenance program in Aboriginal community housing across NSW. A 2010 evaluation of the program undertaken by NSW Health has shown very positive health outcomes as a result of the program. Residents of houses where the *Housing for Health* intervention was implemented had a significantly reduced rate of hospital separation for infectious diseases – 40% lower than for the rest of the rural NSW Aboriginal population where *Housing for Health* interventions were not implemented. [viii]

There is a clear correlation between general, mental health, education and other outcomes resulting from poor housing.

Solutions proposed

The requirements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are acute in every area of Australia. We promote addressing this housing need across different geographic areas by including the following:

- The National Partnership on Remote Housing (NPRH) and its predecessor the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), be renegotiated for a further 10 years with States and Territories contributing on a dollar for dollar basis;
- An additional urban linkage strategy to allow for travel between remote and urban communities and the development of linked accommodation facilities in cities and towns used by remote communities;
- NHHA allocate funding for an extra 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing dwellings by 2028;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers (CHPs), including remote and non-remote local councils, be supported to play a significant role in developing and managing additional housing;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CHPs (ICHOs) be engaged around capacity and capability through a specific strategy;

- An audit of properties under ICHO management and ownership be undertaken and funds for identified urgent maintenance be released without delay to enable the upgrade of substandard housing;
- Australian, State and Territory governments engage in good faith with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representatives over housing issues and to support access to private rental and home ownership for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households;
- To financially support the National Aboriginal Congress to auspice a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing peak body;
- Acknowledging that mainstreaming of Aboriginal housing and services fails to uphold principles of self-determination and does not work as well as Aboriginal community controlled service provision; and
- Australia needs an improved strategy to lift the levels of home ownership among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including reviewing the roles of:
  - Indigenous Business Australia
  - Banks and mortgage lenders
  - The role shared equity products like Keystart[ix] can play to increase home ownership

i Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Indigenous Home Ownership Issues Paper. 2013

ii https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2017/data, supplementary table 4

iii https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2016-17/contents/client-groups-of-interest/indigenous-clients

ivhttp://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Population%20Article~12

v Housing for health : towards a healthy living environment for Aboriginal Australia / Paul Pholeros, Stephan Rainow, Paul Torillo. Pholeros, Paul. 1993

vi Phibbs, P. and Thompson, S. (2011) *The health impacts of housing: toward a policy-relevant research agenda*, AHURI Final Report No.173. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

v11 Lyrian Daniel, Emma Baker & Laurence Lester (2018) Measuring Housing Affordability Stress: Can Deprivation Capture Risk Made Real?,Urban Policy and Research, DOI: 10.1080/08111146.2018.1460267

viii Closing the Gap: 10 Years of Housing for Health in NSW, an evaluation of a health housing intervention, NSW Department of Health 2010, http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/Publications/housing-health.pdf

ix https://www.keystart.com.au/home-loans/shared/shared