

***Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Social Policy and Legal Affairs:
Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia
The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
June 2020***

Victoria has the highest and fastest rising rates of Aboriginal people contacting homelessness services in Australia. Almost half of those presenting to such services are already homeless.

This submission highlights some of the pressures which lead to the over-representation of Aboriginal children, young people and families in rates of homelessness in Victoria. Past policies of discrimination and child removal have ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma, family violence and poverty which contribute to the current over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. Such children and young people are extremely vulnerable to homelessness once they leave care due to;

- Forced independence when leaving care at the vulnerable age of 18
- Insufficient income support payments
- Shortage of safe, affordable, stable and secure housing options and infrastructure
- Lack of culturally appropriate housing and support services

We urge the Committee to consider the specific experience of Aboriginal homelessness and to accordingly respond to it by building on existing policy arrangements around Closing the Gap (Refresh), National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and Income Support Payments. This concerted national approach must be Aboriginal-led and guided by principles of Aboriginal self-determination and the rights of children and young people. We seek a commitment to a major reform of the sector as a whole with a clear priority to address Aboriginal Homelessness.

We also urge the Committee to consider the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on those most vulnerable in our community. We are concerned that for some members of the Aboriginal community it will push them into further crisis and therefore this is an immediate need for effective responses and strategies to mitigate this and support recovery.

Note on language

We use the term Aboriginal in referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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Introduction

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia. VACCA wants to highlight the challenges of homelessness for Aboriginal peoples and potential strategies, approaches and investments that will build and sustain their social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) and safety.

While our submission focusses on the experience of homelessness for Aboriginal communities in the Victorian context, we believe our reflections are pertinent nationally. We believe that when responding to such challenges; policy and program approaches, governance and funding arrangements across the sector must be grounded in the principle of self-determination.

Our submission is based on our unique position as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) providing a suite of child and family welfare services across Victoria. We hope to highlight the key role safe and secure housing has on successful outcomes in education, health, justice, child protection, family violence and employment. Despite this being well known, until now there has been no coherent, concerted approach to addressing homelessness and housing for Aboriginal people at the federal level¹. At the state level, we have the *Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework -Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort (VAHHF)* recently prepared by the Aboriginal community under the auspice of Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV)². VACCA supports this framework and endorses all its recommendations. Both research³ and VACCA's experiences as a child welfare organisation highlight the impact that inadequate housing and homelessness has on the removal and placement of Aboriginal children and young people into out of home care (OOHC), as well as undermining the future prospects for young people when leaving care.

Times of crisis exacerbate existing inequalities and issues for communities who experience an intersection of vulnerabilities. It is therefore crucial to also discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Aboriginal people who experience housing stress and look towards responses and strategies that will support recovery.

¹ Samms, J. (2018). An Aboriginal housing and homelessness framework for Victoria [online]. *Parity*, 31 (5),42.

² Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020). *Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework -Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, Aboriginal Housing Victoria. Melbourne.

³ Lewis et al., (2019); Campo, M., & Commerford, J. (2016); Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., & Snow, P. C (2014).

About VACCA

VACCA is the lead Aboriginal child welfare organisation and the largest provider of Aboriginal family violence services in Victoria. With over 40 years of experience and expertise as an ACCO, VACCA supports and advocates for the needs of Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities. VACCA's vision is Aboriginal self-determination - Live, Experience and Be. Our purpose is supporting culturally strong, safe and thriving Aboriginal communities. We believe in the principle of the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and the rights of the child as well as a strong commitment to upholding Victorian Aboriginal cultural protocols. Our values are: Best Interests of the Child, Aboriginal Cultural Observance, Respect, Self-determination, Healing and Empowerment and Excellence. We deliver over 50 programs across a wide range of program areas including family violence, integrated family services, child protection, cultural strengthening programs, mental health, financial services, justice, early years and homelessness services. By offering a broad range of services, we hope to:

- Ensure child safety and community wellbeing
- Provide targeted support for Aboriginal children, young people and their families
- Maintain and build strong connections to Aboriginal culture
- Promote culturally specific ways of raising Aboriginal children.

VACCA's services are underpinned by principles of prevention, early intervention and therapeutic healing. They are premised on human rights, self-determination, promoting client voice, cultural respect and safety. We provide a number of culturally appropriate housing and homelessness support services, as well as crisis support and case management services to Aboriginal peoples who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These include Kurnai Youth Homelessness Program, Orana Gunyah and Wilam Support Service, along with Ngwala Willumbong Ltd, a specialist homelessness service for Aboriginal men, women and families, providing culturally strong and community-based support and other providers such as VACSAL and positions within local ACCO's across the state.

Our Preston-based homelessness program, the Wilam Support Service, supports Aboriginal individuals, couples, families and young people 17 years or older who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to find stable housing. Case workers also assist with finding employment, access to educational opportunities, support the health and wellbeing of those seeking help and help connect them with their Aboriginal identity and culture.

VACCA's approach to the Terms of Reference

Our submission will address the following Terms of Reference:

- 2. factors affecting the incidence of homelessness, including housing-market factors;*
- 3. the causes of, and contributing factors to, housing overcrowding;*
- 4. opportunities for early intervention and prevention of homelessness;*
- 5. services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including housing assistance, social housing, and specialist homelessness services;*
- 6. support and services for people at particular risk of homelessness, including:*
 - b. children and young people;*
 - c. Indigenous Australians;*
 - d. people experiencing repeat homelessness;*
- 7. the suitability of mainstream services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;*
- 8. examples of best-practice approaches in Australia and internationally for preventing and addressing homelessness;*
- 9. the adequacy of the collection and publication of housing, homelessness, and housing affordability related data;*

VACCA will also respond to the Committee's request for submissions to address the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness in Australia and our experiences in responding to the COVID-19 situation.

Addressing Institutional Racism

We open this submission by noting the entrenched nature of institutional racism in Australia and its specific impact on Aboriginal lives. Addressing over 230 years of European Settler-Colonialism on Aboriginal land requires special measures that are equal to the deep-seated and intractable problems that exist here. They need to be of a long-term nature and primarily aim to strengthen the movement to regenerate Aboriginal communities and culture.

In particular, we endorse the four priority principles adopted by the Coalition of Peaks and COAG to reframe the next Closing the Gap Framework. They are:

- Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander own governance and decision-making structures are supported.
- Recognising community-controlled organisations are an act of self-determination where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people deliver services to their communities based on our own needs, cultures and relationship to land.
- Confronting institutionalised racism in government mainstream institutions and agencies to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access the services they need in a culturally safe way.
- Sharing data and information with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have more power to determine their own development.

We encourage the Inquiry to adopt the same framework and principles in making its final recommendations.

Understanding the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in rates of homelessness

The following section addresses numbers 2, 3 and 6 of the Terms of Reference

Victoria has the highest and fastest rising rates of Aboriginal people accessing homeless services in Australia 17,000 per 10,000 or 17%. Of this 17%, 44% present to the services already homeless (AIHW, 2019). This scale of homelessness would not be accepted in the mainstream.

Access to adequate housing is a human right, as detailed in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1966)⁴. It recognises that everyone has the right to adequate housing where they live in peace, security and dignity. Having stable housing helps to support and sustain positive outcomes in employment, health and improvement in education⁵. The fundamental human right to adequate and secure housing is not being realised for Aboriginal Victorians.

On any given night, over 24,000 Victorians are homeless, including families with children, young people, the elderly, people with disabilities and mental health conditions, couples and single adults⁶. This is due to several structural factors such as lack of affordable housing (including crisis, transitional social housing and private rental), alongside broader policy, social and economic forces leading to chronic housing needs, inappropriate architecture and planning, as well as shifting dynamics in job and housing markets⁷. Within the homelessness population, Aboriginal people are disproportionately over-represented making up more than 10% of clients using homeless services in 2017-18 despite comprising less than one per cent of the Victorian population⁸.

Whilst the invasion of Aboriginal lands, of what we now know as Australia, occurred over 230 years ago, the impact has transcended generations, touching all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives. The ongoing effects of colonisation and its transmission across generations, has created significant systemic and social disadvantage, hindering Aboriginal people's ability to thrive within their communities and creating intergenerational poverty amongst families and communities (Patrick, 2014).

Historic factors such as the dispossession of land and the impact of policies which segregated and disenfranchised Aboriginal communities, including the deliberate exclusion from the economy, has led

⁴ UN General Assembly. (1996), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3.

⁵ AIHW. (2018). *Housing assistance in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government.

⁶ Council to Homeless Persons. (2018). *Homelessness in Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://chp.org.au/homelessness/>

⁷ Anderson, J. T., & Collins, D. (2014). Prevalence and causes of urban homelessness among Indigenous peoples. A three-country scoping review. *Housing studies*, 29(7), 959-976.

⁸ AIHW. (2018). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017-18*. Canberra: AIHW.

to significant and ongoing disadvantage creating not only physical homelessness but also spiritual homelessness⁹.

This disadvantage is evident in Victoria with the highest rate of Aboriginal homelessness across all states and territories in Australia and its steady increase over the past five years¹⁰. In 2019, 17% of Aboriginal Victorians received homeless services in comparison to less than two per cent of all Victorians¹¹. It must be noted that these figures under-represent the actual number of people facing homelessness since much of the problem is under-reported and often under-estimated in data collection¹². ABS data suggests that at least 17% of Aboriginal people are not accounted for on census night, highlighting the challenges with adequately estimating those in transitional housing, staying with kin or sleeping rough¹³. Further to this, some data around the number of Aboriginal people who experience homelessness is based on mainstream homeless service usage and therefore does not capture those who have not accessed homeless services due to fear of stigma, lack of services in regional or remote areas, or apprehension of accessing services that may be culturally inappropriate¹⁴.

Across Australia, 62 per cent of Aboriginal people seeking homeless assistance have sought support in the previous five years and only 67 per cent of Aboriginal people seeking emergency accommodation received it (AHV, 2019)

Many of the community members we work with experience repeat homelessness; where those who enter the homeless support system homeless, also exit the system homeless. This further diminishes the likelihood that they will return to a service system which has proved unable to meet their needs. Again, the Aboriginal population is disproportionately overrepresented in these figures; on a national level, where the mainstream population experiences repeat homelessness at 4.2% per annum, the Aboriginal population experience it at a rate of 5.9%¹⁵.

In particular, the likelihood of Aboriginal children and young people slipping through the cracks of support services and becoming homeless is greater than compared to non-Aboriginal young people¹⁶ because:

- Aboriginal children and young people more likely to come from families facing extreme disadvantage, poverty, insufficient housing, substance abuse or violence¹⁷.

⁹ Aboriginal Housing Victoria. (2020).

¹⁰ Aboriginal Housing Victoria. (2019). *The Victorian Aboriginal housing and homelessness summit: Report of findings*. Melbourne: Aboriginal Housing Victoria

¹¹ Productivity Commission. (2019). *Report on government service 2019: Housing and homelessness*. Canberra: Australian Government.

¹² Aboriginal Housing Victoria. (2019).

¹³ ABS. (2016). *ABS 3238.0.55.001 - Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*.

¹⁴ Aboriginal Housing Victoria. (2020)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Baskin, C. (2007). Aboriginal youth talk about structural determinants as the causes of their homelessness. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 3(3), 31-42.

¹⁷ Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2019).

- Secondly, they are significantly disadvantaged in obtaining stable, well-paying jobs as they are less likely to have obtained formal or tertiary qualifications¹⁸.
- Thirdly, Aboriginal children and young people are over-represented in the child welfare system, with Victorian statistics finding them to be 16 times more likely to be living in OOHC¹⁹.
- Lastly, Aboriginal young people experience marginalisation in additional ways to non-Aboriginal young people through systemic racism and disconnection from culture and Country. These compounding experiences have been linked to homelessness as well as higher rates of suicide, violence, depression and substance abuse²⁰.

Overcrowding is also often listed as a concern and linked to housing stress and homelessness, with Aboriginal households particularly vulnerable. In particular remote and very remote areas across Australia are more likely to experience this compared with other areas²¹.

Previously, Australia has had a housing market where most Australians could afford to buy a house, the private rental market offered a transitional tenure while people saved for their own house and public and social housing was available for the most disadvantaged²². However, since 1971, homeownership has significantly decreased for people aged 25-35 and the Aboriginal community is disproportionately impacted by this as their median age is much younger compared to that of the mainstream community.²³ The latest census data estimates that 38 per cent of Aboriginal households own their own home compared to 69 per cent for the mainstream population²⁴. Is it crucial to highlight that data on the tenures of Aboriginal people provided through the census often significantly overestimates home ownership rates for Aboriginal households. However, this comparison still indicates that Aboriginal households are faced with significantly lower rates of homeownership and are unable to build income and the generational wealth needed to gain housing security²⁵.

In addition to the decline in private ownership, the share of public and social housing as tenure in the housing market has also fallen. Victoria, in particular, has a much lower proportion of public and social housing and the lowest rate of investment in this than any other state or territory in Australia²⁶. With this shortage in social and public housing in mind, more than 4,000 Aboriginal households in Victoria have sought housing through the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) suggesting the housing needs of the

¹⁸ Peters, E. J., & Robillard, V. (2009). "Everything you want is there": The place of the reserve in First Nations' homeless mobility. *Urban Geography*, 30(6), 652-680.

¹⁹ Productivity Commission. (2019). *Report on government service 2019: Community Service*. Canberra: Australian Government

²⁰ Patrick (2014). Aboriginal homelessness in Canada: A literature review. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Pres.

²¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014). Housing circumstances of Indigenous households: tenure and overcrowding. Cat. no. IHW 132. Canberra: AIHW.

²² AHV. (2019). *The Victorian Aboriginal housing and homelessness summit: Background paper 3 Determinants of housing outcomes*

²³ AIHW. (2018). *Housing Assistance in Australia – Home ownership (aggregate) rates, by selected age groups, Census years 1971 to 2016*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Government., ABS. (2016). Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples Quick Stats. Australian Bureau of Statistics.

²⁴ ABS (2018). Census of Population and Housing, customised report. Prepared for: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Available at < <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing>>

²⁵ Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020)

²⁶ Ibid.

Aboriginal community remain unmet.²⁷ It is crucial to highlight that one in five Aboriginal people live in social housing compared to one in 50 of the mainstream community²⁸.

Further pressures on public and social housing emerge due to the inaccessibility and barriers of entry to the private rental market. Only 28% of rental properties in Australia are available to people on minimum wage, with just six per cent of people receiving income support payments²⁹. Aboriginal households face additional challenges such as systemic discrimination when attempting to enter the private rental market. This is particularly pervasive in regional Victoria, where some agents have rationalised illegal discrimination and continue to practice unchallenged³⁰.

Within the current economic climate, rent has increased faster than inflation and the real value of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which increases in line with the consumer price index, has decreased³¹. Private rentals compose a significant share of the housing market, creating an environment of competition and increased rents where the accommodation costs of low-income families absorb 32 per cent of their income, and this meets the definition of housing stress³². Observations from our homelessness programs also suggest that our clients are simply unable to afford rent as minimum wage and the minimum amount of social security payments have not equated rent increases. Such conditions coupled with population growth, where Victoria as the fastest growing state in Australia is set to continue³³, are contributing to ever-increasing waiting lists for public and social housing dwellings especially for Aboriginal communities which are disproportionately represented in these figures.

Observations from our program, the Wilam Support Service, suggest a significant demand in homelessness support services and Emergency Relief payments. This has manifested from increases in the number of cases we carry overall between February 2019 and February 2020. Anecdotal observations also suggest that the Public Housing Renewal program has been a contributor to these changes because public housing is in the process of being demolished and renewed, leaving a shortage of dwellings in the interim. This overall decrease in affordable housing infrastructure in addition to rental stress in the private rental market has contributed to an increased demand on our homelessness programs.

Population movements and projections also pose many challenges for housing our communities that require an appropriate policy and infrastructure response. Aboriginal families have a history of complex trauma that often exacerbates the impact of pressures as job loss, housing stress, everyday expenses and cost of medical care, childcare and schooling. Observations from our homelessness programs suggest that such challenges contribute to families relocating to cheaper accommodation. This influx of families

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Anglicare Australia. (2018). *Rental Affordability Snapshot National Report* <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final---rental-affordability-snapshota302da309d6962baacc1ff0000899bca.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

³⁰ Wallis Consulting. (2008). *Research Report - Access to the Private Rental Market: Industry Practices and Perception*. Wallis Consulting Group.

³¹ Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020)

³² AIHW, 2018. Housing Assistance in Australia. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Government. Available at < <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2018/contents/housing-in-australia>>

³³ State of Victoria, 2019. Victoria in Future 2019. Department of Land, Water and Planning, Victorian Government, Melbourne.



relocating to the fringes of Greater Metropolitan Melbourne has also contributed to an increased demand on our homelessness programs. Aboriginal population projections show that a further 27,000 households will require housing by 2036 with an average annual household population growth rate of 4 per cent³⁴. Such projections strengthen the need to support future demand on our homelessness services with direct investment.

³⁴ Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020)

Definitions, data and reporting

The following section addresses numbers 3 and 9 of the Terms of Reference

Overcrowding

Care should be taken when investigating overcrowding as this concept is based on western assumptions of safe housing and family structures, omitting Aboriginal cultural kinship protocols in relation to raising children communally or caring for extended family members in the same household³⁵. Australian standards define overcrowding when a dwelling is too small, requiring at least one additional bedroom for the size and composition of the household living in it³⁶. Overcrowding is the result of inadequate housing including housing that is inappropriate for Aboriginal family sizes and dynamics. It is the result of poverty and low incomes with people unable to afford private rents leading to dependence on those that do have housing and homes. Aboriginal households may also experience overcrowding due to complex reasons such as the fluctuation of family size due to Child Protection involvement. Anecdotal evidence from our homelessness programs suggests that for some families, when children are removed and the family's Parenting Payments are cut, the family is pushed to downsize their home, resulting in an inappropriate dwelling size later down the track when the children are visiting or eventually returned.

Particular attention should be paid to cases where 'overcrowding' is deemed an issue without focusing on alleviating other contributing structural factors and policy failures that contribute to the lack of safe and secure housing. VACCA contends that while reducing overcrowding should be a key housing policy target, structural problems such as affordability, unsafe and unmaintained public housing stock and inadequate facilities, as well as a lack of housing which accommodate families larger than western normative understandings of a nuclear family must be addressed. Each of these structural problems has been shown to have a greater association with poor wellbeing outcomes for children than overcrowding³⁷.

Transparency and accountability

Issues with accountability and transparency emerge in the mainstream system as information around numbers of Aboriginal people seeking emergency accommodation or homelessness services is not publicly reported³⁸. The absence of streamlined data sharing between the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and VHR prevents a clear mapping of the issue, where critical services are required and impedes program and policy development. Contributing to this, data on the tenures of Aboriginal people provided through the census by Australian

³⁵ VACCA. (2016). *Working with Aboriginal Children and Families: A Guide for Child Protection and Family Welfare Workers*. Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Preston; Memmott, P., Birdsall-Jones, C., & Greenop, K. (2012). *Australian Indigenous house crowding* (Vol. 1001, p. 5). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Melbourne, Australia.

³⁶ AIHW, (2019). *Overcrowding – Housing assistance in Australia 2019*. Australian Institute for Health and Welfare. Australian Government.

³⁷ SNAICC. (2019). *Analysis of the alignment of draft Closing the Gap Targets with SNAICC positions and priorities*. SNAICC Brief. January. <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ClosingTheGap-analysis-targets-brief-Feb2019.pdf> and Biddle, N. (2011). 'Physical and mental health – Lecture 3, Measures of Indigenous wellbeing and their determinants across the life course, CAEPR Lecture Series', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

³⁸ Ibid;

Bureau of Statistics is often unreliable and significantly overestimates home ownership, while underestimating rates of homelessness and housing stress³⁹. There are often gaps in Aboriginal community specific data around projected population movement and specific demographics and this needs to be remedied going forward in the spirit of self-determination.

Aboriginal data sovereignty

Reinforcing such issues around data and evidence is the lack of Aboriginal data sovereignty in the housing and homelessness sector. Self-determination underpins data sovereignty where Aboriginal people have a fundamental right to the collection, intellectual property and application of data regarding them⁴⁰. In addition to a greater transfer of data between mainstream services, government departments and ACCOs, the Aboriginal community and ACCOs must be empowered through adequate resourcing to lead data collection, analysis, program design and delivery, program evaluation and to influence policy. Such measures will strengthen the data and evidence base of the housing and homelessness sector and improve transparency and accountability.

³⁹ Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020)

⁴⁰ AIATSIS. (2019). *Delivering Indigenous Data Sovereignty – Presentations*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; Kukutai, T. Taylor, J. (2016) *Indigenous data sovereignty: toward an agenda*. Canberra: ANU Press.

Reflecting on the Victorian policy context

At the state level, *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan* is the overall homelessness strategy, building on key reform agendas within *Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social emotional wellbeing framework 2017–2027*⁴¹. While these strategies have raised Aboriginal housing as an issue, until the release of the VAHHF in February 2020, there had not been a state-based Aboriginal housing and homelessness strategy⁴². Developed by the Aboriginal community, under the auspice of AHV, the VAHHF is an act of self-determination, and we believe this to be the most comprehensive Aboriginal housing policy framework so far produced in Australia. The VAHHF aims to move beyond crisis management of Aboriginal housing and to achieve housing equity through a new approach which addresses each of the drivers of housing outcomes (See Appendix for overview of VAHHF). VACCA supports this framework and endorses all its recommendations.

In Victoria, the need for more social housing for the Aboriginal community in Victoria is evident. As articulated by 'Priority 4.1: Aboriginal Victorians have stable, secure and appropriate housing' in *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027*⁴³. The strategic direction for this priority area is to 'Advance self-determination in Aboriginal housing and homelessness'. We have seen some progress towards this aim, with the transfer of title for over 1200 homes to AHV for 2017 to 2020 via Victoria's *Homes for Victorians* initiative in accordance with the government's commitment to "self-determination and more culturally appropriate housing services"⁴⁴. However, funding for Aboriginal organisations to deliver housing and homelessness support remains an ongoing issue, despite it being a strategic direction in *Korin Korin Balit-Djak*.

VACCA advocates that to achieve self-determination in a housing and homelessness framework there needs to be a transfer of social housing stock to Aboriginal organisations so that we can address the needs of our communities. Particularly in providing crisis accommodation for individuals affected by family violence and young people leaving out of home care.

Given the overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples in homelessness figures, there needs to be major reform and systemic shift in both state and national approaches ensuring the Aboriginal community are active rather than passive participants in housing and homelessness policy. The first step in this process involves the prioritisation of funding to Aboriginal organisations ensuring we are fully resourced to direct the design and delivery of homelessness supports. Funding should be provided according to proportional equity to reflect the percentage of Aboriginal people needing homelessness services which in this context would be 10 per cent. We believe that a national housing a homelessness framework should also reflect these reforms and priorities.

⁴¹ State of Victoria, (2018). *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*, Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government, Melbourne.; State of Victoria, (2017). *Balit Murrup Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework 2017–2027*. Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

⁴² Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020).

⁴³ State of Victoria, (2017). *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027* Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

⁴⁴ State of Victoria, (2017). *Homes for Victorians Affordability, access and choice*. Victorian Government, Melbourne.

Federal policy context

The following section addresses numbers 2, 4 and 6 of the Terms of Reference

Closing the Gap

The recent 2020 *Closing the Gap* report highlighted that only two of the seven original targets remain on track, with particular concerns around life expectancy for Aboriginal peoples compared to non-Aboriginal Australians⁴⁵. The correlation between stable and secure housing and health later in life has been well-established⁴⁶ where significant inequalities in life expectancy arise due to experiences of housing stress⁴⁷. As housing and homelessness were omitted from the original Closing the Gap targets, Aboriginal Community Housing Ltd (ACHL) Chair Maureen O'Meara has highlighted the difficulty in meeting any of the other targets "without addressing such a fundamental need as safe, appropriate, affordable, good quality housing"⁴⁸.

We welcome Prime Minister Morrison's commitment to Aboriginal-led decision making and to working collaboratively with Aboriginal communities⁴⁹. Through the Partnership Agreement between COAG and the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), Aboriginal communities will be empowered to design and evaluate the new Closing the Gap agenda. Community consultations around the draft priority areas conducted by the Coalition of Peaks have shown that housing is a critical area of concern for Aboriginal communities⁵⁰. Considering this policy shift towards Aboriginal-led decision making and the importance of housing for communities, it is particularly concerning that the Federal Government recently decided to cease funding for remote Aboriginal housing⁵¹. This not only contradicts the Commonwealth's good-will aspirations but also leaves a \$6 billion gap to be absorbed by state-based agreements in meeting the housing needs of Aboriginal communities⁵².

The Closing the Gap Refresh have developed four new priority areas that the findings of this inquiry should align to, so as to ensure relevancy and accountability across the sector. These reform priorities are; formal partnerships and shared decision making, building the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector, systemic and structural transformation of mainstream organisations, and finally shared access to data and information at regional level.

⁴⁵ Commonwealth of Australia. (2020). *Closing the Gap Report 2020*. <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdf/closing-the-gap-report-2020.pdf>

⁴⁶ Oswald, F., & Wahl, H. W. (2004). Housing and health in later life. *Reviews on environmental health*, 19(3-4), 223-252.

⁴⁷ Buck, D., & Maguire, D. (2019). Inequalities in life expectancy: Changes over time and implications for policy.

⁴⁸ "Aboriginal Community Housing Ltd says Closing the Gap fails to address homelessness and housing." *NIT*, February 27, 2020. <https://nit.com.au/aboriginal-community-housing-ltd-says-closing-the-gap-fails-to-address-homelessness-and-housing/>

⁴⁹ Prime Minister Scott Morrison. (2020). Address, Closing the Gap Statement to Parliament SPEECH. 12 February 2020. Parliament House, Canberra. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-closing-gap-statement-parliament>

⁵⁰ Coalition of Peaks. (2020). *Community Engagements Snapshot – A Summary of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Communities Said about the New National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. January 2020 <https://www.naccho.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Coalition-of-Peaks-engagement-snapshot-6.pdf>

⁵¹ NATSILS. (2020). *MEDIA RELEASE: Response to Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Closing the Gap Report*. 12 February 2020. http://www.natsils.org.au/portals/natsils/Users/002/02/2/Media%20release_%20PM%20address%20to%20CTG%20targets.pdf?ver=2020-02-12-114859-560

⁵² NITV. (2020). "Government Looks to First Nations after Repeating Failings in Closing the Gap." *NITV*, February 12, 2020. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2020/02/12/government-looks-first-nations-after-repeat-failings-closing-gap-0>

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)

Since 2018, NHHA has defined the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and each state and territory in improving housing outcomes across the housing spectrum⁵³. This policy has some promising elements with increased accountability measures placed upon states and an extension of previously time-limited funding for frontline homelessness services, however, an inherent funding deficit remains⁵⁴. The Commonwealth has failed to increase its funding from the previous reiteration of the policy as the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, yet expects states to increase their funding under NHHA⁵⁵. A key outcome of the NHHA is the improved housing outcomes for Aboriginal Australians with the relevant national performance indicator including an increase in the number of Aboriginal Australians purchasing their own home.⁵⁶ Even so, with the disbanding of the National Rental Affordability Scheme and investment in remote Aboriginal housing, the Commonwealth may struggle to meet this stated goal. In the current housing environment, there is now less federal funding for new social and affordable housing than in the last decade⁵⁷.

Currently, there is no defined agreement between the Commonwealth and the states around Aboriginal housing funding or outcomes. In response to this, AHV argues for the establishment of specific Aboriginal targets in the Victorian Agreement under the NHHA. This would allow a portion of NAHA housing funds in Victoria's agreement to be solely directed towards improving Aboriginal housing outcomes⁵⁸. Such a measure may be implemented in concert with the refreshed Closing the Gap housing targets and be monitored accordingly through an Aboriginal-led evaluation process.

⁵³ National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. (2018). Council on Federal Financial Relations.
http://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/other/other/NHHA_Final.pdf

⁵⁴ Gurran, N., Rowley, S., Milligan, V., Randolph, B., Phibbs, P., Gilbert, C., James, A., Troy, L. and van den Nouwelant, R. (2018). Inquiry into increasing affordable housing supply: Evidence-based principles and strategies for Australian policy and practice, AHURI Final Report 300, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne

⁵⁵ Gurran at al. (2018).

⁵⁶ National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. (2018).

⁵⁷ Milligan, V., (2018). *The new national housing agreement won't achieve its goals without enough funding*. University of New South Wales in The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/the-new-national-housing-agreement-wont-achieve-its-goals-without-enough-funding-99936>

⁵⁸ Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020)

Understanding the factors for entering out-of-home care

The following section addresses numbers 2, 4, 5 and 6 of the Terms of Reference

Often children and young people coming into care have been removed from their families and homes and placed in OOH as Child Protection has deemed their living conditions unsafe. This may be due to the presence of risk factors such as; poverty, family violence, child abuse or neglect⁵⁹. Taskforce 1000 revealed that 88% of Aboriginal children and young people in OOH in Victoria had experienced family violence, 87% had been exposed to parental alcohol or substance abuse and almost 50% had experienced neglect⁶⁰.

Family violence

Family violence is one of the main reasons for homelessness within Aboriginal communities⁶¹. Aboriginal children, women and families are disproportionately over-represented in rates of family violence, with Aboriginal women 15 times more likely to access homelessness and crisis housing than non-Aboriginal women⁶².

There are a number of complex and compounding reasons why individuals, in particular women and children, are forced to remain in unsafe housing, with a key issue being no alternative, affordable accommodation. For family members wanting to leave a violent household, there is a lack of housing options available and those leaving often need safe, secure and specialised housing.

Everyone has the right to secure housing and, somewhere they feel safe. Family violence undermines this right and pushes victim-survivors to leave their home and find accommodation elsewhere. Many women who seek specialist homelessness services require assistance as they do not have the financial means to acquire housing and consequently their options are extremely limited, impacting on their ability to leave a violent environment.

For children and young people, family violence is the leading cause of homelessness and can have a detrimental impact on their life trajectory, affecting their educational, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and development⁶³. Having access to safe housing significantly impacts on a family's ability to

⁵⁹ Lewis, N., Weston, R., Burton, J., Young, J., Jayakody, N., Mastroianni, A., Wu Tan, W., Parolini, A., Shlonsky, A., & Tilbury, C. (2019). *The family matters report 2019: Measuring trends to turn the tide on the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care*. Eltham: Postscript Printing and Publishing.

⁶⁰ Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP). (2016). *Always was, always will be Koori children: Systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria*. Melbourne: CCYP.

⁶¹ Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW & AIFS). (2016). *Family violence prevention programs in Indigenous communities* (Resource sheet no. 37). Produced by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: AIHW & Melbourne: AIFS

⁶² Braybrook, A. (2016). *Family violence in Aboriginal communities*. Extract from submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/sites/default/files/Family-violence-in-Aboriginal-communities-FVPLS.pdf>

⁶³ DiNicola, K., Liyanarachchi, D., & Plummer, J. *Out of the shadows: Domestic and family violence: A leading cause of homelessness in Australia*. Mission Australia.

provide healthy support and care for their children⁶⁴. Compounded with housing stressors such as unstable housing tenure, homelessness, and mortgage and rental stress, families become vulnerable and at risk of involvement from Child Protection and to child removal. A lack of safe and stable housing, particularly for families exposed to family violence, contributes to both the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people placed in OOHC as well as to high rates of homelessness⁶⁵.

Poverty

A major impact of colonisation has been systemic structures and barriers that create and perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and intergenerational poverty for Aboriginal peoples. Poverty plays a detrimental role in the high rates of homelessness amongst Aboriginal families as well as in the removal of young people into OOHC⁶⁶. Several circumstances associated with poverty are directly correlated with homelessness including; limited opportunities for education, disability, financial stress, debt, reliance on public housing, social exclusion and residing in sub-standard accommodation which all limit the ability to acquire and sustain stable housing⁶⁷. The Aboriginal community is particularly vulnerable to such stressors as a consequence of historical dispossession, exacerbating the already harmful impacts of poverty. These experiences flow through generations of family, entrenching an intergenerational cycle of homelessness.

Although family poverty does not immediately warrant the removal of children, studies have identified poverty to be a key indicator for involvement from Child Protection⁶⁸ as it contributes to the likelihood of young people experiencing adverse events such as family violence, maternal distress and reduced parental responsiveness, a child's access to learning opportunities and their quality of care⁶⁹. This is extremely problematic, as after being removed from their families and placed in OOHC, young people become more likely to face homelessness when leaving care⁷⁰. Without the provision of affordable housing for vulnerable Aboriginal families, this damaging cycle continues.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP)

Crucial to the prevention of homelessness for Aboriginal young people leaving care are early intervention decisions about a child's OOHC placement. The ATSICPP was a key achievement of the Fourth Action Plan: 2018-2020 of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children⁷¹, acknowledging the value of connection to family, community, culture and Country and for child and family welfare legislation, policy and practice⁷².

⁶⁴ Lewis, et al. (2016).

⁶⁵ CCYP (2016). *Always Was, Always Will Be Koori Children: Systematic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care in Victoria*. Commission for Children and Young People, Melbourne.

⁶⁶ CCYP (2016)

⁶⁷ Combat Poverty Agency. (2004). *What is poverty?*

⁶⁸ Lewis et al., (2019).

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Mendes, P., Michell, D., & Wilson, J. Z. (2014). Young people transitioning from out-of-home care and access to higher education: A critical review of the literature. *Children Australia*, 3(4), 243-252.

⁷¹ DSS. (2019). *Protecting Australia's Children*. Department of Social Services. Commonwealth of Australia

⁷² SNAICC., (2019). 'The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A Guide to Support Implementation'. SNAICC - National Voice for Our Children, Melbourne.

The ATSICPP outlines that placement should be prioritised in the following way;

- 1. With Aboriginal relatives or extended family members, or other relatives or extended family members*
- 2. With Aboriginal members of the child's community*
- 3. With Aboriginal family-based carers, especially with siblings*
- 4. With non-Aboriginal family based carers*
- 5. With Aboriginal agency providing a residential setting*
- 6. With non-Aboriginal agency proving residential settings (SNAICC, 2017)*

It is paramount that Aboriginal children placed in OOH do not experience the same damaging effects of removal, including loss of identity and dislocation from family and community as the Stolen Generations⁷³. The intent of the ATSICPP was to stem the rates of removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and if unavoidable, to keep them in touch with their families. It also aims to strengthen protective factors and allows children to have a greater opportunity to thrive in their culture and identity, therefore improving SEWB.

The importance of fully implementing the ATSICPP was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse⁷⁴. VACCA supports this recommendation and has discussed the significance of the ATSICPP for the SEWB of Aboriginal children and young people in our submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Service⁷⁵. Poor SEWB, behavioural issues, mental health issues, substance misuse, homelessness and involvement with the criminal justice system are all interconnected⁷⁶ but by improving SEWB and supporting young people to strengthen their connections, we can reduce the chance of a placement breakdown and the likelihood for Aboriginal children and young people to fall into a cycle of homelessness.

⁷³ SNAICC. (2017). Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle: A resource for legislation, policy and program development. Eltham: Postscript Printing and Publishing.

⁷⁴ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. (2017). Final report - Recommendations. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.

⁷⁵ VACCA. (2019). VACCA Submission in response to the Royal Commission Inquiry into Victoria's Mental Health Services. Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Melbourne.

⁷⁶ Social Health Reference Group (SHRG). (2017). National strategic framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on housing and homelessness issues for Aboriginal people

Governments have enforced physical distancing restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic urging the public to stay home. Yet, many of our Aboriginal community members do not have a safe place to call home.

Aboriginal children and young people in OOHHC and in the youth justice system, as well as Aboriginal adults in correctional facilities or those who are homeless cannot access the health and social benefits of secure housing needed to stay safe, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The health and economic impacts of crisis situations increase risks to violence, child protection involvement and poor mental health and SEWB.

Increased health risk

Comorbidities of health conditions, overcrowded housing and drug and alcohol issues increase vulnerability to COVID-19 for Aboriginal people under housing stress. Due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and poverty, the burden of disease for Aboriginal people is 2.3 times the rate for non-Aboriginal people, where chronic diseases account for 64% of the total disease burden⁷⁷. Unequal burden of disease and increased risk was evident in health advice encouraging Aboriginal people over 50 years of age with more than one chronic condition to self-isolate at home, while for the non-Indigenous community, the recommended age was over 70. High rates of overcrowding in Aboriginal households also have poor implications for self-isolating and physical distancing⁷⁸. The closure of drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities with no new referrals being accepted has left highly vulnerable people with limited options to seek assistance and safe living arrangements⁷⁹.

Poor social and emotional wellbeing

Aboriginal peoples thrive within their culture, family and community and imposed physical distancing restrictions diminishes their ability to remain connected and socially supported. Aboriginal people who experience housing stress are much more likely to have ongoing issues with mental health or poor SEWB and these feelings have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Through consultations with VACCA staff, we found that while many support services have shifted to being offered remotely through video calls, many of our clients cannot access the appropriate technology, feel uncomfortable speaking over the phone about

⁷⁷ AIHW., (2016). Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.

⁷⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014). Housing circumstances of Indigenous households: tenure and overcrowding. Cat. no. IHW 132. Canberra: AIHW.; Faa, M., (2020). 'Coronavirus lockdown rules 'impossible' in already overcrowded houses in Torres Strait, residents say'. 25th March 2020, *ABC Far North News*. Available at: <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-25/coronavirus-lockdown-rules-torres-strait-islanders-impossible/120870009>>; Allam, L., 2020. 'Plea for tents 'or anything' to help with self-isolation in overcrowded Indigenous communities'. 25th March 2020, *The Guardian Australia*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/plea-for-tents-or-anything-to-help-with-self-isolation-in-overcrowded-indigenous-communities?fbclid=IwAR3GkpUOWtsnoDZtx_x9CCgn1jKgOT2sP6QYF7ymwzK14I5sGAgRElai0ho>

⁷⁹ Change the Record, (2020). Critical Condition – The impact of COVID-19 policies, policing and prisons on First Nations Communities. Change the Record. Available at < <https://changetherecord.org.au/critical-condition>>

personal issues or feel that this type of support does not meet their needs. It is essential to support the SEWB and ongoing cultural healing of our community through culturally appropriate therapeutic models of care now and in the recovery process of COVID-19.

Impact on families

The COVID-19 pandemic has had complex and varied impacts on vulnerable families, some of these include the ramifications of job loss, the impact of home-schooling on children and parents; and challenges of working from home if employed. While the temporary provision of free childcare in response to the pandemic may be delivering some financial relief for families, rising rates of unemployment and the looming cease of this policy places families under further economic duress and increases risks to housing stress or homelessness.

Given the vulnerability of the Aboriginal community to health risk, challenges emerge for multi-generational families living together, whether to send children to childcare, kindergarten and schools as restrictions ease and classes resume, and how this choice may impact on the child's opportunity for learning or potential penalisation. This raises concern for how to keep Elders and other vulnerable family members safe, while also supporting the learning of children for families residing together.

For Aboriginal families with involvement from Child Protection, COVID-19 has exacerbated some of the existing issues with the child welfare system. Change the Record's *Critical Condition Report* highlights examples where Aboriginal mothers have had their children removed, and due to COVID-19 restrictions, accessing information from Child Protection has been even more challenging than usual⁸⁰. In one case, an Aboriginal mother sought legal assistance to make a formal request for a photograph of her child⁸¹. There is also concern around the barriers to parents in maintaining connections with their removed children. Supported access to children in out-of-home care is essential for Aboriginal families as this may be a child's only link to their family, community, culture and Country. Unfortunately, the disruption to many support services has restricted this valuable connection and access to children causing distress and anxiety for the whole family⁸².

Impact on family violence

Physical distancing and 'stay at home' measures have resulted in social isolation and research highlights that this exacerbates collective and personal vulnerabilities, while also limiting options for people to seek support⁸³. VACCA staff reflected this concern, raising that physical distancing restrictions and home-schooling confine those at risk to the home, making family violence less visible. We welcome the Victorian government's response to increase crisis accommodation and campaign that encourages people

⁸⁰ Change the Record (2020).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Usher, K., Bhullar, N., Durkin, J., Gyamfi, N. and Jackson, D., (2020). Family violence and COVID-19: Increased vulnerability and reduced options for support. *International journal of mental health nursing*.

to come forward, as well as additional measures to support those fleeing family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic⁸⁴.

Observations from our family violence programs show a steady increase in referrals since the emergence of COVID-19 in five of our six regions. Referrals appeared to spike a couple of weeks after physical distancing restrictions were put in place and then plateaued, where more recently a second spike was experienced. The majority of our early intervention family violence programs have been unable to function as before and have pivoted to crisis response and we have observed a significant increase in demand for over the phone support. Many of our staff are high risk to COVID-19 and have been placed in the difficult position of being unable to do outreach and support our clients to the same level as before. This is concerning in the context of disrupted external support services where some essential behaviour change programs are no longer operating or have stopped taking referrals. Given the current volatile environment and the importance of this work, further resourcing and support are essential to support the commitment and dedication of our family violence teams. Increased risk to family violence is particularly concerning as we know this to be a significant contributor to homelessness amongst Aboriginal communities⁸⁵.

Keeping people safe, supported and housed

The Victorian government has made efforts to keep people who experience homelessness safe during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing funding for Homeless Access Points and temporary accommodation. However, this is not occurring consistently across the board as we have anecdotal evidence suggesting other ACCOS have struggled to secure emergency and crisis accommodation, especially for young people being released early on bail.

The Victorian government has also pledged \$6 million for homelessness services and this is an initiative with St. Vincent's who are triaging people and supporting them to accommodation⁸⁶. However, there is concern amongst our sector that Aboriginal people are having to go through mainstream services that are not always culturally safe and timely. For this reason, it is essential to resource and fund ACCOs to lead housing crisis support and recovery.

Impact on rental affordability

We welcome the National Cabinet's announcement of a six-month moratorium on rental evictions, as well as the addition of the Coronavirus Supplement to all social security payments, with exception to the Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment⁸⁷. Protections for landlords and tenants under s15 of the Victorian legislation *COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020* includes a moratorium on

⁸⁴ Clayton, R., (2020). Family violence campaign launched as Melbourne hospital's emergency presentations double. ABC News. May 9th 2020. Available at < <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-09/victoria-family-violence-cases-double-at-melbourne-hospital/12227594>>

⁸⁵ Braybrook (2016)

⁸⁶ Premier of Victoria, (2020). More Homelessness And Public Housing Support In COVID-19 Fight – Media Statement. Available at < <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/more-homelessness-and-public-housing-support-in-covid-19-fight/>

⁸⁷ National Cabinet, (2020). Media Statement – 29th March 2020. Available at <<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/national-cabinet-statement>>

evictions, suspensions of rental increases, new dispute resolution processes and rent relief for eligible tenants⁸⁸.

Rental affordability for our communities remains a key concern prior, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, conducted in March during the COVID-19 pandemic, had the unique opportunity of assessing the impact of the Coronavirus Supplement on rental affordability⁸⁹. Of the 69,960 properties listed for rent across Australia, just three percent were affordable and appropriate for households on social security payments, and only 22 percent for households on minimum wage⁹⁰. Raising further concern were findings that only nine of the properties listed would be affordable to a single JobSeeker if the Coronavirus Supplement is scrapped after six months⁹¹. While a couple on JobSeeker with two children would see the number of affordable and appropriate rentals fall from 11.6% to 0.8% of all properties of the supplement is cut⁹². These findings highlight the challenges faced by low-income earners in finding appropriate and affordable rentals and how these are likely to be exacerbated by loss of the Coronavirus Supplement, work and income.

We remain concerned for members of our communities who have experienced job loss but will need to continue paying their full rent amount. While the government has placed some protections for tenants, adequate support must be provided for those with histories of trauma who may struggle to participate in a conflict resolution process or may lack the resources to apply for rental relief.

Leaving institutional settings

As discussed earlier, there are already a number of existing pressures on housing for Aboriginal peoples before the emergence of COVID-19. Stable and secure housing for those leaving institutional settings remains a key concern for VACCA, both during and after the pandemic. Despite the additional emergency accommodation options made available for our clients who are in the process of leaving custody, the inability to conduct our essential post-release outreach is a significant barrier to adequately supporting our clients' well-being, needs and smooth transition back into accommodation and their everyday life. VACCA is also concerned about outcomes and housing options for our Aboriginal people leaving custody once the pandemic is over and funding ceases for additional housing. Affordable, secure and stable housing for Aboriginal people leaving custodial settings and young people leaving care is central to fostering thriving communities. In order to mitigate any further disadvantages to our communities as a result of this crisis, funding for housing and the associated support services is essential in the recovery process.

⁸⁸ State of Victoria, (2020). COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020 – Legislation. Victorian Government, Melbourne.; Department of Housing, 2020. Coronavirus (COVID-19) rent relief grant. Department of Housing, Victorian Government. Available at <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/help-renting/rentrelief>>

⁸⁹ Anglicare Australia, (2020). Rental Affordability Snapshot – National Report April 2020. Anglicare Australia. Available at <<https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/rental-affordability-snapshot-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=4>>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

Impact on support services

Our Preston-based homelessness program, the Wilam Support Service has not observed an increase in referrals specifically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is expected to be attributed to additional funding being granted to Homelessness Access Points around Metropolitan Melbourne. However, VACCA is concerned that once the height of the pandemic is over, and the Homelessness Access Points are no longer being funded to the same amount, our services will be inundated. Similarly, we are concerned for members of our Aboriginal community who are rough sleepers and are temporarily being housed in motels and hotels and will have nowhere to go once these accommodation options are no longer available.

The Wilam Support Service is a two-caseworker model and given the large numbers of Aboriginal families who experience homelessness, we will require additional resources to support increased demand on our services once funding for Homelessness Access Points ceases. Unfortunately, for those who are most vulnerable to housing stress, the pandemic will have ongoing and long-lasting impacts. Significant consideration, preparation and resources are necessary to ensure sufficient, long-term support is available to our Aboriginal communities.

The economic fallout of COVID-19 and consequential loss of employment and income is expected to impact rental affordability pressures and housing stress for a prolonged period. The culmination of such issues is likely to have flow on effects in the justice and homelessness sectors with an increased demand for support services. There is also concern amongst ACCOs around the impact of job loss on homelessness after the height of the pandemic, especially in the context of social security payments reverting to their former and inadequate amounts. We anticipate that this will continue to exacerbate housing stress and increase demand for our services for some time to come.

Investing in Aboriginal social housing

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian government announced funding for new Aboriginal social housing stock, upgrading existing stock, conducting maintenance work and investing in the support services necessary for Aboriginal people vulnerable to housing stress⁹³. We welcome this approach as the Victorian government is working directly with AHV in order to address existing and emerging housing issues for Aboriginal Victorians. The self-determination of housing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians is crucial in providing culturally safe housing options and services that support Aboriginal community members through the COVID-19 recovery process and beyond.

⁹³ Premier of Victoria, (2020). 'Building Works: Social Housing for Aboriginal Victorians' - Media Release, 21st May 2020. Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Victorian Government, Melbourne. Available at <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/building-works-social-housing-for-aboriginal-victorians/>>.

Supporting the housing needs of Aboriginal children and young people leaving care

The following section addresses numbers 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the Terms of Reference

Young people exiting care arrangements have been widely reported as one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society⁹⁴. Compared to young people without experiences in OOHC, they are faced with challenges in accessing employment, education and housing in addition to being at a greater risk of early parenthood, becoming involved in the criminal justice system, drug and alcohol abuse and developing a mental illness⁹⁵. Each of these challenges becomes exacerbated when at the age of 18 they are forced to leave home and are not adequately prepared for independent living and/or do not have stable, safe accommodation that is appropriate to their needs.

The over-representation of Aboriginal young people in OOHC and over-representation in the homeless population within a year of leaving care (at a rate of more than one in three) in part explains why more than half of Aboriginal people in contact with homeless services in Australia are under 25 years of age (Campo & Commerford, 2016).

A lack of housing support and forced homelessness are common challenges for young people leaving care due to poor transition planning and a shortage of affordable housing⁹⁶. Having inadequate life skills, being unable to afford single-person dwellings, or living with other young people with challenging behaviours often leads to homelessness. Whilst legislation requires all young people in OOHC to have a transition plan 12 months prior to leaving care, a survey identified only 46 per cent of care leavers and 22 per cent of young people in OOHC reported having a transition plan⁹⁷. In order to reduce the number of Aboriginal young people leaving care and entering homelessness, significant policy reform is required.

Raising the age of leaving care

Living independently requires social skills and the ability to take care of one's physical and mental health⁹⁸. Young people in care have often experienced trauma and struggle to secure healthy connections or know how to approach community networks⁹⁹. Healthy and necessary living skills are often not transferred by the age of 18 and consequently struggle to maintain or build healthy relationships, access housing or monitor their health without support¹⁰⁰. Young people in OOHC have also often faced disrupted

⁹⁴ Mendes, P., Michell, D., & Wilson, J. Z. (2014). Young people transitioning from out-of-home care and access to higher education: A critical review of the literature. *Children Australia*, 3(4), 243-252.

⁹⁵ Campo, M., & Commerford, J. (2016). *Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care* (CFCA Paper No. 41). Canberra: Australian Institute of Family Studies

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Muir, S., & Hand, K. (2018). *Beyond 18: The longitudinal study on leaving care Wave 1 Research Report: Transition planning and preparation*. (Research Report). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁹⁸ Cashmore, J., Paxman, M., & Townsend, M. (2007). The educational outcomes of young people 4-5 years after leaving care: An Australian perspective, *Adoption and Fostering*, 31(1), 50-61.

⁹⁹ Mendes, P., & Moslehuddin, B. (2009).

¹⁰⁰ Heerde, J., Hemphill, S. A., Broderick, D., & Florent, A. (2012). Associations between leaving out-of-home care and post transition youth homelessness: A review. *Developing Practice*, (32), 35-52.

education and as a result, do not acquire formal qualifications. Poor transition planning and poor education outcomes directly correlate into low employment rates, creating challenges for young people trying to financially support themselves and afford rent¹⁰¹. Whilst the Victorian Government provides funding for post-care support places for young people leaving care, these positions are limited and often too restricted in scope¹⁰².

A solution to address this concern is raising the age of leaving care and legislated guaranteed rights to extended care. The benefits of this has been widely researched and found to be one of the most effective ways of improving outcomes for young people in OOHC. Anglicare Victoria found extending care to 21 allows for additional time for personal and financial support and has been linked to the prevention of homelessness¹⁰³. This is in part due to a longer period to prepare for leaving care, with many organisations arguing that most young people do not leave home at 18 so why should young people living in OOHC be expected to.

An evaluation of the Staying Put Program in the UK was conducted to determine whether extending care has a beneficial effect on education outcomes, a successful transition into adulthood and homeless rates¹⁰⁴. They found after three years, homeless rates halved, and education engagement doubled. This promising practice is being piloted through the Home Stretch Campaign in Victoria, promoting changes to leaving care arrangements for young people, through the option of remaining with their carer until the age of 21¹⁰⁵. In 2018, the Victorian Labor Government announced funding for 50 young people over five years to remain with their carer until their 21st birthday. Recognising that the majority of young people remain dependent on their parents or adult support after the age of 18 and into their 20's. Positive early indications from this Pilot point to policy change that can have a long term, beneficial impact on housing outcomes of young people leaving care. Given there is extensive research in Australia and internationally on the benefits of this policy reform, VACCA believes that the age of young people leaving care should be immediately conferred on all young people in OOHC.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian government has extended care arrangements to ensure that any young person in OOHC who turns 18 during the pandemic will not be forced into homelessness¹⁰⁶.

Commonwealth income support payments

Another contributing factor to homeless rates amongst young people leaving care is the accessibility and inadequacy of income support payments. Requirements to receive payments are often unrealistic or

¹⁰¹ Mendes, P., & Moslehuddin, B. (2009). Transitioning from state care to state prison: A critical analysis of the relationship between leaving out of home care and involvement in the criminal justice system. *Social Alternatives*, 28(3), 51-56.

¹⁰² CHP. (2018). *Victorian homelessness election platform 2018*. Collingwood, Melbourne: CHP.

¹⁰³ Anglicare Victoria. (2016). *Raising our children: Guiding young Victorians in care into adulthood*. Deloitte Economics Pty Ltd.

¹⁰⁴ Munro, E., Lushey, C., Maskell-Graham, D., Ward, H., & Holmes, L. (2012). *Evaluation of the staying put 18+ family placement programme pilot final report*. London, United Kingdom: Department for Education.

¹⁰⁵ Create Foundation. (2018, September 25). Victorian labor government will support young people leaving foster care. *Create Foundation*.

¹⁰⁶ Home Stretch, (2020). 'Victorian Government extends care during pandemic', Home Stretch. 23rd April 2020. Available at <<http://thehomestretch.org.au/news/victorian-government-extends-care-during-pandemic/>>

unattainable for young people leaving care. When a young person is experiencing or at risk of homelessness, attending regular appointments with Centrelink Services Australia, meeting deadlines or satisfying mutual obligation requirements may be challenging due to the cost of public transport, access to the internet or a lack of support in accessing the service. Missing deadlines results in the suspension of payments and perpetuates a cycle of homelessness.

In particular, rental affordability remains a significant concern for people receiving the JobSeeker payment (formerly Newstart) and a key cause of homelessness. Anglicare Victoria's 2019 Rental Affordability Snapshot looked at 15,750 private rental listings to determine what proportion were suitable for households on minimum wage, a Commonwealth pension or income support. The report found that only two per cent of properties were suitable for at least one household type living on income support and in metropolitan Melbourne, only 83 households were suitable for at least one household type living on income support payments. This suggests that young people leaving care and receiving JobSeeker payments remain much more financially disadvantaged and unlikely to afford rent¹⁰⁷. The 2019 Rental Affordability Index Report also calculated that the rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Melbourne would absorb 106% of the income of a single person on the JobSeeker payment¹⁰⁸.

It is common for most people who receive the JobSeeker payment to be living below the poverty line. Before the addition of the Coronavirus Supplement, this payment was at \$40 per day, or \$282 per week and had not increased in real terms for 25 years¹⁰⁹. The almost doubling of social security payments in response to COVID-19 has brought attention amongst the wider community to the inadequate level of the former payments. There is concern amongst the social services community sector about the impending return of to these former amounts and the adverse impacts this will cause to vulnerable community members, with flow on effects into crisis and homelessness.

We share concerns of the Australian Council of Social Services who lead the Raise the Rate campaign that is supported by a range of stakeholders including anti-poverty networks, non-for-profit organisations, business groups, unions, local governments, the Victorian State Government and several federal parliamentarians¹¹⁰. An analysis conducted in 2018 of the impact of raising the rate of the JobSeeker payment and other allowances suggests that just an extra \$10.71 per day for the 770, 000 people receiving payments will result in 12,000 people acquiring employment in 2020-21 and boosting the economy overall¹¹¹. This provides an economic argument for increasing the rate in addition to the social welfare case for raising income support payments.

Consultations with VACCA staff have revealed that the payment amount received by clients has been widely reported to be insufficient to meet basic daily needs due to housing costs and bills absorbing most

¹⁰⁷ Osborn, A., & Bromfield, L. (2007). *Young people leaving care*. AIFS (NCPC Brief no. 7).

¹⁰⁸ SGS Economics and Planning. (2019). *Rental affordability index report-November 2019*.

¹⁰⁹ ACOSS and UNSW. (2018).

¹¹⁰ ACOSS. (2020). *Raise the Rate – About Raise the Rate*. <https://raisetherate.org.au/about/>

¹¹¹ Deloitte Access Economics. (2018). *Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates*, Commissioned by Australian Council of Social Service. September 2018. Melbourne.

of the payment. Clients who are repeatedly accessing VACCA's Emergency Relief are commonly people experiencing housing stress and homelessness, single parents and new parents with young families.

We urge the Committee to consider the importance of fair and liveable social security payments for our communities during the COVID-19 recovery and beyond. We therefore recommend for the increases to all social security payments to be maintained, and to also raise the rates of the Carer Payment and Disability Pension. It is crucial to index allowances to wages to reflect increased everyday living, housing, rental costs and to support people through the COVID-19 recovery process in the long run. In addition to this, the increase of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 30% or \$20 per week for a single person on the JobSeeker payment would significantly improve the financial position of vulnerable people and support them to afford their housing needs¹¹².

Such findings highlight that rather than supporting vulnerable people, inadequate, low-income support payments simply entrench them in a cycle of debt, social isolation, poverty and homelessness.

Lack of infrastructure

Finding secure, safe and affordable accommodation is one of the toughest challenges facing young people leaving care and a key contributor to homelessness. Safe accommodation is crucial for a successful transition to independent living and positive outcomes in social connections, health, employment and education¹¹³. Whilst services such as assertive outreach, multidisciplinary supports and case management are important, these approaches are crisis-driven and cannot create long term change without permanent housing infrastructure¹¹⁴. Currently, there is a lack of housing options for young people leaving care, in particular, a significant lack of culturally appropriate accommodation for Aboriginal young people.

A young person leaving care is more likely to succeed if they are able to live in their desired housing option rather than having their agency removed and forced into accommodation that is not suitable. In order to be able to respond, Aboriginal organisations delivering the Aboriginal Leaving Care Program need to be provided with adequate support and funding and to be linked in with housing providers who can help meet housing needs of these young people (AHV, 2019)

Housing needs and preferences often vary for Aboriginal young people depending on their experiences prior to and whilst in care, including lead tenant properties, sharing a privately rented property, staying in a youth foyer or living independently in social housing¹¹⁵. To address this issue, a range of support options

¹¹² ACOSS. (2020).

¹¹³ Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., & Snow, P. C. (2014). Young people transitioning from out-of-home care in Victoria: Strengthening support services for dual clients of child protection and youth justice. *Australian Social Work*, 67(1), 6-23.

¹¹⁴ CHP. (2018). *Victorian homelessness election platform 2018*. Collingwood, Melbourne: CHP.

¹¹⁵ Council to Homeless Persons. (2014). *Preventing homelessness for young people leaving out of home care*. CHP. Retrieved from <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/CHP-leaving-care-proposal.pdf>

and structural assistance must be available to meet the specific needs of young people and the different types of support required¹¹⁶. Tailored approaches that address the individual needs of the young person and embed the “voice of the child” would better reflect a system that is based on the rights of the child, including their right to self-determination.

Culturally appropriate housing and support services

Another concern and a key component to addressing homelessness amongst Aboriginal young people and communities is the need for housing and support services that cater to social and cultural needs. A lack of culturally safe housing results in Aboriginal people slipping through the gaps of the mainstream system and missing the opportunity to access housing support or participate in the private rental market. Aboriginal children and families can be faced with racism and discrimination from mainstream organisations when attempting to secure accommodation resulting in many Aboriginal households being excluded from the opportunity for private rentals and equal access to these markets¹¹⁷. The impact of systemic racism on access to housing is evident not only amongst Aboriginal Victorians but First Nations peoples around the world¹¹⁸. AHV identified racism to be an entrenched challenge for Aboriginal peoples, masked better than ever, particularly in the private rental market¹¹⁹. This undermines housing aspirations and locks many Aboriginal families and households out of the private rental market.

A report on the accessibility of mainstream services for Aboriginal Victorians outlined barriers to accessing mainstream services including; racism, affordability, lack of culturally safe services, shame and fear, a lack of awareness of available services and complex administrative processes¹²⁰. Consequently, AHV has identified an urgent need for Aboriginal specific social housing and transitional housing, with demand expected to continue to grow¹²¹.

Programs such as VACCA’s Kurnai Youth Homelessness Program, Orana Gunyah and Wilam Support Service, along with Ngwala Willumbong Ltd, a specialist homelessness service for Aboriginal men, women and families, provide culturally strong and community-based support and other providers such as VACSAL and positions within local ACCO’s across the state.

Our Orana Gunyah program is a promising example of a culturally appropriate crisis service that supports Aboriginal women and children, women with Aboriginal children or carers with Aboriginal children who are escaping family violence state-wide. Orana Gunyah began in December 2013 and currently provides full family violence outreach support for Gippsland, Latrobe Valley, Baw Baw, South Gippsland and Bass Coast. In April 2014, Orana Gunyah opened a crisis accommodation refuge for clients in Morwell. All

¹¹⁶ Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., & Snow, P. C (2014).

¹¹⁷ AHV. (2019). *The Victorian Aboriginal housing and homelessness summit: Report of findings*. Melbourne: Aboriginal Housing Victoria

¹¹⁸ AHV. (2019). *The Victorian Aboriginal housing and homelessness summit: Report of findings*., Patrick, C. (2014). Aboriginal homelessness in Canada: A literature review.,

¹¹⁹ AHV. (2019). *The Victorian Aboriginal housing and homelessness summit: Report of findings*

¹²⁰ Victorian Auditor General’s Office. (2014). *Accessibility of Mainstream Services for Aboriginal Victorians*. Victorian Government. No 325.

¹²¹ Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., & Snow, P. C (2014).

clients that seek refugee have full case management provided to them, including administrative support to complete paperwork for DHHS public housing, private rentals and Community Housing Limited.

Since its conception, Orana Gunyah Outreach has supported 370 women and 527 children. The crisis accommodation aspect of the program has housed 139 women with children, and while some have returned to the situation they left, most have moved to other refuges, to stay with kin or acquired public housing or a private rental. The correlation between family violence and homelessness for Aboriginal women and children has in the past remained a hidden issue as Aboriginal women are apprehensive when approaching mainstream services due to fear that if they disclose the presence of family violence, their children may be removed. However, when access to an Aboriginal specific, culturally appropriate and wrap-around response is available, as the figures above indicate, there is an increase in the number of Aboriginal women and children seeking assistance. A culturally appropriate response has been reported to significantly contribute to women's willingness to come forward, fosters empowerment and allows women to see a positive future for themselves and their children. Orana Gunyah shows to be a promising example of Aboriginal-led service delivery embedded in Aboriginal self-determination and the rights of women and children.

Whilst such services are great examples of community-based, culturally strong support, they are unable to manage the extent of the issue due to limited resourcing. Other ACCOs also have the knowledge and services to become an entry and referral point, however, they also do not currently have the capacity and resources to do so¹²².

Housing options

Housing support services need to recognise that no one size fits all and that housing responses must have the opportunity and ability to meet varying needs. For example, kinship care creates a need for extended housing and service support with consideration of rental arrangements when household numbers increase¹²³. Services and housing support for Aboriginal young people leaving care need to be culturally appropriate and prioritise connection to family and culture.

There is consensus around the benefits experienced by Aboriginal young people residing in supported living who receive wrap-around support. Such supports consist of culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services including; family mediation, legal assistance, education and training, employment support and mental and primary health services. Without wrap-around supports suitable to individual needs, young people become at risk of losing their housing or placements due to symptoms of these needs that may present as challenging behaviours.

Reform is also required to move towards ongoing and consistent staffing models that can create positive attachments and mentoring relationships as an alternative to rostered staff models that inhibit reliable

¹²² AHV. (2019). *The Victorians Aboriginal housing and homelessness summit: Report of findings*

¹²³ Ibid



connections¹²⁴. New models of support are essential to supporting young Aboriginal people in stable housing and to ensure a successful transition to independence.

¹²⁴ Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., & Snow, P. C. (2014).

Conclusion

Whilst Aboriginal peoples have demonstrated decades of resilience and strength, their healing journey is severely disrupted when there is no safe, affordable housing available to meet their needs and they remain faced with significant and enduring challenges.

This submission has highlighted some of the pressures which lead to experiences of homelessness for Aboriginal peoples. We have emphasised the correlation between the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma, family violence and poverty, and increased rates of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC. This over-representation contributes to a greater vulnerability to homelessness for Aboriginal children and young people. We have also highlighted the impact of the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 on our communities and the need for resourcing and support of an ACCO led approach recognising self-determination¹²⁵ both now, and in the recovery process. In addressing the challenges of homelessness faced by Aboriginal peoples, we presented both preventative and responsive strategies and approaches that are grounded in the principle of self-determination.

We urge the Committee to consider the specific experience of Aboriginal homelessness and to accordingly respond to it by building on existing policy arrangements. This forms the basis for our recommendations around a national approach that is Aboriginal-led and guided by the right to Aboriginal self-determination and the rights of children and young people.

¹²⁵ Marwung Walsh A. and Rademaker, L. (2020). Why self-determination is vital for Indigenous communities to beat coronavirus. *The Conversation*. May 6th 2020. Available at < <https://theconversation.com/why-self-determination-is-vital-for-indigenous-communities-to-beat-coronavirus-137611> >

Recommendations

VACCA recommends the Commonwealth Government undertake the following reforms;

1. Invest in the development of a national integrated housing and homelessness approach, co-designed with ACCOs, that is grounded in the principle of self-determination.
2. Funding should be provided according to proportional equity to reflect the percentage of Aboriginal people needing homelessness services.
3. Build on the existing policy arrangements:

a. Closing the Gap

- i. Commit to homelessness as a target area in Refreshed Targets
- ii. Appropriately invest in this target as a priority area, with specific focus on the needs of Aboriginal peoples, and the development of funding and programs that are allocated to be delivered by Aboriginal organisations.
- iii. Ensure that the ATSICPP is fully implemented as a preventive measure and include targets and indicators around this in Refreshed Targets.
- iv. Support Aboriginal-led monitoring of outcome indicators around rates of homelessness, insecure and temporary housing for Aboriginal peoples compared to non-Aboriginal people.
- v. Support Aboriginal-led monitoring of performance indicators around new culturally appropriate housing stock built and renewal and renovation of current stock for Aboriginal communities.
- vi. Fund initiatives that increase number of Aboriginal people employed in the housing sector as an aspect of equal opportunity and self-determination.
- vii. Aboriginal data sovereignty specific to housing and homelessness to be priority reform area in the Refreshed Targets where Aboriginal community and ACCOs are adequately resourced to lead data collection, analysis and program reform.

b. National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)

- i. To address the current federal funding deficit, it is imperative the Commonwealth increases funding to states to meet the increasing demand for housing and homelessness services.
- ii. Significant resources to be allocated for an Aboriginal community led, designed and implemented housing and homelessness support service which addresses our communities' needs.

- iii. Transfer of housing stock to Aboriginal organisations so they can provide crisis accommodation, especially to individuals affected by family violence and young people leaving out of home care.
- iv. Extend funding arrangements from annual and bi-annual to long-term, flexible funding arrangements in the provision of homelessness support services nationally.
- v. Increase funding for Aboriginal culturally appropriate social housing, transitional and crisis housing options, with a specific focus on one or two-bedroom dwellings to accommodate young Aboriginal people leaving care.
- vi. Investment in suitable accommodation options for independent living to support Aboriginal people leaving institutional settings, as demand for safe housing is likely to increase further in the recovery stage after COVID-19.
- vii. To support the transition of Aboriginal people leaving institutional settings increase funding for outreach positions and support services that strengthen connections to community and culture, and support the well-being, needs and smooth transition back into everyday life.
- viii. In anticipating a housing fallout from COVID-19, fund access to housing stock, emergency accommodation for most vulnerable community members and those impacted by family violence. Expand Orana Gunyah program.
- ix. Support the Victorian Government in providing extended support to Aboriginal young people during and post leaving OOHC.
- x. Establish specific Aboriginal targets in the Victorian Agreement under the NHHA, where a portion of NAHA housing funds Victoria's agreement can be directed towards improving Aboriginal housing outcomes.
- xi. Specific funding to support and extend current Aboriginal culturally appropriate specialist homelessness and family violence programs.
- xii. Specific funding to provide culturally safe drop-in service or youth foyer for Aboriginal young people that provides trauma-informed, wrap-around services.
- xiii. Consider the above two recommendations with the intention to make the mainstream housing and homelessness system culturally safe.

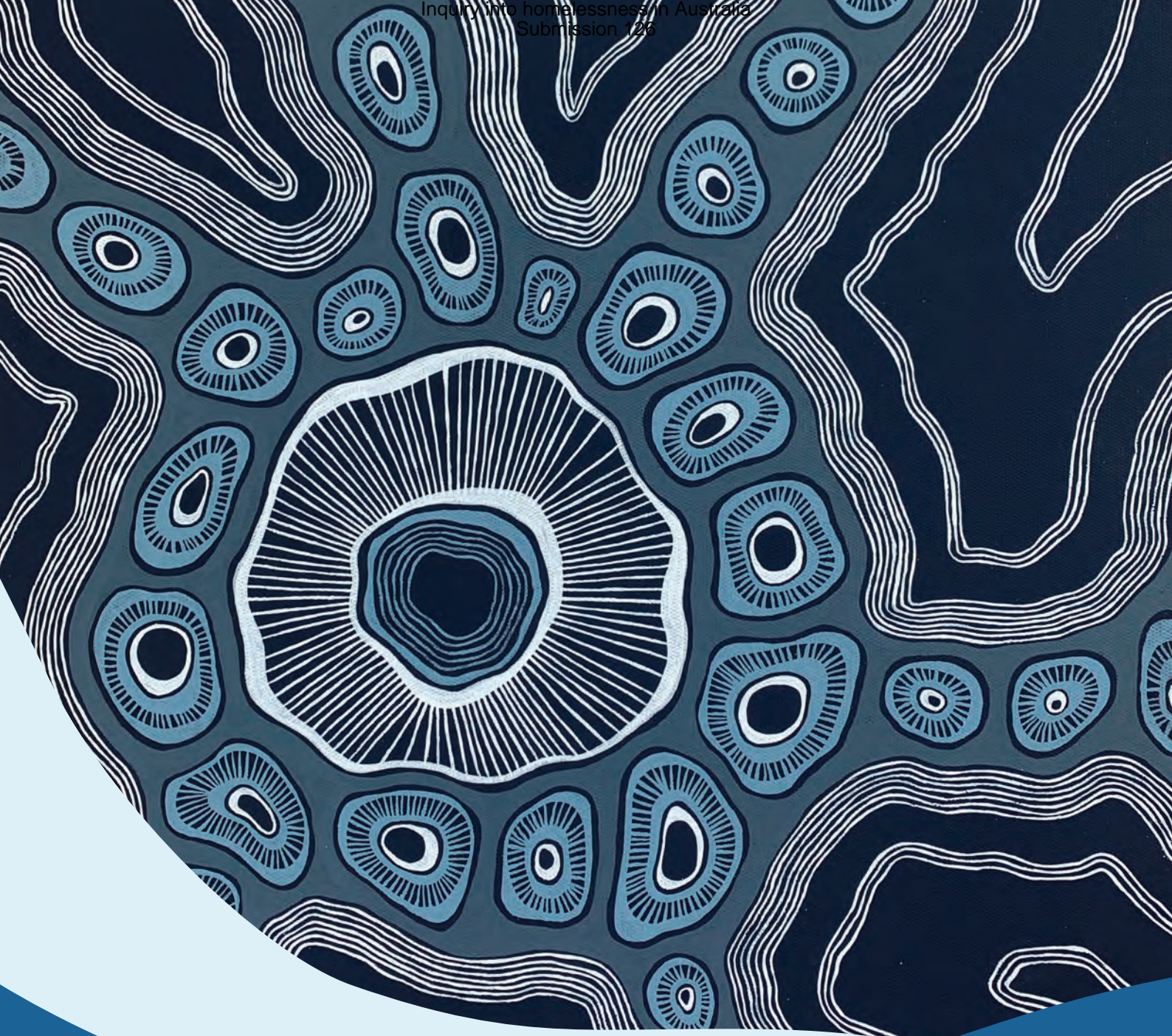
c. Commonwealth income support payments

- i. Ensure increases to all income support payments remain after the COVID-19 pandemic in order to reflect the increased cost of living and housing and meet increased financial strain to follow from the pandemic.
- ii. Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 30%.



VACCA looks forward to supporting and working with the Committee for this Inquiry to ensure the progress of such important and necessary reforms. For further information please contact Nigel D'Souza, Director, Office of the CEO nigeld@vacca.org or on 03 9287 8800.

Appendix – Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Overview



Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort

Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

OVERVIEW

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort translates to 'Every Aboriginal Person has a Home' in the Gunditjmara dialects.

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Overview

ISBN: 978-0-6487772-1-2

Name of Publisher: Aboriginal Housing Victoria

Contact Name: Peter Jones

Email: peter.jones@ahvic.org.au

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Cover artwork: Tarryn Love

Artwork Details: Tarryn Love. "**Peeneeyt**" Translation: *Strength*. Acrylic on canvas.

The central theme of this artwork expresses the idea of various different Indigenous Nations coming together to a central meeting place to co-exist and co-operate with unity, therefore creating a strong diverse community. The large circular shape in the centre recognises all the Indigenous voices contributing to this community and represents the sovereignty and self-determination of each of those individuals.

The design that dominates the movement of the artwork, characterises the waterways that act as bloodlines across country. Rivers are so vital in connecting Nations and the symbols inside the river emphasize the large amount of different Nations that exist across Australia.

The contouring lines in the artwork are a direct link to country and its physical landscape. This symbolism signifies Indigenous people's strong relationship not only physically but spiritually to the land. Overall this artwork is a reminder of the importance and strength that Indigenous people source from place, while also coming together to support this connection.

Tarryn Love is a proud Gunditjmara Keeray Woorrong woman from Western Victoria. Tarryn has a strong passion for culture which is heavily inspired by her family who teach her traditional stories and practices. Through her art she not only continually explores her knowledge but also revives and reinvigorates styles through her experience as a young modern Indigenous woman, while concurrently expressing her identity.

Graphic design: Reanna Bono

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort

Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

OVERVIEW

FOREWORD

Our community has long advocated for improved housing because we know that without stable housing we will not close the gap in the disadvantage that so many Aboriginal Victorians experience.

Yet unlike other areas of social policy that impact on the wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians, housing and homelessness have not been framed by overarching policy either at the State or Commonwealth level.

As a significant recognition of self-determination the Victorian Government funded Aboriginal Housing Victoria to lead the development of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. The Framework has been developed by the community for the community. This is its strength. Government partners have participated in the process, provided guidance and direction, but have recognised the power that has come from a community led response.

The Framework is the product of a literature review, data analysis, three policy background papers and thirteen discussion papers, a state-wide summit with over 150 participants, a report on findings and a community symposium that provided feedback on findings.

A Steering Committee of Government and Aboriginal and other community members provided ongoing leadership and direction.

The Framework provides a 20 year agenda to guide work. Its implementation must build on the momentum that we have created. It will require all of our good will, application and innovation, and with the right resources we are sure that we can do it.

I would like to thank the Steering Committee and the community for the time, energy and thoughtfulness that they all put into the development of the Framework.

We commend the Framework to you and look forward to working together to turn its ambitious agenda into real improvement for our community.



Professor Kerry Arabena
Steering Committee Chair



Ms Daphne Yarram
Steering Committee Deputy Chair

ABORIGINAL HOMELESSNESS – A VICTORIAN EMERGENCY

The contemporary housing experience of Aboriginal people cannot be decoupled from the historical experience of dispossession and dislocation. Deprived of our land, excluded from the fruits of the economy and our traditional authority, lore and customs undermined, we have been homeless in our own land for the past two centuries. While colonial values have receded and Aboriginal people have finally assumed full citizenship, our sustained exclusion has left a lasting legacy of housing poverty and deprivation.

The scale of the housing and homelessness crisis is rapidly mounting. The number of Victorian Aboriginal people assessed by homeless services is growing faster than anywhere in Australia. Around half of those requiring help are under 25. It is clear that if we persist with existing policy settings the emergency in Aboriginal homelessness will not only continue, it will escalate.

Aboriginal people are disproportionately adversely impacted by:

- housing market failure in Victoria;
- stressors which compound the fracturing effects of major life transitions - family violence and breakdown, leaving home and transitioning in and out of institutional settings;
- poverty of household material resources; and
- a mainstream housing and homeless assistance system that lacks cultural accreditation and is frequently experienced by Aboriginal people as a series of closed doors and waiting rooms.




The evolution of Aboriginal housing deprivation in Australia makes it distinctive. The solutions must also be different. They will not be realised without a determined commitment by Governments to support self-determination with the wresting back of agency and control by Aboriginal people. The development of a highly capable, culturally fit Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector is essential to changing the trajectory away from housing stress and homelessness towards collective and individual ownership of land and housing. This Framework will only succeed if it helps to activate the strengths and realise the potential of Aboriginal communities, individuals, families and traditional owner groups.


In 2020, Victoria remains the site of a humanitarian crisis in Aboriginal homelessness.


A ONE SIZE FITS ALL APPROACH WILL NOT DO THE JOB

We know that some people have particular needs and our housing responses must have the flexibility and capability to meet these needs.



Children in care


-  Housing stress can precipitate child protection interventions and be a barrier to reunification;
-  Kinship care creates need for extended housing and service support, consideration of rental arrangements when household numbers increase and provision for family members with criminal convictions who may need to leave the household if there is a child under a protection order; and
-  18 year olds leaving care need somewhere to live. While there may be funding support available there are few housing options, particularly options that provide ongoing emotional support, education and training.

 **Single mothers** who are homeless are a growing group and have obvious special housing needs.




 **Extended families** often experience overcrowding and are impacted when taking in family members affected by substance abuse and related complex and challenging behaviours.


Family violence impacts on housing needs of victims and perpetrators:


-  Lack of alternative housing can prevent women leaving violent relationships and those leaving often need specially purposed safe and secure housing; and
-  Perpetrators also need to be housed.

 **For those in contact with the justice system** unstable housing can precipitate offending and housing is often a condition of bail, parole and corrections orders. Rehabilitation and reintegration into the community rely on stable housing. Youth justice programs must as a priority link with housing.

Older people have special needs

-  Aboriginal people age earlier, acute and chronic conditions hit earlier so they often need support earlier to live independently;
-  Aboriginal families are more likely to care for Elders at home; and
-  Supported care is needed that is culturally appropriate and provides options to live on country.

 **Disability** is a high area of need. Better understanding of NDIS and greater advocacy is required.

 **The lack of mainstream and specialist alcohol and other drug services** is having a very big impact on sustainable housing tenure.

THE STRENGTH OF ABORIGINAL HOUSEHOLDS IS PART OF THE SOLUTION

Aboriginal households are generally more open and flexible, are more likely to care for Elders, be kinship carers and cater for large extended and mobile families. This strength needs to be recognised, supported and nourished.

THE FACTS

A fast growing population

Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population will grow from 57,782 in 2016 to 95,149 in 2036.

Aboriginal households will grow from around 23,000 to more than 50,000 over the same period.

Experiencing historical complex disadvantage

Lower income and education and training levels, complex disadvantage and 200 years of dispossession all impact on the severe housing disadvantage that Aboriginal Victorians experience.

With the highest and fastest growing rate accessing homeless services in the nation

In 2018 17 per cent of Aboriginal people in Victoria sought assistance from a homeless service

- 44 percent were already homeless and the remainder were at risk of homelessness
- Those in need of a homeless service has grown by 34 percent in 4 years
- 10 percent of homeless Victorians are Aboriginal
- If the mainstream sought homeless assistance at the same rate this would be equivalent to more than 1 million people.

And lower rates of home ownership and barriers to private rental

43 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians own or are purchasing their own home compared to 68 percent of the general community

Cost and apparent racism locks many out of the private market.

Is resulting in unmet demand for social housing

More than 4,000 of Victoria's Aboriginal households (around one in five) are seeking social housing through the Victorian Housing Register. One third of these are categorised as "homeless with support".

One in five Aboriginal households live in social housing: 2,754 in public housing and 1,565 in Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

In contrast approximately 1: 50 of general population households live in social housing.

And a projected need for

5,085 additional Aboriginal social housing units by 2036 merely to ensure that the existing scale of Aboriginal homelessness does not continue to escalate.

THE ABORIGINAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS FRAMEWORK - AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

*A capable system that delivers
Aboriginal housing needs*

Vision

Every Aboriginal person
has a home.

*Secure housing
improves life outcomes*



Private Rental

Aboriginal
Ownership

Individual Ownership

Collective Ownership

*Open doors to home
ownership and private rental*

Increasing Independence

Increasing Subsidy and Support

Purpose

Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality
housing outcomes in a generation.

*An Aboriginal focused
homelessness system*

*Build supply to meet the needs of a
growing Aboriginal population*

Developed by the Aboriginal community as an act of self-determination, we believe this to be the most comprehensive Aboriginal housing policy framework so far produced in Australia.

The Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (The Framework) comes from a new perspective. To move beyond crisis management of Aboriginal housing and to achieve housing equity we will require a fresh approach which addresses each of the drivers of housing outcomes.

What is required is the movement of Aboriginal people across all of the housing tenures and possibly the creation of some new tenures. We know that this movement is neither linear nor continual, but our aim is that over time our people move:

- from homelessness to either transitional or more permanent social or private housing;
- from social housing to secure and affordable private rental or ownership;
- from housing stress to affordable housing;
- from all forms of tenure to private or community owned housing; and
- from narrow and rigid notions of traditional tenure to culturally fit tenures which combine Aboriginal community and individual home ownership.

This Framework has been designed to understand and respond to the unique housing challenges faced by Aboriginal Victorians. The goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They require a policy approach which will:

- Restore primacy to housing in policy and as a platform to thrive in life;
- Build the supply needed for a fast growing population;
- Open doors to the autonomy of living in the private market and owning our own homes;
- Create a homeless support system which understands Aboriginal people and responds to our needs; and
- Build the capacity in the Aboriginal and mainstream systems to make homelessness the exception and home ownership the norm (as is the case for other Victorians).

The Framework

Our Vision: Every Aboriginal Person has a Home

The Framework provides the building blocks for reconceptualising Aboriginal housing in Victoria. It initiates a new policy dialogue between the Aboriginal community and the Government. Through this dialogue our vision is to provide every Aboriginal Victorian with a home and end a period in which to be homeless is a rite of passage for too many young Aboriginal people.

Our Purpose: Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation

The Framework's strategies and actions must be backed up by targets and progress measures to ensure investments are focussed and accountability is maintained and that within a generation Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes.



Our Challenge: To meet demand for 27,000 new Aboriginal Households by 2036

The supply of 27,000 more homes by 2036 will not be met through more of the same. It will not be met through an exclusive reliance on housing assistance and more social housing, though these are critically important. It will demand:

- greater access to private rental markets too often closed through racism;
- greater innovation in generating new forms of affordable housing;
- new ways of leveraging Aboriginal community assets and surplus government land;
- fresh models (including shared equity) to extend access to home ownership;
- the development of greater capacity in the Aboriginal community housing sector to develop, grow and maintain supply; and
- building of new partnerships with philanthropy and mainstream providers to extend access to secure long-term housing.

The Principles underpinning this Framework

Aboriginal self-determination – housing responses are designed for and delivered by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are the arbiters of good practice.

Rights based – Aboriginal people have the right to adequate housing.

Housing First – the housing and homelessness safety net provides Aboriginal clients with dignity, respect and quality of life.

Outcome driven – the critical mass of Aboriginal people shift from marginal housing to home ownership.

Transparency and accountability – the housing and homelessness system is accountable to the Aboriginal community through transparent, disaggregated public reporting of outcomes for people who seek assistance.

Cultural safety and access – Aboriginal people can access a system which is responsive to their housing needs and understands their connection to land, culture and family networks.

Strengths based and people centred – Housing is a platform for other services, building on individuals' community strengths to deliver people-centred outcomes that break the cycle of disadvantage.

Capacity – the Framework builds the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled organisations to upskill, create critical mass for development and engage in productive partnerships with the mainstream.

Economic opportunity and innovation – the Framework provides structures for development of local enterprises associated with land and culture; builds commercial opportunities; and delivers greater wealth to the community.

Culturally safe tenancy management – Housing and tenancy policies support and enable Aboriginal approaches to caring for family.

OUR VISION EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

PURPOSE

Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation

Secure housing improves life outcomes

1.1 Embed housing goals and targets in major Government strategic frameworks for Aboriginal people and mainstream policies where relevant.

- 1.1.1 Ensure housing targets are embedded in major Aboriginal reform strategies (VAAF, Closing the Gap, etc.) and relevant mainstream policies.
- 1.1.2 A fair share for Aboriginal housing - All government developments and funding have an Aboriginal housing target; Aboriginal specific funding for growth in social housing; and land and other developments encourage private housing for Aboriginal people.

1.2 Establish secure affordable housing as the foundation for breaking cycles of disadvantage and homelessness.

- 1.2.1 Clients are supported to navigate integrated housing support pathways; access points (physical access, telephone, online) are established and publicised for people with housing needs to access and enter the housing and homelessness systems.
- 1.2.2 Intensive, culturally appropriate structured case managed approaches drawing in relevant and specialist service support are sustained and based on need. Those at high risk receive specialist and intensive housing, community support and pathways, including those experiencing:
 - mental health issues;
 - drug and alcohol issues;
 - family violence – victims and perpetrators;
 - leaving out of home care (at least 5 years); and/or
 - contact with and leaving the justice system.
- 1.2.3 Aboriginal and other service organisations share and coordinate services and pathways to the benefit of clients.

1.3 Make housing the platform for fulfilment of life aspirations and successful education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

- 1.3.1 Use AHV and social housing as a platform to deliver social and economic programs to Aboriginal Victorians.
- 1.3.2 Elders lead strength based approaches which connect with community to change life trajectories for the better.

1.4 Sustain tenancies through culturally strong, Aboriginal focused systems and practices.

- 1.4.1 Tenancies are sustained through integrated and wrap around support to meet tenant needs at particular life stages and when in crisis.
- 1.4.2 Support for tenant advocacy and rights.
- 1.4.3 Establish an Aboriginal List through VCAT.

OUR VISION EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

PURPOSE

Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation

Build supply to meet the needs of a growing Aboriginal population

2.1 Build the supply of homes owned by Aboriginal people and community.

- 2.1.1 Leveraging financial investments and land available to enable an increased supply of Aboriginal social and affordable housing (improving access to finance for housing developments).
- 2.1.2 Increasing the number of homes owned by Aboriginal people and community through:
 - building the supply and pathways to affordable housing; and
 - shared equity programs that build supply and are customised to Aboriginal community and individual needs.
- 2.1.3 Joint investment and development between ACCOs and AHV.
- 2.1.4 Build to rent.
- 2.1.5 Maintaining the value and supply of Aboriginal housing stock.

2.2 Build 5,000+ social housing properties by 2036 – 300 houses p.a. to meet future demand.

- 2.2.1 5,000+ social housing properties by 2036 – 300 houses p.a. to meet future demand.
- 2.2.2 Aboriginal targets included in Government housing funds and initiatives.

2.3 Meet supply needs for transitional and (crisis) short term and special needs housing.

- 2.3.1 Meeting supply needs for transitional and (crisis) short term housing.
- 2.3.2 Needs of Elders and clients with disabilities are addressed including through special purpose developments.

2.4 Support Native Title and Treaty to grow affordable housing.

- 2.4.1 Seeking opportunities from Native Title and Treaty.
- 2.4.2 Establish forms of land tenure that enable growth in housing.

OUR VISION EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

PURPOSE

Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation

Open doors to home ownership and private rental

3.1 Increase uptake of Private Rental.

- 3.1.1 Work with the Residential Tenancy Commissioner to investigate apparent discrimination against Aboriginal people in the private rental market.
- 3.1.2 Increase uptake of Private Rental:
 - campaign with landlords and real estate agents – ‘Aboriginal people are good tenants’;
 - informing community housing aspirations; and
 - providing training opportunities and encouraging Aboriginal people to pursue careers in the real estate industry.
- 3.1.3 Rent brokerage to improve uptake in the private rental market.
- 3.1.4 Meeting the rental gap between market rates and affordability.
- 3.1.5 Bond subsidies.
- 3.1.6 Models to manage tenants at risk so that rent can be maintained and property managed.

3.2 Support to get established in your home.

- 3.2.1 Getting established in your home.

3.3 Create opportunity for ethical investment in affordable rental.

- 3.3.1 Opportunities for ethical investment in affordable rental properties.

3.4 Make home ownership available to more Aboriginal people.

- 3.4.1 Building aspirations for home ownership and capacity to act on them:
 - knowledge and understanding of how to get into the housing market, navigating the transition to home ownership;
 - getting a deposit;
 - personal savings schemes;
 - employer deductions to build savings record;
 - build skills to manage your home, managing personal finances and maintaining your home
 - resourcing and using personal assets;
 - financing and special financing schemes;
 - developing home ownership models for people with disabilities; and
 - create purchase programs for social and community housing tenants.
- 3.4.2 Establish an Aboriginal end-to-end pilot support program to increase home ownership, incorporating:
 - shared equity home purchase;
 - special financing;
 - loan vehicles, advice; and
 - related support to enter the market.
- 3.4.3 Establish rent to buy initiatives.

OUR VISION EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

PURPOSE

Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation

An Aboriginal focused homeless system

4.1 Rebuild an Aboriginal homeless service system from the ground up.

- 4.1.1 Housing First Approach is adopted.
- 4.1.2 Agree on a target to reduce Aboriginal homelessness by 10 per cent per annum compounding for 10 years.
- 4.1.3 Open access points; fund and support an initiative to facilitate Aboriginal entry and referral points into the homeless system.
- 4.1.4 Homelessness services flow seamlessly through to long term housing:
 - create exit points from transitional housing; and
 - cease discharging people from homelessness services into homelessness.
- 4.1.5 The mainstream and Aboriginal sectors work together for the benefit of clients and are accountable to them.

4.2 Provide tailored support for those at high risk.

- 4.2.1 Housing first approach is complemented by appropriate support to achieve sustainable housing outcomes.
- 4.2.2 Those at high risk are targeted – provide housing, support and pathways i.e. mental health, drug and alcohol, leaving out of home care, leaving justice system.
- 4.2.3 Develop and seek funding for transitional and long-term housing options for Aboriginal people who experience and/or use family violence that address their needs and promote and prioritise the safety of victims at a local and state-wide level.

4.3 Increase supply of crisis and transitional housing.

- 4.3.1 Aboriginal hostels and facilities are funded and recommissioned.
- 4.3.2 New transitional and emergency housing options are established to respond to the needs of high need cohorts, including people transitioning from institutional settings (former prisoners, young people leaving care, people with mental health issues) and family violence victims and perpetrators.

OUR VISION EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

PURPOSE Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation

A Capable System that delivers Aboriginal housing needs

5.1 Create a strong and viable Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector.

- 5.1.1 A strong and viable Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector.
- 5.1.2 A Peak body that advocates across the housing and homelessness continuum.
- 5.1.3 Capacity to build and manage housing stock.
- 5.1.4 Aboriginal workforce capacity:
 - structured training, formal and informal training and career paths for Aboriginal housing and property workers; and
 - leveraging new housing developments to create Aboriginal economic development, employment and skill development opportunities.
- 5.1.5 Governance capacity – specific governance capability and commercial acumen in tenancy and asset management through a resourced and supported Aboriginal Housing Provider Forum.
- 5.1.6 All Aboriginal housing providers have housing and tenancy policies that support their practices and inform tenants of their rights.
- 5.1.7 Industry/sector shaping – Create housing provider models that address lack of capacity and critical mass in the Aboriginal housing sector so that assets in the form of land, community connection and services can be harnessed; includes mergers, alliances, and strength based partnerships.
- 5.1.8 Inclusionary zoning and other planning levers, specifically take into account Aboriginal housing needs.

5.2 Make the mainstream housing and homelessness system culturally safe.

- 5.2.1 The mainstream system is culturally competent and workers understand and implement culturally safe practices; mainstream providers have culturally safe policies and practices in place.
- 5.2.2 The Housing Registration system ensures a culturally safe community housing sector for Aboriginal clients; has the flexibility to register Aboriginal housing providers, recognising their particular strengths; and provides activity and outcomes reporting back to the Aboriginal community.
- 5.2.3 The public housing system is culturally safe and provides activity and outcomes reporting back to the Aboriginal community.
- 5.2.4 The data and evidence base is reviewed to ensure it enables continuous improvement and accountability, including back to the Aboriginal community.

5.3 Build a systems based partnership between the mainstream and Aboriginal housing and homeless systems.

- 5.3.1 System connectivity is created, building natural pathways between different forms of housing tenure.
- 5.3.2 Develop localised and customised delivery models.



“If you want change in people’s lives, they have to be housed properly; not in dumps, but in a place they feel safe” - Thorne

DRIVING CHANGE

Policy commitments which have no budgetary impact, but will drive reform across most areas of government should be immediately adopted. These are:






1. All government housing developments and funding, including social housing and land developments for private housing, include an allocation to meet Aboriginal housing.
2. Housing First is adopted as a principle underpinning all Aboriginal housing and homelessness strategies.
3. Housing is a platform for life aspirations.
4. Self-determination is adopted, providing Aboriginal tenants where practical with the choice of having their tenancy managed by a registered Aboriginal community housing agency.
5. Work takes place with Local Government to relieve Aboriginal community housing from the cost pressure of council rates.

TARGETS TO DRIVE CHANGE

To drive change across all areas of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, the Victorian Government and the Aboriginal community should:

1. Embed Aboriginal housing targets in all relevant mainstream and Aboriginal policies, strategies and programs;
2. Strengthen housing targets in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework with the addition of agreed measures of progress; and
3. Adopt a small number of targets designed to drive effort in areas that are essential to improving housing outcomes.

We suggest the following targets and areas:

-  Rates of Aboriginal homelessness reduced by 10% per annum compounding for 10 years.
-  Aboriginal social housing allocations are monitored annually to ensure Aboriginal people receive a proportionate share of new tenancies.
-  5000+ additional social housing units for Aboriginal people by 2036.
-  Aboriginal targets in the Victorian Agreement with the Commonwealth under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA).
-  One percent of surplus Government land that is allocated for social housing is allocated to Aboriginal Housing organisations.

GOVERNANCE

AHV will continue its policy leadership in housing and homelessness, to lead implementation of the Framework and advocate across the sector and community to address the very significant housing challenges identified through this work.

A Framework Implementation Governance Group is required which must include both Aboriginal community leaders and senior public officials. It should be jointly chaired by a respected Aboriginal community leader, with a role to continue to guide and shape evolving policy and a Government Minister, to secure commitments and undertakings across many portfolios and through the bureaucracy.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework has been developed by the community for the community. This is its strength. Government partners have constructively participated in the process, but have recognised the power that has come from a community led response.

If we are to stem the alarming growth in homelessness that we are witnessing we must act with urgency.

The Framework provides the inter-related strategies that are needed to move people from homelessness and dependency to independence. While there will be quick wins, sustained change will take time. With ongoing effort, carefully targeted investments and the involvement of all parties we will be able to reverse the housing situation experienced by so many Aboriginal Victorians.

As this journey continues we aim for a destination where Aboriginal home ownership levels match those of other Victorians and housing crisis is exceptional, temporary and aberrant.

We invite all parties to join us on this journey and to work with us in putting in place the building blocks of a new approach to achieve safe and secure housing for Victoria's First Peoples.

