

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**INQUIRY INTO THE NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
PEOPLE**

SUBMISSION ON HOUSING

BY

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION

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SUMMARY

Indigenous Australians generally continue to experience significantly poorer housing outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians across all key indicators of housing need, including the affordability, availability and adequacy of their housing.

Over the last decade, there have been improvements in some aspects of Indigenous housing outcomes. In remote areas there has been a significant reduction in levels of overcrowding in Indigenous households and in family homelessness, despite increases in housing demand through population growth. Indigenous home ownership rates have risen from around 27% to 31% with the bulk of this growth occurring in urban areas.

Indigenous housing needs vary across urban, rural and remote localities. In general terms remote housing need is characterised by a need for substantial expansion of available rental housing stock, reflecting the limited options for remote communities to pursue other forms of housing tenure, and to respond to the chronic levels of overcrowding and inadequate standards of around 30% of houses.

Indigenous urban needs are more strongly characterised by difficulties with the affordability of a range of housing choices. Over 30% of all urban indigenous households are in “after housing” poverty. Without dramatic improvements in indigenous employment and income status, the major challenges in improving indigenous housing outcomes will be to improve the affordability of rental housing and to continue to expand Indigenous home ownership levels.

This submission first sets out, in Part 1, the current housing status of urban indigenous Australians, including key issues for policy and programs. Part 2 outlines a way forward and identifies early priorities for future policy and program directions.

Key issues

- All jurisdictions – the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments – have roles to play in improved indigenous housing outcomes. Over recent years Commonwealth and State Housing Ministers have overseen the development of a series of long term strategies to improve indigenous housing outcomes, and Ministers are due to consider levels of commitment to these strategies in May 2001. ATSIC believes that it is critical that Ministers commit to sustained strategies.
- A key strategic issue for improved indigenous housing assistance in urban areas is to improve the linkages between housing tenures. Key issues in this regard are:
 - the respective roles of public and indigenous community housing in urban areas;
 - scope for greater transitions from rental tenures to home ownership;
 - scope for housing assistance to contribute to other social support strategies in indigenous communities; and

- the effectiveness of support strategies for homeless or “at-risk” indigenous people and links between housing provision and other social support.
- The most widespread housing problem in urban indigenous households is ‘after housing poverty’ which affects 30% of all urban Indigenous households. The rate of increase in the indigenous population and in indigenous household formation combined with relatively slow improvements in income and employment status suggest that this issue will require sustained assistance to be addressed.
- Expanded assistance to increase the rate of indigenous home-ownership in urban areas is critically important since assistance for home-ownership can address housing needs and assist in the accumulation of household wealth. Recent shifts in taxation policies may reduce the dual benefit of this form of assistance in the medium term, although the low rate of indigenous home ownership suggests that there will be considerable demand for home ownership assistance for some time.
- ATSIC believes there is considerable scope to expand its Home Ownership program as an effective and targeted response to indigenous aspirations for home ownership.
- The proportion of rural Indigenous families experiencing overcrowding is far greater than for urban families, but in absolute terms the numbers are similar.
- ATSIC’s emphasis in rental housing assistance is on targeting rural and remote communities where other housing options are very limited, and this is likely to continue.
- ATSIC is particularly concerned that there are considerable levels of after-housing poverty and overcrowding among indigenous households renting public housing.
- ATSIC has actively pursued reforms to indigenous community housing, including in urban areas. These reforms have included rationalising the numbers of community housing providers to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in asset and tenancy management. The numbers of community organisations managing rental stock have decreased, particularly in Qld and NSW, which combined had over 50% of community rental providers.

ATSIC suggests five principles which should inform housing assistance for Indigenous Australians:

- general housing assistance should complement and where necessary link with other strategies to empower indigenous people, be responsive to the cultural, social and historical circumstances of indigenous communities, and support their broader economic and social aspirations;
- Indigenous-specific funds should be used strategically to target most critical Indigenous housing need;

- Indigenous-specific housing assistance should be provided through a mix of targeted programs which address long term trends in Indigenous demographics and the diversity of their housing needs and aspirations;
- in areas where there are mainstream private housing markets (for rental and/or purchase) and mainstream government housing assistance is more readily available, these housing choices should be the dominant focus of targeted assistance for Indigenous people; and
- the Indigenous community housing sector has a significant role in improving housing outcomes and has potential to facilitate more holistic responses to community needs.

BACKGROUND

ATSIC/Commonwealth Policy for Housing

At a national level the Commonwealth's objective in providing Indigenous specific housing assistance is equality of outcomes in housing provision for Indigenous Australians. Equitable housing outcomes can be measured through four major parameters:

Adequacy – housing provided should meet tenants requirements, including household composition, and compliance with building design and construction standards, public health regulations and environment and Planning laws and regulations;

Affordability – cost of housing should be affordable for the target group and for the tenure-type through which assistance is provided;

Access – housing should be available in suitable locations, with suitability being determined with regard to factors such as tenants choice, regional and local variations in cost of provision, proximity to services and employment opportunities, and should provide security of tenure consistent with households' housing aspirations and capacity to meet tenant obligations;

Appropriateness – housing stock provided should be appropriate to the geographic and climatic circumstances, and to the social and culturally determined lifestyles of households and their communities.

Achieving equality of housing outcomes does not mean that Indigenous housing circumstances should replicate those of non-Indigenous Australians. This is particularly the case in relation to the tenure profiles of each population, where the demography of Indigenous Australians and particularly the relatively high proportion of Indigenous Australians who reside in remote areas on community owned land means that private rental and home ownership options are very limited.

Tenures

There are four key housing tenures to be considered in developing Indigenous housing policy.

- Home Ownership
- Private Rental Housing
- Public Rental Housing
- Community Rental Housing

Each of these is to be considered in terms of meeting urban indigenous housing needs. Community housing assumes a higher importance for meeting indigenous housing need in rural and remote areas where there is little or no public housing and no private housing market for rental or home ownership. The role of SAAP in addressing indigenous homelessness is also important.

In addition there is the crucial element of: Environmental Health. This involves provision of environmental health infrastructure more in rural and remote areas and the provision of recurrent funding to provide essential services. In the case of urban areas, environmental health infrastructure is a matter primarily for State and local governments and does not constitute a distinct outstanding need. Some essential services are provided by funded Aboriginal organisations within town boundaries eg Alice Springs and Tennant Creek Town Camps.

Environmental health concerns are nevertheless an important consideration in urban areas as overcrowding, poor design of older private and public rental dwellings, in terms of adequacy of space, ventilation and underperforming health hardware are factors in contributing to rates of infection, morbidity and stress.

Comprehensive national data on housing and infrastructure need is available from the ATSIIC sponsored 1999 ABS Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey and the analysis of the 1996 ABS Census. An analysis of the data in terms of these parameters and tenures is outlined in Part 1.

Overall Demand for Housing and Infrastructure.

Surveys and censuses over the past decade have shown that Indigenous households are about twice as likely as other Australian households to be in need of housing assistance. The data also show that Indigenous people experience high rates of both 'before housing' and 'after housing' poverty and homelessness, and are more likely to live in overcrowded housing.

Estimates based on a number of assumptions about acceptable housing and related infrastructure standards and data from surveys and censuses show that about \$2.2 billion is needed to address capital housing need. This is around seven times current annual funding from all sources. Of this, \$0.5 billion is required to meet the housing shortfall in urban areas. It is expected that detailed analysis of data will demonstrate that up to a further \$1 billion is required for essential services infrastructure, more in rural and remote areas.

Emerging Indigenous housing need cannot be measured definitively at this time, but is likely to have a significant impact in the near future. It has been estimated that \$120 million capital is needed each year for housing to meet the growth in indigenous population rising at 3% per year and household formation. An increasing proportion of this rising demand is in urban areas.

PART 1

AN OVERVIEW OF HOUSING STATUS AND POLICY AND PROGRAM ISSUES OF URBAN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Indigenous housing circumstances

Indigenous Australians currently do not have equitable access to adequate, appropriate or affordable housing. Census and other data indicates broad features of Indigenous housing circumstances as:

- Indigenous rates of home-ownership are around half that for other Australians;
- Indigenous families are more reliant on community and public rental housing than other Australians;
- community-based rental housing is the principal form of social housing assistance available to most remote Indigenous communities;
- Indigenous households experience much higher rates of overcrowding than non-Indigenous households, and this problem is particularly acute in rural and remote areas;
- Indigenous households are more likely to experience poverty when meeting housing costs than non-Indigenous households;
- inadequate provision of housing and associated services has contributed significantly to poor environmental health conditions, and health problems, in many Indigenous communities. and
- many Indigenous communities in rural and remote areas require substantial assistance to develop and maintain appropriate and affordable housing-related services such as water and power supply and waste management systems.

These features of Indigenous housing status stem from a range of factors, including:

- the distinctive demography of Indigenous communities, and in particular the large proportion of the population residing in relatively small remote communities;
- the social and political forces that displaced many traditional Indigenous settlement patterns, disrupted attachment to traditional country and often relocated people to missions or reserve settlements, many of which have developed into Indigenous townships;
- Indigenous people's continuing responses to displacement and relocation, including efforts to return to traditional country and community responses to social, economic and political problems in many larger towns;
- continuing high rates of Indigenous poverty and unemployment that limit options for affordable housing;
- the relatively recent development of a significant emphasis on Indigenous housing within overall social housing assistance; and

1.2 Demographics

Indigenous people are much less urbanised than the general Australian population, however, the level of urbanisation is increasing. The following table illustrates this.

Table 1- Percentage of Indigenous population by Urban/Remote category 1991-1996

	Indigenous		Indigenous	Aust Total
	1991		1996	1996
Major Urban (pop.centres>100,000)	26.69%		30.29%	62.7%
Other urban (pop.centres 1000-100,000)	40.91%		41.15%	23.2%
Rural/Remote (pop. centres <1000)	32.29%		27.31%	14.1%

The Indigenous housing tenure profile in urban areas (as set out in Table 2, using 1996 Census data) shows Indigenous tenure patterns concentrating more on those forms of tenure which predominate for non-Indigenous Australians (private and public rental and purchase/ownership). In major urban areas, public rental, private rental and purchasing all rise to about 4-6% above the national average. This increases the tenure differences between Indigenous and other households in relation to public and private rental, but decreases it in relation to purchasing.

Table 2 Housing tenure of Indigenous and other households by urban/ rural location.

Location	Indigenous Households		Other Households	
	Number	%	Number	%
Major Urban				
Owned	4,400	13.2	1,621,200	42.9
Purchasing	7,300	21.9	1,026,900	27.2
Private rental	9,900	29.8	718,100	18.9
Government rental	8,900	26.8	211,900	5.6
Community rental	660	2.0	13,200	0.4
Other rental	1,200	3.5	84,400	2.2
Not Stated	960	2.9	107,300	2.8
Total	33,200	100	3,783,100	100
Other Urban				
Owned	4,500	11.1	572,200	41.8
Purchasing	6,600	16.3	362,100	26.5
Private rental	9,800	24.1	246,200	18.0
Government rental	11,800	29.1	83,500	6.1
Community rental	3,500	8.8	6,800	0.5
Other rental	2,800	6.8	61,000	4.5
Not Stated	1,600	3.8	36,800	2.7
Total	40,600	100	1,368,700	100
Rural and Bounded Localities				
Owned	3,500	16.7	398,000	51.9
Purchasing	3,000	14.3	203,000	26.5
Private rental	2,700	12.6	79,700	10.4
Government rental	1,400	6.5	3,900	0.5
Community rental	5,300	25.1	1,100	0.2
Other rental	2,600	12.5	56,100	7.3
Not Stated	2,600	12.3	25,400	3.3
Total	21,100	100	767,300	100

Source ABS 1999 Census Publication using %s.

A far higher proportion of Indigenous households live in rural and bounded localities than other households. 21,100 of the 94,900 identified in the 1996 Census, or 22%, were in rural and bounded localities compared to 13% of other households.

The difference in purchasing percentages between Indigenous and other households in major urban areas becomes quite slight (21.9% compared to 27.2 %), while the differences in government rental (26.8 % compared to 5.6 %) and private rental (29.7% compared to 18.9 %) become more marked. The ownership percentages for Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in major urban areas remain much the same as the total national figures. In other urban areas the shift away from the national figures is more slight, with the significance of public rental among Indigenous households being perhaps the one clear instance of difference (up from 23.3 % in the national figures to 29.1 % in the other urban figures).

1.3 Urban Housing Needs

Indigenous Housing Need in urban areas tends to be driven more by economics or affordability, than by adequacy or the housing shortage of rural and remote areas. Overcrowding and after housing poverty are the major concerns.

Overcrowding

The Jones census analysis gives overcrowding numbers for Indigenous households by tenure and section of state. For urban households 18% (3,307) of public sector households were overcrowded while 36% (1,453) of community sector households were overcrowded. The 1999 CHINS indicates that around 20% of community households in urban areas were in discrete Indigenous communities (usually former reserves and missions that were once on the edge of town but the town has now grown around). Note that the census undercounted community dwellings by around 60% compared to the 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey data.

6,710 families in rural areas needed either new housing or relief from overcrowding while 6,488 families in urban areas were in housing need. As a proportion of Indigenous families the rural need is greater but in absolute terms the numbers are similar and public housing appears to not fully be meeting the housing need of Indigenous Australians.

The 1996 levels were significantly higher than in 1991 with 1,310 second families in need of housing, but for primary families and other adults the change was to a slightly lower figure since 1991 (from higher numbers 4,399 and 6,384 respectively). In more general terms, the urban bedroom need rose marginally from 15,081 bedrooms in 1991 to 15,552 bedrooms needed in 1996, despite an increase in the urban Indigenous population of 42%,

Housing Poverty

Almost 30% of Indigenous households are in poverty, the rate is the same in both urban and rural areas. Housing costs are a more significant factor in urban areas while low incomes are the main cause in rural areas. In urban areas 22, 371 Indigenous households were in poverty compared to 5,664 households in rural areas.

Looking at housing affordability, 9,062 Indigenous urban households were in poverty before housing costs were considered in 1996 and housing costs forced another 13,309 households into poverty - resulting in a total of indigenous households in poverty of 22,371. The highest increases by State and tenure are in NSW (from 25% to 48%) and ACT (24% to 54%) in Public Housing households.

Poverty before housing costs numbers are about equal in both community and public housing where 24.8% and 22.5% of households are in 'before housing costs poverty'. The higher housing costs of the public rental sector push an additional 20% of households in that sector into poverty compared to community rental costs pushing an additional 12% of households into poverty.

Across the States and Territories, Indigenous urban poverty rates vary with Tasmania, NT and ACT lowest at 23-25% and NSW and WA highest at 31-33% with the other 3 States 28-29%. In terms of 'before housing costs' poverty rates, South Australia is highest at 15% with the other states ranging from 9-13% (see below).

Table 3 Indigenous Poverty rates in Urban Areas – Before and After Housing Costs

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aus
Owned	6%	7%	7%	8%	5%	4%	5%	4%	6%
Purchasing	4%	5%	4%	5%	6%	3%	2%	1%	4%
Renting	16%	14%	13%	18%	16%	14%	13%	14%	15%
Private	8%	7%	8%	9%	9%	7%	5%	4%	8%
Public	25%	25%	22%	21%	22%	21%	14%	24%	22%
Community	19%	22%	19%	28%	17%	16%	26%	67%	20%
Other rental	14%	13%	10%	22%	9%	14%	4%	14%	12%
Other tenure	11%	17%	15%	25%	6%	10%	24%	0%	13%
Total	12%	11%	11%	15%	13%	9%	11%	10%	12%

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aus
Owned	6%	7%	7%	8%	5%	4%	5%	4%	6%
Purchasing	18%	19%	17%	18%	18%	17%	12%	9%	17%
Renting	40%	38%	35%	39%	35%	39%	26%	32%	37%
Private	35%	32%	35%	37%	33%	34%	23%	14%	34%
Public	48%	46%	41%	42%	41%	46%	27%	54%	43%
Community	41%	43%	36%	36%	30%	46%	33%	67%	37%
Other rental	28%	33%	23%	30%	17%	25%	13%	21%	24%
Other tenure	11%	17%	15%	25%	6%	10%	24%	0%	13%
Total	31%	28%	29%	33%	29%	25%	23%	23%	30%

1.4 Housing related poverty across various tenures and geographic locations

Rents paid by Indigenous households vary considerably across tenures. On average, rents charged by Indigenous housing organisations are much lower than for private

rental and even lower than for government rental. 49 % of households in Indigenous community housing were paying rents of less than \$50 per week in 1996, compared to 26 % of public tenants and 2 % of private tenants. This reflects setting of appropriate rent levels by Community organisations.

Table 4. Weekly rent of Indigenous households in private, government and community rental, 1996 Census

Rent per week	Private rental %	Government rental %	Community rental %
\$0-\$49	2.2	26.2	49.0
\$50-\$99	19.0	50.1	38.6
\$100-\$149	44.6	14.7	7.1
\$150-\$199	24.6	3.9	1.0
\$200+	7.6	0.7	0.6
Not Stated	2.0	4.4	3.7
	100	100	100

One source of potential indirect recurrent income for Indigenous community housing organisations is rent assistance paid to income support recipients under the Social Security Act. However, assistance of 75 cents for each dollar of rent is only paid over a restricted range after a minimum rent has already been reached. That minimum rent in recent years has been around \$60 to \$80 for various types of single income support recipients and around \$100 to \$120 for couples. Hence, most Indigenous community rental households do not pay sufficient rent to benefit from the Rent Assistance Program. The rules of the program do not reflect the realities of their social circumstances and requires further policy and procedural modification to deliver equality of outcomes to indigenous clients . To provide greater equality of outcome, there is scope for introduction of financial assistance, ‘deemed’ equivalents to rent assistance, to the IHOs directly recognising their effective housing support provided to tenants and enabling them to provide a more viable housing service, maintaining stock to good standard etc.

Table 5, drawn from the Department of Family and Community Services’ recent longitudinal administrative data set, shows that among income support recipients identifying as Indigenous only 26 % of the ‘tenure eligible’ Indigenous clients receive rent assistance compared to 55 % among those not so identifying.¹ It also shows that when Indigenous income support recipients do receive rent assistance, on average they receive less than others; \$51.89 compared to \$59.41. This may reflect lower rents paid by Indigenous people in the private rental sector and perhaps lower standard of housing.

¹ The idea of ‘tenure eligibility’ removes owners; purchasers, government tenants and residents of government funded aged care facilities from the total number of income support recipients, as rent assistance is simply not available to them. The number of ‘tenure eligible’ recipients that remains after this removal is much larger than the Census household figures for private plus community rental because it is individual income units, not households, which are eligible for rent assistance.

Table 5. Rent assistance paid to Indigenous and other social security recipients

	Indigenous recipients	Other recipients
Number of recipients	14,100	986,800
Average rent assistance	\$51.90	\$59.40
Tenure eligible clients (TECs)	53,000	1, 89,000
Recipients as percentage of TECs	26	55

With 33 % of Indigenous households living in the low cost, income-sensitive housing tenures of public and community rental, compared to 5.5 % of other households, it would be unrealistic to expect Indigenous home ownership and purchase rates to approach those of non-Indigenous households. Not all of the difference between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous home ownership and purchase rates should, therefore, be seen to the detriment, or disadvantage, of Indigenous people. In part, the difference reflects major policy interventions for the benefit of Indigenous people in public and community rental housing.

1.5 The 1999 Australian Housing Survey

This survey included a large sample of Indigenous households so that Indigenous data could be obtained from the survey to compare to the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous data from the survey presented a number of key housing issues for Indigenous people in one publication for the first time. Notably information on tenure, life cycle (how households change size, relationships and tenure with age), affordability and dwelling characteristics and conditions.

The survey reinforced a range of data obtained from other sources such as the regular censuses and the ATSI 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey. There were a number of significant results that varied from census data particularly in the tenure area and in the estimated number of households.

The home ownership rate from the survey was estimated at 39% compared to the census result of 31%. The difference in these figures is significant and can be attributed to a number of issues:

- The survey was not conducted in the sparsely settled area where Indigenous people rely on community housing as almost the only housing tenure available. From previous estimates this probably accounts for around 3 to 4 percentage points difference at the national level.
- The survey was undertaken by trained interviewers. In the census 5% of Indigenous households have the tenure as “other or not defined” while 7% have the landlord as “other”. In the survey these categories account for only 3% of households.
- Given that community rental is often concentrated in former reserves and missions the lumpy nature of this distribution means that community renters who would be expected to account for over 20,000 dwellings nationally are under estimated.

This does not mean that the data from either the census or the Australian Housing Survey are wrong. However, it means that users should be aware that there are possible and explainable differences. Generally the Australian Housing Survey will only provide a single national picture of Indigenous Housing issues. The census allows for the opportunity to dissect the data to finer levels by States, ATSI Regions and urban rural splits.

Because of the differences in the collection methodology, the sampling issues and the issue of the non collection of data from the sparsely settled strata the results of the two data sources will be different but understandable. Results from the two sources should be used where most appropriate. Given the more comprehensive nature of the census it should be the prime data source but the results of the survey should be used where they provide better opportunities for analysis or discussion.

1.6 Indigenous access to equitable housing outcomes by tenure

1.6.1 Public Housing Sector - Indigenous Access

Public housing is a very significant form of housing provision for Indigenous people. The 1996 Census indicates that 22.3% of Indigenous households reside in public rental accommodation. Indigenous take-up of public housing reflects historic patterns of provision by State and Territory governments, which have concentrated investments in public housing in larger population centres. Hence, the 1996 Census indicates that 29.8% of Indigenous households in urban areas and 29.1% of Indigenous households in other urban areas reside in public rental housing while only 6.5% of Indigenous households in rural and remote areas rent public housing.

It is difficult to determine whether there has been significant change in Indigenous access to public housing as the 1996 Census is the first to separately identify public and community rental. State/Territory governments have indicated in recent reports that Indigenous access to public housing has increased. Recent reporting arrangements for the CSHA agreed between the Commonwealth, States and Territory governments should provide better more consistent administrative data on Indigenous access to public housing.

1.6.2 Community Housing Sector -Indigenous Access

Indigenous community owned rental housing is a major form of housing provision for Indigenous Australians. The 1996 Census is the first to separately identify Indigenous community rental from public rental. Analysis of the 1996 Census confirms the overall picture of the development of community rental – that it has evolved as a significant tenure in rural and remote localities, partly in response to lack of alternatives such as public and private rental. The Census identified only 2% of Indigenous households living in urban areas as living in community rental while 25.1% of Indigenous households in remote locations rented housing from community based organisations.

There has been significant debate about the adequacy of Census collection and enumeration of Indigenous households with a possible under-count of community housing stock in the Census. Changes in recent Censuses have improved the accuracy and usefulness of data collected. ATSIIC's 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) has identified 707 Indigenous Housing Organisations (IHOs) controlling over 20,424 dwellings. Of these, 296 are urban housing organisations with 4,821 dwellings.

Most of these were in NSW (170) and Queensland (76) and WA (23) and Vic (22). Of the 20,424 dwellings overall, 29% were reported as needing major repairs or replacement. However, a smaller proportion of stock in urban areas (18%) was in this category.

In urban areas community housing organisations tend to be smaller with an average of 16 dwellings each, as distinct from the rural organisation average of 38 dwellings.

As a tenure, community housing exhibits the most severe strain on current housing assistance in dealing with a long-term backlog of capital need for additional housing in rural and remote areas and in providing affordable housing in areas with chronic Indigenous unemployment. Census data indicates that 48% of Indigenous households in community rental were overcrowded, more than double than that of any other tenure and 12 times the incidence of overcrowding among non-Indigenous households.

The 1996 Census also indicates that 36.8% of Indigenous households in community rental were in poverty, compared with 42.5% of households in public rental and 34.7% in private rental. However, it is likely that the high level of overcrowding in community rental is masking much higher levels of poverty since community rental households are more likely to accommodate a number of incomes, given the chronic levels of overcrowding in community rental and numbers of community rental dwellings occupied by more than one family.

The challenges confronting the Indigenous community rental have been the focus of significant program and policy attention over recent years and there are signs of improvement in housing outcomes in this area. Current policy directions are expected to continue to produce improved outcomes in key areas:

- continued targeting of capital funding for additional housing in areas experiencing high rates of homelessness and overcrowding;
- reforms to assist Indigenous community based housing organisations to operate more effectively and efficiently.

Consistent with research findings on the financial viability of Indigenous community housing sector, there is a significant affordability gap for tenants of Indigenous community owned and managed stock. Given the tenancy profile of IHOs, their relative lack of economies of scale and the higher costs associated with operating in predominantly rural and remote locations contribute to a relatively high cost structure for community based delivery of housing and essential services. Within available funding there is a need for a balance to be struck between the optimal use of recurrent

funding for IHOs and targeting the backlog of capital need for additional housing and infrastructure.

In the absence of additional funding, the gap in recurrent funding for IHOs will need to be met through two related reform processes:

- collaboratively with State and Territory governments and Indigenous housing authorities, rationalise the number of IHOs;
- review the balance of capital and recurrent funding currently provided in Indigenous specific programs and to adjust this if necessary to support IHOs to achieve efficient and effective management of housing stock.

Links between community and other housing tenures and assistance.

ATSIC notes the historical development of community tenure as the principal tenure available to communities in other urban and rural areas. However, it also acknowledges longstanding interest amongst many non-metropolitan Indigenous households and communities to access other forms of housing tenure and in particular home ownership. Initiatives are needed to further examine and develop options other than community rental tenure for communities and households in rural and other urban areas.

1.6.3 Private Rental Sector - Indigenous Access

The demographic and socio-economic circumstances of Indigenous people are major factors contributing to their greater reliance on rental accommodation, including private rental. Nationally, 25.9% of Indigenous households rent privately, compared with 18.4% for non-Indigenous households. A considerable percentage of Indigenous people live in areas with little or no freehold title. However, when considering the remaining households that reside in those geographic locations where private rental is a common form of tenure (metropolitan and larger rural towns) Indigenous households are still more reliant on private rental than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Objectives for Indigenous participation in the private rental markets should be :

- to ensure non-discriminatory access to private rental accommodation;
- to provide equitable access to Rental Assistance for Indigenous private renters;
- to target assistance to low-income families renting privately to purchase homes.

The key forms of government intervention in private rental tenure are:

- broad fiscal policy affecting the attractiveness of residential property investment;
- legislative and regulatory constraints on the conduct of renters including, anti-discriminatory legislation, regulatory frameworks for promoting/safeguarding rights/responsibilities of landlords and tenants, and public and environmental health legislation covering residential premises;
- financial assistance provided by the Commonwealth government for low-income earning private renters, available through the Rent Assistance scheme;

Governments' capacities to influence the availability of private rental are comparatively limited. Governments' fiscal policies tend to influence property investment at fairly macro-levels and the relatively small and specific place that Indigenous tenants have in overall housing markets means that such policies are a largely irrelevant tool to achieve Indigenous specific housing policy, although along with other low income earners, many Indigenous private renters would be severely affected by a dramatic tightening in the availability of private rental accommodation.

There continue to be complaints to HREOC and Anti Discrimination bodies by Indigenous tenants and prospective tenants about instances of discrimination by landlords and their agents. ATSIC believes that the current anti-discriminatory legislation is adequate as a safeguard to Indigenous renters and prospective tenants. ATSIC however notes that there has been no broad ranging review of Indigenous tenant awareness or of access to tenancy dispute resolution processes or of the effectiveness of tenancy dispute resolution arrangements.

There has been substantial policy discussion about the role of Rent Assistance in overall government housing assistance, but very little which examines the effect in relation to indigenous housing outcomes.

Specific strategies that need be pursued to ensure equitable access to private rental markets will need to include:

- a review of levels of access by Indigenous private renters to Rental Assistance.
- development of more sound tenancy management and rent setting policies among Indigenous community housing organisations to facilitate more equitable access to Rent Assistance.
- in consultation with all stakeholders examine the need for and possible scope of an information awareness campaign about discrimination in private rental practices;

1.6.4 Home Ownership - Indigenous Access

Indigenous aspirations to home ownership are strongly supported by ATSIC, in particular, through the continued operation and expansion of ATSIC's Home Ownership Program (HOP), a concessional home loans program targeting low-income families.

Census evidence indicates that Indigenous households owning or buying their own homes increased from 28% in 1991 to 31% in 1996. Analysis of national home lending also suggests that, during the 1990s, the proportion of home lending for all Australians which was taken up by first home buyers declined, in part reflecting regional variations in affordability of homes and broader changes in lifestyle and investment choices. In contrast, Indigenous families appear to forming at comparatively high rates. The analysis of demographics and housing tenures suggests that the concentration of home ownership in cities and large rural towns will continue and that comparatively high rates of population growth and family formation in those areas will mean continuing demand for government assistance to achieve home

ownership, especially given relatively slow rates of progress in lifting Indigenous income and employment status.

The 1996 Census identified 16,911 Indigenous households which were buying their homes. At the time the ATSI Home Ownership Program (HOP) loan portfolio comprised 3,832 loans, representing less than a quarter of all Indigenous home purchasing households. Given the number of variables influencing Indigenous access to private sector housing finance, it is difficult to identify the contribution to overall rates of Indigenous home ownership growth. It is clear from the HOP eligibility guidelines that borrowers overwhelmingly would not be eligible for private sector finance. On this basis, maintenance of HOP funding rates will need to be maintained at current levels to assist in future growth in Indigenous home ownership.

There needs to be an increase in funding and new strategies and initiatives to ensure a continued growth in Indigenous home ownership.

The historical pattern of distribution of Commonwealth assistance for home ownership reflects the distribution of the Indigenous population and the proportion of population residing in areas where freehold tenure is available as a basis for securing loans.

Table 7 – Total Indigenous specific housing loans, by State

	Total loans 1974-75 to 1991-92	Total loans 1992-93 to 1997-98	Percent
NSW	2160	848	35.7
Vic	639	163	9.5
Qld	1698	648	27.8
WA	738	362	13.0
SA	271	208	5.6
Tas	174	45	2.5
ACT	100	21	1.4
NT	266	83	4.1
Total	6046	2378	

It is expected that this pattern of distribution of HOP clients will continue. Since the self funding basis of HOP relies on mortgage repayment rates which are linked to rates of depreciation associated with housing markets based on freehold title, it is not proposed that HOP be considered as a source of funding for expanding home ownership options on community land titles.

The 1996 Census identified 14.5% of Indigenous home buyers experiencing after housing poverty compared with 10.8% for all home buyers. Since at the time of the 1996 Census, the HOP was the principal lender for less than 25% of households buying it is difficult to assess how many HOP clients would have been in after housing poverty at that time. There is considerable anecdotal evidence that periodic affordability pressures on home ownership at the household level are a feature of household experience and reflect households adjusting to meet the long-term objective of home ownership. As well, analysis of national trends for arrears in home loans indicates that they have increased and declined in line with movements in the business cycle, reflecting changes in mortgage interest rates and general economic

conditions². The 1996 Census collection was during a period of comparatively high interest rates.

As part of the ongoing review and refinement of the HOP, ATSIC is involved in developing a number of projects including:

- a review of loan arrears to assess factors which triggered development of arrears, and the effectiveness of the scheme in assisting tenants to adjust and overcome arrears and manage associated risks.
- a joint project with the Queensland State Government on Home Ownership Options on Aboriginal Owned land;
- research to determine what mix of private, public and community renters have accessed the scheme and to consider whether historic patterns of take-up by clients' former tenures suggest directions for the program.

While ATSIC is primarily concerned with home ownership as a tenure choice, it also acknowledges that home ownership is often also pursued as means to financial security and can contribute to improving Indigenous socio-economic status. The extent to which home ownership contributes to improved financial security for Indigenous owner-buyers (either for one generation of owner-occupiers or inter-generationally) is not well understood. To examine these issue, ATSIC will undertake a study of socio-economic impacts of home-ownership. The study will focus primarily on current and former clients of ATSIC's HOP and will consider whether changes to HOP policy or program delivery would assist in furthering socio-economic benefits accruing to clients. Outcomes of the study will be factored into further policy and program development.

² Falling Out of Home Ownership – Mortgage Arrears and Defaults in Australia, 1999, by Mike Berry, Tony Dalton, Benno Engels & Kim Whiting, AHURI, UQ Brisbane

Part 2

FUTURE POLICY AND PROGRAM DIRECTIONS TO MEET URBAN INDIGENOUS HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Introduction

The draft report of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, following its 2000 review of indigenous funding, has recommended the continuation of ATSIC's strategic directions for housing and infrastructure, as developed since 1993. These include: the development of a range of agreements between Commonwealth and State service agencies; streamlining relevant funding for greater efficiencies in planning and service delivery; targeting and direct delivery of programs to meet complex environmental health needs; and a general reform of the indigenous community housing sector.

A major challenge for the Commonwealth-State Working Group on Indigenous Housing and ATSIC is the development of an effective housing needs assessment model that is robust enough to deal with the complexity of a range of variables :

- how to cost affordability into a model - particularly relevant for urban areas; and
- how to allocate limited funds to the different housing options of capital to meet the backlog , emerging need, recurrent need and their long term effects.

ATSIC accepts that equality of outcomes require differential program and policy inputs. Some key factors, which may require differential program inputs to achieve equitable outcomes for Indigenous clients, are:

- culturally determined usage patterns for housing (such as cultural beliefs which influence housing choice and co-habitation patterns);
- demographic trends including much higher than average rates of population growth and family formation, and a much younger population than non-Indigenous Australians;
- increasing rate of urbanisation;
- the generally higher costs associated with service delivery in rural and remote areas, where a greater than average proportion of Indigenous Australians reside;
- lack of economies of scale for project delivery;
- chronic poverty and levels of unemployment creating a greater reliance on government assistance to meet needs for housing and housing related services;
- the socio-economic status of Indigenous peoples, and particularly their continuing high levels of unemployment and poverty are significant factors in determining their housing circumstances and in particular their reliance on subsidised social (public and community) housing.

2.2 *Broad objectives for future action in each housing tenure and related government assistance*

Broad objectives for future action in each housing tenure and related government assistance are suggested below.

2.2.1 Home ownership

The principal objective in relation to home ownership should be to increase the proportion of Indigenous households owning or buying their home to 40% by 2010, an increase of 9% over the level recorded in the 1996 Census. This is recommended as a major emphasis for an urban housing strategy, particularly given demographic indications of increasing urbanisation.

The principle means through which the Commonwealth/ATSIC should pursue this objective is through the continuation of ATSIC's Home Ownership Program (HOP) and the promotion of State Indigenous Home Ownership Programs.

At current funding levels the ATSIC program can be expected to provide around 4,900 new loans over the next ten years.

Supplementary strategies by ATSIC to increase Indigenous home ownership will be to:

- examine scope for communities and households on Indigenous community-controlled land to achieve home ownership through innovative financing and tenure arrangements;
- assess scope for improved performance and targeting of HOP including through a review of prior tenures of HOP clients to assess barriers faced by various rental tenures;
- further expansion of HOP should funds become available.

Key variables which will affect growth in home ownership levels are:

- relative movements in property values;
- relative movements in interest rates and attractiveness of homeownership compared with other possible investment;
- rates of Indigenous population growth and family formation;
- changes in Indigenous employment and income status.

2.2.2 Private rental

Some key objectives in relation to private rental should be to:

- ensure the effectiveness of landlord-tenant regulatory arrangements within each jurisdiction to ensure a non-discriminatory basis for rental and tenancy management practices;

- ensure landlord-tenant regulatory agencies are aware of and responsive to Indigenous housing circumstances;
- ensure Commonwealth housing assistance equitably assists low income Indigenous households renting privately.(Rent assistance)

Suggested strategies to achieve these objectives are:

- The Commonwealth to consult with State and Territory governments on the need for and scope of reviews of Indigenous access to and satisfaction with landlord/tenant regulatory arrangements;
- a joint review of Indigenous access to the Rent Assistance program.

2.2.3 Public rental

The principal objectives in relation to public housing should be to:

- maintain the current level of access for Indigenous people, as a proportion of their overall tenure mix ;
- address the issue of post housing poverty which affects 43% of all indigenous households in public rental housing .
- ensure that public housing provides effective and appropriate housing assistance to Indigenous clients;
- achieve levels of tenant satisfaction among Indigenous households in public rental housing which are comparable to that of other public rental households

Suggested strategies to achieve these objectives are:

- within the context of Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Data, and agreed reporting arrangements for reporting on CSHA outcomes, monitor Indigenous access to public rental in conjunction with population growth, rates of family formation and relative change in income status;
- monitor after housing poverty rates;
- a review of Indigenous tenant satisfaction data available under the CSHA and consider the need for supplementary strategies to monitor Indigenous tenants;
- reviews of levels of overcrowding and housing related poverty for Indigenous public housing tenants.

Variables which will affect the achievement of the objectives are:

- effectiveness of CSHA in providing housing assistance to low-income Indigenous households;
- relative change in Indigenous households income status;
- responsiveness of State/Territory governments in assessing need for review and undertaking reviews where necessary.

2.2.3 Community Rental

The specific goals, objectives and strategies of ATSIC's Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) are outlined at Attachment A.

The principal objectives in relation to Indigenous community rental housing are to:

- develop community rental housing sector as a viable effective provider of housing assistance for Indigenous households which operates within agreed financial performance benchmarks;
- expand stock managed the Indigenous community housing providers to reduce homeless and overcrowding in rural and remote Australia to levels comparable to those of other Australians; and
- where appropriate, support community-based providers to effectively link housing provision with other social support strategies.

The suggested strategies to achieve these objectives are:

- Implementation of reform strategies on Indigenous community housing to be agreed by Housing Ministers, including:
 - re-examination of capital and recurrent funding mix within Indigenous specific performance benchmarks for community housing providers.
 - development of transparent and effective means to deliver recurrent subsidies for community housing.
 - incremental rationalisation of numbers of community housing providers,
 - development and implementation of a national Indigenous community housing management training strategy.
 - completion and or review of bilateral agreements covering Indigenous-specific housing assistance within each jurisdiction.
 - joint reviews of community housing management support and repairs and maintenance programs to identify and implement reforms needed to support benchmarked approach to recurrent funding for community housing and to incorporate "healthy housing" principles in asset management strategies.

- development of bilateral agreements covering housing –related essential services in relevant jurisdictions, including agreed cost sharing for essential services and reform strategies to improve service standards; and
- reviewing commitment of funds to new projects in the context of a better balance between capital and recurrent funding for Indigenous community housing.

Variables which will affect the achievement of the objectives are:

- responsiveness of State and Territory governments to initiatives which require negotiation and collaboration;
- responsiveness of State and Territory governments to initiatives involving joint Commonwealth-State/Territory funding; and
- relative income and employment status of Indigenous Australians in rural and remote areas.

2.3 Current Reform Directions in Community Rental Housing

2.3.1 Rationalisation of Community Housing IHO Sector

The majority of Indigenous housing assistance is delivered under arrangements agreed bilaterally with State and Territory governments. The Commonwealth and State Housing Ministers have already agreed on key elements of support strategies to assist community housing organisations improve their performance. In addition to these strategies the Commonwealth believes that there is a need to review the structure and distribution of IHOs to determine whether greater economies scale and better management structures can also improve the efficient delivery of housing services.

The CSWGIH has identified the need for asset management of community owned stock to be delivered through administrative structures that are capable of sustaining the required technical skills. In many cases these skills are not present in many rural and remote communities.

There is considerable diversity in the numbers of dwellings owned and managed by IHOs. CHINS found that around 50% of IHOs managed over 50 dwellings. There are marked differences in average numbers of housing stock managed by IHOs in each State. The table below provides numbers of IHOs, number of community-owned in each State/Territory and an average number of stock by IHO for that State/Territory.

Table 6 IHO Nos by State, IHO Stock Numbers and Average Stock by State

Jurisdiction	IHO Numbers	IHO Stock	Average Stock per IHO
NSW	234	3775	16.1
Vic	25	385	15.4
Qld	126	5790	45.9
SA	47	988	21.0

WA	130	3147	24.2
Tas	3	123	41
NT	136	5955	43.7
Aust	701	20163	28.7

To an extent this distribution reflects variations in the size of discrete communities in rural and remote areas in each State.

2.3.2 Reviewing the balance of capital and recurrent funding

Recent program evaluations and commissioned research suggest that the mix of capital and recurrent funding in these programs should be reviewed.

Based on an analysis of the sector and the socio-economic profile of tenants, Indigenous community housing providers, even operating at maximum efficiency will not be able cover their recurrent costs through rent collection.

A key element in the process of rationalising community based housing delivery will be the establishment of performance agreements between funding agencies and community based providers. A number of jurisdictions have commenced the process of linking recurrent funding to operational performance:

In future discussions with States and Territories over Indigenous specific housing assistance ATSIC and the Commonwealth will need to seek to agree with each jurisdiction:

- a timetable, targets and strategies for rationalising of community based housing providers;
- benchmarked level of recurrent support for IHO providers, including operating costs and rent subsidies; and
- benchmarked levels of recurrent support for community infrastructure and essential services, with agreed approaches to cost recovery and subsidies for essential services.

The extent of any redirection will need to depend on the outcomes of a recurrent funding review and discussions with State and Territory governments and Indigenous Housing Authorities. It is accepted that any shift in the balance of funding, from capital to recurrent, will necessarily reduce capital available to meet additional housing to reduce homelessness and chronic overcrowding. To secure the long term development of the IHO sector and to ensure that Commonwealth housing assistance is effectively delivered it is essential that sufficient recurrent funds are available to resource effective administration of IHOs and optimal repairs and maintenance over the full life of their capital assets.

On completion of the review and progress with developing agreements with State/Territory on levels of recurrent funding for housing and essential services, the Commonwealth and States will be in a position to assess the level of funds available

to target the need for capital development of new housing stock in areas of highest direct homelessness, chronic overcrowding, population growth and family formation.

2.4 Future Directions

The cumulative impact of these objectives and strategies should see:

- significant expansion of Indigenous home ownership and the Indigenous community housing relative to private and public rental tenures as proportions of overall housing tenures;
- strong growth in Indigenous access to public and private rental in absolute numbers to meet projected Indigenous population growth in metropolitan and rural areas;
- significant reforms to the operations of Indigenous community housing sector to achieve more effective tenancy and asset management and longer life-cycles for housing stock and modest growth in size of tenure in overall tenure-mix; and
- gradual reduction in levels of overcrowding across all tenures.

2.4.1 Coordination – Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing

In December 1992, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders*. This framework is still relevant and has been used in the COAG approach of November 2000 to address Aboriginal reconciliation.

When Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Housing Ministers met in 1996 and 1997, they supported this commitment and acknowledged the important nexus between better housing and improved health outcomes for Indigenous people.

Housing Ministers established the Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing (Working Group) to develop practical strategies to improve housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The Working Group consists of senior officials from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), ATSIC and State and Territory housing authorities.

A number of reports over many years have pointed to the need to improve coordination between the various housing and infrastructure programs and funding and delivery agencies. A major focus has been on Indigenous housing due to the existence of two separate, Commonwealth-funded Indigenous rental housing programs.

In the early 1990s decisions were taken to channel both programs through ATSIC. One of the recommendations of the 1992 'Mainly Urban' report was to this effect (Rec 47). For various reasons all parties did not support this arrangement and ATSIC initiated arrangements for the pooling of ATSIC and CSHA funds to be managed by

Indigenous housing authorities under State control. The operation of these agencies are governed by bilateral agreements between the relevant State or Territory government, the Federal housing minister and ATSIC.

To date, bilateral agreements involving the pooling of housing funds and the creation of Indigenous housing authorities have been signed for the Northern Territory, New South Wales, and South Australia. A bilateral agreement involving joint planning of CSHA and ATSIC funds, but not pooling has been signed in Western Australia.

ATSIC is also working with State and Territory governments to develop joint approaches to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the sector.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers, at their inaugural meeting on Indigenous housing at Launceston in April 1997, resolved to address the impediments to improving housing and health outcomes for Indigenous people. Housing Ministers endorsed the Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing to progress work in four major areas:

- Identifying practical and accurate ways of measuring Indigenous housing need and realistic approaches to resource allocation.
- Investigating ways to improve the viability of Indigenous housing organisations.
- Developing national principles and a framework which will result in the development of safe, healthy and sustainable Indigenous housing.
- Developing a national approach to reporting on Indigenous housing programs and carrying out Indigenous housing research.

The Working Group has developed a range of recommendations that, if endorsed and implemented, will advance improvements in Indigenous housing in urban, rural and remote areas. (See Attachment B)

2.4.2 Addressing priority needs through targeting expenditure - ATSIC's View

With the significant yet limited funds available for Indigenous specific housing, ATSIC and the Commonwealth, in partnership with States and Territory governments, will need to consider a range of complex issues to ensure that available funds are used effectively to target needs.

ATSIC suggests five principles which should inform housing assistance for Indigenous Australians:

- general housing assistance should complement and where necessary link with other strategies to empower indigenous people, be responsive to the cultural, social and historical circumstances of indigenous communities, and support their broader economic and social aspirations;

- Indigenous-specific funds should be used strategically to target most critical Indigenous housing need;
- Indigenous-specific housing assistance should be provided through a mix of targeted programs which address long term trends in Indigenous demographics and the diversity of their housing needs and aspirations;
- in areas where there are mainstream private housing markets (for rental and/or purchase) and mainstream government housing assistance is more readily available, these housing choices should be the dominant focus of targeted assistance for Indigenous people; and
- the Indigenous community housing sector has a significant role in improving housing outcomes and has potential to facilitate more holistic responses to community needs.

Analysis of the 1996 Census and CHINS 1999 indicates three main areas of housing outcomes that require priority targeting:

- chronic levels of overcrowding and inadequate housing particularly in rural and remote areas;
- chronic levels of poverty and housing-related poverty, which are prevalent in all geographic locations; and
- comparatively low rates of home ownership.

In the context of limited funding, these needs are necessarily competing, and the key policy issue to achieving an appropriate balance in the allocation of funds. For example, greater direction to construction of new housing in rural and remote areas to address chronically overcrowded and inadequate housing (as a means to address consequent environmental health problems) will necessarily divert funds from other areas of need in metropolitan areas and rural towns, where Indigenous overcrowding still exceeds that of other households, where there are housing related affordability problems and where there are still barriers to Indigenous access to mainstream housing tenures and assistance. The ability to target funds to capital programs for unmet housing need also needs to be balanced with the need to provide adequate recurrent funding to sustain effective management and maintenance of existing housing stock

While ATSIC believes that inadequate housing, which is contributing to ill-health, must be the first priority in targeting housing needs, options for further directing available funds to those geographic regions with high rates of homelessness and chronic overcrowding are limited, without injection of additional funds.

An overarching priority for the Indigenous community housing sector, irrespective of geographic location, is securing its viability and improving its performance, particularly in asset management which contributes to community environmental health and levels of amenity from housing over a reasonable capital life cycle.

Commonwealth and State Housing Ministers have identified a need for expanded recurrent funding to achieve a reasonable level of operational support for Indigenous community housing providers. Dilemmas include:

- To direct funds away from metropolitan and rural towns at the expense of effective recurrent support puts at risk housing and health outcomes from existing Indigenous specific housing stock.
- To forego any further capital expansion of Indigenous specific housing stock in areas, where there are substantial mainstream housing markets and more ready availability of mainstream government housing assistance, may risk future housing pressures. Population growth is high in these areas and the scope for significantly expanded access to appropriate housing from mainstream forms of government assistance is unknown.
- The extent of pressure on existing mainstream assistance in metropolitan areas and rural towns is indicated by the level of overcrowding in Indigenous households in public rental housing identified in the Census. In relation to public housing in particular, the current CSHA and related bilateral agreements provides significantly greater flexibility for State housing agencies to achieve more efficient and appropriate housing assistance. However, given the scope of assets being deployed within public housing it is unrealistic to expect that these flexibilities will free up public housing resources at such a rate or on a such a predictable basis to form a reliable source of additional public housing assistance to Indigenous people, to warrant large scale redirection in Indigenous specific housing programs exclusively to areas without public housing assistance.

2.5 ATSIIC Reform Directions

ATSIIC has already implemented a number of reform measures, consistent with the broader directions outlined in the CSWGIH report:

- A major reform agenda for the Indigenous Community Housing Sector which has focussed on improving its efficiency and effectiveness. This has included strategies to rationalise the sector and improve housing organisations' management capacity. This work has converged with the activities of the Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing. A key issue emerging from this work is the right funding mix of Capital and Recurrent funding necessary to ensure sustainability.
- Ongoing negotiations with government on the establishment of a national Office of Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure or other effective co-ordination arrangements of Commonwealth funds targeted to indigenous housing.
- ATSIIC and the Department of Family and Community Services have entered into Bilateral Housing Agreements with the governments of SA, NT, NSW, Qld and WA. These agreements increase the effectiveness of program delivery through pooled funding arrangements and better program coordination. The agreements

provide for strong ATSIC representation on decision-making forums in each State and Territory concerned.

- A reform agenda to improve the provision and maintenance of essential services to ensure the sustainability of capital infrastructure. Bilateral agreements for essential services provision have been negotiated with SA and WA governments. At project level, through its NAHS arrangements, ATSIC seeks to ensure improvements by incorporating planning for recurrent management and maintenance of assets as part of the capital construction process.

ATSIC stresses that to meet the true needs in housing and environmental health, particularly for urban people, it is necessary to work actively in all the tenures - public housing, community rental, private rental and home ownership and it is necessary to go beyond the focus of the CSWGIH report which is predominantly on rural and remote community rental housing.

In essence, to overcome disadvantage in indigenous housing status, future action requires:

- funding at levels sufficient to reduce backlogs and to ensure sustainability of assets and levels of essential services;
- cooperation and coordination between all stakeholders and jurisdictions; and
- pursuit of the strategies and detailed actions as outlined above.

ATSIC's COMMUNITY HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

Program Goals

1. To develop living conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which:
 - Are at least the same standard as those delivered to all Australians by Governments.
 - Provide the basis for sustainable communities.
 - Are designed to improve the health and social basis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
2. To develop the capability of Indigenous community organisations to control and manage community housing, infrastructure and essential services, in a manner which reflects the views and aspirations of community members.

Objective

“To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with access to adequate housing, infrastructure facilities and essential municipal services consistent with, and appropriate to, their expressed needs”

The Community Housing and Infrastructure Program includes the following elements:

- ***Housing*** – Provides for: capital construction, purchase and upgrade of adequate and appropriate rental housing with an emphasis on quality health hardware; supplementary recurrent funding for general administration costs of Indigenous housing organisations; and recurrent funding for repairs and maintenance of existing housing stock where rental income and service charges are not sufficient to meet the costs involved.
- ***Infrastructure*** – Provides capital funding for essential services such as water, roads, sewerage, power, etc. to rural and remote communities to accelerate the provision of essential and municipal services to severely disadvantaged rural and remote communities.
- ***Municipal services*** – Recurrent funding is provided for maintenance of community power, water and sewerage services, garbage collection, internal road maintenance, dog health programs, operational costs associated with the administration and functions of organisations which provide infrastructure and municipal services.
- ***National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS)*** – Provides capital funding for major environmental health projects (ie. health related housing and infrastructure), generally to rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Stringent eligibility criteria and rigorous assessment of priorities ensure that the highest priority projects are funded. The scheme is administered on a State-wide basis by external program managers who have construction management and engineering expertise.

- **Program support** – Funding may be available for surveys, organisational reforms, planning and delivery of programs, needs analysis, technology research and design.

ATSIC’s CHIP program also strong links to the Home Ownership program which is mainly focussed on urban areas..

CHIP funding is delivered in four main ways:

1. Through grants to Indigenous community organisations following approval by ATSIC Regional Councils, for housing, infrastructure and municipal services.
2. Through grants to State and Territory government agencies in accordance with housing and infrastructure agreements reached with State and Territory governments.
3. Through grants to Indigenous community organisations via trust accounts administered by Contracted Program Managers.
4. Through grants or consultancy contracts to specialist bodies to provide services to support the program.

CHIP program elements are supported through a range of related advocacy, co-ordination and planning activities. These include:

- Regional Council planning.
- The pursuit of bilateral agreements with State and Territory Governments on the provision and maintenance of housing and essential infrastructure services to Indigenous communities.
- Funding research into, and distributing advice on, good practice in project delivery including appropriate design and standards for community housing and infrastructure.
- Research and data gathering to support Regional Council decisions about need in their region.

Program Details

The 2000-2001 CHIP budget against program elements is as follows.

Community Housing	\$60.0m
Community Infrastructure	\$30.0m
Municipal Services	\$40.8m
National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS)	\$93.5m
Program Support	\$1.3m
Total	\$225.6m

In 1999-2000 total housing funding was \$116.2 million, through:

- \$31.4 million spent by Regional Councils for housing programs, including \$4.1 million for Indigenous Housing Organisation operational subsidies.

- \$40.3 million spent on the housing element of NAHS projects.
- \$39.7 million was provided under bilateral agreements as follows:
 - \$24.5 million to the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory. This included \$16.5 million for 1999-2000 and an advance of \$8.0 million for 2000-2001.
 - \$11.0 million to the New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office.
 - \$3.4 million to the South Australian Aboriginal Housing Authority.
- \$2.4 million to the *Fixing Houses for Better Health* project.
- \$3.2 million for housing support activities.

This funding produced the following **outputs**:

- In 1999-2000 403 dwellings were built or purchased.
- In the same period 1036 dwellings were upgraded or renovated.

The proportion of ATSI CHIP funding to urban, rural and remote locations:
Of \$212 million nationally:

- \$12.1m went to urban (5.7%),
- \$52.5m to rural (24.7%) and
- \$148.3m (69.6%) to remote areas.

The Indigenous Community Housing Sector.

Overall there are 707 IHOs with around 20,000 community dwellings.

Despite a 41 per cent increase in the number of Indigenous families between 1991 and 1996 the Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey of 1291 communities shows a number of improvements in the housing circumstances of Indigenous people.

- Average Indigenous household size has decreased from 4.6 persons per dwelling in 1991 to 3.7 persons per dwelling in 1996 (though this is still substantially greater than the comparative non-Indigenous figure of 2.7 persons per dwelling).
- The 'additional bedroom need' of Indigenous people declined by 6 per cent between 1991 and 1996.
- The number of Indigenous families living in overcrowded conditions decreased from 18 per cent to 14 per cent in 1996.

- The proportion of Indigenous households living in improvised dwellings (a measure of homelessness) fell from 2.9 per cent in 1991 to 2.3 per cent in 1996.

In addition, results from the survey of community housing and infrastructure in discrete communities in 1999 found that:

- The proportion of houses requiring major repair or replacement in discrete communities fell from 39 per cent in 1992 to 30 per cent in 1999.
- Sixty nine per cent of dwellings had some maintenance on them at a total cost of \$39 million.
- The total housing stock increased by 66 per cent to 20,000 dwellings in 1999.

Other Indigenous Housing Programs

ATSIC's programs are only some of those that fund Indigenous housing and infrastructure:

- The Aboriginal Rental Housing Program under the Commonwealth- State Housing Agreement provides funding for capital and recurrent purposes. This funding is split between Community Housing and State Owned Public Housing earmarked for Indigenous tenants.
- To supplement the ARHP States also contribute funds (largely from untied CSHA allocations) to Indigenous specific Housing Programs. In addition, Indigenous people are eligible to be housed through mainstream public housing programs.
- Indigenous people in rental housing may also be eligible for rent assistance provided through Centrelink. Eligibility is based on income, rent paid and the tenure occupied.
- There is a range of programs for temporary accommodation and meeting some needs of transient and homeless people. These are significant in urban areas. See the recent reviews of the SAAP program administered by the Department of Family and Community Services, and also Aboriginal Hostels. See further comments on SAAP in the Attachment below.
- Local governments are also responsible for providing a range of services. The current performance audit by the Australian National Audit Office describes the delivery mechanisms for some of the municipal and other essential services in a number of States and Territories.

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES FOR ATSIC's CHIP PROGRAM.

To obtain the best outcomes for clients from limited resources, the following principles guide the ATSIC approach to delivery of CHIP at all levels:

- Identify national and regional Indigenous housing and infrastructure needs, the level of recurrent funding required for essential services and seek increased funding to address those needs.
- Promote better targeting of resources to need by focusing on environmental health related housing and infrastructure priorities.
- Determine intended outcomes from identified need at the national, regional and project level.
- Enter partnerships through formal agreements with other Commonwealth, State and Local Government bodies for housing and infrastructure, to coordinate and jointly plan all available funds and activities.
- Encourage organisations which provide housing to operate on a viable basis.
- Ensure self-determination in project and program delivery through Board and Regional Council involvement and community participation.
- Insist on effective planning by grantees for projects ie links to regional, community and local government plans; master plans as prerequisites for funding; feasibility plans and project planning and business plans for organisations.
- Insist on effective consultation with and actual empowerment of Indigenous people, in the needs, design and process stages of projects.
- Ensure capital construction projects meet quality assured standards and realistic timeframes for program planning and expenditure.
- Access technical expertise and implement best practice in engineering, design, project planning, quality assurance, sustainability, etc. through partnerships with program and project managers, at the national, regional and community level. Obtain value for money and achieve planned outcomes to intended standards.
- Develop effective integrated arrangements for asset and tenancy management, and repairs and maintenance.
- Adopt appropriate housing design and sustainable technologies.
- Develop appropriate support for sustainability of housing and infrastructure through homemaker services, training and career structures for community housing staff, essential services officers and environmental health workers.
- Develop integrated support for ATSIC Regional Councillors, staff and community organisations through policy, guidelines, proformas and management products.
- Achieve quality outcomes for clients by working with organisations to develop effective client services.

- Ensure that decision making for CHIP is subject to Commission Decision Making Principles, is consistent with legislation, Commission policy and procedures and natural justice principles.

COMMONWEALTH STATE WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS HOUSING

Introduction

Establishment of the Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing has led to considerable improvements in the level of coordination and cooperation within each State and Territory and nationally.

Systemic change is essential if sustainable improvements in housing for Indigenous Australians are to be achieved. This requires time and coordinated effort. Indigenous housing bilateral agreements provide a structure for the Commonwealth, ATSIC and each State and Territory to work together to improve and simplify the planning, coordination and delivery of Indigenous housing programs. Agreements have been signed with the Northern Territory (1995), Western Australia (1997), New South Wales (1998) and South Australia (1999), and a Torres Strait housing and infrastructure agreement was finalised in 2000. Negotiations are continuing on agreements for mainland Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

Achievements of the Working Group

The Working Group has prepared a report to Ministers on its achievements over the past three years, and will be undertaking further consultation with the Indigenous community before finalising the report in early 2001. Some of the Working Group's products are already in operation, some are almost ready to be implemented, and other products need further work and refining. The Working Group's achievements are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Multi-measure approach to assessing Indigenous housing need

A multi-measure approach to assessing Indigenous housing need has been developed which takes account of differences in location and circumstances, and recognises that housing need is multi-dimensional and complex. The approach includes measures of housing adequacy (homelessness, overcrowding, services and stock condition), housing affordability (household income available for housing after other basic needs have been met, and costs to public and community housing suppliers of charging tenants affordable levels of rent), appropriateness of housing and security of tenure. Measures of future growth in demand for housing also need to be incorporated because of the rapidly growing Indigenous population. The value of each measure depends on the availability and reliability of relevant data. At present, there are gaps in data for some of the measures and no data for others.

Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information

A five year *Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information* was signed in 1999 by chief executive officers from all states and territories, FaCS, ATSIC, Torres Strait Regional Authority, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Bureau of Statistics. Its purpose is to facilitate collection of nationally consistent and comparable Indigenous housing data which will assist in planning, policy

development and program performance management. The agreement includes development of a national Indigenous housing minimum data set and data dictionary as the first step towards consistency.

National Framework for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Indigenous Housing

The *National Framework for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Indigenous Housing*, which was launched by Senator Newman in September 1999, aims to achieve safe, healthy and sustainable housing for Indigenous people. It complements mainstream regulatory building mechanisms, and has the following elements:

- national principles of safety, health, quality control and sustainability;
- State and Territory remote area building standards;
- a *National Indigenous Housing Guide* which is structured around the issue of safety and the nine healthy living practices³ (first developed by Nganampa Health Council in 1985 and subsequently used in many parts of suburban, rural and remote Australia). The guide provides practical advice on the design, selection, installation, construction and maintenance of housing health hardware items (for example, taps, showers, toilets) and other aspects of housing-related environmental health (for example, dealing with dust, insects and dogs); and
- a regular review and evaluation process to ensure the national framework and guide continue to deliver improved housing for Indigenous people.

Centrepay

In December 1998, Centrelink introduced Centrepay, a voluntary direct deduction scheme for income support customers. Under the scheme, tenants of public and community housing organisations can ask Centrelink to direct a portion of their income support payments automatically to their housing organisation to pay for rent and housing-related services such as electricity, gas and water. In January 2000, 243 Indigenous community housing organisations had joined Centrepay and 4,318 Centrelink customers had deductions paid directly to those organisations.

Asset management principles and guidelines

The Working Group conducted a project to identify housing management problems confronting Indigenous community housing organisations. This project involved extensive consultation with Indigenous community housing organisations across the country. It confirmed that a funding emphasis on new houses for Indigenous people, without adequate provision for maintenance, is counter-productive. Financial viability modelling found that in the absence of recurrent funding, operating deficits are an 'immutable characteristic' of the Indigenous community housing sector. In recognition of these findings, the Commonwealth has introduced flexibility to allow Aboriginal Rental Housing Program funds to be used for housing maintenance and management functions, as well as for construction or purchase of new houses.

The housing management project has resulted in:

³ 1. washing people; 2. washing clothes and bedding; 3. removing waste safely; 4. improving nutrition; 5. reducing crowding; 6. separating people from animals, vermin and insects; 7. reducing dust; 8. controlling temperature; 9. reducing trauma.

- an appraisal of current asset management best practice, incorporating case studies on asset management;
- a set of principles on which sound asset management should be based;
- *Guidelines for Indigenous Housing Organisation Asset Management* (nearing finalisation); and
- a companion video for the guidelines (nearing completion).

This work has shown the fundamental importance of building the capacity of the Indigenous community housing sector, and reinforced the need for a better balance in the use of funds for housing construction, maintenance and management.

National Skills Development Strategy for Indigenous Community Housing Management

The *National Skills Development Strategy for Indigenous Community Housing Management* is intended to improve Indigenous community housing organisations' access to relevant training programs and increase their capacity and skills to manage housing assets and tenancies. The strategy requires a national teaching and learning package linked to national competency standards; training that is customised for Indigenous community housing organisation staff and which adopts a community development approach; and coordination with existing training providers in states and territories.

Some components of the strategy have been implemented in some states. Further work, particularly in collaboration with Commonwealth, state and territory education and training departments, and additional funding are required to develop further and implement the strategy nationally.

Building a Better Future

The Working Group has drafted the following vision for Indigenous housing, which states:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia will have:
 - access to affordable and appropriate housing which contributes to their health and well being;
 - access to housing which is safe, well-designed and appropriately maintained.
- There will be a vigorous and sustainable Indigenous community housing sector, operating in partnership with the Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Governments.
- Indigenous housing policies and programs will be developed and administered in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous communities and with respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The document also states the desired outcomes and guiding principles for Indigenous housing, and sets out objectives and broad strategies to realise the vision.

SAAP AND INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

The SAAP program has been running since 1985 and is cost-shared and jointly managed at the national level between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. Delivery is primarily by non government agencies with some local government participation. The recurrent allocation was \$220.5 million in the 1996-1997 financial year and this funded just under 1,200 SAAP agencies across the country.

Common reasons for seeking accommodation assistance from the SAAP include breakdown of family relationships, domestic violence and financial difficulty. On Census night 1996 12,900 people were staying in accommodation funded under the SAAP, such as hostels, refuges, night shelters and other types of emergency accommodation 1.

In the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994), the overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services in order to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. Within this aim, the goals of SAAP are to resolve crisis, re-establish family links where appropriate and re-establish the capacity of clients to live independently.

However the program has to date failed to support homeless people to either self – reliance or independent living. The National Evaluation of SAAP 1999 (NAS) found that 90% of SAAP clients had not moved on to “independent living”.

How Indigenous Australians access SAAP

Recent State and Territory SAAP Evaluation Reports raise concerns about changes in public housing policy and shortages in public housing stocks exacerbating homelessness. In the case of Indigenous people this is particularly important because a high proportion of Indigenous persons are reliant on public sector housing .The New South Wales Evaluation Report emphasised that there was poor access for some client groups including Indigenous people.

SAAP funding is allocated on a population pro rata basis, because it has been assumed that the homeless population is fairly evenly distributed across the country. However, a comparison between the total number of people accommodated in SAAP on Census night with the total number of people recorded as homeless shows this assumption to be incorrect.

The prevalence of homelessness is similar in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT (40 – 50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population). However, it is significantly higher in Queensland and Western Australia (70 – 80 per 10,000 of the population). The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in the country, where there are many Indigenous people living in improvised dwellings. The homeless rate in the Northern Territory accounts for nine percent of the homeless population but receives only two percent of the total SAAP funding.

The table below shows the homeless population per 10,000 of the population and the percentage of total homeless against the percentage of SAAP funding to each State.

	<i>ACT</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>NT</i>
<i>Homeless per 10,000 pop</i>	40.3	41	48.1	43.9	49.9	70 - 80		523
<i>Percentage of total homeless</i>	1	17	7	2	28	24	12	9
<i>Percentage of SAAP funding</i>	3	36			36	14	9	2

This table shows the percentage of the homeless people in each State accommodated by SAAP. There appear to be marked differences in how effectively each State spend the SAAP funding.

	<i>ACT</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>NT</i>
<i>% in SAAP</i>	40	19	21	19	11	9	11	2

How are ATSI people targeted (what are the barriers to access)

The consultations and report by Keys Young 1998 identified five distinct groups of Indigenous homelessness.

- Spiritual forms of homelessness, which relate to separation from traditional land or family
- Overcrowding
- Relocation and transient homelessness
- Escaping an unsafe or unstable home
- Lack of access to any stable shelter

Indigenous definitions of homelessness include concepts that are not included in the SAAP definition of 'homeless'. The notions of spiritual or psychological homelessness, transient homelessness and overcrowding, do not have direct equivalents in the SAAP definition, although other forms of Indigenous homelessness do have more direct equivalents (escaping an unsafe home and /or no access to safe, secure or affordable accommodation).

There is an identified need for SAAP providers to expand and further develop the cross-cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous SAAP workers and appropriate cultural awareness training for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous staff in Torres Strait Islander culture.

SAAP services on the mainland (where most Torres Strait Islander live) are not culturally appropriate to the needs of Torres Strait Islander people. Where Indigenous staff are employed or Indigenous views sought and represented Torres Strait Islander views are no included.

As Indigenous homelessness is experienced at the level of the community, the family and the individual, it follows that the solutions to Indigenous homelessness must also lie at these three levels. To address homelessness, it is insufficient to work only at the level of the individual (SAAP's key role). Equally it is insufficient to work only at the structural level as many people will require individual support and assistance to develop the skills and capacities to live independently.

To date there are insufficient linkages at a policy and Planning level between SAAP and relevant Indigenous and other programs and departments, particularly in regions with sizeable Indigenous populations.

SAAP's major responsibility is to provide individual support or assistance to homeless people. With a few fairly minor exceptions, SAAP alone is targeted at providing support to individuals who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. To date it has not been SAAP's role or responsibility to address the broader systemic causes of much Indigenous homelessness.

Breakdown of non Indigenous and Indigenous users of the SAAP

The 1993 evaluation of the SAAP noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are over represented in SAAP services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders constitute one point five percent of the total Australian population but eight percent of the SAAP client group.

Further, in services catering for women experiencing family violence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders constitute 19.1 percent of the client group. In fact the main reason given for seeking help from SAAP was domestic violence (32%). The table below sets out the breakdown of reasons given for using SAAP services by Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients .

Main Reason for Seeking Assistance	Indigenous Clients (n=7,088)	Non-Indigenous Clients (n=45,315)
Long-term Homeless (more than 12 months)	4%	5%
Time out from Family Situations	7%	3%
Relationships/Family Breakdown	11%	15%
Interpersonal Conflicts	3%	4%
Physical/Emotional Abuse	4%	3%
Domestic Violence	32%	20%
Sexual Abuse	1%	1%
Financial Difficulty	8%	14%
Eviction	4%	7%
Substance Abuse	4%	6%
Emergency Accommodation	1%	25
Recently Left Institution	1%	2%
Psychiatric Illness	<1%	2%
Arrival From interstate, No Means of	3%	4%

Support		
Itinerant	4%	5%
At Imminent Risk, But Not Homeless	4%	3%

The most common type of service used by Indigenous people in 1996/7 was crisis/short-term accommodation followed by medium/long-term accommodation. This pattern is also true for non-Indigenous clients but a higher proportion of Indigenous clients (47%) utilised crisis/short-term accommodation in comparison to non-Indigenous clients (34%).

ATSIC's view of Indigenous homelessness comprises three distinct living circumstances:

- direct homelessness - Indigenous persons or families residing in improvised dwellings, sleeping out or residing temporarily in hostels for homeless persons;
- family homelessness - Indigenous families living in dwelling so overcrowded as to require a relocation of the family to achieve a reasonable occupancy standard;
- amenity homelessness - persons or families living in dwellings which need to be replaced to meet adequate housing standards and levels of amenity.

Direct homelessness

1996 Census data indicates that, nationally, housing need arising from direct homelessness has improved marginally since the previous Census with the number of bedrooms needed to house homeless Indigenous families and individuals decreasing from 6306 bedrooms in 1991 to 5847 in 1996. However, there remain areas of high incidence of families and individuals relying on improvised dwellings. NT, Qld and WA continue have the highest incidence of homeless families residing in improvised dwellings while NSW, WA and Qld have highest number of homeless people residing in shelters, refuges or hostel for homeless persons.

Family homelessness

Is discussed in context of overcrowding below.

Amenity Homelessness

General assumptions: that owner occupied Indigenous households are privately responsible for adequacy of dwelling, privately and publicly renting Indigenous households will have recourse to tenancy tribunal to enforce landlord responsibilities.

A significant area of concern for ATSIC, is the performance of community owned and managed housing organisations to provide housing with acceptable amenity for its tenants. CHINS 1999 found that 28% of community owned and managed dwellings were reported to need either major repair or replacement. While this indicates a

substantial improvement in the quality/amenity of community owned stock from the 1992 CHINS, which found almost 40% of housing in geographically discrete Indigenous communities needed major repairs or replacement. Census data also indicates positive trends in levels of overcrowding, although high rates of Indigenous population growth and of family formation will mean that overcrowding and related family homelessness will continue to be major challenges for governments' housing assistance.

Indigenous issues for SAAP

The definition used by SAAP is a service delivery definition. In contrast, the definition used by the ABS is an operational definition which focuses on aspects of homelessness that are recognisable and measurable for the purposes of the Census.

The 1996 Census targeted Australia's homeless population using the cultural definition of homelessness proposed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie in 1992⁴. This definition identifies the homeless population in three segments:

Primary homelessness

People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter

Secondary homelessness

People who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter or another. It covers people using emergency accommodation, teenagers staying in youth refuges, women and children escaping domestic violence, people residing temporarily with other family members and those using boarding houses

Tertiary homelessness

People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities to their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease.

The Chamberlain report supported the validity of the Census estimate of homelessness based on the definition used.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie argue that homelessness is best defined in relation to shared community standards about the minimum accommodation that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions of contemporary life. The minimum community standard is equivalent to a small, rented flat, with a bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchen.

While the estimate of homelessness is credible for the total homeless population it may not capture the true nature of Indigenous homelessness, as the definition used by

⁴ Dr Chris Chamberlain is the Head of Sociology at Monash University and Dr David MacKenzie is the Head of Sociology at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

the ABS is culturally reflective of the non Indigenous population. Some Indigenous people sleeping in impoverished dwellings may not consider themselves homeless in this sense, while they are none the less living in circumstances which have negative implications for their health.

In addition, there are aspects of homelessness specific to Indigenous people. The Keys Young report reviewed a number of definitions of homelessness within an Indigenous context. These definitions are important in highlighting a spiritual form of homelessness, which relate to separation from traditional land or from family.

Keys Young describe this form of homelessness as ‘a State of mind, an essentially spiritual rather than a physical State of being’. Indigenous homelessness stems from dispossession from the homeland or family as a consequence of a 200 year history, ‘which is unparalleled in any other group of Australians’⁵.

Indigenous people are significantly over represented amongst the homeless population and often present with complex needs. Nationally, they comprise 12% of all SAAP clients⁶. This is six times their percentage in the general population, and around 11% required support for high and/or complex needs⁷.

It is reasonable to assume that Indigenous people are also over represented amongst the significant number of homeless people not accommodated by SAAP. The identified level of unmet need is likely to under represent the real need of Indigenous people for adequate accommodation as identified in the 1996/7 Census data. The Chamberlain analysis of the 1996/7 Census data showed that half of the people living in impoverished homes, tents or sleepers out were Indigenous. The majority of those were in the Northern Territory where 89% of those in this category were Indigenous and in Western Australia where Indigenous people represented 54%.

Common reasons for accommodation assistance from SAAP include breakdown of family relationships and domestic violence. In 1996/7 32% of Indigenous clients sought accommodation from SAAP providers to escape domestic violence in comparison to 20% of non Indigenous clients⁸. In comparison to non Indigenous users of SAAP services, Indigenous clients are more likely to be female, in particular women escaping domestic violence.

The National Evaluation of SAAP III highlighted that a large number of homeless people could not access SAAP because demand for services exceeds capacity. Further the majority of SAAP accommodation is located in urban centres.

This is supported by the findings of a report commissioned by the State Government of Queensland, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, ‘Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence’ in 1999.

⁵ Keys Young 1999, p. 25-26.

⁶ Keys Young 1998, p. vii.

⁷ Bisset et al 1999, p. 70.

⁸ Keys & Young 1998, appendix A p. 7.

While this report assessed services in Queensland it is likely to highlight issues which are relevant in other States.

The report raises concerns about the shortage of safe houses for Indigenous women and children escaping domestic violence. “Even when there are safe houses, some women face an extra problem. Because a regulation prevents male children over the age of 11 years being admitted with their mothers, these women must separate their children at a time when they need to be together for support”⁹.

A further gap within the domestic violence services, nationally, is a lack of sufficient, consistent support for children who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence. Some States have appointed regional child specialist workers to assess children, and provide secondary consultation to SAAP staff¹⁰.

Indigenous clients often use SAAP services on a more short-term and intermittent basis than non-Indigenous clients, and are likely to have multiple support periods. Crisis/Short-term accommodation was used by 47% of Indigenous clients in comparison to 34% for non Indigenous clients, with 55% of Indigenous clients using SAAP services for less than three days compared with 45% of non Indigenous. As highlighted in the findings of the Chamberlain report, these people are homeless on entry and again after exiting SAAP accommodation. These patterns of usage have implications for SAAP service delivery models and also for the capacity of services to conduct meaningful case management with Indigenous clients, as it is unlikely that a client with complex needs will have these addressed within a very short accommodation period.

Many Indigenous people feel uncertain or uncomfortable in using mainstream services that are culturally inappropriate. Others report that services provided by Indigenous organisations may be monopolised by particular family groups¹¹. For Indigenous people an alternative to SAAP accommodation is often stays, for varying periods of time, with relatives. Indigenous clients are more likely to be living with family members before and after their period of support from SAAP¹². It is reasonable to conclude that overcrowding is a contributing factor in the high presentation rate amongst Indigenous people for ‘time out from family’.

Short stays in SAAP accommodation do not alleviate this ongoing problem. There remain linked issues surrounding the high need for short term accommodation in SAAP and shortages in public housing. While overcrowding remains a factor in the demand for SAAP accommodation the need for services continues to grow.

The key areas requiring policy and Planning consideration for improved service delivery to Indigenous homeless people are:

- SAAP services for under serviced homeless people such as those in rural and remote locations.

⁹ SERC & AHURI 1998, p. 166.

¹⁰ Bisset et al 1999, p. 103.

¹¹ Keys Young 1998, p. 100.

¹² Keys Young 1998, p. vii

- Targeted program for homeless Indigenous people with complex needs that will continue beyond their brief stay in SAAP accommodation.
- Crisis support and accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence that supports all members of the family.
- An increase in suitable accommodation for whole families
- Improve data collection to report on need for public housing to alleviate over crowding
- Review definitions of 'homeless' to ensure next Census captures all Indigenous homeless
- SAAP staff increase cultural awareness in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the inter related issues impacting on Indigenous homeless people.

ATSIC is seeking to work with FaCS and State/Territory Governments to strengthen SAAP in its fourth evolution. It is likely that States will assume more direct responsibility for Planning and implementation of SAAP projects as the Commonwealth focuses on overriding policy coordination.