

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

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

**Northern Territory Government submission**

**December 2000**

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## THE NORTHERN TERRITORY CONTEXT

For the purpose of this report the term “urban”, in the Northern Territory context, applies to the centres of Darwin/Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. It should be noted, however, that several remote Aboriginal communities also have relatively large populations, Port Keats 2150, Maningrida 1982, Yuendumu 1000, and Galiwinku 1648, for example.

While nationally indigenous people make up only 2 percent of the total population, in the Northern Territory indigenous people make up almost 30 percent of the population. Indigenous issues therefore have a much higher profile in the Territory, and mainstream programs and services are tailored to suit the needs of indigenous Territorians.

<b>POPULATION STATISTICS</b>			
	<b>1986</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1996</b>
Number indigenous persons, Australia	227,645	345,000	386,049
Number persons, Australia	16,018,000	17,284,000	18,310,714
Indigenous proportion of population, Australia	1.4	1.9	2.1
Proportion of Australian population located in urban centres	88	85	86
Proportion of Australian indigenous located in urban centres	67	68	72
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Number indigenous persons, NT	34,739	43,800	51,876
Number persons, NT	143,390	165,500	181,900
Indigenous proportion of population, NT	24.2	26.5	28.5
Proportion of NT indigenous located in urban centres	31.0	34.6	39.6
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NT proportion of Australian indigenous population	15.3	12.7	13.4
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Number indigenous persons: Darwin/Palmerston	5,506	6,179	7,368
Number indigenous persons: Katherine	871	1,478	1,623
Number indigenous persons: Tennant Creek	690	928	1,517
Number indigenous persons: Alice Springs	3,454	3,708	3,911
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Number of persons: Darwin/Palmerston	72,374	78,401	83,978
Number of persons: Katherine	5,691	9,372	10,384
Number of persons: Tennant Creek	3,503	3,480	3,802
Number of persons: Alice Springs	22,966	27,517	25,952
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Proportion indigenous persons: Darwin/Palmerston	7.6	7.9	8.8
Proportion indigenous persons: Katherine	15.3	15.8	15.6
Proportion indigenous persons: Tennant Creek	19.7	26.7	39.9
Proportion indigenous persons: Alice Springs	15.0	13.5	15.1

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics)

The 1996 census recorded about 73 per cent of Australia's indigenous people as living in urban areas. In the Northern Territory, by contrast, the majority of indigenous people live in rural and remote areas, with less than 40 per cent living in urban centres. The proportion of indigenous people living in urban centres as opposed to rural and remote locations appears to be slowly but steadily growing, at the rate of about 1 per cent a year, with the exception of Tennant Creek, where the indigenous population has more than doubled in ten years.

**Whilst the Northern Territory recognises the special needs of urban dwelling indigenous people and provides specific programs to meet their needs, it also recognises that the needs of indigenous people living in rural and remote communities are generally of a much greater magnitude. This is clearly demonstrated by health, education and housing statistics. Australia-wide, the greatest need is in northern and central Australia. The Northern Territory strongly supports funding allocation being based on relative need, and would therefore strongly oppose any move to reallocate existing limited funds and other resources to the detriment of indigenous people in rural and remote communities.**

In considering the needs of urban dwelling indigenous people in the Northern Territory, it is important to recognise that they encompass a range of groups with widely differing backgrounds, needs and aspirations. They include the following groups:

- Long term urban dwellers, sometimes for several generations. This element of the population would appear to experience no greater difficulties with access to services or representation from local government than any other urban resident. Many in this group would be traditional owners of country on which the urban centre was established, the Larrakia people in Darwin, and the Arrernte people in Alice Springs, for example.
- Those who have permanently relocated to urban centres seeking a variation of lifestyle unavailable in their home community, or seeking to avoid community conflict.
- Those seeking specialist services, eg medical treatment. There are growing numbers of people having to relocate permanently, and often unwillingly, to urban centres for long term medical treatment such as renal dialysis or rehabilitation. Families often accompany these people.
- Medium and short term visitors to town. This group appears to fall into two main categories, those visiting for a specific purpose such as obtaining medical treatment, holidaying, attending a show or sports festival, shopping or visiting relatives with the clear intention of returning to the home community, and those visiting for an indefinite period. The preferred accommodation option for many of these people while in town appears to be staying with

friends or relatives living in public housing or Aboriginal urban living area (town camp) accommodation. Many also, for a number of reasons, choose to stay in informal camps, often in parks or other public land. These people are sometimes referred to as “long-grass” people. A significant number of non-indigenous people also camp in the “long-grass”.

Many of those in the latter three categories face difficulties in adjusting to a mainstream urban life style, and lack skills in a wide range of areas, from budgeting, to managing the behaviour of visitors and routine house maintenance, necessary to succeed in an urban setting. This lack of urban living skills all too often leads to unsatisfactory outcomes, such as eviction from housing.

### **TOWN CAMPS (ABORIGINAL URBAN LIVING AREAS)**

One of the major differences between the situation in the Territory’s main urban centres and that prevailing in other jurisdictions is the presence of town camps, sometimes referred to as “Aboriginal urban living areas” within the boundaries of urban centres. Most of these town camps were established on Special Purpose Leases with Commonwealth funding prior to Northern Territory self government. There are five town camps in the Darwin/Palmerston area, three in Katherine, nine in Tennant Creek and twenty in Alice Springs. Many camps were originally established to provide transient accommodation to visitors to urban centres. All have now become permanent or long term places of residence, and visitors are often unwelcome because of their behaviour.

The town camps are administered by Indigenous town camp organisations separately from the relevant local governing bodies in each centre. Funding is provided by a range of Commonwealth and Territory agencies. The larger of these organisations, Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs and Julalikari Council in Tennant Creek, provide a wide range of services including housing administration, banking and budgeting assistance, night patrols and programs for the elderly. While many of the camps are well managed, some are unable to impose alcohol restrictions and are a cause of concern to authorities, providing an environment where family violence sometimes flourishes, and with often poor health, welfare and education outcomes for their residents.

### **Relationships Between Councils and Town Camp organisations**

Indigenous people living in urban areas contribute to the revenue of local councils in the same manner as any other resident unless they live in a town camp. This has been the cause of contention for many years. At one time the town camp organisations were funded by ATSIC to pay rates and charges. This funding ceased some years ago and some of the organisations have since claimed status as public benevolent institutions, thus removing their liability to pay rates and charges. Resultant court action has been costly and debilitating for both councils and town camp organisations.

The reality is that local government services are provided to Indigenous residents of town camps by both town camp organisations and by councils. This is apparently not always recognised by either councils, town camp organisations or urban residents.

Councils provide their services to residents and visitors to town camps in the same manner as they do for all residents. Residents of town camps use the roads, public places and other facilities funded by councils in the same manner as all other residents. Council services, however, do not enter the boundaries of the Special Purpose Leases on which town camps are situated. Inside the leases the town camp organisations provide a wide range of municipal and other services. It is in recognition of this function of town camp organisations that the Territory Government provides some funding from its Operational Subsidy pool to the town camp organisations. The prospects for duplication and inefficiency under this arrangement are obvious.

There are at times significantly higher costs for councils in providing services that relate to residents and visitors to town camps. The Alice Springs Council expends significant resources in maintenance and removal of rubbish from public places, particularly the Todd River, that is almost entirely a result of the actions of visitors to the town and town camp residents. A similar situation applies to a lesser extent in Darwin, Katherine and Tennant Creek. From the perspective of town camps this is not really their problem. They tend to take the view that the problem for the councils is caused by visitors, and that visitors are as much a problem for the residents of the town camps. Town camps also have an impact on urban councils in the need to provide higher levels of services in areas such as animal control.

The Department of Local Government has been keen to see a more cooperative arrangement develop between councils and town camp organisations than has existed in the past. This is not easy to achieve, partly as a result of the history of the situation. Recently, however, Tangentyere Council (the Alice Springs town camp organisation) and Alice Springs Town Council came to a formal understanding about their relative roles and responsibilities, and about the way municipal services will be delivered in future. Such agreements may avert the need to some extent to consider legislative action to deal with the current lack of liability for payment of rates and charges for areas of land, the residents of which are a major drain on the resources of urban areas.

## **NORTHERN TERRITORY RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Responses to the specific terms of reference from the relevant Northern Territory Government agencies are provided below.

<p><b>1. The nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people.</b></p>
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### **HEALTH**

#### **1.1 General**

Health services in the urban community are provided through a multitude of government, non-government and private organisations. The extent of indigenous ill health has a major influence on the provision of health and community services. It has been difficult to capture comprehensive information on this wide array of service providers.

Health Services in the NT have historically been based in the 5 major urban centres where there are hospitals and a range of other services including medical specialists. The limited capacity of the NT Government to fund health and community care in remote areas is reflected in the unsatisfactory health outcomes of indigenous people in remote areas. The low level of funding has contributed to a drift of Aboriginal people into towns in order to access health services.

Urban services have been required to support remote communities by direct service provision. This has been exacerbated by the closure of women's shelters and Aranda House. Demands on THS urban services continue to increase because funding of remote services are neglected by the Commonwealth and there continue to be inadequate commonwealth funded medical and community care services in urban centres.

Territory Health Service (THS) programs and services reports that follow detail specific strategies and performance that in practice form part of a whole of government approach to improve indigenous health and well being. The directions taken in indigenous health are firmly aligned with the Territory Health Services Corporate Plan, and, in particular with the goals of strengthening community capacity, increasing indigenous involvement in the health workforce, and enhancing intersectoral collaboration and service delivery by others.

## 1.2 Territory Health Services programs and services

Generally, Territory Health Services programs and services are provided for urban indigenous populations through mainstream health services that are sensitive to meeting the cultural needs of indigenous people. All staff are encouraged to attend Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Programs (ACAP) and employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within their work units.

Multi disciplinary Community Care Centres are situated in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs. These main centres provide an integrated generalist service that is staffed by nurses, Family and Children's Services (FACS) workers, Disability Information officers and social workers. In addition to this, Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal Liaison Officers are located at these Centres. The services provided by these centres include maternal and child health services, school health screening, women's health, allied health care, domiciliary care, immunisation, clinical treatment, public health advice and screening.

Overall, the health, family and children's services needs of urban based indigenous people are accessed through regional Community Care Centres, regional hospitals and Aboriginal community based organisations. Other services are accessed through urban school health screening programs such as dental services, hearing services, and child health screening.

A range of programs and services are specifically directed to urban indigenous people through the following categories:

- Community Health
- Domiciliary Care Services
- Disease Control surveillance and immunisation
- Alcohol and Other Drugs program
- Substance Misuse program ( includes Counselling and rehabilitation)
- Aged Care & Disability Services
- Childbirth services
- Children's services
- Health Promotion program
- Women's health program
- Life Promotion program (Central Australia Emotional & Social Wellbeing program)
- Family Planning and Sexual Health program, Health Educator Services
- Family and Children's Services
- Mental Health services
- Night Patrol coordination
- Wardens Scheme in Alice Springs
- Dental health services



- Palliative Care services
- Environmental health services
- Women's Shelter program
- Aboriginal Child Care Agencies
- Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin)
- Darwin City Council (funding for mobile playgroup for residents of Aboriginal Hostels)
- Child care service for town camps and urban families (Yeperenye School)
- Aboriginal and Islander Medical Services (AIMS) funding which provides medical transport and Sobering Up Centre.
- NT Hearing services

### **1.3 Specific program examples of current needs assessment methods**

#### **1.3.1 POPULATION SCREENING:**

Population screening is a common method of health care needs assessment in the Northern Territory. Examples of where this approach is utilised include:

- Breast Cancer and Cervical Screening – clinic based
- Child health screening – school based
- Dental screening – school based
- Screening for diabetes/STDs – clinic based

#### **1.3.2 CHILD CARE PLACES:**

Assessment methods for priority allocation of child care funds for indigenous services have been based largely on the Commonwealth-designed Child Care Planning system. This draws in the first instance on normative measures of child care demand, such as children aged 0-4 and 5-12 years with a parent or parents in the workforce or training. Measures of work-related child care demand use ABS census data/estimates and labour force participation rates. This data is supplemented with measures of felt need ie. qualitative information obtained through consultation. Service viability indicators are also used including such indicators as:

- the presence of community infrastructure and community development plans;
- sponsor capacity and interest;
- other services available for children.

All funding is expended through Non-Government Organisations.

#### **1.4 Culturally effective service delivery to urban indigenous people:**

The employment of indigenous staff is seen as the best way to increase the involvement of indigenous clients in THS services. For example, NT Public Hospitals, Community Care Centres and Palliative Care teams employ Aboriginal Health Workers, Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers and Aboriginal Interpreters. This also allows for indigenous people's involvement in internal decision making. Internal contact at an operational level is maintained with local urban based Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and is more often issues-based.

Increased indigenous involvement in the work force is guided by the THS Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy and supported by the THS Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program, which is now available in all regional areas. THS has commenced the final phase of the implementation of the new Aboriginal Health Worker career structure which will allow for the continuation of indigenous input into decision making of Aboriginal urban health needs.

### **EDUCATION**

#### **1.5 General**

Education within the Northern Territory is provided through the combined resources of the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE), the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office (NTCEO) and the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT). The Commonwealth Government through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs provides significant supplementary funding to the three educational service providers. A total of 186 educational institutions provide support to approximately 40,913 students of school age. Of these, 14,329 or 35% are recorded as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Straits Islander descent.

Within the NT educational urban areas there are 5,483 indigenous students. These represent approximately 18% of the urban student body and comprise 13% of the total Northern Territory student cohort. As a result of increasing numbers of indigenous people relocating to urban centres for a variety of reasons, as described above, urban schools increasingly face demands to meet the needs of indigenous students with less than comparable standards of urban social understanding and literacy and numeracy levels. Measures to meet required standards include the provision of English as a Second Language programs, whereby learning is structured for non-English-speaking students, and the employment of additional specialist support staff necessary to facilitate learning and support for these students.

There is no universal assessment within the Northern Territory Department of Education to measure indigenous need amongst individuals, communities or as a population, whether urban or rural. However, there are two methods in use to

identify the effects of disadvantage and isolation amongst the student population as a whole, but these make no differentiation between indigenous and non-indigenous students. A further program, English as a Second Language – Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ESL-ILSS), specifically targets indigenous students for English capability and provides short-term support to address deficiency. This program is applied irrespective of the location of the student, but generally relates to non-urban indigenous students. Individual indigenous student capabilities are monitored through benchmarking of literacy and numeracy in English and are undertaken through Multi-level Assessment Profiles (MAP) testing. This does not address needs *per se*, but can be aggregated to provide system wide information against national benchmarks.

Additionally there are numerous independent initiatives that attempt to neutralise indigenous disadvantage, especially within small remote schools. These relate to resource allocations to redress the effects of isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, cultural differences, language needs, health aspects and lack of economies of scale.

Whilst there is no formal quantification of urban-dwelling indigenous student need, there are a range of specific programs available to meet the educational requirements for urban based indigenous students. These specifically focussed initiatives are in place to maximise indigenous student participation within the education system. The programs are achieved through successful ongoing collaboration between NTDE, non-government providers, other agencies, the Commonwealth government and communities. NTDE and the other educational providers in the Northern Territory will continue to evolve more appropriate delivery of educational outcomes to meet the emerging needs of urban dwelling indigenous students, to a level comparable with mainstream results. This can only be achieved through the active participation of indigenous people in decision making, to ensure that educational activity appropriately reflects needs to significantly improve indigenous opportunities.

## **1.6 Existing programs and services**

Educational facilities are equally available to all individuals of school age. There are 85 schools within the urban areas. The present spread of resources means that students in urban areas have greater access to the full range of educational facilities by virtue of close proximity, reduced climatic limitations and greater freedom of choice. There is greatest choice in the Darwin and Palmerston centres, with lesser choice in the other four urban areas. The Katherine and Alice Springs Schools of the Air provide primary education through distance learning modes, and the Northern Territory Open Education Centre provides secondary courses through correspondence. Whilst the Schools of the Air target non-urban students, a number of urban indigenous students utilise the services of the Northern Territory Open Education Centre.

### 1.6.1 LITERACY AND NUMERACY PROGRAM

The Literacy and Numeracy Program is used to distribute funds to assist disadvantaged students. It is part of a Commonwealth Government initiative that provides resources to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes amongst all students. The Literacy and Numeracy Program has two funding strands – grants to schools to foster literacy and numeracy development, and grants for national literacy and numeracy strategies and projects. Funding available is distributed to schools, regions, or for system-wide projects addressing the achievement of improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy for educationally disadvantaged students. Because of their poor results, a major proportion of funding is focused towards indigenous students in small remote schools, however 24 urban schools in the Territory are also included.

Generally, program funding is allocated to schools on a submission basis, through a committee forum. Target groups include students from early childhood through to secondary levels, and specifically include indigenous students with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills to undertake the school curriculum. A further program objective is to facilitate the move to consistent and comparable reporting of student outcomes. This will allow the reporting of indigenous students' results, and should facilitate analysis of causal determinants. In recognition of this, pro-active redressal of fundamental literacy and numeracy outcome gaps and related areas is now being initiated.

Determination of need in the Literacy and Numeracy Programme is achieved through the weighting of schools needs via application of the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED). The IRSED comprises census variables that correlate to low socio-economic status. These correlate closely with the indigenous student body.

Each school in the Northern Territory is given an IRSED score that is compared to the Australian average. The mean score for Australia on IRSED is 1000, with a score greater than 1000 indicating socio-economic advantage and a score below 1000, disadvantage. Schools are then allocated resources on a scale of 1 to 5 based on their IRSED score; ie, 1000 to 901 = 1, 900 to 801 = 2, 800 to 701 = 3, 700 to 601 = 4 and less than 600 = 5. In the past, schools' allocations are aggregated to a regional total and that amount of funding is available to the Regional Programs Committees to allocate through a submission process. The regional committees make recommendations to the Education Advisory Council Specific Purpose Programs Committee, which presents recommendations to the CEO of NTDE for decision.

A criticism of the method is that the regional aggregation of funding can be applied to non-disadvantaged schools within that region. Whilst submissions are used within the program guidelines to address literacy and numeracy deficiencies, the broadening of accessibility to all schools may not allow the full fund allocations to be available for the identified disadvantaged schools. Further,

the method does not address individual student need, as it is a measure of school need only. Accordingly, a needy indigenous student in an affluent school, for example, may not necessarily access appropriate targeted funding. These concerns could be rectified through the individual identification of disadvantaged students and adoption of an appropriate distribution method.

Whilst there are factors other than socio-economic which contribute to educational disadvantage, this method continues to be a useful guide for committees in the absence of other methods.

## HOUSING

### 1.7 General

The two principal permanent housing options available to indigenous people in the Territory's urban centres are public housing, managed by Territory Housing, and housing in Aboriginal urban living areas, managed by indigenous organisations, and funded by the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory [IHANT] and the ATSIC National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) program. Home ownership levels are generally low, and relatively few indigenous people access the private rental market, with its high rent levels.

CENSUS DATA 1996- TYPES OF HOUSING- URBAN DWELLING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE NT	
CATEGORY OF HOUSING	PERCENTAGE
1. Full home ownership	5%
2. Purchasing own home	15.4%
3. Private market rental	12%
4. Territory Housing rental	41%
5. Community housing rental	9.8%
6. Other/not stated/rent free	16.8%
Total	100.0%
Notes:	
1. These figures include those people/households which were included in the 1996 Census.	
2. In addition to category 5, category 6 is also likely to include town camp residents.	

### 1.8 Equitable access to mainstream housing for indigenous people

There are two key initiatives in providing indigenous people with access to mainstream housing in the NT:

- Requirements under the Commonwealth State Housing Bilateral Agreement and under the *Agreement for the Provision and Management of Housing and Related Infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Northern Territory* (the Bilateral Agreement on Indigenous Housing).

- Funding of three Indigenous Housing Advisory Services (funded jointly by the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory [IHANT] and Territory Housing) in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.

(Note: Information on IHANT is provided under section 2.2 of this submission).

Mainstream housing schemes do cater for indigenous people, however further work is being done to support access to housing and in maintaining tenancies. The Indigenous Housing Advisory Services are designed to assist indigenous people in gaining access to mainstream housing and in providing support to maintain public housing tenancies. Territory Housing works closely with these services with an objective to improving tenancy outcomes for indigenous Territorians.

Territory Housing is also working with a range of government and non-government agencies to address the issue of itinerant people regarding their housing needs in urban areas, the impact they have on the lives of their relatives and friends, and the social harmony of other residents. These matters are discussed further in the following two sections on General Public Housing Programs and the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory.

## **1.9 Current housing and related statistics- Northern Territory**

1272 public housing tenancies (21.0% of the total public housing tenancies) were maintained by indigenous people, as at 30 June 2000.

Public housing data may not reflect the exact numbers of indigenous people currently occupying public housing tenancies. Until recently staff did not always ask applicants to indicate Aboriginality on application forms, but improvements in the administrative data collection methodology are currently addressing this issue. In addition, only the primary client is identified, which means that 'mixed' households may not be reflected accurately.

Currently there are 476 indigenous people (25.0% of the total public housing waiting list for tenancies) on existing waiting lists for public housing tenancies across the NT. Public housing is allocated on a wait list turn system. Priority Allocation may be approved for those who have an urgent need for housing on medical or social grounds. For instance, indigenous people with renal failure and other complex health problems will usually receive priority allocation, based on their need to move to a main centre for urgent and/or long-term medical treatment.

There are currently approximately 5,900 community-managed indigenous housing units (both urban and rural/remote), as identified by ATSI's 1999 CHINS survey. More detail is provided under section 1.4.

## **1.10 General public housing programs**

### **1.10.1 HOUSING 2003**

Housing 2003 is a current policy initiative aimed at improving housing outcomes for low-income Territorians. Housing 2003 was launched in 1998 as a five-year strategy to:

- match the housing stock profile to housing need
- increase levels of home ownership, and
- reduce waiting times for public housing

Outcomes of Housing 2003 have included:

- Barriers to home ownership have been reduced for low-income earners
- Fixed term leases have been provided to tenants
- Rent changes have directed housing provision to those most in need
- Waiting times have been reduced in all centres, generally by over 50%
- Housing stock has been significantly re-profiled to meet need

Key outcomes of Housing 2003 are the reduction of waiting times and the targeting of public housing to those most in need, which has created greater opportunities for Indigenous people to access public housing. All public housing programs and services are available to all eligible indigenous people.

### **1.10.2 MAINTAINING SUCCESSFUL TENANCIES THROUGH INDIGENOUS SUPPORT SERVICES AND URBAN LIVING SKILLS PROGRAMS**

In Territory Housing's Casuarina Area Office, a 12 month trial position has been established to provide support to indigenous tenants in public housing and improve liaison with indigenous organisations. Another initiative is the placement of an indigenous person experienced in policy development in the Public Housing Branch to work with regional staff and indigenous groups on projects focusing on indigenous housing issues.

Many indigenous people relocating from remote areas to live in urban centres are not familiar with town living expectations and urban by-laws and often find the change difficult. Territory Housing together with indigenous housing organisations have recognised the need to establish an Urban Living Skills Program across the Northern Territory to assist public housing tenants to develop the skills required to maintain successful tenancies. A program developed by the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD), the Alice Springs Aboriginal Urban Housing Association (ASAUHA) and Territory Housing is already operating in Alice Springs.

### 1.10.3 HOUSING ADVISORY AND REFERRAL SERVICES PROGRAM

Territory Housing has long recognised the need to involve indigenous people and in particular indigenous community organisations in delivering services to maximise outcomes for indigenous tenants. One initiative has been the establishment of indigenous specific housing advisory and referral services, initially created within the housing department. The department quickly recognised that these services would be best provided directly by indigenous organisations, which generally have a much better understanding of indigenous housing issues and effective communication skills with indigenous people. A focus of these services includes training and increasing skills in home budgeting and general home care.

The Darwin Aboriginal Housing Advisory Service was established first in 1987 to provide tenancy support services to clients in Darwin, Palmerston and Katherine and the Alice Springs Referral Service began in about 1988 within the then Department of Housing.

The Darwin based organisation was established as an incorporated body and funded by the then Department of Lands and Housing with the over-riding aim of improving the housing outcomes for indigenous public housing tenants. In 1997, management of the Darwin and Katherine services were split and undertaken by organisations based in those centres. The Alice Springs service expanded to include an advisory service and transferred to a newly formed indigenous housing organisation in the mid 1990s. More recently the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT) has contributed additional funds, through Territory Housing, to increase the capability of these services.

Territory Housing has engaged indigenous organisations to provide this service. Services are currently being provided by the Indigenous Housing Association in Darwin, the Jawoyn Association in Katherine (out to tender in October 2000) and the Alice Springs Aboriginal Urban Housing Association in Alice Springs. Discussions have taken place in Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy with relevant indigenous organisations to explore options for those centres.

Performance indicators for the Housing Advisory Services Program are agreed with each individual service, and documented on an annual basis for reporting to Territory Housing and IHANT. Territory wide, the funding allocation agreed by the IHANT Board for the 2000/2001 financial year will be \$325,000. Territory Housing has also agreed to contribute \$325,000 to this program in 2000/2001, and is set to contribute the same amount during 2001/2002.

### 1.11 Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT)

IHANT provides housing grants to indigenous housing organisations throughout the Territory on the basis of need, measured in terms of homelessness and overcrowding. **The greatest need is in rural and remote communities, and**



**the majority of the available funds is allocated to those communities.**

Grants are however also provided to urban indigenous housing (or “town camp”) organisations in the four main urban centres. The following housing programs are available to indigenous Territorians through IHANT.

#### 1.11.1 IHANT CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS: HOUSING AND LAND SERVICING

The Construction (Housing) program provides for the construction of new dwellings, purchase of existing dwellings where applicable, and major upgrades or renovations to existing dwellings. The purpose of this program is to address the high level of housing need in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The agreed performance indicators for the Construction (Housing) Program are as follows:

- Number of new houses constructed
- Number of upgrades to existing houses (i.e. houses upgraded to a level of amenity such as the provision of additional bedroom(s) & provision of an additional toilet/bathroom)
- Number of existing houses renovated (i.e. major renovations to existing houses to restore them to a level of amenity)
- A suitable multi-measure approach to housing need adopted as the basis to inform regional housing allocations

The funding allocation that was agreed to by the IHANT Board for the financial year 2000/2001 totaled \$27,000,000.

The Construction (Land Servicing) program provides for the delivery of serviced sites for the purpose of new housing construction. The agreed performance indicators for the Construction (Land Servicing) Program are as follows:

- Delivery of agreed numbers of serviced land sites available for new housing construction
- The delivery of appropriate housing-related infrastructure, in a timely and efficient manner

The funding allocation that was agreed to by the IHANT Board for the 2000/2001 financial year totaled \$3,500,000.

#### 1.11.2 IHANT HOUSING MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

There are two IHANT-funded Housing Management Programs: the Establishment Program and the Recurrent Program.

The Establishment program will provide 3-4 communities per annum with a program aimed at developing five year housing plans for the community; training

for housing officers; training and information provision to community leaders in housing issues, etc. The purpose of this program is to improve community housing planning and management in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The agreed performance indicators for the Establishment Program are as follows:

- Number of new communities participating in the Establishment program
- Increased compliance with grant conditions
- Number of existing communities completing the Establishment program

The funding allocation that was agreed to by the IHANT Board for the 2000/2001 financial year totalled \$500,000.

The Recurrent program provides annual grants to indigenous communities for the employment of Housing Officers. Established community housing management services on targeted communities are eligible for grants. The funding allocation that was agreed to by the IHANT Board for the 2000/2001 financial year will be \$1,500,000

#### 1.11.3 IHANT MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

The Maintenance program provides for a grant of \$1,700 per house to communities who collect rent and who meet or are attempting to meet the minimum housing standards required in the Minimum Standards for Housing Management booklet, in accordance with the IHANT Board's key decisions on maintenance. The agreed performance indicators for the Maintenance Program are as follows:

- Number of communities acquitting Maintenance Program grants
- Improved environmental health as measured by Environmental Health Surveys conducted annually
- Improved life span of housing stock

The funding allocation that was agreed to by the IHANT Board for the financial year 2000/2001 totaled \$8,500,000.

#### 1.11.4 IHANT SERVICED LAND AVAILABILITY PLANS PROGRAM

The Serviced Land Availability Plans program will provide maps of communities pertaining to available land for usage for a variety of community planning purposes. The agreed performance indicator for the Serviced Land Availability Program is:

- Availability and production of SLAP maps for agreed communities.

The funding allocation agreed to by the IHANT Board for the 2000/2001 financial year is \$225,000.

## **1.12 SPORTS AND RECREATION**

The NT Department of Sports and Recreation is responsible for the delivery of sport and recreation to urban and remote indigenous Australians through the Indigenous Sport Program (ISP). The framework for this program is established under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and the Department of Sport and Recreation.

As at 1 January 2001 there will be seven officers delivering this program throughout the Northern Territory, with one officer responsible for facilitating the delivery of sport and recreation to each of the seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission (ATSIC) regional council areas. ISP officers work closely with community councils and recreation officers to provide training and deliver sport and recreation in accordance with the needs of each community.

The annual grants program is accessible by indigenous communities as a means of establishing sport and recreation facilities and assisting with recreation officer salary, professional development, administrative support and travel. Agency officers work closely with councils and recreation officers in assisting with annual submissions.

The Northern Territory Institute of Sport is currently developing a proposal for a regional sports scholarship scheme on behalf of the ATSSIC funded Indigenous Sports Program.

Indigenous people feature prominently in the sporting life of the Territory, both in urban and rural environments. Their sporting skills are well recognised, and many have represented the Northern Territory as individuals or members of sporting teams competing at interstate and national events. Although no specific statistics are kept, the Northern Territory Football League estimates that indigenous people make up 90% of players in regional areas and 40% of players in urban centres.

## **1.13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The following comments are provided by the Northern Territory Department of Local Government. The Standing Committee could also usefully seek submissions on this issue from the local governing bodies in the Northern Territory's main urban centres, and from the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT).

### **1.13.1 GENERAL**

The Northern Territory aims to achieve viable, sustainable and credible local government councils that effectively and efficiently deliver services to all of their constituents. Many councils in the Territory do not currently meet these objectives. The main focus of programs and services of the Department of Local Government at the moment tends to be on the smaller and more remote councils in the Northern Territory which overwhelmingly demonstrate greatest need and which are the primary source of services by the majority of the Territory's indigenous population. In the larger councils in the more urban areas services are generally available to indigenous people as they are for everyone else and, while there could clearly be improvements, the needs in this area tend to be overshadowed by the much higher levels of need in rural and remote areas.

The current Local Government Reform and Development Agenda should have a positive outcome for urban dwelling indigenous people. This initiative, which is now developing momentum, will significantly change the nature and form of local government in the Territory to promote its credibility, capacity and sustainability into the future. The Reform and Development Agenda seeks to re-structure local government to achieve an outcome where local governments are seen to be legitimate both by their constituents and other governments and provide effective service delivery frameworks.

The achievement of structures that are seen to be legitimate, particularly by indigenous constituents, requires a significantly stronger commitment to consideration of traditional indigenous decision making structures than may have been the case in the past. While it is not anticipated that methods of recognition of traditional structures would be the same as in areas where there is an overwhelming majority of indigenous people in a local government area, there is an increasing awareness of the value of working through and with traditional structures.

For many urban dwelling indigenous people in the Territory, local governments may not be either their primary source of services nor their first option for representation. Town camp (Aboriginal urban living area) residents are represented and provided with services by organisations established and funded specifically to cater for their needs. The town camp organisations provide some of the services that might normally be expected of a local government to residents of the urban living areas.

The Territory currently has 68 local governing bodies. Of these 6 are Municipal Councils, 31 are Community Government Councils and 30 are incorporated pursuant to the *Associations Incorporation Act* or the *Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Association Act 1976*. 57 of the councils are small, remote and have largely indigenous populations. The remaining eleven consist of larger Municipal councils and councils that cover a number of other small towns.

There is a high level of mobility within the Territory's indigenous population, making it difficult to establish with any precision the numbers of indigenous

residents in specific communities at any one time. A substantial percentage of the indigenous population of urban areas have an apparently low level of need for special services or access to representation. This element of the population has lived in the major centres for many generations and would appear to experience no greater difficulties with access to service or representation from local government than any other resident.

Those residents who move to urban areas from the more remote areas tend to do so to access services, such as education or health, or for entertainment, holidays, sporting events and the like. This element of the population may live in an urban area for extended periods without necessarily intending to live there permanently.

### 1.13.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY

Local councils in urban areas deliver services in much the same manner and using similar arrangements as those in other parts of the country. Such services include road construction and maintenance, animal control, control and maintenance of public places, waste management and disposal, libraries and museums, child care and traffic control. These services are provided generally in the community and the needs of indigenous people could be assumed to be taken into account as part of that community. Clearly, this theory may not always be borne out in practice, and a number of strategies are being pursued to reinforce the need for councils to recognise the needs of all elements of their community in the manner in which they deliver services.

## **2. Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements.**

### **2.1 HEALTH**

A major step toward greater intersectoral collaboration was the signing of the NT Aboriginal Health Framework Agreement on 8 April 1998. This was an agreement between the NT Minister for Health, Family and Children's Services, the Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Executive Secretary of the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory.

One of the aims of the Agreement is to improve health outcomes for indigenous people through joint planning processes which allow for full and formal indigenous participation in decision making and determination of priorities.

For example, partnership arrangements for urban indigenous people exist in the following areas:

- Partnership arrangement with Central Australian Regional Indigenous Health Planning Committee (current working groups include the renal, substance misuse and Central Australian Disease Control Committee).
- Partnerships with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Congress Alukura, Tangentyere Council, Arrernte Council, Institute of Aboriginal Development and CAAAPU.
- THS membership of Indigenous Housing Authority of the NT
- Alice in 10 – Quality of Life projects
- Barkly Blueprint regional development
- Partnerships with Julalikari Council and Anyinginyi Congress
- Top End Mental Health Services – Indigenous youth group (chaired by ATSIC)
- Partnerships with Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services program
- Youth at Risk Network Partnership program.
- Royal Darwin Hospital Aboriginal Issues Committee
- Aboriginal representation on Hospital Boards
- Top End Regional Health Planning Study (Aboriginal Health)

## **2.2 EDUCATION**

The Department of Education recognises that the involvement of indigenous people is vital in turning around educational outcomes for indigenous students. Conscious of the need to better understand the educational and support needs of indigenous students, the Department commissioned the Learning Lessons Report in 1999. The report aimed to establish the views and educational aspirations of indigenous parents and communities, identify key issues affecting educational outcomes for indigenous children, and recommend supportable actions for achieving education improvements. The report aimed to present an independent view of the present state of indigenous education within the Northern Territory, and testifies to the earnest approach being made to provide improved educational support for all indigenous students. This has been further illustrated by the NTDE, NTCEO and AISNT coordinated willingness to partake in the Commonwealth funded National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in the latter part of this year.

A cornerstone of the Learning Lessons outcomes is the acknowledgment that appropriate educational support for indigenous students can only be achieved through partnerships at a local, regional and state level. Systemic partnership capacity is now being developed as a priority to alleviate the limitations of previous indigenous advisory bodies. NTDE is considering the development of Local Education Advisory Boards that may be required to work beyond existing School Council functions. These may positively impact upon urban dwelling indigenous students through the availability of more appropriate delivery of educational activity and support. The Department of Education further supports and promotes the activities of Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness

(ASSPA) Committees that have been developed within schools. ASSPA committees are critical organisations allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people an opportunity to participate in the decision making processes related to schools and the larger school community. Further, they provide a forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop skills of leadership and decision making within a context of local governance.

NTDE is an equal-opportunity employer and actively recruits indigenous teaching and support staff. For example, support is provided to the Batchelor Institute of Tertiary Education, a campus devoted to providing tertiary courses for indigenous people, and includes the training of teachers. Presently six cadetships are funded by NTDE to assist candidate teachers in the completion of their studies. Additional professional development is being considered within NTDE to assist in the ongoing training and development of indigenous teachers and Principals. Aboriginal resource Officers (ARO's) and other indigenous staff are employed in a large number of schools and their skills, knowledge and experience inform school management with respect to the needs of indigenous students and the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous stakeholders. Induction courses are conducted for staff involved in teaching indigenous students. A formal mentoring program is in place to provide ongoing support to indigenous staff.

An example of recognising the need to increase indigenous decision making was in the establishment of the Secondary Indigenous Reference Group. Established in Alice Springs in April 1999, the Secondary Indigenous Reference Group provides a formal medium in which relevant community groups can discuss issues with NTDE managers and provide advice on educational issues in Alice Springs such as;

- the factors impacting on indigenous youth's access to appropriate education programs,
- the identification and provision of relevant and acceptable secondary-aged education programs,
- the improvement of educational outcomes and retention of secondary Indigenous students in mainstream schools, and
- the support of programs operating in alternate settings and monitoring the outcomes of these programs.

Through these targeted programs it is hoped that the needs and particular requirements of indigenous students and staff can be accounted for to optimise educational outcomes. These efforts will assist to maximise the involvement of indigenous people in decision-making affecting their local communities.

## **2.3 HOUSING**

### 2.3.1 PUBLIC HOUSING

Territory Housing has been developing relationships and networks with indigenous organisations and related community support agencies to increase the involvement of indigenous people in housing issues. This has mainly been achieved through the partnership arrangements of IHANT and the Indigenous Housing Advisory Services. More recently other networks have been established with individual organisations or groups representing or advocating housing needs of indigenous people.

An example of this is highlighted through the development in recent years of Safe Houses in remote Aboriginal communities, leading to increased participation and decision making at the local level. The most significant example of this has been the Ali Curung Safe House, which was developed through community participation and funded through ATSIC CDEP funds. Using this same approach a women's shelter has been established at the Bagot community in Darwin, funded through the Crisis Accommodation Program, managed by Territory Housing, and in cooperation and coordination with the local community council, ATSIC and Territory Health Services. Residents of the Bagot community were actively involved in the design and construction of the women's shelter.

Territory Housing hosted two Housing Forums with community organisations in April this year, one each in Darwin and Alice Springs. The outcomes were very constructive, raising issues including priority housing, bond assistance, financial counselling, "community building", provision of information on tenant entitlements and responsibilities, youth issues, disability and mental health issues, and indigenous housing. Six working groups with community organisations (three in Darwin and three in Alice Springs) have been established to progress key action areas. Territory Housing has committed to hold further forums and to continue working collaboratively with the community sector to improve housing outcomes.

In response to the impact itinerants were having on public housing tenants Territory Housing initiated a joint approach with community organisations to address the long-standing issues surrounding indigenous "itinerants" in the Darwin and Palmerston region. A broad range of community organisations and other government agencies attended a community workshop on this topic in August 2000, with a follow-up workshop planned for June 2001. Community organisations have widely supported the idea of working in collaboration with other service providers and with government agencies. "Itinerant" issues often require cross-agency involvement and by forging closer links this enables wider community input.

A consultant will be shortly engaged to undertake a comprehensive research study of "itinerants" in the Darwin and Palmerston region. The research study is jointly sponsored by Territory Housing and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, in conjunction with community-based indigenous



organisations. Other organisations involved in managing this project are North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (NAALAS), ATSIC, Larrakia Nation, Northern Land Council (NLC), Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance NT (AMSANT), and Territory Housing.

To assist with the planning of tenancy support services and to foster partnerships, Territory Housing supports the day-to-day activities and liaises closely with community organisations, such as the Darwin Indigenous Housing Association, the Alice Springs Urban Aboriginal Housing Association, Kalano Association in Katherine and Julalikari Association in Tennant Creek.

### 2.3.2 THE INDIGENOUS HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY (IHANT)

The establishment and development of IHANT is a good example of the involvement of indigenous people (including indigenous people resident in urban areas) in decision-making on housing issues.

On 30 June 1995, a Bilateral Agreement was signed by the Commonwealth Government (represented by the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs) and the Northern Territory Government (represented by the Minister for Housing).

This Agreement specified the roles and responsibilities of each level of government in the provision of housing for indigenous people in the Northern Territory. The Agreement also facilitated the establishment of a government-related entity, the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT).

IHANT is the single organisation responsible for the development of improved housing outcomes and the coordinated distribution of all available housing funds to ATSIC Regional Councils. IHANT membership comprises of nine elected NT ATSIC members, up to seven NT Government representatives, and a representative of the Commonwealth Government.

Key improvements created by the establishment of IHANT are as follows:

- Improved co-ordination of housing program funding for indigenous people.
- Improved collaboration in the planning and delivery of housing programs:
- Implementation of the Bilateral Agreement
- Involvement of ATSIC Regional Councils
- Heightened input from elected arm of ATSIC

Improved policy development at the Territory level in the provision of housing programs:

- Guidelines for Environmental Health Standards for Rural and Remote Communities established and implemented
- Repairs and maintenance funding and policy guidelines implemented
- IHANT rent policy implemented- rental collections increasing
- Minimum Standards for Housing Management policy established and implemented

All parties have now reviewed the Bilateral Agreement and proposals stemming from this review are being developed for implementation.

## **2.4 SPORTS AND RECREATION**

ISP Officers work closely with Councils e.g. through the medium of law and justice strategies, workshops, preparation of grant submissions, cross-sectoral working groups and the training of recreation officers in assisting to identify specific community sport and recreation needs. Partnerships have been encouraged with other communities to access funding i.e. “Women In Sport And Recreation” and specific facility needs.

## **2.5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The electoral system is the first and most basic means of establishing accountability by a representative body. The electoral system that operates for local government councils in urban areas is established in the *NT Local Government Act*. The Act provides for a council to be divided into wards or not. It allows for wards to be represented by a single member or a number of members. The method of counting prescribed is that known as ‘exhaustive preferential’.

Indigenous people have not generally shown a great deal of interest in standing for election in the larger councils. There is, at present, just one indigenous alderman in a municipal council while there are almost 700 in the smaller more remote community government and ‘Association’ councils. The situation in the larger councils is of concern. For the last two elections the Department of Local Government has provided assistance to the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory to develop an education and awareness campaign aimed at generating greater interest among indigenous residents of the urban centres in local government. In the most recent municipal elections in May 2000 there was, again, a disappointing result in terms of the number of indigenous candidates.

Criticism has been levelled at the voting system as the reason for failure of those indigenous candidates that do stand. Most of the urban councils operate on a multi member single ward system. While there is an argument that a proportional representation system would assist indigenous candidates, there appears to be little difference between the results that proportional representation would provide than the current exhaustive preferential system.

It is possible that division of municipalities into wards, either single (as in the case of Litchfield Shire Council) or multi member (as is the case in Darwin), would assist indigenous candidates. It is not clear whether the low numbers of indigenous people standing for election stems from lack of interest, a general satisfaction with current representation, or a reaction to an assessment of possible success.

Training people to be effective representatives is difficult. It is, however, possible to provide elected members with skills that they will use in their representative capacity. The Department of Local Government is providing funds to LGANT to assist in the delivery of Local Government Learning, a program aimed at assisting elected members to develop the skills they need to carry out their duties.

**3. The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program).**

## **HEALTH**

### **3.1 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a joint Commonwealth, State and Territory initiative which commenced in 1985. SAAP is a support program aimed at assisting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, through a range of supported accommodation services. It is an important part of Australia's overall response to homelessness and of the broader social safety net designed to prevent disadvantage in the community.

In the Northern Territory indigenous people represent 43% of the SAAP client group, the majority of whom are urban based. The SAAP program is located in urban areas and delivery is primarily by non-government agencies with some local government participation.

### **3.2 Health situation and needs of Indigenous youth**

All program areas have identified the need to provide or enhance culturally appropriate services and improve links between Programs to coordinate responses. A community youth centre in Tennant Creek was opened with funding from the Living with Alcohol program. This program was initiated to try and address some of the issues facing urban indigenous youth, for example, substance misuse, and violence.

### **3.3 Employment**

Alice Springs Hospital has developed an Aboriginal employment and career development strategy in consultation with local indigenous organisations, and employs a part time mentor/project officer to support young people in obtaining experience and employment in administrative and operational areas.

### **3.4 Issues identified by THS facing young urban indigenous people**

Issues identified by THS that include some unmet demands facing young urban indigenous people are:

- Overcrowding in Aboriginal town camp housing
- Substance misuse includes petrol sniffing (Alice Springs) and the growing use of cannabis (all centres). THS has a watchdog brief on underage drinking.
- Current and emerging issues include after-school and vacation care, homelessness, substance abuse and violence.
- Separation from family or relocation with the main carer to receive medical and other services, is an issue for young indigenous people with a disability.
- Increase in completed suicide in young indigenous males and attempted suicide in females.
- Lack of employment, and training opportunities
- Paint and glue substance misuse is problematic
- Inadequate safe places for younger people who are at risk of physical assault
- SAAP services support young people aged 16 years to 24. The number of young people who are seeking alternate accommodation support is often averaging 13 to 14 years, with some as young as 8 years old.
- Aranda House, which was primarily funded by ATSIC, now has a budget shortfall of at least \$200K per annum, a consequence of ATSIC budget cuts. (Aranda House provides care for indigenous youth under care of the NT Minister for Health).

### **3.5 EDUCATION**

The needs of indigenous young people in urban areas are further met through a range of discrete programs, largely funded through the Commonwealth Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program.

#### **3.5.1 ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER TERTIARY ASPIRATIONS PROGRAM (AITAP)**

The Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program (AITAP) is a school and community based program that encourages, supports and assists indigenous students through their secondary school years to improve their academic attainment, aspirations and expectations. This program was introduced to curb the high exit rate of indigenous students from the secondary schools system, and has achieved a notable turnaround by providing encouragement and support in urban areas.

AITAP offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the challenge of looking towards higher goals in education. It achieves this through supporting students at their chosen curriculum courses, and enhancing educational and career aspirations through fostering cultural identity, academic skills and personal development. The program encourages and assists students to gain tertiary entrance qualifications by involving students, teachers and parents working together to keep students at school.

AITAP has resulted in increases in the number of indigenous students successfully completing Year 12 studies and gaining a Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE), and in gaining a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) and entering higher education courses.

#### **3.5.2 ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER EDUCATION WORKER (AIEW) AND ABORIGINAL RESOURCE OFFICER (ARO) PROJECTS**

The Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker (AIEW) and Aboriginal Resource Officer (ARO) projects are primarily aimed at increasing attendance and retention of indigenous students in the schooling system, and aiding in increasing indigenous student education outcomes. This is achieved through the placement of indigenous staff to undertake key student management and support roles, particularly relating to monitoring of attendance and assistance in cultural interpretation of western educational delivery. The programs increase the chances that indigenous students will remain in the education system, increase individual skills and improve opportunities and access to employment. These aid in breaking the poverty cycle of many indigenous people and reducing the risk of resorting to crime in an attempt to break out of this cycle.

### 3.5.3 MENTORING, CADETSHIPS AND THE INDIGENOUS TEACHER SALARY SCHEME

Mentoring, Cadetships and the Indigenous Teacher Salary Scheme programs are aimed at retaining indigenous adults in the teaching stream, thereby increasing the chances that the education system will become more appropriate and less threatening for indigenous students and their carers.

### 3.5.4 THE PRINCIPAL DIRECTED PILOTS PROGRAM

The Principal Directed Pilots program requires school principals to commit to targets for improved outcomes for indigenous students in attendance, literacy and numeracy. The project funds specific initiatives as determined by the schools, generally having consulted their respective indigenous stakeholders. The outcome from these projects will allow for dissemination of successful practice to NT schools.

### 3.5.5 THE DETOUR CONCEPT

The Detour Concept is an educational initiative developed in Alice Springs. This program caters for the educational needs of indigenous youth that have disengaged from mainstream schooling. The program focuses on holistic community development of students and parents where appropriate. The program provides positive options for young people to engage in, as well as a safe place to be during the day.

The combination of these projects increases indigenous student educational outcomes, thereby giving indigenous students more choices in life and greater opportunities for advancement.

### 3.5.6 REDUCING UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES

There appears to be a strong correlation between retention within the educational system, increased educational outcomes and the reduced likelihood of resorting to unlawful activities. If this link is made then a number of programs operating in schools contribute to reducing crime in the Northern Territory.

One key program is the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre. Partners in the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre are Centralian College and Tangentyere Council. Irrkerlantye is an educational program that focuses on assisting with the educational needs of four Eastern Arrente extended families. The program includes a significant component of adult education and continues to be developed as an inter-generational learning unit with a focus on community development. Currently approximately 40 students are enrolled.

Alice Outcomes, another such program, is coordinated through Alice Springs High School and targets indigenous and non-indigenous students not accessing mainstream schooling. This program commenced operation in Term 1, 2000 with

three distinct groups of students being placed in alternative settings to traditional schooling.

Yarrentye-Artere Learning Centre is a community development educational program which commenced in Term 2, 2000 at the Yarrentye-Artere (Larapinta Valley) Town Camp. This program caters for school-aged students. The students have a tragic record of substance abuse, poor health, general social dysfunction and alienation. Partners in this program are Tangentyere Council, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Yarrentye-Artere Housing Association and Gillen Primary School. At least 20 children are enrolled in this program. The program aims to provide students with greater understanding of and opportunities to achieve mainstream acceptance and move towards ongoing life-long learning.

### **3.6 HOUSING**

There have been no indigenous organisations funded under the Crisis Accommodation and Community Housing Programs that specifically target the needs of young people. However, the housing needs of indigenous youth are considered by community organisations targeting youth housing and welfare services. Approaches have been made recently from one particular Aboriginal organisation into possible funding for a project targeting the needs of indigenous youth, however the full submission is not expected on this until 2001

### **3.7 SPORTS AND RECREATION**

ISP officers work in conjunction with the Northern Territory Department of Education and Territory Health Services to deliver to indigenous Australians messages of health and well being, through their respective programs. Visits to communities are arranged simultaneously, messages of health and physical activity are jointly presented and shared workshops and one day sporting events are established in conjunction with community needs.

The Department is also working with CREATE and Batchelor College in identifying appropriate programs for recreation officers. This has the longer term goal of ensuring that accredited and trained indigenous people may access employment opportunities within the sport and recreation industry.

#### **4. The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged.**

##### **4.1 EDUCATION**

The NT Department of Education recognises the essential place of an indigenous perspective in the school curriculum through its *Australian Indigenous Studies Policy (1998)*. Indigenous viewpoints, interests, perspectives and expectations are reflected in all curriculum and teaching activities. Each school is required to develop and implement respective Indigenous Studies policies in support of the departmental policy. Schools may offer specific courses such as Indigenous Studies (Stage 1 and 2) or an indigenous language (Dripstone and Sanderson High Schools). A support document is available for teachers, for example, *Whole school approaches to implementing Australian Indigenous studies in Northern Territory urban schools (1998)* which provides practical information to schools on implementing the Indigenous Studies Curriculum Policy.

The evolving NT Curriculum Framework is in the process of ensuring that indigenous perspectives are embedded within all Learning Areas so that teaching within each area reflects the indigenous heritage and diverse nature of Northern Territory society. The essential learning component within the NT Curriculum Framework enables teachers to build flexible and inclusive programs based on their student population so they can include indigenous culture.

The role of AIEWs and AROs, and the AITAP also support and promote indigenous perspectives and culture in all schools. This is reflected in the active promotion and recognition by schools in the Northern Territory of events such as NAIDOC Week and Cultural Days.

##### **4.2 HOUSING**

Housing does not specifically address this issue. However, IHANT takes into consideration the desires of indigenous community people in the design and location of houses, particularly as it relates to cultural and family needs.

##### **4.3 SPORTS AND RECREATION**

Under the Active Australia framework, ISP officers work with communities in respect to the identification of role models and implementation of a mentoring framework which meets specific cultural and community needs.



## **5. Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas**

### **5.1 EDUCATION**

Opportunities for economic independence of indigenous students arise through their achievement of educational outcomes. Students can choose to undertake tertiary training or undertake pathways to work through vocational training in a number of urban and rural centres. The programs encourage completion of school studies and so maximise opportunities for employment and further studies. The active encouragement of indigenous staff within NTDE and the other educational providers offers opportunities for indigenous students to attain well paid work throughout the Northern Territory in a wide choice of locations.

Ongoing assistance through cadetships and other external funding initiatives, such as ABSTUDY, assists indigenous students to complete a higher level of education than might otherwise have been possible.

### **5.2 HOUSING**

There are several initiatives, which are currently being undertaken to improve the economic independence of indigenous people in urban areas in the Northern Territory. One objective of IHANT has been to aim to leverage the provision of housing programs into positive social and economic outcomes for indigenous people in the NT. These initiatives and NT Government initiatives are detailed below.

#### **5.2.1 EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES CREATED THROUGH IHANT**

The key initiative in this area has been the requirement that all IHANT construction projects must contain evidence of indigenous training and employment outcomes. IHANT is also collecting data on the participation of indigenous people in the IHANT Maintenance program. The IHANT Board is currently considering ways of supporting local and regional indigenous building teams to ensure their sustainability in a competitive environment.

#### **5.2.2 JOINT MEETINGS BETWEEN IHANT AND NAHS ON EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES**

The Program Managers for IHANT and for the National Aboriginal Health Strategy program have been meeting on a regular basis with key employment and training providers to explore the opportunities for developing employment opportunities for indigenous people.

Two pilot projects are currently being established to determine if forecast capital works from all Northern territory Government departments can be co-ordinated to

provide for meaningful ongoing employment and training outcomes for indigenous people.

### 5.2.3 FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE – NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

Foundations for the Future are a key Northern Territory Government initiative, established by the Chief Minister in June 1999. These broad policy documents provide an overall direction for the Northern Territory Government, with the aim of providing leadership to the public and private sectors and the community on the future shape and direction of the Territory.

There have been three working groups of direct relevance to the provision of improved economic outcomes with regard to housing programs:

- The Working Group for Foundation 4 is considering the possibility of an IHANT model for pooling available dollars for delivery of infrastructure.
- A second Working Group has established a whole of government approach to collection of data on current areas of responsibility in the provision of housing-related infrastructure for indigenous communities. This work has now been completed and will be used in connection with the strategy outlined in section 5.2.
- A third Working Group is aiming to collect data on current home living skills programs. This data will then be used by the Working Group to review current models in the provision of home living skills programs and consider links to other community-based programs.

## **6. Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.**

### **6.1 EDUCATION**

The housing needs of urban dwelling indigenous students are largely met by respective families through their own means. However, in recognition of the problems facing indigenous students from remote communities who study in the urban areas, a number of institutions offer boarding accommodation. There are nine formal educational boarding/hostel institutions within the Northern Territory provided by the three educational sectors. Additionally, the Northern Territory Christian Schools Association presently runs four hostel-type leased houses in Darwin, where students from remote communities can live in a supervised and appropriate environment for the duration of their studies. Each house is fully supervised by live-in house parents, and is serviced with transport and funding from a combination of personal contributions, ABSTUDY, NT and

Commonwealth funding. In addition there are a range of indigenous hostels which are available to the general public, where students can reside with their families. Housing for education staff is not normally provided in urban areas.

## **6.2 HOUSING**

### **6.2.1 CONTEXT OF SERVICE DELIVERY, AND CURRENT ESTIMATES OF UNMET HOUSING NEED IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

In order to set the context for discussions regarding housing issues, it is important to briefly review the history of housing program delivery in the Northern Territory and to provide contextual information by describing the overall level of unmet housing need in the Northern Territory.

### **6.2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HOUSING PROGRAM DELIVERY**

A brief history of the provision of housing for indigenous people in the Northern Territory since self-government is as follows:

Prior to and after self-government the Commonwealth continued to administer a separate Aboriginal housing program in the NT and in the States. The Program was administered by the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) and subsequently by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

In 1986 the Commonwealth/Northern Territory Joint Review of funding arrangements in Aboriginal Affairs agreed at officer level that the co-ordinated provision of housing between the Commonwealth and the Territory was as efficient as could be achieved. It was further agreed that added efficiencies were only available by the exit of one of the two levels of government from the field, and that the Northern Territory Government was the appropriate body to continue the Housing Program.

The 1987 ADC National Housing Needs Survey identified a backlog of 3,500 houses in the Northern Territory.

In a submission to a 1988 enquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs the Northern Territory Government noted that 'these recommendations have not yet been considered by the Commonwealth Government. Given this degree of co-operation and co-ordination, rectification of the substantial housing shortfall is only achievable by a major real terms increase in housing funds.'

Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) Aboriginal Housing Grants to the Northern Territory totaled \$11.79m in 1986/87; \$12.5m in 1987/88; \$13.26m in 1988/89; and \$17.51m in 1989/90. From 1990/91 to the present, CSHA grants to the Northern Territory have remained at the same level- \$19.458m per annum.

On 30 June 1995, a Bilateral Agreement was signed by the Commonwealth Government (represented by the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and the Northern Territory Government (represented by the Minister for Housing).

The Bilateral Agreement specified the roles and responsibilities of each level of government in the provision of housing for indigenous people in the Northern Territory. The Agreement also provided for the pooling of funds earmarked for Indigenous housing, creation of the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT) with a majority of membership from the ATSIC elected arm and Commonwealth and Northern Territory government representation.

### 6.2.3 INDICATORS OF HOUSING NEED - HISTORICAL AND CURRENT

In 1987 the ADC National Housing Needs Survey identified a shortage of 3,500 houses for indigenous people in the Northern Territory, **predominantly in rural and remote communities**. In 1992 the then NT Department of Lands and Housing produced the Northern Territory Aboriginal Housing Strategy. That document identified a current need for 3,100 houses and a need for an additional 2,000 houses by the year 2001 to clear the backlog and meet the housing demand from new family formations. One of the four key issues identified in the strategy was 'the financial resources available this decade for the construction of housing and infrastructure.' The cost of new housing and related infrastructure requirements was estimated at \$750M if the need was to be met within ten years.

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) produced a 1991 report titled 'The Housing Needs of Indigenous Australians', which indicated that the backlog of housing need for indigenous people in the Northern Territory equated to 11,350 bedrooms, which is equivalent to the Northern Territory's assessment at the time.

The 1996 Census generated further data on indigenous housing need in the Northern Territory and a resultant analysis (Indigenous Housing 1996 Census Analysis, ATSIC) identified the following statistics on housing need:

- A sharp increase in the number of homeless indigenous families from 2,050 in 1991 to 2,958 in 1996, an increase of 44.2%.
- The number of indigenous people living in improvised dwellings also rose sharply, from 792 in 1991 to 1,224 in 1996, an increase of 54.5%.
- The number of second and third elementary families in overcrowded dwellings rose from 1,258 to 1,734, an increase of 37.8%.
- Poverty rates increased from 26.2% to 28.4% in the NT between 1991 and 1996.
- The proportion of overcrowded elementary families fell slightly from 1,547 in 1991 to 1,353 in 1996, a decrease of 12.5%.

- The number of other adults requiring more appropriate forms of housing also fell slightly from 3,864 in 1991 to 3,717 in 1996, a decrease of 3.8%.

The 1998 report by Dr Roger Jones “Experimental Estimates of Indigenous Housing Need” estimated the total capital costs of indigenous housing need by State and Territory. Key findings included:

- A capital injection of \$147M required in the Northern Territory to address homelessness, which comprised 51.9% of the Australian total of \$283M estimated requirement to address homelessness.
- A capital injection of \$285M required in the Northern Territory to address overcrowding, which comprised 25.6% of the Australian total of \$1,113M estimated requirement to address overcrowding.
- A capital injection of \$81M required in the Northern Territory to address necessary improvements in stock condition, which comprises 33% of the Australian total of \$246M estimated requirement to address stock condition.

#### 6.2.4 SUMMARY OF ESTIMATE OF CURRENT UNMET INDIGENOUS HOUSING NEED IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

There have been various assessments of indigenous housing need conducted over the past eight years, with the NT’s proportion of the national need for Indigenous housing estimated at 34%. There has yet to be a complete analysis of the ATSIIC 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) data, which has already predicted a worsening picture for the Northern Territory. An exact calculation should be available shortly.

This inequity in funding, which has consistently been applied at the national level for the past ten years without any alteration, continues to place the indigenous population in the Northern Territory at a very significant disadvantage compared to indigenous people in some other jurisdictions.

#### 6.2.5 GENERAL PUBLIC HOUSING POLICY AND SERVICE PROVISION ISSUES

There is a growing number of indigenous people from remote communities who require housing in urban centres to access specialist health services, post primary and specialist education and employment. In the transition to suburban living, some indigenous people experience special housing problems and urban socialisation conflicts.

Issues particular to urban indigenous housing include:

- Strong cultural obligations to accommodate extended family members has often been a trigger for a range of tenancy issues (including neighbourhood disputes, domestic violence and social disharmony)
- Strategies for acquiring skills necessary for living in a suburban environment
- Indigenous people who have lived in urban areas for long periods may also require a range of appropriate and targeted support and assistance from time to time.
- Importance of linking housing with other services, such as health and community services to better meet the particular needs of indigenous people
- Barriers due to discrimination, particularly in accessing the private rental markets
- Home budgeting and financing skills
- Low levels of home ownership.

#### 6.2.6 INDIGENOUS HOUSING KEY ISSUES

The key points pertaining to the impact of Commonwealth funding on Indigenous housing programs in the Northern Territory are:

#### 6.2.7 INEQUITABLE FUNDING

The Northern Territory has not received an equitable share of Commonwealth funding through the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program for the past ten years, and has been significantly disadvantaged relative to some jurisdictions. If the Northern Territory were able to receive an equitable share of Commonwealth funds relative to need, this would create a major opportunity to address the housing backlog. The Northern Territory's high need for increased funding has been consistently documented for ten years and yet there has been no change in the Commonwealth funding methodology.

It is therefore recommended that the Commonwealth distribute funding for indigenous housing in an equitable manner relative to identified need. It is further recommended that the Commonwealth investigate the implementation of an equalisation process to address the historical inequities in the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program.

#### 6.2.8 CONTRADICTIONS TO THE NT BILATERAL AGREEMENT ON INDIGENOUS HOUSING

The operation of a Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth (as represented by the Department of Family and Community Services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and the Northern Territory (represented by Territory Housing) since 1995, has been successful in delivering a coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of indigenous housing programs through the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT). However, the implementation by the Commonwealth of housing related

funding programs such as NAHS and Fixing Houses for Better Health outside the framework of the Bilateral Agreement is counter-productive, and contradicts the whole purpose and spirit of the Bilateral Agreement.

It is therefore recommended that the Commonwealth direct all funding programs for indigenous housing programs in the Northern Territory through IHANT in order to maximise the partnership between different levels of government.

#### 6.2.9 BASE FUNDING OF INDIGENOUS HOUSING IN THE NT

Perhaps the key indigenous housing funding issue for the Northern Territory is that of the historical development of the Indigenous Housing program. At the time of self-government of the Northern Territory in 1978, the Commonwealth chose to retain funding responsibility for indigenous Housing. There was no provision for the cost of indigenous housing built into the base funding of the Northern Territory by the Grants Commission. This unique funding issue is a major problem for the NT, which is disadvantaged by comparison with other jurisdictions.

It is therefore recommended that the Commonwealth review the base funding position of the NT and provide appropriately for adequate funding for indigenous housing in the NT.

#### 6.2.10 MAXIMISING CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION

The NT Government has actively sought to ensure that co-operation and co-ordination occurs between various NT Government agencies in the planning and delivery of the IHANT housing program. Initiatives such as Housing 2003 and Foundation 4 are key steps in ensuring maximal inter-agency co-operation at the Territory level.

#### 6.2.11 FOCUS ON HOUSING NEED

The general housing policies of Territory Housing have sought to create a focus on addressing the housing needs of the most disadvantaged sections of the community. Recent housing initiatives (Housing 2003; Housing Advisory Services; specific purpose housing projects- all discussed in detail above) have served to create better access for indigenous people to mainstream housing services and to reduce barriers to access for Indigenous people.

#### 6.2.12 NORTHERN TERRITORY COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS HOUSING

Based on 1997/98 statistics, the NT Government provides a contribution of \$21.05 per person of Territory revenue to the Indigenous Housing Program. This is significantly larger than the next highest jurisdiction (Queensland) which contributes \$6.60 per person. On the basis of this information, the commitment of

the NT Government to the provision of indigenous housing should be recognised with additional Commonwealth funding support.



## SUMMARY

In the Northern Territory indigenous people make up almost 30 percent of the total population. Indigenous issues therefore have a much higher profile in the Territory than in other jurisdictions, and many mainstream programs and services in areas such as health, welfare, education and housing are specifically tailored to suit the needs of indigenous Territorians.

Australia -wide, about 73 percent of indigenous people live in urban areas. In the Northern Territory, by contrast, the majority of indigenous people live in rural and remote areas, with less than 40 per cent living in urban centres. The proportion of indigenous people living in urban centres as opposed to rural and remote locations appears to be slowly but steadily growing, at the rate of about one per cent a year.

**Whilst the Northern Territory recognises the special needs of urban dwelling indigenous people and provides specific programs to meet their needs, it also recognises that the needs of indigenous people living in rural and remote communities are generally of a much greater magnitude. This is clearly demonstrated by health, education and housing statistics. Australia-wide, the greatest need is in northern and central Australia. The Northern Territory strongly supports funding allocation being based on relative need, and would therefore strongly oppose any move to reallocate existing limited funds and other resources to the detriment of indigenous people in rural and remote communities.**

In considering the needs of urban dwelling indigenous people in the Northern Territory, it is important to recognise that they encompass a range of groups with widely differing backgrounds, needs and aspirations.

One of the major differences between the situation in the Territory's main urban centres and that prevailing in other jurisdictions is the presence of town camps, sometimes referred to as "Aboriginal urban living areas" within the boundaries of urban centres. Most of these town camps were established prior to Northern Territory self government. While many of the camps are well managed some, and particularly those without alcohol restrictions in place, are a cause of concern to authorities, providing an environment where family violence sometimes flourishes, and with often poor health, welfare and education outcomes for their residents.

There are at times significantly higher costs for municipal councils in providing services that relate to residents and visitors to town camps. The Alice Springs Town Council for example expends significant resources in maintenance and removal of rubbish from public places, particularly the Todd River, that is almost entirely a result of the actions of visitors to the town and town camp residents.

A similar situation applies to a lesser extent in Darwin, Katherine and Tennant Creek. The Department of Local Government is keen to see a more cooperative arrangement develop between town councils and town camp organisations than has existed in the past, with formal agreements in place detailing respective roles and responsibilities. This will not be easy to achieve.

The current Local Government Reform and Development Agenda should have a positive outcome for urban dwelling indigenous people. This initiative, which is now developing momentum, will significantly change the nature and form of local government in the Territory to promote its credibility, capacity and sustainability into the future. The Reform and Development Agenda seeks to re-structure local government to achieve an outcome where local governments are seen to be legitimate both by their constituents and other levels of government and provide effective service delivery frameworks.

Indigenous people have not generally shown a great deal of interest in standing for election in the larger councils. There is, at present, just one indigenous alderman in a municipal council while there are almost 700 in the smaller more remote community government and 'association' councils.

Increased indigenous involvement in the Northern Territory Public Service is actively encouraged, guided by departmental Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategies. Cross-cultural training is available to NTPS staff, who are actively encouraged to undertake this training. An Aboriginal Interpreter Service has been established within the NT Office of Aboriginal Development. At the time of writing 118 interpreters were registered, covering a total of 76 languages. Funds have been allocated to agencies with a legal and/or health related focus to access the Service. As such, interpreters are mainly used in legal and medical situations. This is the only such Government sponsored service for indigenous people in Australia.

The behaviour of many itinerant visitors to all urban centres is of concern to government, town councils, town camp organisations and other indigenous agencies. In response to the impact of itinerants on public housing tenants Territory Housing has initiated a joint approach with community organisations to address these long-standing issues in the Darwin and Palmerston region. A consultant is being engaged to undertake a comprehensive research study, jointly sponsored by Territory Housing and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, in conjunction with community-based indigenous organisations.

There have been various assessments of indigenous housing need conducted over the past eight years, with the NT's proportion of the national need for Indigenous housing estimated at 34%. There has yet to be a complete analysis of ATSI's 1999 CHINS data, which has already predicted a worsening picture for the Northern Territory. An exact calculation should be available shortly. Funding levels to the Northern Territory through the Commonwealth State

Housing Agreement (CSHA) have remained at the same level, \$19.458m per annum, since 1990/91, and have obviously declined significantly in real value over that period.

This inequity in funding, which has consistently been applied at the national level for the past ten years without any alteration, continues to place the indigenous population in the Northern Territory at a very significant disadvantage compared to indigenous people in other jurisdictions. It is therefore recommended that the Commonwealth distribute funding for indigenous housing in an equitable manner relative to identified need. It is further recommended that the Commonwealth investigate the implementation of an equalisation process to address the historical inequities in the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program component of the CSHA, and that the Commonwealth direct all funding programs for indigenous housing programs in the Northern Territory through the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT) in order to maximise housing outcomes for indigenous Territorians.