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# Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing



**Authored by**

**Selina Tually**, University of South Australia  
**Deirdre Tedmanson**, University of South Australia  
**Daphne Habibis**, University of Tasmania  
**Kelly McKinley**, University of South Australia  
**Skye Akbar**, University of South Australia  
**Alwin Chong**, University of South Australia  
**Kate Deuter**, University of South Australia  
**Ian Goodwin-Smith**, University of South Australia

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**Authors**

Selina Tually, University of South Australia  
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Ian Goodwin-Smith, University of South Australia

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## Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACCO</b>	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
<b>ACCHO</b>	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
<b>AHPRA</b>	Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
<b>AHURI</b>	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
<b>AIHW</b>	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
<b>AMSANT</b>	Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance (NT)
<b>AOD</b>	alcohol and other drugs
<b>APONT</b>	Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT
<b>APY Lands</b>	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands
<b>ATSIC</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
<b>AZP</b>	Adelaide Zero Project
<b>CEARS</b>	COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation for Rough Sleepers (SA)
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments
<b>COH</b>	Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
<b>CSI</b>	Centre for Social Impact
<b>DAIWS</b>	Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Service
<b>DCP</b>	Department for Child Protection
<b>DCHDE</b>	Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (QLD)
<b>DIMS</b>	Darwin Indigenous Men's Service
<b>DV</b>	domestic violence
<b>NACCHO</b>	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
<b>NDIS</b>	National Disability Insurance Scheme
<b>NHHA</b>	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
<b>NIAA</b>	National Indigenous Australians Agency
<b>SAHA</b>	SA Housing Authority
<b>SHS</b>	Specialist Homelessness Service
<b>VI-SPDAT</b>	Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool

## Terminology

**Use of Aboriginal persons or Indigenous persons** ‘Aboriginal persons’, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons’, and ‘Indigenous persons’ are respectfully used in this report, with Aboriginal persons used in the South Australian case studies and contexts related to South Australia in line with Community preferences, and Indigenous persons used in most other contexts.

**Cultural safety** ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety is defined as an environment that is safe for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience.’ (Department of Health and Human Services Victoria 2019: 7)

‘Cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities.’ (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency [AHPRA] c.2020: 9)

‘Cultural safety involves an understanding that there are power relations in and between all cultural groups and at all levels. From this basis, services are able to work on addressing cultural inequities in health in safe ways.’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 15)

Drawing on the health context, but with broader application, ‘Culturally safe practice is the ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.’ (AHPRA c.2020: 9)

‘Cultural safety builds on knowledges, tools and resources reflective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and ways of working. It includes cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural knowledge, cultural respect and builds the cultural capabilities of the health workforce.’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 15)

And, importantly, as noted by Ramsden (2002: 6) ‘Cultural Safety is a mechanism which allows the recipient of care to say whether or not the service is safe for them to approach and use. Safety is a subjective word deliberately chosen to give the power to the consumer’.

Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity and beyond cultural competence (see for example Dudgeon, Milroy et al. 2014; Kurtz, Janke et al. 2018: 272). Some commentators (e.g. Jennings, Bond et al. 2018; Jowsey 2019) warn of the potential that ‘some of these practices, particularly those informed by cultural awareness, can produce essentialised, homogenised, stereotypical representations of “Indigenous culture”’. (Downing et al. 2011, cited in Jennings, Bond et al. 2018).

Comments by Mr Darren Smith, Chair of the Community Housing Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework Steering Committee and CEO of Aboriginal Housing Victoria (CHIA VIC 2020: 9) about cultural safety and Indigenous self-determination are particularly pertinent here: ‘In the delivery of housing services that impact on Aboriginal people two fundamental questions are posed. How are Aboriginal choices honoured and respected? How are Aboriginal people’s rights to their cultural identity and practices respected and supported?’

**Cultural awareness** ‘Awareness of how one’s own cultural values, knowledge, skills and attitudes are formed and affect others, including a responsibility to address unconscious bias, racism and discrimination.’ (CHIA 2020: 14)

‘Understanding the role of cultural difference and diversity. For non-Indigenous staff this means the capacity for self-reflection as to how the Western dominant culture impacts on both themselves and on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and can impact the service setting they operate in.’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 15)

Cultural awareness is considered one of the three elements of **cultural competencies**—‘a skill set that can be gained by experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and by training modules’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 15). The other elements are:

- **Cultural respect:** Valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures. This includes a commitment to self-determination and building respectful partnerships.
- **Cultural responsiveness:** Having the ability and skills to assist people of a different culture other than your own.

**Self-determination** In the context of issues affecting Aboriginal people and groups, the term self-determination draws from the United National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 3: ‘Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.’

This means that Indigenous people, referred to as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia, have the unquestionable right to work towards their own futures. This meaning of self-determination includes the consideration of peoples as groups as considered in a collectivist culture, rather than the individualistic mindset of the mainstream Australian population. This means that Aboriginal peoples, groups and communities have the right to determine their own ways in all aspects of life and society, and this is best enacted with the support of networks of mainstream systems.

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# Executive summary

## Key points

- Australia-wide, one in 28 Indigenous people were homeless at the time of the 2016 Census.
- The Indigenous homelessness rate is 10 times that of non-Indigenous people (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2019; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2019a).
- The Indigenous population in Australia is expected to grow to around 1,060,000 by 2031. Housing policy frameworks and investment must account for this growth in population.
- A continuity of dispossession, racism, profound economic disadvantage and cultural oppression shapes the lived experience of many Indigenous Australians today.
- Indigenous homelessness is culturally distinct. The drivers of Indigenous homelessness and the entry and exit points to accessing services are different. The notion of 'home' and 'homelessness' are culturally mediated terms.
- There is a lack of dedicated services for Indigenous Australians experiencing homelessness in urban areas, despite their acute over-representation. This combines with other systemic barriers to explain their acute over-representation among specialist homelessness services.
- Indigenous-led services need to be supported and enabled to work more closely with housing and homelessness organisations.

- **There is a policy tension between prioritisation of adequate supply of housing and the services and supports needed to assist people retain housing.**
- **Family violence, community dislocation and economic pressures combine to escalate issues of sleeping rough, overcrowding and intermittent or cyclical homelessness.**
- **Wraparound trauma-informed holistic support is needed for up to a year for Indigenous women and children impacted by family violence.**
- **The over-representation of Indigenous people in Australian prisons increases the risk of homelessness post-release. Indigenous people transitioning out of prison need secure and culturally safe accommodation support, as well as wraparound services that provide pathways out of vulnerability and risk.**
- **A strengths-based approach focussing on the interplay between Indigenous-controlled support services and homelessness support can generate more holistic and culturally safe responses.**
- **Indigenous-led responses to urban Indigenous homelessness are culturally appropriate and thus likely to be more impactful and lasting.**

### **Key findings**

- Homelessness among Indigenous people arises from a clustering of vulnerabilities that easily spiral out of control. Minor problems, such as a broken fridge or a parking fine, can rapidly escalate to a major problem of rent arrears, court appearances and failed tenancies. This breakdown places a further barrier to housing access as a failed tenancy means individuals can be placed on the Tenant Information Centre Australia list, which landlords access to check on the status of housing applicants. Poverty is part of this vulnerability, as a proportion of the homeless Indigenous population have '*nothing but the clothes they are standing in...*' (RD1, Manager Community Service Organisation), are unable to pay bonds, or meet their basic needs.
- As crisis beds become more difficult to find, so frontline workers must spend excessive time placing their clients. Hostel managers and shelters describe turning people away, leaving clients with little option but to sleep on the streets. For legal services, finding appropriate accommodation for individuals exiting custody or jail is '*their number one problem, right across the state*' (RQ2, CEO Indigenous SHS).
- Inadequate funding for homelessness services, limited crisis and transitional accommodation, the shortage of affordable housing, barriers to housing access and inadequate attention to tenancy sustainment, create a revolving door of housing and homelessness for many Indigenous people. Although problems of discrimination, mental illness and poverty make it difficult for Indigenous people to access and sustain housing, it is the barriers resulting from problems and limitations of the housing and homelessness system that merit greatest attention.

- Other barriers to accessing priority housing (and waiting lists), include:
  - lack of identity documents
  - low incomes
  - problematic housing histories, including rent arrears and other housing debts, warnings for disruptive behaviour
  - criminal history
  - lack of a tenancy history
  - low tolerance for completing forms as well as low literacy—which makes it difficult to understand forms
  - lack of a stable address, making it difficult to keep appointments.
- One of the characteristics of Indigenous homelessness is the extent to which some people move between different forms of housing insecurity and homelessness, effectively cycling through the system rather than progressing through it towards long-term housing. Addressing their needs requires more housing and a more assertive approach to sustaining tenancies.
- While issues of overcrowding may have a cultural dimension, we note that while connection is cultural, abuse is not.
- Funds available to housing managers make no provision for the intensity of support required to manage unapproved occupants, who are often highly transient and with complex needs. The pressures of managing the service mean that managers have little choice but to implement a regulatory response rather than a social justice response.
- The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been counterproductive for many homeless people for multiple reasons, as plans cannot be accessed unless the individual has a fixed address. The NDIS is predicated on residence at a stable, fixed location and makes no provision for those in unstable housing circumstances. If you have no home, NDIS support plans are of little value.
- Cultural safety and cultural awareness training are imperative to good practice in the homelessness sector.
- A specifically Indigenous approach to service provision—including the affirmative approach to Indigenous employment—means the experience of clients accessing the service can be distinct from mainstream services, overcoming barriers of distrust and establishing reputational credibility.
- Instead of a one-size-fits-all model, services need to adapt to local requirements. Strategies and practices need to be adjusted to fit local client socio-demographics, such as ethnic or language group mix and local service profiles.
- Partnering with Indigenous community-controlled organisations is key to ensuring good practice for clients.
- The intersectional nature of Indigenous homelessness means people are doubly hard to reach, as both homelessness and Indigeneity can be characterised by a distrust of formal institutions. This lack of trust requires an awareness that, as well as ensuring cultural safety, it may be necessary to work with clients long-term.
- The very high rate of Indigenous incarceration is a critical area for policy attention. There is insufficient coordination between specialist homeless services and the criminal justice system. A formal protocol for advising crisis accommodation services is needed, as is support for sustaining tenancies.
- Developing and maintaining strong networks with local and peak Indigenous health, welfare, legal and financial services is critical to providing effective services.
- To provide an appropriate and culturally safe service to homeless Indigenous individuals and families requires services to establish strong relationships with Indigenous/mainstream services, and to find ways to work together rather than be siloed.
- One way to strengthen Indigenous homelessness services is for Indigenous community health services to play a greater role in the housing and homelessness sector. Indigenous-led services are critical to the success of initiatives to address Indigenous urban homelessness.

## Policy development options

A range of policy development options flow from this research, clustered around the three key themes of the study:

### Theme 1: Indigenous homelessness is different

1. Cultural responsibilities and expectations can result in fluctuating levels of crowding, and mobility between communities and localities. This can result in situations that fit ABS definitions of homelessness, but which may not be homelessness from an Indigenous perspective. Culturally appropriate responses must respect Indigenous perspectives and focus on safety and understanding ahead of non-Indigenous concepts of home and culturally embedded imperatives.
2. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) need to be central to efforts to meet the needs of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. This requires resources and needs to be supported.
3. Co-designed programs and responses to Indigenous homelessness are critical: 'nothing about us, without us' is an important principle in this context, as an expression of the need for self-determination.
4. Lived experience of Indigenous homelessness needs to be recognised and supported as a key form of expertise in the homelessness workforce. Employing Indigenous staff is a key priority.
5. There needs to be a targeted, resourced strategy that establishes goals, standards, and frameworks for supporting the cultural safety of homelessness services. This needs to be at both Commonwealth and state levels.

### Theme 2: Inflow into Indigenous homelessness requires situationally specific and culturally appropriate responses

1. As with the broader population, domestic and family violence is the largest driver of homelessness for Indigenous women and children. This highlights the importance of enhanced links between homelessness and domestic and family violence services.
2. To reduce inflows from public housing into homelessness, one approach would be to support Indigenous services for intensive tenancy management, so that the established tenancy is sustained, and unapproved tenants are supported towards establishing a pathway out of homelessness.
3. The revolving door of unstable housing and homelessness that characterises some Indigenous homelessness groups makes it essential that housing is accompanied by support—for up to at least six months. This means supporting tenants to maintain rental payments, to budget, to manage daily living needs including cooking, and to keep medical and other appointments.
4. Culturally appropriate assertive outreach based on a Housing First model is a critical component for reducing rates of Indigenous homelessness. Stable housing creates a virtuous circle, in which the impact of problems such as mental and physical illness and substance use are improved and this, in turn, improves the capacity of people to sustain their tenancy.
5. People's homelessness pathways intersect with several other systems—for example, correctional services, justice, health, and mental health services. The responsibility and potential of these systems and institutions to reduce inflows into homelessness is a key to engaging with the complexity of Indigenous homelessness. Linking Housing First strategies to Indigenous health and mental health services is crucial.
6. Identifying the supports tenants need to sustain their tenancy and linking these with supports across other key areas of people's lives (culture, reunification, trauma) is critical in disrupting initial pathways to homelessness and working to ensure stable, long-term housing outcomes.

### **Theme 3: Exits from Indigenous homelessness require situationally specific and culturally appropriate responses**

1. Different Indigenous people experience homelessness in different ways and require different responses. These responses need to include: Housing First pathways that provide culturally appropriate response; a Support First pathway, coordinating the non-housing needs of people in crowded or rough sleeping situations; and a Cultural Engagement pathway, recognising that many Indigenous people perceived to be homeless are not in need of support or housing, but could benefit from coordinated, culturally safe relevant engagement strategies for welcoming, supporting and setting expectations for visitors.
2. There is potential to strengthen connections between homelessness responses and NDIS and My Aged Care funding opportunities.
3. Supply constraints, especially of culturally appropriate social housing, need to be addressed. In addition, eligibility criteria and application processes need to be examined for cultural exclusion risks, and attention needs to be given to the suitability of social housing types and locations for Indigenous people.
4. Culturally appropriate and low-barrier transitional accommodation facilities have the potential to enhance the suite of responses to Indigenous homelessness.
5. An expanded or new Aboriginal Elders village offering specialist aged care for prematurely aged Aboriginal people has the potential to enhance the suite of responses to Indigenous homelessness.
6. An adequately resourced Return to Country program has the potential to enhance the suite of responses to Indigenous homelessness.
7. Trials of housing that can be flexibly configured to accommodate larger family or kinship groups have the potential to enhance the suite of responses to Indigenous homelessness.

### **The study**

This project examines the ‘challenge’ of urban Indigenous homelessness in detail, and focusses on the following core research questions:

- What are the causes, drivers, and cultural contextual meanings of homelessness for Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
- What do culturally safe responses to homelessness look like for Indigenous Australians?
- How are homelessness, family and child support, health and wellbeing, and housing programs targeted, coordinated, and operationalised to support Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
- How are Indigenous community-controlled organisations and governance bodies engaged with/in the provision of homelessness support?

This research builds on previous work about Indigenous homelessness, including that of Long, Memmott et al. (2007) and intergenerational work of Milligan, Phillips et al. (2011), with a specific focus on Indigenous families and children. The research followed a multi-methods approach that included:

- a desktop review of Australian policy, practice, and academic literature, along with literature from other ex-colonial countries such as New Zealand and Canada
- service and stakeholder mapping at case-study sites (and beyond)
- national and jurisdiction-focussed data analysis
- semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in case-study sites.

A case-study approach was decided as most appropriate for this project. It allowed us to capture similarities and differences in how Indigenous people experience homelessness across geographies, as well as place-based responses to the 'challenges' of urban Indigenous homelessness. Four case-study sites across three jurisdictions (Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia) were selected based on consideration of evidence about homelessness in urban settings nationally, input from key stakeholders and the networks and knowledge of project team members.

Data were collected for each case-study site via individual and group interviews with key stakeholders from agencies assisting Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. Agencies included those providing homelessness services, as well as agencies from intersecting sectors such as health, justice, and community services. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms.

Although not all participants had an Indigenous background, emphasis was given to the perspectives of Indigenous people working in the homeless or wider service systems in the case-study sites. These informants shared their perspectives on current service provision and the potential for future policy, system, and practice improvements.

---

# 1. Introduction

- **Indigenous Australians are disproportionately over-represented on all measures of socio-economic disadvantage nationally, including the high prevalence of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in urban settings.**
- **This project examines the ‘challenge’ of urban Indigenous homelessness in detail to deepen our understandings of the many ‘drivers’ of such homelessness: cultural dispossession, intergenerational poverty, mobility, sociality, cultural responsibilities, and extended kinship care.**
- **These drivers of homelessness are considered alongside current or shifting policy priorities and the needs of individuals and communities, including the landscape of available, overstretched, and non-existent services.**
- **The research has been undertaken with clear recognition that:**
  - a continuity of dispossession, racism, profound economic disadvantage, and cultural oppression shapes the lived experience of Indigenous Australians today.
  - non-Indigenous Australians’ notions about stark differences between regional and urban contexts may not be ideas shared by all Indigenous people.
  - there is a lack of dedicated services for Indigenous Australians experiencing homelessness in urban areas, despite their over-representation among SHS users nationally.

- the increasing prevalence of whole family groups and young children experiencing homelessness is a consequence of the intersection of complex socio-economic factors, poverty, trauma, and physical and mental health issues.
- family violence, community dislocation and economic pressures combine to escalate issues of sleeping rough, overcrowding, and intermittent or cyclical homelessness.
- a strengths-based approach focussing on the interplay between Indigenous-controlled support services and homelessness support can generate more holistic and culturally safe responses.
- **Culturally safe responses to homelessness from Indigenous perspectives are the preferred way forward for supporting people’s social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing, providing opportunities for holistic, coordinated and operationalised support for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in urban settings.**
- **Ultimately, this study confirms that urban Indigenous homelessness is about much more than housing.**

## 1.1 The ‘challenge’ of urban Indigenous homelessness

Indigenous Australians comprise 3 per cent of Australia’s population, yet they are 15 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be homeless or at risk of homelessness. Indigenous people also constitute some 27 per cent<sup>1</sup> of users of specialist homelessness services (SHSs), with a rate of support 9.4 times that of non-Indigenous service users (71,582 individuals; see AIHW 2020b). Of Indigenous people accessing SHSs, more than one in five are children aged 0–9 years, and almost two in five (36.9%; 26,432 children) are aged under 18 (AIHW 2020b). Intergenerational homelessness is 69 per cent higher for Indigenous Australians, yet there remains a lack of targeted Indigenous-specific state, territory, or national homelessness programs (AIHW 2020b; Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016).

Despite comprehensive research across past decades identifying the over-representation of Indigenous Australians among the homeless in urban settings, there has been a lack of coherent policy development about Indigenous homelessness at state, territory, and national levels (Flatau, Conroy et al. 2013; Long, Memmott et al. 2007; Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016). The need for good practice guidelines for culturally safe, appropriate, co-designed and embedded interventions to assist homeless Indigenous peoples has received little attention, and no consistent implementation across jurisdictions (Milligan, Phillips et al. 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> With this proportion potentially higher, given that relatively consistently 8–9 per cent of SHS users do not indicate their Indigenous status (AIHW 2020b).

While the term 'homelessness' has been defined to mean a state of 'non-permanent accommodation' including sleeping rough, 'in parks, caves, cars, and makeshift dwellings', 'staying in crisis or transitional accommodation ... temporary living with other households ... living in boarding houses ... couch surfing' or other 'short-term or medium to long-term' accommodation (Flatau, Conroy et al. 2013: 1), there is little in-depth work deconstructing notions of homelessness in more nuanced ways from Indigenous community contexts or cultural perspectives.

While the term 'Indigenous' is used throughout this report to be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the research team acknowledges that:

... there is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture or group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and tribes, as well as ways of living. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may currently live in urban, rural or remote settings, in traditional or other lifestyles, and frequently move between these ways of living. (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 3)

This study deepens understandings about Indigenous homelessness with respect to issues of mobility, sociality, extended kinship care, cultural responsibilities and intergenerational poverty. It also identifies how shifting policy priorities, demographic changes and changes in access to services (e.g. health) can lead to movements of people into urban centres, as extended families follow sick kin to regional centres or city hospitals. The research is solutions-focussed, amplifying Indigenous perspectives on current service provision and the potential for future policy, system, and practice improvements.

Building on the now decade-old audit and research review work of Long, Memmott et al. (2007) and intergenerational work of Milligan, Phillips et al. (2011), and with a specific focus on Indigenous families and children, the research project addresses four core research questions:

1. What are the causes, drivers and cultural contextual meanings of homelessness for Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
2. What do culturally safe responses to homelessness look like for Indigenous Australians?
3. How are homelessness, family and child support, health and wellbeing, and housing programs targeted, coordinated and operationalised to support Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
4. How are Indigenous community-controlled organisations and governance bodies engaged with/in the provision of homelessness support?

The research team has approached this study from a particular conceptual standpoint: with explicit acknowledgement that a continuity of dispossession, racism, profound economic disadvantage and cultural oppression shapes the lived experience of Indigenous Australians today (see Cripps and Habibis 2019; Flanagan, Blunden et al. 2019). We also acknowledge that non-Indigenous notions about stark differences between remote, regional and urban contexts may not be ideas shared by all, if any, Indigenous people.

In addition, the research has been framed within the context of end-homelessness, Housing First (Clarke, Parsell et al. 2020; Clarke, Watts et al. 2020; Parsell and Moutou 2014; Parsell, Moutou et al. 2015; Tsemberis 2010) and intersectoral approaches (Cripps and Habibis 2019). These approaches posit that more than housing is needed to assist vulnerable populations experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The intersectoral approach woven throughout the research builds on the well-developed whole-of-life, community-driven work within the Indigenous health and wellbeing spaces, which has clear utility for understanding the intersections of challenges with culture, Country and community. These approaches draw together frameworks for social and emotional wellbeing from the fields of mental health and family violence, as well as social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health.

## 1.2 Research approach

A multi-methods research design was adopted for this project. It incorporated the following:

- Desktop review of research, policy and practice to update understandings of urban Indigenous homelessness, including key work from AHURI and elsewhere.
- Service and stakeholder mapping at case-study sites to identify the following in each target area:
  - the key institutions and community organisations engaged in homelessness systems
  - the key Indigenous institutions and organisations engaged with homelessness systems
  - the key governance and community-controlled representative bodies
  - service provision in relation to Indigenous health, welfare, family violence and youth/child safety and wellbeing
  - key stakeholders in homelessness and Indigenous advancement
  - developments since the Milligan, Phillips et al. (2011) study of social housing for Indigenous Australians and models of culturally respectful and adaptive services.

Such information has been used to determine the services landscape and capacity opportunities and limits, as well as to connect with the relevant services in the case-study locations for field engagement.

- National and jurisdiction-focussed data analysis to quantify current Indigenous homelessness, and to inform the selection of case studies that are the foundation of the study (see 1.2.1).
- Interviews with stakeholders in case-study sites to provide a nuanced picture of urban Indigenous homelessness in selected urban settings (discussed in more detail later).
- Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with Indigenous people engaged in the homeless or wider service systems in the case-study sites to learn about their attitudes about homelessness, its meaning within their own terms, and their own experiences, needs and wants.

Ethics approval was sought and received from the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee before starting any field engagement (protocol number 202307). Ratification of the University of South Australia ethics approval was successfully progressed at the University of Tasmania, as the partner institution in the research.

### 1.2.1 Case studies

A case-study approach was decided as most appropriate for this project as it allowed us to capture similarities and differences in how Indigenous people experience homelessness across geographies, as well as place-based responses to the 'challenges' of urban Indigenous homelessness. Or, as case-study method proponent Richard Yin (2009: 18) notes:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

The case-study approach supports the narrative style of this research, which prioritises Indigenous life-worlds and knowledges, and connections through kinship, culture, Country and community.

Four urban case-study sites were chosen as the foundation of this research:

- Greater Brisbane (Queensland)
- Greater Darwin (Northern Territory)
- Adelaide (South Australia)
- Port Augusta (South Australia).

The case-study sites were chosen based on evidence about homelessness in urban settings nationally, input from key stakeholders, and the networks and knowledge of project team members. Unfortunately, some originally planned case-study sites became inaccessible, as the prolonged periods of COVID-19 restrictions limited both researcher access and the availability of stakeholder respondents.

Two of the case-study sites encapsulate the entirety of a state or territory capital city—the greater metropolitan areas of Brisbane and Darwin. These sites have high numbers of Indigenous people moving in and out of surrounding regions or remoter areas, often to access health services. Both sites had been places of related Indigenous-based research for members of the research team, which helped facilitate access just prior to COVID-19 shutdowns in Brisbane and, soon after, in Darwin.

In Adelaide, the case-study site focussed specifically on the inner-city area (the Adelaide local government area), where the Adelaide Zero Project (AZP) collaboration has been working with the shared goal of ending rough sleeping homelessness since 2018. (Rough sleeper homelessness is one prominent sign of homelessness in Adelaide's inner-city area.) Because of the over-representation of Aboriginal people sleeping rough or sleeping out in Adelaide's inner city and surrounding parklands, ending Aboriginal homelessness is a strong focus of the AZP work (AZP 2020; Brennan 2019; Casey and Brennan 2019; Pearson, Tually et al. 2021; Tually and Goodwin-Smith 2020). Notably, the focus on Adelaide's inner city within this study did not equate to an investigation of rough sleeping homelessness for Aboriginal people only, as stakeholders in the homelessness services system and intersecting sectors work much more broadly than towards such a single focus. It is noteworthy that our study coincided with a government-led homelessness-sector reform process in South Australia (SA Housing Authority [SAHA] 2020a, 2020c), which impacted agencies and service-delivery structures; sparked debate—both positive and negative; and commanded significant resources from agencies (especially staff time) to build collaboration and service delivery models: all against the backdrop of one of the hardest years in service delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fourth case-study site, Port Augusta, is a regional city in South Australia. Port Augusta has long been a significant destination and stopping point on travel pathways to Adelaide from the far west coast of SA (Ceduna and homelands), the Eyre Peninsula (Port Lincoln) and the remote Aboriginal communities in the far north-west of South Australia and beyond, especially from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands and cross-border communities in the NT and WA. Because of the strong links between Adelaide and Port Augusta, these case studies are presented together in this final report.

Fieldwork undertaken at each case-study site comprised individual and group interviews with key stakeholders from agencies assisting Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via an online platform (Zoom). Although the original intent was to conduct face-to-face interviews in each case-study location, it was necessary to adjust the interview research method to Zoom interviews, as the rollout of the fieldwork in South Australia and Darwin overlapped with the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia and was significantly delayed and impacted by community- and state-imposed restrictions on interpersonal contact. The Brisbane fieldwork was completed just prior to the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions.

The shift in fieldwork method from face-to-face to online interviews led to a revision of research protocols and documents, plus a variation to the University of South Australia ethics approval (per the University's stipulated processes). Notably, while the pandemic resulted in some significant delays to fieldwork, along with the necessity to forego interviewing people with lived experience of homelessness, the online interviews with stakeholders worked well, and the data collected is insightful and valuable.

Interviews conducted with stakeholders were semi-structured, allowing interviewees to direct conversations. The interviews captured rich qualitative information about:

- the general picture of Indigenous homelessness in the participant's city or region, including demographics, causes and drivers
- whether accepted definitions of homelessness are appropriate to Indigenous life-worlds

- the experiences of the individuals, groups and communities that services work with
- local service provision and continuity and change in mainstream and Indigenous-specific services
- challenges and opportunities in assisting, preventing and ending homelessness for Indigenous people in urban environments.

Stakeholders were recruited via direct contact after scoping the services landscape in each case-study site and within each jurisdiction more broadly—both region-wide and statewide. Services targeted included SHSs and services best described as Indigenous-specific, and mainstream services interfacing with homelessness. This broader-than-homelessness sector reach acknowledges key findings in other research:

- the diverse background, needs and connections among homeless people are met by a range of support services
- Indigenous people do not just seek services from Indigenous-specific agencies.

This latter point has been demonstrated recently in South Australia, where research mapping housing and homelessness service provision noted that most Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness do not access Indigenous-specific services (Stefanson and Goodwin-Smith 2019).

Stakeholders represented agencies interfacing with Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in each place, across the SHS sector; housing providers; domestic and family violence, drug and alcohol services; health, youth and community services. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) are among the agencies represented in the study.

In terms of job descriptions, respondents included team leaders, frontline workers (including outreach workers and counsellors), program managers, CEOs, directors and senior managers in both operations and strategy-focussed roles. Respondents included people of Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds.

Table 1 provides a summary profile of participants ( $n=51$ , across 36 places of employment) in the case-study element of the study. While we have classified agencies/organisations for clarity as best we can according to 'type', many agencies provide, coordinate or facilitate access to a broad range of services for their clients and therefore felt empowered to talk from multiple perspectives—including previous roles—about the challenge of urban Indigenous homelessness, as well as speaking in relation to service and system capacities and concerns. Many respondents also hold multiple roles in the community sector generally—such as board memberships of other organisations, advocacy, and other roles— and therefore represented more than the role for which they are primarily employed. Therefore the data in the table does not accurately capture or reflect the true scope of service types, although the narrative in the case studies captures this more effectively.

Table 1: Summary data, case-study participants

Location	Indigenous-specific or mainstream agency/organisation	Agency/organisation type	Number of services	Numbers of respondents
Brisbane	Indigenous-specific	SHS	1	3
		Young people	1	4
		Justice and law	1	1
		Community health	1	1
	Mainstream	SHS*	2	2
		Youth service	1	3
		Domestic violence	1	1
		Community housing provider	1	1
		Hostel accommodation	1	1
		Outreach service	1	2
Darwin	Indigenous-specific	Housing provider/services*	2	2
		Health*	1	1
	Mainstream	Community sector, including homelessness and housing*	3	3
		SHS	1	1
Adelaide	Indigenous-specific	SHS	1	2
		Youth and family*	1	2
	Mainstream	SHS	1	2
		Community sector, including homelessness and housing*	1	2
		Specialist health*	1	2
		Youth service	1	2
		Housing provider*	1	1
		Hostel accommodation*	1	1
		Local government*	1	1
		Other (advocacy, academic etc)*	4	4
Port Augusta	Indigenous	Temporary accommodation and community services*	1	1
	Mainstream	SHS*	1	1
		Youth service*	1	1
		Family and domestic violence*	1	1
		Community services*	1	2
<b>Totals</b>		<b>36</b>	<b>51</b>	

Notes: \* Respondent spoke from multiple perspectives/viewpoints.

Source: Authors.

### 1.2.2 Analysis

The rich data collected in each case-study location was analysed thematically, following the methodology devised by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) (see also Spencer, Ritchie et al. 2014). In broad alignment with their thematic analysis approach, four steps were followed:

1. Familiarisation with study data through close review of transcripts and fieldnotes, documenting key reflections.
2. Content analysis to pinpoint repeated themes.
3. Ordering of themes for logic and flow and weaving these together to create the thematic analysis framework structure underpinning the case studies.
4. Analysis and interpretation of themed data, including matching stakeholder or expert quotations against themes to demonstrate their prominence.

This process showed the intersections between themes, experiences, and locations, illuminating opportunities and challenges, as well as some place-based differences in urban landscapes. It showed how homelessness is experienced by Indigenous people, as well as how Indigenous people experiencing homelessness are supported.

Direct quotes from interviews are used throughout this study as a deliberate way to preserve the voices of the respondents who participated in the study, many of whom are proud Indigenous Australians. As is best practice in research, any potentially identifying information has been removed from quotes and considerable attention paid to the context around quotes to ensure anonymity of participants and clients. Where identifying information is presented, this has been done with the express permission of the relevant service or participant or, if requested, from publicly available information.

### 1.2.3 Challenges, limitations, and cultural acknowledgement

As noted in subsection 1.2.1, the research team experienced some challenges in relation to data collection because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such challenges were able to be negotiated with some stakeholders. However the impact of COVID-19 and associated national and state emergency measures—especially in relation to Indigenous and other vulnerable peoples—delayed and curtailed aspects of this research project.

However, we attempted to connect with many more stakeholders or organisations than is reflected by the actual number of interviews conducted. While this is common with all research, we did experience a higher than usual rate of agencies or stakeholders who indicated an initial interest in the study but did not participate, for a range of reasons. We especially experienced this issue in South Australia and Darwin, where we assume that the drop-off in interest may have been related to the timing of fieldwork and the immense workload placed on homelessness and Indigenous-controlled services during the pandemic. We also expect that the largely self-determined decision to close remote communities to protect vulnerable residents—along with some communities or facilities in rural and regional locations, such as near Port Augusta—added to pressures on communities and stretched the capacities of a range of services.

Closing communities had the desired effect of protecting vulnerable people—but also stranded some community members away from community and Country. This had a flow-on effect of putting pressure on other communities, services and agencies, as people needed support outside their home community and Country; see the South Australia case studies in Section 5 for further discussion. Additionally, we heard anecdotal evidence to suggest that stakeholders were experiencing research fatigue, particularly because of research in regional and remote SA investigating the efficacy and impacts of the Cashless Debit Card (Ceduna and surrounds) and Basics Card (Playford local government area in outer northern metropolitan Adelaide).

The biggest limitation to this study was the need to abandon the planned lived experience component. This component was scheduled to follow the initial investigations with stakeholders, which meant that timing-wise it coincided with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the jurisdictions studied. Protecting vulnerable Indigenous communities and individuals was a paramount consideration for researchers, universities, and their ethics processes throughout 2020 and into 2021, limiting what the research team were able to achieve for this aspect of the project.

Finally, and importantly, it must also be acknowledged that while the team that undertook this research is comprised of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, the research is positioned outside any one specific Indigenous community. Hence the report comprises the team's interpretation and analysis, acknowledging we have not captured all Indigenous perspectives (Patrick 2014: 7). Our research framework acknowledges that non-Indigenous notions about stark differences between remote, regional, and urban contexts may not be ideas shared by all Indigenous people.

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## 2. Indigenous homelessness: the policy, practice, and research evidence

- **This chapter provides the policy, practice, and research evidence contexts for the project.**
- **The discussion is structured around three key themes:**
  - understandings and definitions of Indigenous urban homelessness
  - cultural and non-cultural drivers of Indigenous urban homelessness
  - the relationship between wellbeing frameworks and Indigenous urban homelessness.
- **The evidence findings show the need for greater focus on the multiple cultural meanings of ‘homelessness’, home, Country and community.**
- **Findings also set the broader context against which culturally safe and appropriate management practices should be developed and delivered for Indigenous people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in urban spaces.**

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a thematic overview of the literature and policy, practice and evidence contexts that contribute to a picture of Indigenous homelessness in urban settings. It explores the whole-of-life impact of homelessness, its intersectoral nature, and its many facets, reflecting and building on the elements of social and emotional wellbeing frameworks and social and cultural determinants of health for Indigenous Australians.

Due to the interrelated and complex nature of urban Indigenous homelessness, there is frequent overlap or crossover, with multiple themes and subthemes evident. The chapter begins with discussion of the supporting policy landscape, then turns to the recent relevant academic and practice literature. The latter section is structured around three meta themes (and associated subthemes) identified in the evidence, concluding with a summary of contemporary learnings about Aboriginal homelessness in Canada (see Appendix 1 for summary of methods employed for the review):

1. Understandings and definitions of Indigenous urban homelessness.
2. Non-cultural and cultural drivers of Indigenous urban homelessness.
3. The relationship between wellbeing frameworks and Indigenous urban homelessness.
4. The chapter provides a backdrop to the case-study findings in identifying the holistic continuum of support required to ensure Indigenous people's safe home, space or place needs. It provides context for recommendations about how culturally appropriate management practices could be further developed and delivered in the social housing system.

The review applies a cultural lens to bring about a deeper awareness of the underlying cultural dimensions of Indigenous urban homelessness (Haswell, Fitzpatrick et al. 2011). This view acknowledges the need to account for historical, geographical, cultural, and social factors driving homelessness and its conceptualisation—thus influencing the lives and wellbeing of this group. It is founded on explicit acknowledgement that a continuity of dispossession, racism, profound economic disadvantage and cultural oppression continue to shape the lived experience of Indigenous Australians today.

While the review does apply a cultural lens, the research team acknowledge that it may not fully reflect the varied cultural and community differences among diverse Indigenous peoples across Australia. It does not fully reveal the diversity and varied lived experiences of the many language groups of Indigenous peoples, nor explicitly focus on particular Indigenous groups, for example Indigenous people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Finally, in setting the context for this chapter, it is important to note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban Indigenous homelessness. Box 1 provides some important insights about this, with the pandemic likely to have a lasting impact on understandings and practice.

## 2.2 The policy context

This chapter provides the policy context for this research on urban Indigenous homelessness in Australia. Understanding this context is important for two key reasons:

- First, and logically, policy frameworks articulate ideology and program, practice, and funding mechanisms for governments. Such policy structures often specify when and how progress is measured and reported.  
To a significant degree, policy frameworks also set the parameters of the operating environment for agencies beyond government—particularly where such agencies must adhere to often highly prescriptive rules around the use of funds for programs and practice in a particular priority area.
- Second, there have been changes, renewal or evolution in many of the key policy frameworks that are focussed on, impact upon or support Indigenous Australians of late. This is the case at national, state and territory level. These changes have been enacted for a range of reasons, including:
  - because frameworks have reached or neared their end dates
  - because frameworks were seen not to deliver on expected outcomes
  - because of changes in policy directions and priorities brought on by political or leadership change—for example, with the new, then re-elected Morrison government (installed August 2018, re-elected May 2019). The refreshing of the national Closing the Gap agenda over the past two years is also a case in point (see discussion later in this section).

As noted throughout the following discussion, many changes are still filtering through the political, cultural and policy landscapes. It will take time for the shape, form, appropriateness, and impacts of such policy changes to be known.

Box 1: Impacts of COVID-19 on urban Indigenous homelessness

Infectious disease epidemics and pandemics disproportionately affect people experiencing poverty, marginalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination (Perri, Dosani et al. 2020). Those with comorbid health conditions are at highest risk of developing severe cases of COVID-19, predisposing them to poorer health outcomes, including death from COVID-19 (Flatau, Seivwright et al. 2020). This disparity particularly applies to homeless individuals. In view of such vulnerabilities, homeless people should always be afforded priority for testing for COVID-19 and access to vaccines.

Contact tracing to contain the spread of COVID-19 may be exacerbated by the transient nature of homeless populations (Tsai and Wilson 2020). This has required shelters and other organisations supporting homeless individuals to facilitate physical distancing. One strategy adopted internationally has been to accommodate homeless individuals in hotels or motels, implemented by government and shelter personnel (Perri, Dosani et al. 2020). This strategy was also adopted across Australian jurisdictions, with approximately 1,000 and 2,200 homeless persons provided such accommodation in Queensland and New South Wales, respectively (Verghis 2020). State governments have come under criticism because of the added social and cultural complexities for Indigenous homeless people who are not used to staying in hotels (Snow 2020).

The number of homeless people requiring support is likely to increase significantly due to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 (Flatau, Seivwright et al. 2020), especially with rising levels of unemployment. While the pandemic has highlighted the importance of housing as a social determinant of health, it also raises the question of whether current approaches to addressing homelessness should be re-evaluated (Parsell, Clarke et al. 2020; Pawson, Martin et al. 2021; Perri, Dosani et al. 2020). According to the Centre for Social Impact's (CSI) recent report *Homelessness and COVID-19 response*, Flatau, Seivwright et al. (2020) present policy and practice responses they argue would significantly reduce the impact of COVID-19 with respect to health, homelessness, and economic impacts. Regarding homelessness more broadly, CSI proposes that action be taken to:

- provide immediate additional funding to homelessness services (women's, men's and youth services) to meet projected increases in demand; rapidly transition those without shelter or in supported accommodation into permanent housing—particularly vulnerable rough sleepers with high health needs
- convert vacant accommodation (rental housing, hotels, motels, unused student accommodation and office space) into temporary housing with support for new entrants to homelessness.

Given that Indigenous peoples account for 20 per cent of the homeless population nationally, CSI proposes specific action be taken by governments and services to:

- work directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to ensure that a proportion of the newly acquired temporary accommodation is culturally appropriate
- allocate a proportion of the newly acquired accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiencing homelessness (Flatau, Seivwright et al. 2020: 7).

In line with the above recommendations, Perri, Dosani et al. (2020: E718) argue that 'programs and policies for addressing COVID-19 should be developed with and by Indigenous organizations to ensure that stigmatisation, racism and ongoing colonisation experienced by Indigenous people is not compounded by public health approaches to the pandemic and that the unique needs of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness are met'.

The feasibility of overhauling the way that homeless people are treated and sheltered—as well as placing greater emphasis on longer-term recovery through permanent housing and supports—will be impacted by enduring changes in the housing market, public priorities and government budgets in response to COVID-19, thus requiring additional funding and human resources (Perri, Dosani et al. 2020).

This chapter examines the core policy structures relevant to an examination of urban Indigenous homelessness in Australia. The discussion does not profess to cover every element of policy relevant to Indigenous Australians, instead focussing on relevant structures: *Closing the Gap*, housing, and homelessness policy generally, and mentioning other structures of policy relevance. However, we acknowledge the importance of education and health, which are often viewed as areas for long-term investments in lessening homelessness.

### The National Indigenous Australians Agency

At the federal level, changes in the structuring of Australian Government portfolios have implications of importance for Indigenous Australians, policy, and this research. On 29 May 2019, the Governor General, Sir Peter Cosgrove of Australia signed an Executive Order for the establishment of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), fulfilling an election commitment of the re-elected Morrison Coalition Government. The NIAA sits within the area of responsibility of the Minister for Indigenous Australians, held by the Hon. Ken Wyatt, AM MP, Federal Member for Hasluck in WA. It was launched on 1 July 2019.

As an Executive Agency, the NIAA has nine functions, as specified in the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth):

- i. 'to lead and coordinate Commonwealth policy development, program design and implementation and service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- ii. to provide advice to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Indigenous Australians on whole-of-government priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- iii. to lead and coordinate the development and implementation of Australia's Closing the Gap targets in partnership with Indigenous Australians;
- iv. to lead Commonwealth activities to promote reconciliation;
- v. to build and maintain effective partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, state and territory governments and other relevant stakeholders to inform whole-of-government priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and enable policies, programs and services to be tailored to the unique needs of communities;
- vi. to design, consult on and coordinate the delivery of community development employment projects;
- vii. to analyse and monitor the effectiveness of programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including programs and services delivered by bodies other than the Agency;
- viii. to coordinate Indigenous portfolio agencies and advance a whole-of-government approach to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- ix. to undertake other tasks the Prime Minister and the Minister require from time to time.' (*Public Service Act, 1999* (Cth)).

The NIAA has responsibility, within its executive function, for a key policy plank nationally, *Closing the Gap*, as well as responsibility for Commonwealth Indigenous policy development and advancing whole-of-government priorities and approaches for improving the lives of Indigenous Australians.<sup>2</sup>

### Closing the Gap

At the foundation of policy for First Peoples in Australia remains the *Closing the Gap* agenda, framed through the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* and supported through several National Partnership Agreements.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.niaa.gov.au/who-we-are/the-agency>.

Fundamentally, the *Closing the Gap* agenda sets a priority for all levels of government to work with Indigenous people and communities to achieve the target of Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage by 2030, signalled through equality in life expectancy. The agenda was initially underpinned by six (later seven) absolute or relative outcome or process targets (Box 2), across these seven interrelated ‘building blocks’:

- Early childhood
- Schooling
- Health
- Economic participation
- Healthy homes
- Safe communities
- Governance and leadership.

Box 2: *Closing the Gap* targets

<b>Child mortality</b>	Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under 5 (aged 0–4) (by 2018)
<b>Early childhood education<sup>1</sup></b>	95 percent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education (by 2025)
<b>School attendance</b>	Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018)
<b>Literacy and numeracy</b>	Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018)
<b>Year 12 attainment</b>	Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020)
<b>Employment</b>	Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018)
<b>Life expectancy</b>	Close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation (by 2031)

Notes: 1) Target revised in 2015 after original target was not met.

Sources: COAG 2008; AIHW 2018.

The *Closing the Gap* agenda turned 10 in 2018. This decade milestone is important for this research, Indigenous people, and the nation for a number of reasons:

- It elevated the profile of *Closing the Gap* in political spheres, refocussing attention towards Indigenous disadvantage and the lack of progress towards closing the disadvantage gap.
- It signalled the approaching end date of several of the original targets within the agenda, thereby highlighting the need for its review, ultimately resulting in the Closing the Gap Refresh process (commencing in December 2016) (COAG 2018).

- It prompted a range of stakeholders and organisations to propose an agenda ‘reset’. Vocal among such stakeholders was (and remains) the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality,<sup>3</sup> the representative body responsible for producing an annual report on progress to close the gap. This group’s 10-year review of *Closing the Gap* was damning and did not mince words (2018). The group advocated strongly for a reset to the national agenda, citing the need for both development and adequate resourcing of supporting ‘architecture’ for the *Closing the Gap* agenda to be realised. Such architecture includes resourcing of ‘health enabling infrastructure, particularly housing’ (p. 6) and a recommendation for reset:

Recommendation 6: an overarching health infrastructure and housing plan to secure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples equality in these areas, to support the attainment of life expectancy and health equality by 2030, is developed, costed and implemented by the end of 2018. (p. 33)

The Steering Committee’s 2019 Close the Gap progress report—*Our Choices, Our Voices*—raises ‘Good housing for good health’ to the level of one of three key forward priorities to steer progress towards closing the disadvantage and inequality gap (The Lowitja Institute for the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality 2019).

- It saw a Special Gathering of senior leaders approach Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to put forward their priorities for the agenda and a clear case for a different way of working together for the ‘refreshed’ or next phase of the agenda (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2019; The Uluru Statement 2018).
- In December 2018, COAG agreed to a draft ‘refreshed’ *Closing the Gap agenda* (2019–2029) and a review of the supporting *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* (COAG 2018).
- This announcement was accompanied with a commitment to establish a Joint Council for Closing the Gap, recognising that ‘shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their representative organisations, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Closing the Gap framework is essential to closing the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ (Joint Council on Closing the Gap 2019). The Joint Council met for the first time in Brisbane in March 2019. Its membership includes 12 members of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (representing community-controlled organisations), all state and territory Ministers, and a representative of the Australian Local Government Association:

A Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019–2029 came into effect in March 2019 to support the refresh of the agenda, especially the new way of working together to accelerate progress, as well as stipulating the roles and work of the Joint Committee, review of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement and commitment to three-yearly Indigenous-led evaluation of Closing the Gap. (National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019)

The *Closing the Gap* refresh is significant for housing and homelessness policy and research in Australia. Housing is a specified 10-year priority area in the refreshed agenda, along with:

- Families, children and youth
- Justice, including youth justice
- Health
- Economic development
- Culture and language
- Education
- Healing
- Eliminating racism and systemic discrimination (COAG 2018).

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<sup>3</sup> A representative body of around 50 national and regional bodies (predominately health-focussed), with the Australian Human Rights Commission acting as secretariat (Australian Human Rights Commission 2019).

Although the original agenda included ‘Healthy homes’ as a building block, there was no national target attached. The focus of attention on healthy homes within the original agenda centred on the importance of a healthy home as a precondition of a healthy population—that is, social determinants of health framework. Recognising the inadequate infrastructure and living conditions in many communities—especially in remote Australia—the housing-related building block emphasised ‘the current unsatisfactory living conditions’ in communities. It also drew together the strong links between the adequacy of what the late Paul Pholeros described as health hardware (adequate sewerage, water, waste and electricity infrastructure), housing stock, design and maintenance, overcrowding and impacts on hygiene and schooling outcomes for children (COAG 2008: 7; Herath and Bentley, 2018). These focusses within the original *Closing the Gap* agenda reflect the learnings and decades of environmental health- and design-led work by Pholeros, Lea et al. (2013) advancing the Health Habitat model, and the voluntarily applied guidelines in the *National Indigenous Housing Guide* (2007) and Health Habitat’s own 2013 update of that guide: *Homes for Health—the Guide* (see Grant, Zillante et al. 2017, 2016 for further discussion).

The housing element in the refreshed, strengths-based cross-system *Closing the Gap* agenda (currently in draft form), sets a broader focus, as detailed in Box 3.

Box 3: *Closing the Gap* refresh housing target

Housing	
Outcome statement	Desired outcome
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives
Draft target	
State-led	
Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 82 per cent by 2028	

Source: COAG 2018: 7.

The inclusion of this outcome statement offers hope of increased focus at systems level, community level and individual level. It focusses on the issue of Indigenous housing broadly, as well as on homelessness. The overcrowding-focussed target has specific relevance for Indigenous homelessness, including urban settings, where overcrowding remains a key driver of homelessness, as well as a contributor towards it.

Note: Following the re-election of the Morrison Coalition Government in May 2019, *Closing the Gap* transferred from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to the NIAA, under the portfolio of the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Hon Ken Wyatt.

## Housing and homelessness policy

### The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) ([https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2021-07/NHHA\\_Final.pdf](https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2021-07/NHHA_Final.pdf)) is the primary vehicle outlining responsibilities for the delivery and funding of housing assistance (per capita) and specialist homelessness services (matched with states and territories). It is an intergovernmental agreement, enacted through bilateral schedules with each state and territory. The five-year NHHA came into effect on 1 July 2018, bringing together the former National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and its supporting funding mechanism, the National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment, and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (Council of Federal Financial Relations [COFFR] 2018). The objective of the Agreement develops from the former NAHA by incorporating a homelessness focus, which is:

to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing across the housing spectrum, including to prevent and address homelessness, and to support social and economic participation (p.2, NHHA, 2018)

The NHHA provides funding for a range of housing assistance measures: the delivery and maintenance of social (public and community) housing; (some) Indigenous-specific housing; affordable housing; and private rent assistance in the form of bonds, rent in advance and rent in arrears payments to private tenants struggling with access and sustainment in that sector of the housing market. The NHHA also incorporates support for first homebuyers. The Agreement also provides funds for the network of SHSs operating nationally, including generalist (mainstream) services and those that aid specific groups, such as youth, and women and children impacted by domestic, family and community violence.

The NHHA (2018: 3-4) outlines a range of what are termed 'aspirational, national outcomes' for housing and homelessness, including one that is Indigenous-specific:

- a. a well-functioning social housing system that operates efficiently, sustainably and is effective in assisting low-income households and priority homelessness cohorts to manage their needs;
- b. affordable housing options for people on low-to-moderate incomes;
- c. an effective homelessness service system, which responds to and supports people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to achieve and maintain housing, and addresses the incidence and prevalence of homelessness;
- d. improved housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians;
- e. a well-functioning housing market that responds to local conditions; and
- f. improved transparency and accountability in respect of housing and homelessness strategies, spending and outcomes.

The Agreement also specifies national housing policy priority areas, homelessness reform priorities and priority cohorts, as outlined in Table 2. Indigenous Australians are one homelessness priority cohort. How each state and territory is addressing and contributing to priorities is the domain of each jurisdiction.

## 2. Indigenous homelessness: the policy, practice, and research evidence

Table 2: NHHHA housing and homelessness priority areas

Housing	Homelessness	
Policy priority areas	Priority policy reform areas	National priority cohorts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. social housing that is:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. utilised efficiently and effectively (may include redevelopment and stock transfers)</li> <li>ii. responsive to the needs of tenants (may include redevelopment and stock transfers)</li> <li>iii. appropriately renewed and maintained (may include redevelopment and new construction)</li> <li>iv. responsive to demand (may include new construction and redevelopment).</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. community housing support that improves the viability and encourages growth of the sector (may include redevelopment and stock transfers)</li> <li>c. affordable housing (may include stock transfers and incentives to increase supply)</li> <li>d. tenancy reform that encourages security of tenure in the private rental market</li> <li>e. home ownership including support for first home buyers</li> <li>f. planning and zoning reform and initiatives, including consideration of inclusionary zoning and land release strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Achieving better outcomes for people, setting out how the desired outcomes for individuals will be measured (may include a focus on priority groups, economic and social participation)</li> <li>b. Early intervention and prevention, including through mainstream services, setting out actions being taken through homelessness services and mainstream services (may include a focus on particular client groups or services)</li> <li>c. Commitment to service program and design, that is evidence- and research-based, that shows what evidence and research was used to design responses to homelessness and how responses/strategies will be evaluated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. women and children affected by family and domestic violence</li> <li>b. children and young people</li> <li>c. Indigenous Australians</li> <li>d. people experiencing repeat homelessness</li> <li>e. people exiting institutions and care into homelessness</li> <li>f. older people.</li> </ul>

Source: NHHHA 2018, Schedules A and B.

The national performance indicators underpinning the Agreement are also relevant, with the relevant indicators shown in bold in Box 4. Many of the indicators relate to homelessness: reducing rates of homelessness overall, prevention work and improving system and outcomes efficiencies. Given Indigenous Australians are over-represented among homeless people across all types of homelessness and are a priority cohort across the Agreement and especially for homelessness, these performance indicators can be taken to be directly related to Indigenous people. This reality is also confirmed in Clause 32 of the Agreement, which is related to performance and monitoring, and states:

The reporting on performance under this Agreement will include disaggregation of each national performance indicator (where appropriate) to identify Indigenous Australians and other priority homelessness cohorts.

This clause, along with the data improvement work specified in the NHHHA (to improve coverage, explore potential for data linkage), should allow more granular information for understanding and guiding forward action around housing outcomes and homelessness reform to improve the situation facing Indigenous Australians.

The social-housing-related indicators are also of relevance. We know from other research about the high proportion of Indigenous Australians in social housing, and who can fall out of tenure through eviction. This means that targets related to better matching of stock to need, accounting for customer satisfaction and allocating social housing to priority homeless cohorts should work to improve outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Similarly, the data improvement as part of the Agreement should serve to prove this—or to highlight where it's not working.

### State and territory policies

As noted earlier, the NHHA sets much of the scene for states and territories in terms of homelessness policy and priorities, tied to funding. The states and territories also determine policy priorities and program focusses as part of their role within the NHHA, with these articulated through bilateral schedules.

All jurisdictions have Indigenous or Aboriginal housing strategies, and an identified focus on Indigenous homelessness in their relevant state housing and homelessness strategies or plans per the NHHA. How policy translates on the ground in terms of programs and service delivery varies, with a lack of Indigenous-specific programs and services across urban geographies in particular, as noted in the detailed case studies that comprise much of the remainder of this report (see Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

### Other important frameworks and policy intersections

A range of other important policy and practice frameworks exist nationally and jurisdictionally to support better life outcomes for Indigenous peoples, especially in the context of vulnerability (such as homelessness). As with state and territory policies, there is not room to go into all the details of these. However, the key policies and frameworks are discussed throughout the research and practice evidence that forms the rest of this chapter; they also feature in the detailed case-study discussions where policies meet service delivery and shape client outcomes.

#### Box 4: NHHA National Performance Indicators

31. Progress towards achieving the objective and outcomes that this Agreement contributes to will be informed with reference to the following national performance indicators:
- a. the total number of dwellings relative to the population;
  - b. the stock of affordable rental housing relative to the population;
  - c. the stock of social housing dwellings relative to the target population for social housing;
  - d. an increase in the proportion of social housing occupants that are housed in homes that match their needs;
  - e. an increase in the number of social housing occupants with greatest need as a proportion of all new allocations;
  - f. an increase in the proportion of social housing occupants whose needs are met and are satisfied with services provided by their housing organisation;
  - g. a decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness;
  - h. a decrease in the number of people that experience repeat homelessness;
  - i. an increase in the proportion of people who are at risk of homelessness that receive assistance to avoid homelessness;
  - j. an increase in the proportion of people who are homeless that are assisted to achieve housing;
  - k. an increase in the number of dwellings that are permitted by zoning in cities or urban areas;
  - l. the measurement of this indicator will be considered as part of the operation of the Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group (established by Schedule C), with measurement to commence from 1 July 2021 subject to the development of a reliable measure;
  - m. a reduction in the average time taken to decide the outcome of a development application or residential building permit (as applicable) in cities or urban areas;
  - n. a decrease in the proportion of rental households with household income in the bottom two quintiles that spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent; and
  - o. an increase in the proportion of Indigenous Australians purchasing or owning their own home.

Source: NHHA 2018, pp. 8–9.

Notable among such policy intersections and frameworks are:

- **For Indigenous health, mental health, and wellbeing:**
  - The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2012–2023* (Commonwealth of Australia 2013), and complementary *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023*. (Commonwealth of Australia 2017)

These health policies and frameworks emphasise the holistic, whole-of-life understanding of health and the multi-directional relationship between health and other life domains, culture, social and emotional wellbeing. Thus they are instructive for conceptualising and understanding home and homelessness and its underlying drivers.

- **For Indigenous family and community violence:**
  - The key vehicle is the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (Commonwealth of Australia 2019), currently being activated through the *Fourth Action Plan 2019–2022* (the final action plan under the current framework). The plan includes several priorities of relevance to this work:
    - National Priority One: Primary prevention is key.
    - National Priority Two: Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.
    - National Priority Three: Respect, listen and respond to the diverse lived experience and knowledge of women and their children affected by violence.
    - National Priority Four: Respond to sexual violence and sexual harassment.
    - National Priority Five: Improve support and service system responses (Commonwealth of Australia 2019: 5–6).

The Fourth Action Plan builds on significant work in prior plans around voicing Indigenous experiences, the uniqueness of Indigenous experiences and prioritising cultural safety. The plans form the basis of the work of a range of organisations, many of whom are also strong advocates for deepening cultural understandings and voice for Indigenous women and children, such as the work of *Our Watch* (Our Watch 2018) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

## 2.3 Understandings and definitions of Indigenous homelessness

Definitions of homelessness vary, and there are differences not only within the national context but also in the cultural context. Definitions are also contested, and although the Australian definition is considered to be broader than that of most other OECD countries (AIHW 2019a); this is also the case within Australia, with debate ongoing (Chamberlain 2019; Kuzmanovski 2016). The current, official definition of homelessness used by the ABS for statistical purposes states that:

When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement: is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations. (ABS 2012)

However, the 'culturally embedded' (Zufferey and Parkes 2019: 3) nature of ABS methodology has limitations when applied to deriving homelessness estimates for Indigenous Australians. The statistical definition does not address specific cultural definition issues related to concepts and Indigenous understandings of home and homelessness, which may differ in a range of ways from those of non-Indigenous Australians (Memmot 2015). For instance, different meanings and interpretations of 'home', 'house' and 'usual address' grounded in culture may result in the under-enumeration and both underestimation and overestimation of the Indigenous homeless population—and this is in addition to the data on Indigenous status collected through self-identification (AIHW 2019a: 85). Three significant ways in which the perspectives of Indigenous Australians differ from those reflected in the ABS definition of 'homelessness' have been identified:

- **Connection to Country:** Indigenous Australians are less likely to perceive themselves as homeless if they are living on Country, irrespective of dwelling adequacy.

- **Family and kinship responsibilities:** Family and kinship responsibilities play a large part in Indigenous culture. Disconnection from family can be seen as a form of homelessness for Indigenous Australians. In some cases, a person who has no suitable accommodation alternatives may not consider themselves to be homeless if they are staying temporarily with family due to cultural norms and responsibilities. This also ties in with crowding, as the expectations to provide shelter for family can place pressure on the overall household.
- **Mobility:** Indigenous Australians are often highly mobile and connected to multiple communities, which leads to them having multiple usual residences where they feel at home (Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019: 27).

Researchers have pointed out that, in the main, ‘Western and urban policy assumptions about homelessness dominate’, and overall, these definitions and assumptions centre on the absence of or inadequacies of housing (Zufferey and Chung 2015: 14). While policy definitions that focus on housing as the primary issue may also be deficient when applied to homeless individuals and populations more generally, this is especially the case regarding Indigenous homelessness.

A perspective from Canada on Indigenous homelessness that resonates with the Australian context is how historically this has been:

incorrectly understood by settlers as being without a structure of habitation or being roofless (Somerville 1992), when Indigenous homelessness is also about being without All My Relations. Being without a physical structure is only a symptom of the root causes of Indigenous homelessness, which are being without healthy social, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and physical relationships. (Christensen 2013, cited in Thistle 2017: 16)

In essence, the Indigenous concept of home is a ‘holistic metaphysical understanding of emplacement, rather than a built environment’ (Thistle 2017: 15). Furthermore, the picture of homelessness among Indigenous people is more nuanced at the jurisdictional, regional and sub-regional levels. Understanding these nuances is important in the context of this research, which is focussed on urban Indigenous homelessness.

‘Urban’ in the context of this research is defined broadly, meaning places of population density and built environment infrastructure. ‘Urban’ therefore includes all of Australia’s capital cities. In terms of ABS regional data, ‘urban’ for this project is taken to accord with a minimum of Statistical Areas Level 3 (SA3s) in the Main Structure of the current ABS *Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS)* (ABS 2018a). The 358 SA3s in the 2016 ASGS have populations of between 30,000 and 130,000 persons (ABS 2017c).

A number of studies conducted within the past 20-plus years<sup>4</sup> have sought to understand and define the character of homelessness as experienced by Indigenous people in Australia. It is now generally accepted—if not always adequately acknowledged in policy—that the experience of Indigenous homelessness is different from homelessness among other populations within the community.

Although solutions require an understanding of how culture shapes homelessness, a cultural basis for ‘homelessness’ does not exist in Indigenous society. Furthermore, the lived experience of homeless Indigenous persons is diverse, and understandings of homelessness based on subjective experience may differ from how homelessness is understood by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are not themselves homeless, including practitioners (Birdsall-Jones, Corunna et al. 2010). Thus ‘[e]ffective solutions to prevent and respond to homelessness ... require evidence on both its individual and structural determinants’ (Parkinson, Batterham et al. 2019: 67).

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<sup>4</sup> This Report draws primarily on literature and studies from the past decade however the authors acknowledge extensive work undertaken across the past 20 years and particularly note the contributions of AHURI studies including those by Memmott, Long et al. (2003); Milligan, Phillips et al (2011); Habibis, Memmott et al, (2013); Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016; Moran, Memmott et al. (2016) and Cripps, K. and Habibis, D. (2019) amongst many others.

### 2.3.1 'Home, space or place': Indigenous concepts of home and homelessness in Australia

Applying standard or 'mainstream' definitions of 'home' and 'homelessness' to Indigenous populations is problematic for reasons beyond statistical implications. The key to defining Indigenous homelessness is first, to acknowledge Indigenous understandings of 'home' and being 'at home'. While research conducted with non-Indigenous homeless people indicates that the notion of home 'stands for something beyond housing' and has meaning on 'social, emotional, spiritual and material levels' (Parsell 2012: 159), Mallett's (2004: 84) review of the construct of home suggests that Aboriginal concepts of home may be different from those of Anglo-Australians:

Clearly the term home functions as a repository for complex, interrelated, and at times contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people's relationship to it and one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things. It can be a dwelling place or a lived space of interaction between people, places, things; or perhaps both. Briefly, how home is and has been defined at any given time depends upon 'specification of locus and extent' and the broader historical and social context.

Aspects of the categories of Indigenous homelessness are tied to factors such as housing markets and availability of affordable housing. However, as Canadian author Thistle (2017: 6) explains:

Indigenous homelessness is not simply a response to such circumstances; it is best understood as the outcome of historically constructed and ongoing settler colonization and racism that have displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories.

Work over the past two decades has further expanded and refined a conceptualisation of homelessness based on Indigenous cultural, spiritual and experiential dimensions. This has happened in the Australian context (Memmott 2003; 2015), as well as in countries such as Canada (Christensen 2013; Peters and Christensen 2016; Thistle 2017) and New Zealand (Groot and Mace 2016; Isogai 2016; Kake 2016; Lawson-Te Aho, Fariu-Ariki et al. 2019).

While this project focuses on urban settings, of interest is an Australian research finding by Zufferey and Chung (2015: 21) that the term 'homelessness' was not frequently used by service providers when working with Australian Indigenous peoples in remote communities:

Aboriginal people in particular did not identify as 'homeless' if they were 'houseless' or 'rough sleeping' and were not referred to as 'being homeless' by service providers because 'everyone comes from somewhere'. The notion of 'home' in Indigenous cultural contexts relates to people's identities and sense of belonging to culture, land, family and community. Aboriginal people who were 'taken away', such as in the Stolen Generation/s, are reconnecting with their 'homes', and finding ways for 'everyone to come home' (Lester 2000, p. 23), to their community (or land) of origin.

Zufferey and Chung (2015: 21) further note that these findings:

resonate with the theorising of Australian researchers Moreton-Robinson (2003) and Ramzan, Bryant et al. (2009, p. 439) who have highlighted that meanings and experiences of home (and homelessness) in the Australian context are 'intensely political' and 'enmeshed' with the white 'invasion and occupation of Indigenous land'.

Prout, Quicke and Green (2017: 167) investigated the experiences of Indigenous people in a regional WA urban centre, in particular how housing has been 'a representative domain of struggle' in view of the way that 'colonial discourses of absence, threat, and authenticity have informed policy frameworks that have militated against various Indigenous claims of belonging, rights, and aspiration in relation to urban places'. Findings on Indigenous homelessness from urban and regional areas across Australia provide insight into the local factors and diverse Australian and Indigenous social and geographic contexts that shape experience. It is clear from this existing research that normative understandings of homelessness as 'houselessness' are not always applicable.

### 2.3.2 Spiritual homelessness

The concept of 'spiritual homelessness' can refer to a person's separation from family, kinship networks and traditional lands or homelands, as well as disconnection from heritage (Memmott, Long et al. 2003; Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016). This is better understood as a dimension of homelessness rather than a definition and, with contextual adjustments, it has been used to 'shed light on the lived realities' of Indigenous peoples in colonial societies such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada (Kake 2016; Patrick 2014: 13). Spiritual homelessness is further defined as 'a crisis of personal identity wherein a person's understanding or knowledge of how they relate to Country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused or lacking', and this can lead to significant mental health impacts (Memmott and Chambers 2010: 10; Brackertz, Wilkinson et al 2018).

A broader reading of spiritual homelessness by Thistle (2017: 34) is expressed as 'interrelated with and form[ing] an umbrella over many of the other typologies of Indigenous homelessness'. Work by Memmott (2015: 59) further divides the concept of spiritual homelessness in the context of mobile Indigenous public-place dwellers who are absent from their homeland and living itinerant lifestyles in towns and cities into two categories:

1. Those who have lost their traditions (spiritually homeless) and are chronically homeless.
2. Those who are maintaining their traditions in a new itinerant lifestyle through the re-creation of traditional place properties wherever they camp or reside.

### 2.3.3 Public-place dwelling: rough sleeping and camping in the context of Indigenous homelessness

The ways in which Indigenous peoples use of public space is conceptualised and problematised is contested. From a research perspective, descriptions in the literature variously re-characterise homelessness as 'living in public places', 'public-place dwelling', and being 'unsheltered' (Memmott, Long, et al. 2003; Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019). This reflects, at least in some cases, a place-based or place-use element to homelessness in Fremantle (Martin, Fernandes et al. 2019), Darwin (Phillips and Parsell 2012; Parsell and Phillips 2014), Sydney (Phillips and Parsell 2012) and Adelaide (Browne-Yung, Ziersch et al. 2016)—as well as regional areas in general (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2012).

Overall, findings are that 'public-place dwelling' and public intoxication by Indigenous people—especially in regional centres in proximity to Indigenous communities—is unique in nature and involves 'diverse socio-economic, lifestyle, cultural and spiritual factors' that should be recognised. This range of behaviours is not necessarily 'rough sleeping' as understood in homelessness discourse more generally—and this requires acknowledgement and consideration. Grant, Zillante et al. (2017: 45) note that the term 'sleeping rough' is a colloquialism referring to 'the practice of sleeping in unoccupied spaces near townships (often for the purpose of drinking)'. Research has investigated aspects of 'rough sleeping' by Indigenous people in urban settings such as Perth, and in homelessness policy and program design (Phillips and Parsell 2012: 70).<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, the term 'sleeping rough' differs from the concepts of 'camping out' or 'camping over' (Grant, Zillante et al. 2017: 45). Camping is sometimes preferred to shelter options that are not appropriate or comfortable for Indigenous people, and it has a 'long tradition in the Indigenous context and has historically been connected to socio-spatial rules and Aboriginal land rights' and does not equate to being homeless (Memmott 2007; Parsell 2012; Parsell and Phillips 2014; Zufferey and Chung 2015: 17). In addition, research on housing design for Australian Indigenous peoples reflects the preferences of many Indigenous people to 'sleep near the ground to be "close to Country" and maintain feelings of wellbeing' (Grant, Zillante et al. 2017: 67). The reality of the 'historical and cultural connections to "camps" and Land as "home"' held by many Indigenous Australians is 'not consistent with policy definitions of homelessness that focus on houses or dwellings as a solution to homelessness' (Zufferey and Chung 2015: 17).

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<sup>5</sup> In the remote/regional context, Zufferey and Chung (2015) found that Indigenous people in remote communities tended not to identify as 'homeless' if they were 'houseless' or were rough sleeping.

In terms of policy, legislation and practice, cultural practices and perceptions of Indigenous people occupying public spaces shape responses that may be counterproductive and harmful, and these responses also differ across geographical, social, political and cultural contexts.

For instance, in the case of Darwin, where the majority of people sleeping rough are Indigenous Australians, Parsell and Phillips (2014: 198) reached the conclusion that:

assumptions about cultural mobility, mainstream societal practices and Indigenous people's expectations inform structural and institutionally organised forces that create, accept and stigmatise Darwin's rough sleeping population.

According to this analysis, the resulting policy focus is on moving the problem—perceived to be Indigenous people who are 'out of place' in the urban environment—rather than on investments in secure housing and holistic health and wellbeing support.

The 'public safety' approach, which targets 'anti-social behaviour and behaviour considered disruptive', also confronts people dwelling or spending time in public places—especially parks—in urban WA. Martin, Fernandes et al. (2019: 161) conducted research into the lived experience of Indigenous people staying in parks in Perth and Fremantle during 2014–16, a period which they argued represented a 'policy vacuum and inertia in homelessness in Australia'.

As part of their research into how these experiences intersect with health, wellbeing, homelessness and dispossession, Martin, Fernandes et al. considered the cultural, spatial and historical differences of the two locations and their significance to local Aboriginal people to provide depth to the research context and findings (p. 160). Although Indigenous people staying in urban parks had a range of reasons for being in those locations, including proximity to the hospital or other services (Perth), the majority of participants expressed the significance of home and Country. Overwhelmingly, participants felt that spending time in the parks was unsafe and difficult, and it created experiences of marginalisation and isolation and at times led to the criminalisation of homeless people. Difficulties with obtaining housing or staying in crisis accommodation were emphasised by respondents—along with other reasons for being in parks, such as social reasons—as were specific issues for women, such as sexual violence, physical assault and exploitation (Martin, Fernandes et al. 2019: 167).

In other research, Thomas, Gray et al. (2017) investigated the common experiences or 'collective stories' of Indigenous homeless people in a regional city in Northern Queensland. The researchers found that for the people they spoke with, connection to Country is important for wellbeing. However, they were not allowed to stay in the parks, which many felt denied them aspects of basic cultural rights. Other access issues existed in Queensland for homeless people, including local bylaws such as stop-and-search for alcohol, moving people on, locking toilets at night, and early-morning spraying of the lawns where people might otherwise sleep. Extended kinship relationships are built with people in the 'mob' (i.e. other Indigenous people who are homeless), and 'self-identity in homelessness is affirmed through occupations [e.g. connections to Country and kinship groups] that are socially and culturally valued' (Thomas, Gray et al. 2017: 188).

## 2.4 Drivers of Indigenous homelessness

### 2.4.1 Non-cultural drivers

Some causes and drivers of Indigenous homelessness are non-Indigenous-specific and are linked to Australian society more broadly—for example, economic determinants such as housing markets, availability of affordable housing, and general social indicators. Other broad drivers include the following:

- *Housing crises* (AIHW 2019a; see also Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011; Memmott, Phillips et al. 2011; Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016; Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019).
- *Substance and alcohol misuse, youth to adult pathway, and time spent in jail* (Birdsall-Jones and Shaw 2008; Birdsall-Jones, Corunna et al. 2010; Browne-Yung, Ziersch et al. 2016; Memmott, Phillips et al. 2011).

- *Domestic or family violence*—which has been shown to be the largest driver of homelessness for women and children in Australia more broadly (see Cripps and Habibis 2019; Zufferey and Parkes 2019). Domestic and family violence has recently been shown to be the main reason for Indigenous women and children at risk of homelessness to seek assistance (2017-18).<sup>6</sup> Family violence has also been found to contribute disproportionately to homelessness among older Indigenous people (AIHW 2019b; Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019).

As noted in other research and policy frameworks for Indigenous Australians, the disparity in socio-economic wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has many contributing factors, from colonisation through to assimilation and separation policies. The impacts of these factors are still evident today, and directly correlate to the key and intersectional social determinants of health, including education, housing, and employment.

While income levels and inequality are one metric that can be used to measure disadvantage (and the success of policy) (Westbury and Dillon 2019), such inequalities are not shaped solely by unequal distributions of material resources. Although most measures of disadvantage are worse for Indigenous populations in remote regions, 'it would be a mistake to think that the trauma of dispossession and exclusion does not continue to affect the lives' of Indigenous people in regional and urban Australia (Westbury and Dillon 2019: 8). For example, in areas where tighter housing markets or weaker labour markets occur, Indigenous Australians are significantly more likely to enter homelessness (Johnson, Scutella et al. 2019).

Research in Newcastle, NSW, by Howard-Wagner (2019) found that complex and intersecting layers contribute to disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people, reinforcing past findings. Improved material or socio-economic conditions did not erase disadvantage—and the 'disadvantage Aboriginal people living in Newcastle experience is not experienced by all Novocastrians of lower socio-economic status' (Howard-Wagner 2019: 15). Interviewees in Howard-Wagner's study themselves defined Indigenous disadvantage in a way that differs considerably from how it is defined in mainstream policy circles in Australia, where limited sociological and policy consideration are given to racism as a determinant of disadvantage (Howard-Wagner 2019: 15). However, racism and discrimination are institutionalised. Homelessness exists as one of the 'significant social [problems] that Aboriginal people continue to experience' in Newcastle (Howard-Wagner 2019: 10), exacerbated by interconnecting social problems and other factors—such as family violence, difficulties with renting in the private market, and lack of housing for families in crisis.

Disability, including cognitive impairment or psychosocial disability, has also been found to be potentially significant in Indigenous homelessness. In Cairns, Far North Queensland, research by White, Townsend et al. (2019: 193) found a prevalence of cognitive impairment in a homeless population attending a local crisis shelter (75% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander), adding to a 'growing body of research' that is beginning to establish that 'a high proportion of homeless populations experience cognitive impairment' (see for example Flatau, Tyson et al. 2018).

However, there is a dearth of research investigating rates of cognitive impairment among homeless populations that include a high proportion of Indigenous people in Australia, compounded by the need for culturally appropriate assessment tools—and this lack of accurate evidence to inform NDIS provision has implications for supports under the NDIS; see Townsend, White et al. 2018. Further complicating this is a shortage of suitable housing for Indigenous individuals living with disability (Grant, Zillante et al. 2017). Recent work by Parkinson, Batterham et al. (2019) has found that homeless Indigenous people in urban settings may be less likely to receive services in the form of supported accommodation. Finally, as a result of homelessness, people are unlikely to have access to disability services (Grant, Zillante et al. 2017). A shift in practice is called for to ensure that culturally safe and appropriate methods with a focus on cognitive health are employed to support Indigenous people who are homeless.

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<sup>6</sup> The literature search did not specifically focus on gender and Indigenous homelessness, although some examples are included in this review, such as research focussed on domestic and family violence (e.g. Cripps and Habibis 2019). Work by Wallace, Graham et al. (2014) and Graham, Wallace et al. (2014) investigates homelessness among Indigenous women in Cairns and Mount Isa from the perspectives of service providers and those with lived experience. Other work addresses issues related to gender to some extent, in particular research by Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. (2011), which found that 'unless the homelessness of young Aboriginal men is curtailed, as they become older they become the hardest to serve, and most chronically homeless, of all population groups' (cited in Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019: 57).

Ultimately, although these may be non-cultural drivers, the way these challenges are experienced is nevertheless culturally specific and must be situated in the overarching context of a legacy of colonisation and state control (Browne-Yung, Ziersch et al. 2016). Framing the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people primarily as marginalisation from the mainstream economy is an oversimplification and does not acknowledge the complex and interwoven factors that contribute to Indigenous disadvantage, including homelessness, and especially the impact of racism and discrimination.

### 2.4.2 Cultural drivers

Although a cultural basis for homelessness is not considered to exist in traditionally oriented Indigenous societies, some drivers of Indigenous homelessness are based in (even sanctioned by) Indigenous cultural and lifestyle practices and norms such as mobility, shared resources, and kinship obligations. Among those that have received substantial attention in the literature are Indigenous mobility between remote communities and regional and urban areas (Habibis 2013; Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011; Memmott, Phillips et al. 2011; Moran, Memmott et al. 2016; Zufferey and Parkes 2019; see also Peters and Robillard 2009 for some Canadian context) and high-density household structures or 'crowding' (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2012). According to Memmott, Phillips et al. (2011: 21–22) these Indigenous cultural norms are seen to:

contribute to a distinct set of characteristics of Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness. By amalgamating these two causal perspectives we can arrive at a more sophisticated, nuanced understanding of the drivers of Indigenous homelessness including those that might be sanctioned and non-sanctioned in Aboriginal cultural norms, as well as some understanding of why some services are less successful than might be hoped and why others are more effective.

### 2.4.3 Mobility and crowding

#### Indigenous settlement use and residential mobility

Indigenous mobility and settlement use—of which crowding is one element—has been studied over many years now. Browne-Yung, Ziersch et al. (2013) have recently added helpful perspectives on this literature in terms of *Aboriginal Australians' experience of social capital and its relevance to health and wellbeing in urban settings* (2013), noting that:

while there is evidence that social capital experiences may differ between rural and urban areas ... Aboriginal Australians are both culturally diverse and extremely mobile where people move between rural and urban settings for varied periods throughout the life course ... (p. 21)

The importance of distinguishing between different mobility groups among Indigenous people has been established and at least seven different categories of Indigenous mobility have been identified:

1. Temporary visits.
2. Migrations—long-term mobility, for example for employment, marriage and access to services.
3. Boarding—moving away from 'home' for predictable periods, for example, for education and training.
4. 'Between place' dwelling—people who have a 'home' and residence in more than one location.
5. Transience—people who express their autonomy by resisting community expectations.
6. Involuntary mobility—people with little choice, for example, escaping violence.
7. Chronically 'homeless'—people without a permanent address or 'home' (Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011; Zufferey and Chung 2015: 14).

Past research has shown that kinship, mobility and enduring attachment to remote homelands are important elements in Indigenous society, and that Indigenous people travel regularly and often. The concept of a 'mobility region', or an individual's 'pattern of movement [which] is defined by the location of relations within a region

which includes, but is not limited to, traditional Country', often includes metropolitan areas as well as remote and regional areas of Australia (Birdsall-Jones, Corunna et al. 2010: 55; Habibis 2011; Memmott, Long et al. 2006). This means such Indigenous norms and behaviours are—or should be—'important policy concerns in both urban and remote contexts' (Moran, Memmott et al. 2016: 13).<sup>7</sup>

Such patterns of settlement use and residential mobility by Indigenous people are often in conflict with mainstream housing systems based on sedentary populations, and may contribute to 'Indigenous housing disadvantage' via high levels of tenancy failure and homelessness (Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011; Habibis, Memmott et al. 2013; Moran, Memmott et al. 2016). In addition, it is claimed that the 'invisible complexity' of Indigenous mobility and critical cultural attachment, which contrasts with the 'Eurocentric' concept of home as a fixed place and an inflexible service system, positions Indigenous people—especially mobile families in regional areas—as less deserving of assistance from the homeless service system (Moran, Memmott et al. 2016; Zufferey and Parkes 2019: 5).

Habibis, Memmott et al. (2013) suggest that greater correspondence between housing services and Indigenous values and lifestyles has the potential to improve Indigenous housing access and tenancy sustainment and, in turn, reduce entry to homelessness via this pathway. A study of the role of private rental brokerage in housing outcomes for vulnerable Australians found that Indigenous Australians are among the groups that are especially vulnerable—both in the housing market generally and through exclusion from the private rental sector because of discrimination, stigma and stereotyping (Tually, Slatter et al. 2016). They are also more likely to face barriers to locating private rental accommodation appropriate to their cultural needs (AIHW 2019a; Tually, Slatter et al. 2016). However, as Phillips and Parsell (2012: 46) found in their case study of rough sleepers in Darwin, although temporary mobility of Indigenous people does in fact form part of an enduring cultural tradition, such mobility is not 'an exclusively cultural phenomenon'. Similarly, Greenop, Birdsall-Jones et al (2012: 8) argue the need for specialist Indigenous homelessness services as 'effective and humane responses to Indigenous homelessness require a culturally distinctive practice approach and understanding'.

### Crowding

Crowded housing conditions are not experienced exclusively by Indigenous people. However, compared to the general population, Indigenous Australians are more likely to be subject to poor housing conditions and crowding (AIHW 2019a; Moran, Memmott et al. 2016: 24; Scott 2019). Experiences of crowding may be influenced by a number of factors including:

- housing shortages
- economic fragility
- the prevalence of primary and secondary homelessness among Indigenous people (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2012; Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019).

Overcrowding among Indigenous people also reflects different cultural norms and drivers, such as kin sociality and care, and the cultural traits of demand sharing and mobility in Indigenous communities—with such practices and values typical across Australia, in urban as well regional and remote locations (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2012; Scott 2019). In addition to 'crowding' Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. (2011) also use the terms 'permeable' households and 'hub' households.

Although crowding may correspond to high density, which is the number of individuals per unit area, a culturally specific understanding based instead on an individual's *experience* of crowding has been established, in which—as Biddle (2012: 5) notes, 'standards and preferences are unique to individuals and the households in which they live'—a person may or may not believe they are in an overcrowded situation. Rather, perception of overcrowding is more likely to relate to housing that is inadequate to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians regardless of household size (Biddle 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> This is also the case in Canada, as per Long, Memmott et al. 2007 and Canadian research.

The need for tenants to manage visitors may give rise to tensions with housing providers or management and impact on wellbeing in a range of ways (Habibis, Memmott et al. 2013: 70; this is in the context of flow between town camps and surrounding remote communities in the NT, but is applicable more widely). In non-Indigenous public and community housing in urban areas, policies and programs 'do not always align with Indigenous cultural beliefs, practices and needs' (AIHW 2019a: 7). These policies may take approaches to housing management which, if not punitive, fail to recognise the importance of kin and social ties and associated obligations. This can exacerbate crowding<sup>8</sup> and related stress for the tenant/s, cause conflict with housing providers over tenancy roles and responsibilities, and ultimately lead to eviction (Prout Quicke and Green 2017).

Overcrowding can have negative impacts on health outcomes, with flow-on effects such as:

- poor school attendance
- strained relationships
- higher rates of domestic and family violence.

Overcrowding can also impact the condition of the dwelling which, in turn, also impacts health in a vicious cycle. Maintaining a crowded home, financially and otherwise, is likely to place a heavy burden upon the householder. Recent research by Thredgold, Beer et al. (2019) found that the ongoing expectation that older Indigenous people will accommodate family members, often on a long-term basis, may contribute to homelessness for this group. Family separation—and possible entry into or return to homelessness of some family members—is also a potential outcome of overcrowding if a dwelling is declared unsuitable to house an entire family unit (Doherty and McPherson 2019). As with mobility, 'overcrowding' in Indigenous homes can raise conflict with mainstream housing systems based on non-Indigenous norms and thus contribute to high levels of tenancy failure and homelessness.

While structural and individual-level determinants are implicated, as in homelessness generally, Indigenous homelessness has additional, culturally specific drivers and a unique demographic profile (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011; 2012). Its drivers are linked to Australian society more broadly and the structural changes that are driving deeper inequality across cities and regions (Memmott, Phillips et al. 2011; Parkinson, Batterham et al. 2019). There also appears to be consensus on the impact of structural inequalities and intergenerational cycles of trauma related to colonisation, dispossession and racism across Australia, Canada and New Zealand, as highlighted by Anderson and Collins (2014) in their three-country scoping review on urban Indigenous homelessness. In their volume on Indigenous homelessness perspectives in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Peters and Christensen (2016) similarly identify that 'being homeless in one's homeland is a colonial legacy for many Indigenous people in settler societies' (p. 1):

The construction of Commonwealth nation-states from colonial settler societies depended on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. The legacy of that dispossession and related attempts at assimilation that disrupted Indigenous practices, languages, and cultures—including patterns of housing and land use—can be seen today in the disproportionate number of Indigenous people affected by homelessness in both rural and urban settings.

It is recognised that the complex intersections of these historical, systemic, and individual experiences of marginalisation—as well as physical, cultural and spiritual displacement—both underlie and contribute to Indigenous experiences of homelessness. Ultimately, all the drivers of Indigenous homelessness are the result of the forces of wider Australian society.

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<sup>8</sup> There is acceptable and unacceptable crowding (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2012: 3).

## 2.5 Relationship between social and emotional wellbeing frameworks and urban Indigenous homelessness

This final theme considers other developed intersectoral models to inform this review, drawing on frameworks for social and emotional wellbeing and social and cultural determinants of Indigenous health. Such frameworks have utility for understanding intersections of challenges with culture, Country and community that have been developed with communities. For example, Anderson and Collins (2014: 970) cite loss of social and psychological wellbeing as one of many outcomes of colonialism that is relevant to homelessness. Social and emotional wellbeing frameworks emphasise the holistic, whole-of-life understanding of health and the multi-directional relationship between health and other life domains, culture, social and emotional wellbeing, making them instructive for conceptualising and understanding home and homelessness and its underlying drivers.

Social and emotional wellbeing is broadly defined as a 'multidimensional concept of health', which includes domains and objective indicators of wellbeing such as life expectancy and population health. Yap and Yu (2016: 316) note that interest in wellbeing more broadly has been increasing in recent decades. However, the concept of wellbeing widely used by policy makers, academics and others is often 'poorly defined with little agreement on the meaning of the term'.

Moreover, wellbeing is often used interchangeably with notions of happiness, quality of life or health. And 'just as happiness and health are culturally and contextually constructed, so are conceptions and expressions of wellbeing' (Yap and Yu 2016: 316). Factors that affect Indigenous culture and wellbeing are overlapping and complex (Salmon, Doery et al. 2018; Thistle 2017). However, in Australia, there is limited data on which to establish or define 'the relationship between health, wellbeing and culture and the mechanisms through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural determinants impact health and wellbeing' (Lowitja Institute 2018; Salmon, Doery et al. 2019: 1).

Comparisons between wellbeing of Indigenous populations and non-Indigenous populations tend to focus on the gap. This is sometimes described as the 'deficits approach' and does not accurately reflect key determinants of health and wellbeing for Indigenous Australians (Biddle, Gray et al. 2017; Fogarty, Lovell et al. 2018). It is argued that a more constructive approach includes strengths-based approaches that encompass a range of closely related themes and concepts that emphasise elements such as:

- culture
- Country
- human rights
- partnership
- wellbeing.

Being healthy includes social and emotional wellbeing, which for Indigenous people is entwined with elements such as connection to/access to Land or 'Country', culture—for example, speaking an Indigenous language—spirituality, ancestry, family, and community (Biddle, Gray et al. 2017; Le Grande, Ski et al. 2017; Walter 2016). Similarly, in exploring the impact of remote community enterprises on family networks Tedmanson and Guerin (2011) show how mental health improves and social wellbeing accrues in communities engaged in sustainable self-determined activities.

Sutherland and Adams (2019) build on the definition of social and emotional wellbeing used within an Indigenous health framework with the aim of distancing it from its current discipline of 'mental health'—the Eurocentric term commonly used in social science literature. This is to emphasise that, within Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Māori and First Nations (Canadian) languages, there is no specific word for 'health'. The Māori term *tangata whaiora* ('all people who have lived experience of mental illness and are users of mental health services') is interpreted as 'people in search of wellness' (Isogai 2016: 67). Thus, the term 'social and emotional wellbeing'

fits best with the way that Indigenous peoples see health, healing and wellness (Social Health Reference Group 2004, cited in Sutherland and Adams 2019: 48). Although Indigenous peoples in each of these three countries use different terminology to discuss social and emotional wellbeing, they share the same basic conceptual elements.

Work by Salmon, Doery et al. (2018) identifies six broad cultural themes or domains (with sub-domains) for describing culture specific to Indigenous peoples in Australia, but which has commonalities with other cultures, as referred to earlier. The domains are factors that are seen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as 'enabling or related to producing good health and wellbeing' (2018: 3, 57):

- Connection to Country
- Indigenous beliefs and knowledge
- Indigenous language
- Family, kinship and community
- Cultural expression and continuity
- Self-determination and leadership.

Considering the rapid growth, urbanisation and ageing of Australia's Indigenous peoples, it also remains important to recognise that the predominantly urban populations do not currently have equal access to the NDIS, aged care and healthcare services and resources that are available to the non-Indigenous population. Despite geographical proximity of facilities, there are major barriers to access and equity in service use.

Furthermore, high-density urban Indigenous communities have similar mid-life death rates, similar levels of chronic disease and disability and, importantly for aged care, the same levels of cognitive decline and dementia as found in remote communities. 'The barriers to aged care service access for rising urban Indigenous population centres need to be identified and removed' (Aged Care Sector Committee Diversity Sub-Group 2019: 5).

### 2.5.1 The relationship between wellbeing and housing

The positive relationship between appropriate housing and good health, wellbeing and quality of life is well established—as is the inverse (Andersen, Williamson et al. 2016; Biddle 2011; Grant, Zillante et al. 2017; Pholeros, Lea et al. 2013; Vallesi, Tighe et al. 2020). An assumption of this research is that an Indigenous understanding of 'home' is a key determinant of Indigenous spiritual, physical, economic, social and cultural wellbeing. Beyond the evidence for this linkage, elements of mental health and social and emotional wellbeing frameworks—as well as social and cultural determinants of health for Indigenous Australians—can provide models or frameworks that could be drawn on to help formulate more culturally appropriate and safe models of housing and homelessness service provision for Indigenous Australians.

The *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023* aims to 'contribute to the vision of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2012–2023*, which includes achieving the Council of Governments' (COAG) Closing the Gap target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous life expectancy equality (as a measure of health equality) by 2031' (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 2). The causal pathways between social determinants and health are complex and multi-directional. Addressing social determinants requires a collaborative approach that includes services outside the health sector including housing, education, employment, recreation, family services, crime prevention and justice (Osborne, Baum et al. 2013). The Framework cites the *Model of Emotional and Social Wellbeing* developed from an Aboriginal perspective by Gee, Dudgeon et al. (2014), which consists of seven overlapping domains: body; mind and emotions; family and kin; community; culture; Country; and spirituality and ancestors.

A relationship between housing types and subjective wellbeing has been established in the research literature (see for example Biddle 2011; Grant, Zillante et al. 2017; Milligan, Phillips et al. 2011). For example, Andersen, Williamson et al. (2017) analysed the relationship between tenure type and housing problems, and the prevalence of same, among participants in a study of urban Aboriginal families in New South Wales. They found that a range of poor living conditions were common, including crowding, vermin, damp and mildew, structural issues and affordability, which contributed to poor health and social disadvantage.

Another urban-located study, which focussed on the effects of poor housing conditions on health, found that such conditions had negative effects on physical health and social and emotional wellbeing for the more vulnerable members of the community, such as the elderly, children and those with existing health conditions, as well as across the Aboriginal community in the area studied (Andersen, Williamson et al. 2016). Biddle (2011: 17) found that 'structural problems and missing facilities had a greater association with wellbeing than overcrowding, the number of usual residents and housing tenure'. The negative effects of affordability-linked housing stress on wellbeing are also clear:

Households that have spent longer in [housing] stress have poorer wellbeing outcomes—these include 'social and economic participation outcomes and health outcomes and is of particular concern for those already marginalised in the housing market, which may include people with disability, Indigenous Australians and people who have been homeless or are at risk of homelessness' (or any combination of these). (Tually, Slatter et al. 2016: 17 citing Rowley and Ong 2012: 14)

## 2.5.2 Some international learnings

Exploration of Indigenous peoples' cultural understandings of home and homelessness beyond normative definitions based on physical shelter is limited in the Canadian literature (Groening, Bonycastle et al. 2019), although there are exceptions (Christensen 2013). However, a distinct, comprehensive definition of the meaning of homelessness through a Canadian Indigenous lens has recently been developed (Bingham, Moniruzzaman et al. 2019; Thistle 2017).<sup>9</sup> As in the Australian context, homelessness is defined not solely or primarily as a lack of housing but can be more fully understood and described through a 'composite lens of Indigenous worldviews' as articulated by Canadian Indigenous peoples (Thistle 2017: 6). Expanding on and refining concepts of Indigenous homelessness from Australian (Keys Young 1998) and Canadian literature (Homeward Trust 2015),<sup>10</sup> twelve dimensions of Indigenous homelessness comprise this definition; a homeless individual may experience or be affected by one or, more likely, multiple dimensions. The 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness (Table 3) (Thistle 2017) resulted from over one and a half years of consultation with Indigenous scholars, frontline workers, community members, and those who have experienced homelessness first-hand or who work in the field of Indigenous homelessness. The consultation pool consisted of over 50 Indigenous people. Thistle (2017: 29) describes a layering strategy, to be applied on an individual basis to 'understand, articulate and help find solutions for each homeless' Indigenous person or community. Table 3 defines each dimension in the Canadian context; these are juxtaposed with Australian examples, illuminating (where applicable), resonance with the Indigenous experience of homelessness in Australia.

These twelve dimensions work 'in tandem, in clusters, or in constellations to cause, compound and entrench Indigenous homelessness in Canada' (Thistle 2017: 39). They also intersect with the four kinds of settler homelessness, as defined in the *Canadian definition of homelessness*:

1. **Unsheltered:** living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation
2. **Emergency sheltered:** those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, or shelters for those impacted by family violence

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<sup>9</sup> This is the most comprehensive definition encountered in the literature.

<sup>10</sup> The Homeward Trust (2015) report uses four domains or realms (spheres of the Medicine Wheel) which represent physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms.

3. **Provisionally accommodated:** those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenancy
4. **At risk of homelessness:** those who are not homeless, but whose current economic or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards (Gaetz, Barr et al. 2012).

Importantly, the experiences of homelessness among Indigenous people as defined by the twelve dimensions are not limited to those who are without shelter. Rather, they underscore the 'loss of relationships endured by Indigenous Peoples through the processes of Canadian colonization and the disconnection from the Indigenous understanding of home as All My Relations' (Thistle 2017: 39). Despite such loss of relationships, Thistle (2017: 17) emphasises the notion of inclusivity, stating that:

everyone is kin by virtue of our interconnectedness in time and space, or in experience and territory, if those words are better understood. We are all members of the community, and so creating this sense of membership becomes central to understanding what it means to be Indigenous and without home.

Table 3: The 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness

The 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness in Canada*	
<b>Historic displacement homelessness</b>	The displacement or removal of Indigenous peoples from pre-colonial or traditional lands and resources.
<b>Contemporary geographic separation homelessness</b>	Separation of an individual or community from Indigenous lands following assumption of colonial control.
<b>Spiritual disconnection homelessness</b>	An individual or community's disconnection from Indigenous worldviews and spiritual beliefs.
<b>Mental disruption and imbalance homelessness</b>	An 'imbalance of mental faculties' experienced by individuals and communities as a result of 'colonization's entrenched social and economic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples' (10).
<b>Cultural disintegration and loss homelessness</b>	Individual and community loss of 'cultures, knowledges, identities, names, languages, gender roles, songs, traditions, rites of passage, kin groups, clans, moieties and broader community supports'. This is a dislocation from the 'relationship web of Indigenous society' (35).
<b>Overcrowding homelessness</b>	When the number of people dwelling in an Indigenous household (rural or urban) exceeds the national household average. This contributes to and creates living spaces that are overcrowded, unsafe and unhealthy, in turn causing homelessness.
<b>Relocation and mobility homelessness</b>	'Mobile Indigenous homeless people travelling over geographic distances between urban and rural spaces' for access to a range of personal needs (e.g. work, health), cultural and spiritual reasons, for access to affordable housing, and 'to see family, friends and community members' (11).
<b>Going home homelessness</b>	When an Indigenous person or family who has lived outside their 'home community' returns and is unable to secure a place to live, which may be due to a range of reasons.
<b>Nowhere to go homelessness</b>	'A complete lack of access to stable shelter, housing, accommodation, shelter services or relationships' (12).
<b>Escaping or evading harm homelessness</b>	'Fleeing, leaving or vacating unstable, unsafe, unhealthy or overcrowded households or homes' for safety and/or survival' (12).
<b>Emergency crisis homelessness</b>	When natural disasters or other types of destruction combine with a systemic failure to cope with subsequent, immediate demand for housing (which is different to 'Escaping harm homelessness').
<b>Climatic refugee homelessness</b>	Disruption or alteration of 'lifestyle, subsistence patterns and food sources, relationship to animals, and connection to land and water' by 'drastic and cumulative weather shifts due to climate change'. This can result in homelessness for individuals and entire communities (12).

Note: \* As articulated by Indigenous people across Canada. In all cases, individuals, communities, Nations and Peoples referred to are Indigenous.

Numbers in brackets in the Table above denote source pages in Thistle.

Source: Adapted from Thistle 2017.

A key feature of this powerful framing of the multi-dimensional nature of Indigenous homelessness is 'recognition by the state of how Indigenous Peoples imagine and experience homelessness on their own terms' (Thistle 2017: 17).

It is notable in relation to learnings for Australia about Aboriginal homelessness that at a relatively recent roundtable in Winnipeg (October 2019), Indigenous service providers, advocates, and people with lived experience of homelessness came together to further the conversation around conceptions and definitions of Indigenous homelessness in the Canadian context. A targeted discussion at this gathering focussed on the Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada as articulated by Thistle (2017). Although itself a product of broad consultation, most roundtable participants saw this definition as more informative than practical and felt that a more functional definition is needed for Indigenous communities. Some attendees were involved in developing such a definition at the time of the gathering. The twelve dimensions definition was a valuable educational tool for building awareness and for 'non-Indigenous people to learn about the ways that Indigenous people experience homelessness' and how they are distinct (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness [COH] 2019: 18). '[It's] good to have it for non-Indigenous people to open their minds and help them understand' (COH 2019: 20).

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has set the context for the research findings that follow, drawing on academic literature, policy and practice. The discussion shows that there is much to learn, much to do and great appetite and need for further attention and work in the Indigenous homelessness space. The case studies that follow build upon what is presented in this chapter and provide a more granular understanding of experiences of 'homelessness' for Indigenous peoples. As Peters and Christensen (2016: 1) remind us in their exploration of Indigenous perspectives of homelessness in Canada, Australia and New Zealand:

effective policy and support programs aimed at relieving Indigenous homelessness must be rooted in Indigenous conceptions of home, land, and kinship, and cannot ignore the context of systemic inequality, institutionalization, landlessness, among other things, that stem from a history of colonialism.

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## 3. Case study: Greater Brisbane, Queensland

- **This case study demonstrates the intersectional nature of Indigenous homelessness in Greater Brisbane, especially the need for greater coordination across mainstream and Indigenous-specific SHSs, and broader systems of support across health, family violence and justice.**
  - ‘One-stop shops’ for housing and support for people experiencing homelessness are needed, with specialist workers facilitating access to whole-of-life supports.
  - Indigenous-controlled community health services want to play a greater role in supporting housing pathways as part of people’s holistic social and emotional wellbeing.
- **Some Indigenous people move between different forms of housing insecurity and homelessness, with people/kinship groups cycling through the system rather than progressing towards stable housing outcomes.**
  - Addressing people’s needs requires more housing and a more assertive approach to sustaining tenancies.
- **A revolving door of housing and homelessness for Indigenous people in Brisbane is created by inadequate funding for homelessness services, limited crisis and transitional accommodation, shortage of affordable housing, barriers to housing access, and inadequate attention to tenancy sustainment.**
- **There is a scarcity of Indigenous-controlled housing in Queensland and a need for targeted funding to build and renew the Indigenous housing and homelessness sector.**

- **Procurement policies that prioritise Indigenous services are needed. If funding continues to go to mainstream services characterised by a low level of cultural safety, Closing the Gap targets will not be met.**
- **Indigenous people experiencing or at risk of homelessness distrust formal institutions.**

### **3.1 Profile of urban homelessness**

#### **3.1.1 Patterns of urban Indigenous homelessness**

##### **Numbers**

Queensland has the third-highest rate of homelessness of any Australian jurisdiction, with 46 homeless persons per 10,000 of the population (ABS 2018c).

According to the 2016 Census, there were 21,715 individuals estimated to be homeless in Queensland, including 4,438 people identifying as Indigenous (see Table 4). The total number of Queenslanders experiencing precarious housing in 2016 was almost 40,000, with 7,581 Indigenous people among this group, including individuals who are marginally housed.

Table 4 shows that the state's homeless population includes almost 3,000 children under the age of 12 years, and a further 1,366 between the ages of 12 and 17 years. And, as also shown in the other case studies, a significant proportion of children experiencing homelessness are Indigenous—two in five children in Queensland (40.3%, 1,746 children). Rough sleepers and couchsurfers together comprise just over 30 per cent of Queensland's total homeless population, with a further 17 per cent of people in supported accommodation.

The high rate of homelessness in Queensland is partly explained by its large Indigenous population, with 20.4 per cent, or 4,438 homeless individuals identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Given the issues with under-enumeration of Indigenous population and Indigenous homelessness, the actual figures are likely to be significantly higher. A large proportion of the Indigenous population experiencing homelessness in Queensland is living in severely crowded dwellings, with almost 40 per cent of individuals in severely crowded homes being Indigenous.

Over 40 per cent of Queensland's homeless population (42.9%) are located in the Greater Brisbane area (9,326 of 21,717 individuals), with almost one in three people recorded as homeless at the 2016 Census located in the Brisbane inner city (see Table 5, and also data presented in Table 6). In Greater Brisbane, just under 6 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness identified as Indigenous (551 of 9,326 individuals), with the majority in supported accommodation, couchsurfing or in severely crowded dwellings (Table 6). Some 15 per cent of people sleeping rough in inner Brisbane identify as Indigenous.

Table 4: Profile of homelessness, Queensland, 2016 Census

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total population		186,692	3.9	425,9250	89.5	314,653	6.6	4,760,599	100.0
<b>All homeless persons<sup>1</sup></b>									
Gender	Males	2,327	52.4	8,777	59.0	1,578	65.9	12,685	58.4
	Females	2,111	47.6	6,097	41.0	818	34.1	9,030	41.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,438</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>14,874</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,396</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>21,715</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	<12 years old	1,251	28.7	1,521	10.2	198	8.3	2,970	13.7
	12-17 years old	495	11.4	774	5.2	97	4.0	1,366	6.3
	Adults (18+ years old)	2,612	59.9	12,584	84.6	2,101	87.7	17,297	80
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,358</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>14,879</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,396</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>21,633</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Homeless Operational Group</b>									
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)		399	23.0	1,213	70.0	123	7.1	1,732	8.0
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless		587	15.7	2,036	54.6	1,105	29.6	3,727	17.2
Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)		296	6.1	4,458	92.3	73	1.5	4,830	22.2
Persons living in boarding houses		283	7.8	2,301	63.7	1,029	28.5	3,612	16.6
Persons in other temporary lodgings		9	4.2	203	95.3	0	0.0	213	1.0
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings		2,867	37.7	4,665	61.4	73	1.0	7,603	35.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,441</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>14,876</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>2,403</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>21,717</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Persons who are marginally housed <sup>2</sup>		3,140	17.3	14,724	80.9	351	1.9	18,197	-
<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>		<b>7,581</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>29,600</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>2,754</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>39,914</b>	<b>-</b>

Notes: Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) 'All homeless persons' relates to the aggregated data from the six homeless operational categories determined for/from the Census: persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers); persons in supported accommodation for the homeless; persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfers); persons living in boarding houses; persons in other temporary lodgings; persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. 2) Includes persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks or living in crowded or improvised dwellings that are excluded from the Homeless Operational Groups count.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

Table 5: Profile of homelessness and marginal housing, Greater Brisbane and rest of state, Queensland, 2016 Census

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>All homeless persons<sup>1</sup></b>								
Greater Brisbane	Brisbane–East	19	4.4	387	89.0	25	5.7	435
	Brisbane–North	56	10.6	403	76.5	67	12.7	527
	Brisbane–South	71	4.7	1,276	83.9	171	11.2	1,521
	Brisbane–West	8	2.7	267	89.9	16	5.4	297
	Brisbane Inner City	138	4.7	1,957	67.0	834	28.5	2,923
	Ipswich	109	8.9	1,039	84.5	76	6.2	1,229
	Logan–Beaudesert	68	5.5	1,108	90.4	48	3.9	1,226
	Moreton Bay–North	63	7.0	770	85.6	77	8.6	900
	Moreton Bay–South	12	4.3	254	91.0	19	6.8	279
	<b>Total</b>		<b>551</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>7,469</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>1,325</b>	<b>14.2</b>
Rest of state <sup>2</sup>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,893</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>7,396</b>	<b>59.8</b>	<b>1,091</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>12,375</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,441</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>14,876</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>2,403</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>21,717</b>
<b>Other marginal housing<sup>3</sup></b>								
Greater Brisbane	Brisbane–East	26	6.2	389	92.6	8	1.9	420
	Brisbane–North	37	5.6	609	91.7	10	1.5	664
	Brisbane–South	19	1.4	1,347	96.8	19	1.4	1,391
	Brisbane–West	0	0.0	197	98.0	0	0.0	201
	Brisbane Inner City	4	0.5	760	98.4	4	0.5	772
	Ipswich	73	4.6	1,491	93.8	23	1.4	1,589
	Logan–Beaudesert	56	3.1	1,757	95.7	40	2.2	1,836
	Moreton Bay–North	52	6.6	724	91.8	17	2.2	789
	Moreton Bay–South	44	10.7	358	86.9	3	0.7	412
	<b>Total</b>		<b>327</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>7,631</b>	<b>94.5</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Rest of state <sup>1</sup>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,808</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>7,096</b>	<b>70.1</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>10,126</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,140</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>14,724</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>18,197</b>
<b>Total homeless or marginally housed</b>								
Greater Brisbane		878	5.0	15,100	86.8	1,448	8.3	17,400
Rest of state <sup>1</sup>		6,701	29.8	14,492	64.4	1,315	5.8	22,501
<b>Total</b>		<b>7,581</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>29,600</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>2,754</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>39,914</b>

Notes: Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) 'All homeless persons' relates to the aggregated data from the six homeless operational categories determined for/from the census: persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers); persons in supported accommodation for the homeless; persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfers); persons living in boarding houses; persons in other temporary lodging; persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. 2) Includes data for Cairns, Darling Downs (Maranoa, Central Queensland, Gold Coast, Mackay), Isaac (Whitsunday), Queensland Outback, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Townsville, Wide Bay. 3) Includes persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks, living in crowded or improvised dwellings that are excluded from the Homeless Operational Groups count.

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

Table 6: Profile of homelessness in Greater Brisbane, 2016

Greater Brisbane <sup>1</sup>		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Homeless Operational Group	Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)	51	15.0	246	72.6	43	12.7	339
	Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	201	10.6	1,110	58.7	586	31.0	1,891
	Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)	91	5.1	1,665	93.9	25	1.4	1,773
	Persons living in boarding houses	78	3.6	1,449	67.3	633	29.4	2,154
	Persons in other temporary lodgings	0	0.0	33	100.0	0	0.0	33
	Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	130	4.1	2,966	94.6	38	1.2	3,136
	<b>Total</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>7,469</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>1,325</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>9,326</b>
	Persons who are marginally housed <sup>2</sup>	327	4.1	7,631	94.5	123	1.5	8,074
	<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>15,100</b>	<b>86.8</b>	<b>1,448</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>17,400</b>

Notes: Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) Greater Brisbane includes Brisbane–East, Brisbane–North, Brisbane–South, Brisbane–West, Brisbane Inner City, Ipswich, Logan–Beaudesert, Moreton Bay–North, Moreton Bay–South. 2) Persons who are marginally housed includes persons living in other crowded dwellings, persons in other improvised dwellings, and persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

Suburbs with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—especially the southern suburbs of Mount Gravatt, Nathan and Sunnyban—have the most severe levels of crowding and couchsurfing, and almost 40 per cent of the total proportion of rough sleepers is also located in these areas. The inner city is the other area where rough sleepers and boarding-house residents are concentrated. These figures are reflected in the observations of informants who uniformly suggested that the proportion of Indigenous homeless accessing their service ranged from 20–25 per cent. A large proportion of these individuals are young people, with one estimate that around 400 Indigenous children aged between 10 and 16 were in the Brisbane area. One service suggested the number of Indigenous young people sleeping rough or couchsurfing had grown between 7–13 per cent each year.

The profile of Indigenous homelessness is also distinct, with high numbers of people sleeping rough or couchsurfing. One respondent who worked in the inner city said that he had observed 30–40 individuals sleeping rough just on his way in to work. One of the outreach service respondents observed that the level of rough sleeping is not simply a factor of over-representation but is also due to a lack of access to shelters:

I would be guessing at why that would be. If that is to do with the actual crisis shelters that are available, if they're not culturally appropriate or whether it's choice in that actually we have, I guess, communities within communities that are on the streets. (RQ16, Manager, mainstream outreach service)

### Geographies

Accounts of client-catchment areas emphasise the extent to which Brisbane attracts Indigenous people across a substantial area. Most clients are from immediately surrounding areas of the service, with the poorer southern suburbs and locations with high concentrations of social housing, such as Logan, Woodbridge and Ipswich, frequently mentioned. There is a pattern of movement from outer suburbs such as Logan and Caboolture, where housing has become expensive and inaccessible, to inner suburbs where housing and related services are more available.

Many respondents describe clients as coming from 'all over', with more than one respondent suggesting it is not unusual to have clients travelling 300 or 400 kms to Brisbane. This partly reflects Brisbane's role as a key service centre, and partly reflects the high level of mobility among Indigenous populations where individuals travel from regional and remote locations to the capital city, to visit relatives, attend funerals and for entertainment and work (Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011).

Indigenous clients were described as coming from regions as far as Cairns and Townsville in the far north, and 'all the way down to the Sunshine Coast'; from Mount Isa on the border of the NT; from Redcliffe down to the Gold Coast and from Birdsville on the border of SA. Many respondents also described clients as coming from interstate, especially the NT and NSW. But the area most frequently mentioned by respondents was Cherbourg, a former Aboriginal mission located some 250 km north-west of Brisbane which took people from across Queensland and northern NSW, with regular, frequent movement between Cherbourg and Brisbane.

Population mobility is less of a contributor to urban Indigenous homelessness in the capital city, but it is a substantial issue for regional towns like Townsville that act as service centres for surrounding areas. People travel to Townsville from small towns and communities in Palm Island, across to Mount Isa and north to Cape York. Some visit for dialysis treatment, while others visit for shopping and entertainment. The cost of transport home is often too high, so people get stuck in the city, effectively homeless. While Townsville has a 50-bed purpose-built diversionary facility located about 20 minutes from the centre of town, it is over-capacity, so many Indigenous people have no option but to sleep on the streets where they are highly vulnerable to criminalisation and physical violence.

### 3.1.2 Socio-demographic characteristics

The interview data suggests homelessness among Indigenous populations in Brisbane comprises three main groups:

- Individuals and families experiencing short-term difficulties—such as inability to pay the rent, or family violence—and where appropriate support results in the re-establishment of housing security within a short- to medium-time frame. This includes young people couchsurfing or sleeping rough due to difficulties in the family home, as well as women and children escaping family violence, who access crisis accommodation and then establish a new home away from the perpetrator.
- Individuals in inappropriate or insecure accommodation and who are seeking support for a transfer.
- Individuals who are long-term homeless who cycle in and out of insecure housing and homelessness. They are often older, with high levels of complex need, especially mental illness, and chronic physical illness, together with problems of substance abuse. Some have criminal histories, with homelessness closely linked to the difficulty of accessing appropriate housing when exiting jail. This group includes women and children escaping family violence who either return to an unsafe home, or who cycle through different forms of insecure temporary housing, including couchsurfing, crisis accommodation and boarding houses, over a period of months or years, while waiting for more sustainable and appropriate permanent accommodation:

There'll be periods of time where they're sleeping on the street, so they're sleeping rough during, like the interim, while waiting for someone else, a friend, to let them back in, or begging for a family member to maybe let them stay for a couple of nights here and there. (RQ19, Program coordinator, Indigenous crisis service)

Much of the interview data focuses on the experiences of the long-term chronic homeless.

### 3.1.3 Exclusion, poverty and homelessness

Two interrelated factors underpin experiences of chronic Indigenous homelessness:

- the continuing legacy of colonisation on the physical and mental wellbeing of Indigenous individuals and families
- the impact of poverty on access to the private rental market.

The legacy of colonisation is evident in high levels of trauma, often linked to lateral violence within the home and repeated experiences of loss. Several respondents emphasised the intergenerational trauma, involving patterns of behaviour and difficulties that extended across the generations.

Themes of grief and loss resonate through the data, alongside a profound sense of physical and spiritual disconnection from people, place and culture. Many respondents provided harrowing accounts of the difficulties that form the backdrop to homelessness:

Either they've been in long-term prison, there's been extreme violence in their family, the violence against women has disrupted their relationships, their mothers have died. Once that happens, the relationships fracture even more. The women in the community seem to look out for them, but once they're older and not able to do that, you really do notice people really get more disconnected than what they were previously. (RQ12, CEO mainstream crisis service)

There was violence in the home. The parents were in and out of prison and then they didn't go to school. And then there was deaths, that grief and loss stuff that actually ends up with them being on the street. (RQ17, Indigenous outreach worker)

... death on top of death and people don't actually recover to an extent ...it's so often. And I guess with the people that we see, it's so often from a really young age. There's the death, there's chronic disease. You see children, they'd have—if it was my child or your child, we'd have them to the doctor, but you've got children that can't hear because they've got such ear infections where there's green pus coming out of their ear, so that constant not-feeling-well from a really young age. And the violence that is in the families, and then they end up in the system. And that's what we see with the people on the streets here. So it's all that stuff, I think. (RQ16, Manager, mainstream outreach service)

These experiences of violence, grief and loss are closely related to experiences of disconnection, a point more fully discussed in Section 3.4. One respondent described a client as 'floating around in the ether' as a result of being adopted, then losing her adoptive parents at a young age and having no connection with her family of origin. The mental health assessment was that reconnection to her people and Country was critical to her recovery.

Even when people are connected to their family and community, support may be limited. Because trauma and problems are widespread in many poorer Indigenous groups, family and friends may also be struggling, which compromises their capacity to support other individuals and families:

Where they do have strong networks, they aren't always in a position to help them because they themselves may be struggling. So the people that they're going to, they're struggling, and that's where it's quite difficult. They're going to homes where—one of the most common things that we hear is that, 'I have to get out of the community. I have to remove myself right away from everything that's happening.' (RQ15, Manager, mainstream hostel)

Low income compounds the psychological harms associated with intergenerational trauma, effectively excluding people from access to the private rental market. Because many Indigenous people have difficulty accessing the labour market, many are dependent on income support, where levels of payment mean there is little chance of finding appropriate housing within the private rental market. Even tenancies in the social and affordable housing sectors do not protect them from tenancy failure because of the difficulty of meeting everyday expenses.

We have families coming to us that aren't experiencing substance abuse, they're experiencing poverty. And poverty is probably the key problem for the majority. It's rare for any of our families to actually be liquid. And so their fridge breaks down, they get behind in their rent. They can't catch up in their rent because they're still paying their fridge off. The poverty, for me, is probably the biggest issue, because if they weren't poor they could probably then get into the private rental market and they wouldn't get behind in their rent, and they wouldn't get in debt. (RQ7, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

Homelessness among Indigenous people arises from a clustering of vulnerabilities that easily spiral out of control. Minor problems such as a broken fridge, or a parking fine, can rapidly escalate into a major problem of rent arrears, court appearances and failed tenancies. This places a further barrier to housing access, as a failed tenancy means individuals are likely to be placed on the Tenant Information Centre Australia list, which landlords access to check on the status of housing applicants. Poverty is part of this vulnerability, with a proportion of the homeless Indigenous population having '*nothing but the clothes they are standing in*,' (RD1 Manager, Community Services Organisation) unable to pay bonds, or meet their basic needs.

There are also particular risk factors associated with the combination of low income, Indigeneity, complex needs, and trauma, especially where this involves the difficulties of accessing safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation when:

- exiting jail or other forms of custody
- fleeing family violence, especially when children have been removed.

For these individuals, crisis accommodation is often the only option, and as crisis accommodation is normally operating at capacity the only option is couchsurfing or living on the street.

### 3.1.4 Indigeneity and definitions of homelessness

While there were some respondents who believed the profile of Indigenous and non-Indigenous homelessness was largely the same, most respondents believed Indigenous homelessness was distinctive because of:

- the combination of psychological and physical displacement
- the loss of connection
- the complexity of needs because of intergenerational trauma
- high levels of distrust.

Some people are part of the Stolen Generation and have no connection to their culture or their family of origin. Others have lost connection to family and community because of difficulties associated with lateral violence. This—together with experiences of loss and grief, as well as physical and mental problems—makes Indigenous people highly vulnerable and can contribute to a damaging loss of identity:

A lot of people are seeking connection with things that are maybe not as healthy and as helpful, in place of a connection that should have been to Land or could have been to community. And there isn't that sense of community really. There's a lot of people that don't have any contact with family and friends and people that have shared life experiences or cultural experiences ... I have worked in mainstream services prior to here. And I think, from what I've seen of their presentations around homelessness, it is more linked to financial circumstances, violence—so domestic and family violence, and mental health. But I don't think there's such an emphasis on trauma—all of those other things, Stolen Generations, intergenerational trauma, all those other factors ... Most of the people actually that come to see me, that are homeless, have children not in their care. (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

The disconnection is also related to feelings of shame and the difficulty of knowing who to trust. Repeated experiences of family violence, poverty, grief and loss makes them difficult to describe. What people—especially women—are looking for is safety, but they may not trust services sufficiently—sometimes including Indigenous services—to disclose their circumstances. They have no one to explain to them what's happened and what their situation is, and nowhere to go that feels safe.

You've just got families that are leaving their homes and just travelling because they don't know where to go or what to do or who to talk to or who to trust. (RQ15, Manager, mainstream hostel)

These complexities are further complicated by the high level of unstable, crowded housing, where people couchsurf with relatives and friends. Because crowding and housing instability are so normalised, as is staying with family or friends, they may not consider themselves to be homeless.

A further distinguishing feature is the high level of distrust of both government and community services, making the population especially hard to reach. Reasons include the history of Indigenous engagement with the state, with events such as the Stolen Generation and the Northern Territory Emergency Intervention leaving a legacy of distrust of white services. These experiences are not something that occurred in the distant past but are part of living memory. Some clients have close relatives who were stolen, and they are familiar with the stories. Some have had their own children removed, and others have had the children of close family members removed. Many have had contact with the criminal justice system, often from an early age. White services are therefore often viewed with suspicion and caution. So before anything can be done, the first requirement is to gain client trust.

Our clients are very untrusting. And you build that rapport of trust with them and then we're able to work with them on the stuff that they need ... They want to know what people are using the information for. Is it against them? Especially when it comes to the government. And that's that transgenerational trauma stuff as well. So, we've got to ensure that our clients know that we don't want to disadvantage them more than what they already are. (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous homelessness service)

Because that's a huge thing you've got to get over. It's the distrust of institutions, because people let them down all the time. (RQ12, CEO, Mainstream SHS)

This distrust partly explains the high proportion of Indigenous individuals and families engaged in rough sleeping or couchsurfing, because this is preferable to engagement with white service providers. Therefore, establishing trust requires a particular use of self when interacting with clients, with authenticity and client confidentiality being key elements:

We want to make sure that their information is highly confidential so that they don't feel—and they also need to know that we're here to provide a service and not here for ourselves, because that's an issue. They need to know that we're community people as well and not people with just jobs who actually don't care—we do care. (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

It also requires delivering on promises and demonstrating early on in the engagement that the service will be effective in meeting client needs. Some respondents suggested there was a pattern of passing clients from one service to another, and of services over-promising what they were able to offer. The risk is that clients then lose hope in the system and their sense of distrust and resistance to engagement deepens. These characteristics interact together to make homeless Indigenous individuals both highly vulnerable and hard to reach. This loss of faith in the system contributes to the high rate of rough sleeping and couchsurfing and compromises the accuracy of data on Indigenous homelessness.

## 3.2 Service delivery

The most important failure of service delivery to Indigenous populations is lack of housing options. As crisis beds become more difficult to find, so frontline workers must spend excessive time placing their clients. Hostel managers and shelters describe turning people away, leaving clients with little option but to sleep on the streets. For legal services, finding appropriate accommodation for individuals exiting custody or jail is *'their number one problem, right across the state'* (RQ2, CEO Indigenous SHS).

Virtually all respondents described services as significantly under-resourced, especially those reliant on federally funded programs. Program managers describe a mismatch between funding levels and program delivery expectations:

They'll fund, like a 1.4 position to respond to a huge catchment area, and then wonder why we're not getting all the outcomes that we're trying to achieve ... (RQ5, CEO, Indigenous youth service)

### 3.2.1 The systemic nature of barriers to accessing housing

A revolving door of housing and homelessness for Indigenous people in Brisbane is created by:

- inadequate funding for homelessness services
- limited crisis and transitional accommodation
- the shortage of affordable housing
- barriers to housing access
- inadequate attention to tenancy sustainment.

While problems of discrimination, mental illness and poverty make it difficult for Indigenous people to access and sustain housing, it is the barriers that result from the problems and limitations of the housing and homelessness system that merit greatest attention.

Bottlenecks in the housing and homelessness system are the taken-for-granted backdrop to service provision, with insufficient crisis and transitional beds, virtual exclusion from the private rental market and limited access to social and affordable housing—including waiting lists of up to six years in some suburbs—and housing stock that is sometimes run down and poorly maintained:

Properties are, when they move into them, often haven't been repaired or cleaned or maintained in any way. I've had clients with cockroach bites and mould everywhere and respiratory conditions from those properties that aren't maintained, and it is really difficult to organise any maintenance of the property once you're there. (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

There is increasing pressure on the government with numbers on the Housing Register for all types of social housing steadily growing for example 40,000 individuals in 2018, an increase of 7,039 from the previous year. It was felt that this has led to tightening criteria and requirements to demonstrate hardship such as evidence for two periods of homelessness or failure to access the private rental market.

It doesn't matter if you're in crisis accommodation, you have to tick so many boxes before they'd even get you on the register. Now, if you're not on the register for the Department of Housing, you're not able to apply for social housing as well. So, it's making it harder. You have to tick the boxes of addiction, you have to tick the boxes of mental health ... (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

Getting on the register is especially difficult for Indigenous populations, because of their distrust of services, and a reluctance to disclose their full circumstances.

Aboriginal people don't want other people or other services knowing their private stuff. And they don't like admitting to having addictions or mental health or family breakdowns and why they're homeless. So, the guidelines have changed now and it is harder for not only First Nations people but everybody—all people—to be on that Department of Housing register. (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

The sense of failure that comes with trauma applies especially where people are disconnected from family and if their children have been removed. Other barriers to accessing priority waiting lists include:

- lack of identity documents
- problematic housing histories—such as rent arrears, housing debts, warnings for disruptive behaviour
- criminal history
- lack of a tenancy history
- low tolerance for completing forms, as well as low level of literacy (which makes it difficult to understand forms)
- lack of a stable address and low income—which make it difficult to keep appointments.

Until these problems are resolved, clients are unable to be considered for social housing. Respondents—especially those working within Indigenous-controlled services, also suggested that in some cases Indigenous clients were labelled by some housing providers as undeserving of support:

Part of the problem is that some individuals and families get labelled as problematic and this effectively excludes them from access to prioritisation. At one of the working groups, we tabled the case for a mother who has been homeless for a year and a half, and a number of the housing services when they heard her name, rolled their eyes ... We're coming from a social justice framework and believing in change, whereas housing is coming from a completely different perspective. (RQ7, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

Equally problematic is the perception that Indigenous people are just too hard to house. Many respondents emphasised the importance of assertive practice and of the need to spend additional time with Indigenous clients in order to overcome psychological, social and practical barriers to housing access and support.

Services need to work harder at keeping them in the system till something does become available. That's where they fall through the cracks. They end up back on the street, crime, away you go. Through the same process and away we go. Because no one—they've gone to that homelessness service, and they [the homeless service] go, 'We can't do anything.' But okay, what are some of the things—the underlying issues—that can be dealt with in the meantime and keep you in a safe environment until something does arrive? (RQ13, Manager, Indigenous community service)

There are also practical barriers to accessing social housing, because there's no single entry to the housing system, with each provider having their own office. These offices are often located in suburbs that involve complicated journeys on public transport. This is a substantial barrier for Indigenous clients who often have little or no money, as well as a significant impost on services if they have to accompany clients.

Even if clients are offered a property, the poor quality of the housing or the unsafe area it is located in means the client may refuse the property, preferring rough sleeping or couchsurfing to living there.

I think that's the other side of housing that people don't consider, because 'Oh, you're lucky, you've got a house.' Well, it's completely unsuitable and I preferred actually sleeping on couches because at least I had supports around me and I'm not isolated. (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

It was felt that any 'reasonable' offer must be accepted regardless of the risk to health and safety of their current situation. When asked how well the Queensland government's homelessness policies were working, the general view was that they were not very successful:

A lot of the clients that I have been working with have been listed on the high-priority list for two, three, four years, and homeless for most of this time, so couchsurfing, hostels or on the streets, and have had no housing ... There's one client that's an Elder, that has a disability. She waited two years alternating between hostels and had heard nothing. We checked every month, and she was still listed on the very-high-priority list, she had significant health concerns, and that took two years. (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

These barriers are beyond the capacity of individuals to overcome, no matter how expert they are at negotiating the housing and homelessness system. So while some homeless Indigenous individuals may be well-informed and assertive, the systemic nature of the barriers to housing security make it likely that they will be unable to improve their situation in a timely manner. And given the multi-layered vulnerability of many Indigenous individuals, it is no wonder that many give up hope—and housing precarity becomes a way of life.

### 3.2.2 The revolving door of housing and homelessness

One of the characteristics of Indigenous homelessness is the extent to which some people move between different forms of housing insecurity and homelessness. They effectively cycle through the system rather than progress through it towards long-term housing. Addressing their needs requires both more housing and a more assertive approach to sustaining tenancies. The hard-to-reach nature of the population requires assertively working with clients to get them on to waiting lists. But even when clients are housed, there is a high rate of tenancy failure. Tenants struggle to manage the tension between their tenancy obligations and their kinship obligations, with difficulties managing visitors and occupant numbers. Despite service providers' widespread understanding of the problem, it continues to be a cause of tenancy failure.

Tenants need support to manage visitors, including helping them to distinguish between meeting cultural obligations and exploitation of this in ways that threaten their tenancy and damage the tenants' wellbeing and safety.

A lot of people say, 'It's cultural that people take people in', or they have to take people in. Whereas we would say, 'No, that isn't cultural ... because people abuse that relationship'. We need to educate people about what is a healthy relationship. If someone wants you to leave their space, you shouldn't say, 'Oh, it's cultural that you let me stay and I drink all night and you get evicted.' The behavioural side of it needs to be nurtured and challenged at the same time. They'll say to us, 'This is cultural for us.' And we'll say, 'Yeah, connection is cultural, but abuse isn't ...' (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

One of the problems is that housing managers are not funded to manage the demands of Indigenous tenants, so anything they do impacts on the capacity to do other work. The funds available to housing managers make no provision for the intensity of support required to manage unapproved occupants who are often highly transient and with complex needs. The pressures of managing the service mean housing managers have little choice but to implement a regulatory response rather than a social justice response.

But such pressures are also due to the complex needs of some low-income Indigenous people and their vulnerability to problems such as mental illness, physical illness and incarceration:

When I look at our data, financial difficulties, makeshift dwellings, recent evictions—those are the housing ones that come up. When I look a bit deeper, I see things around ongoing health and mental health, itinerancy, lack of community support and unemployment. (RQ13 Manager, Indigenous community service)

Addressing such complex issues requires levels of tenancy support that are often not available, especially when people move from crisis or transitional accommodation to long-term, independent housing. Women fleeing family violence find it especially hard to manage living away from their support networks, often managing highly stressful situations in unfamiliar circumstances. They frequently move to long-term accommodation with minimal support, which often leads to a revolving door between homelessness, crisis accommodation and long-term accommodation because of difficulties sustaining tenancies or difficulties living in hostels.

Appropriate levels of support are also an especially important issue for many other groups, including people with addictions, people who have recently exited jail—especially after significant terms—young people who have little experience of living independently, and people with mental illness.

### 3.2.3 Impact of the NDIS

Although the NDIS was not a specific focus for discussion, a number of respondents volunteered the view that the introduction of the NDIS has been counterproductive for many homeless people, for multiple reasons. The most problematic one is that plans cannot be accessed unless the individual has a fixed address. One respondent described clients with annual plans of \$100,000 but because they are homeless, they are unable to activate them. The NDIS is predicated on residence at a stable, fixed location and makes no provision for those in unstable housing circumstances. If you have no home, then NDIS support plans—no matter how impressive on paper—are of no value.

Many Indigenous people also have difficulty establishing the plans because the application and assessment process requires a high degree of literacy and numeracy, as well as a clear understanding of support needs and future goals. Although support coordinators are available to help navigate the NDIS system, they are often effectively unavailable to Indigenous clients because they operate via phone calls, and many Indigenous people do not have stable phone numbers.

A further problem with the NDIS is the cost of assessments for modification of the home. The assessment is a requirement, but the cost often takes up the available funding. Arranging the assessment is also a barrier, as this is done over the phone rather than face-to-face and many clients find this too difficult. So even if a homeless Indigenous person has a support plan, it cannot be used because they do not have a fixed address or because they are unable to negotiate the system. One respondent said she could only think of one client where the NDIS had been helpful and, in that case, it had taken about three days of working solidly with the client to go through the application and assessment process and get it operational. In many other cases, the support is effectively hypothetical and of little use.

## 3.3 Cultural safety

Respondents from both Indigenous and mainstream services were mostly in agreement that Indigenous clients fared better when services were delivered by Indigenous-controlled services. The explanation for this was framed largely within the cultural safety these services afforded, and which was expressed at all levels of the organisation, from the availability of Indigenous frontline workers to the distinctive service philosophy and its emphasis on flexible, client-directed practice. While mainstream services understood the importance of cultural safety, and were committed to delivering this, what they offered in practice was qualitatively different from that provided by Indigenous-controlled services. This is illustrated in the following observations of the CEO of an Indigenous youth services, comparing a mainstream mothers' and babies' program with one that is an Indigenous service:

They're just mainstream. It's absolutely not suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mums and bubs where there's some concerns around child protection, because when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have babies, there's blessings. There's all these things that should happen at certain times after [the] baby's born. You also have your mum, your grandmother, your aunty, whoever that family is, that surrounds you through that time, that also reinforces the attachment. You're not allowed to have visitors at this [mainstream] place. There's nothing culturally safe about it. (RQ5, CEO, Indigenous youth service)

### 3.3.1 Cultural safety within mainstream services

Without exception, all the respondents from mainstream services understood the importance of cultural safety and expressed their commitment to achieving this. They appeared to mostly have a good understanding of the extent to which Indigenous individuals are over-represented among the homeless and the reasons for this, including the problems caused by culturally inappropriate service provision.

The commitment and understanding of mainstream services co-existed with limited attention to ensuring their own service was delivered in a culturally appropriate way, reflected in the virtually uniform absence of fully articulated strategies for achieving this. Strategies were piecemeal and inconsistent, with considerable variation between services. They included:

- generic policies on diversity and inclusion
- efforts to establish connections with Aboriginal services
- the inclusion of Indigenous individuals on the board
- induction programs that include cultural awareness training
- regular cultural-awareness training opportunities.

Only two services had specific Indigenous positions and very few had formal partnerships with an Indigenous service. Instead, the main mechanism to ensure cultural safety was through informal networks in relation to specific cases. For example, one youth service had an informal agreement with an Indigenous service that the Indigenous service would provide family support while they provided youth support. A women's hostel linked up with an Aboriginal community health service to provide Indigenous residents with access to an Indigenous-run home mentor program, budgeting skills and healthy relationships program.

Lack of resources was the main explanation for the limited development of cultural safety strategies by mainstream services. Program managers and CEOs were keen to develop strong relationships with Indigenous services and were committed to ensuring the cultural safety of clients, but establishing these relationships required time and skills. One program manager observed:

It's like, 'How do you do this?' Run the services we run, with increasing demand, with tight time frames and not much available space to prioritise some of this very important work. (RQ10, Program manager, mainstream youth service)

While this explanation for the limited attention to Indigenous cultural safety is understandable in terms of the stretched resources and the intensity of demand faced by housing and homelessness services, it undoubtedly helps explain the problematic profile of Indigenous homelessness. One Indigenous respondent described the cultural safety within mainstream organisations as 'black cladding':

[Black cladding] is about a white mainstream organisation who puts a few black faces in their organisation to try and meet the needs. So that individual might be doing a magnificent job, but when that individual moves on, where does that go? So typically, it [cultural safety] is not about the organisation, it's typically about the individual. (RQ13, Manager, Indigenous community service)

The concern is that in organisations where cultural safety is not embedded in a systemic way, it relies on individuals, and is therefore contingent and uncertain. Although racism was not identified as an issue by any respondents, there were some accounts of individual workers taking a punitive approach and lacking the cultural knowledge to provide an effective service. This sensitivity was especially the case for housing officers whose primary concern is property management rather than tenancy sustainment.

### 3.3.2 Good cultural practice: Indigenous-led services

For Indigenous services, establishing cultural safety revolved around their shared connection with their clients to people, place and culture. The personal background of workers, and a specifically Indigenous approach to service provision, meant the experience of clients accessing the service was distinct from mainstream services—and this was critical in overcoming barriers of distrust.

Establishing reputational credibility is also critical. Respondents emphasised that to establish trust in the community and with individual clients it was important to have ‘skin in the game’, both in the sense of authentic connections to the community, and in the sense of having been involved in service provision for a significant period of time. This was described by an Indigenous SHS:

We’ve got a good name in Brisbane. We’ve got a name for servicing the disadvantaged Indigenous people in Brisbane. Our CEO has got a good name down here. I think most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know our CEO because he’s been with us a long time. And I think it’s about —people in Brisbane, and I dare say in Townsville and anywhere else—they know who’s who. Aboriginal people know each other. (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

Establishing a brand that is recognised in the community as a trusted service that offers clients both safety and effectiveness is a critical component of success.

#### Indigenous employment

In contrast with mainstream services, most of the Indigenous-led services had very high numbers of Indigenous employees, in some cases amounting to almost 100 per cent. This was a crucial strategy, because the shared cultural background made it easier for clients to trust, and therefore access, the service. The capacity of Indigenous workers to translate the demands of mainstream housing and homeless services is important for many clients who struggle to negotiate mainstream agencies and services, including the courts.

Indigenous managers and frontline workers described a capacity to empathise with clients that was based on their own lived experience. They locate their practice in the reality of the client’s life-worlds, including experiences of intergenerational trauma and experiences of child removal. Crowded homes and relatives who belong to the Stolen Generation are part of their own life-worlds, rather than something they have learned about indirectly:

Most of our staff and their families have been part of the transgenerational trauma that’s happened to Aboriginal people. So, we’re aware of Stolen Generations. It’s stuff that non-indigenous people can’t understand. They can read it but they haven’t lived it. (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous hostel)

It’s not only our clients, it’s us too. Us staff members are also living that life of injustices. We have a staff member at this current time whose child is struggling to find somewhere to live after being in prison. (RQ4, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

Some respondents emphasised that the employment of Indigenous workers was more than a matter of ‘ticking the black box’, because Indigenous workers were usually also located within an Indigenous organisation where the work culture, priorities and service-delivery model reflect Indigenous values. It’s the combined strengths of an Indigenous worker located within an Indigenous service that makes the service culturally appropriate. The availability of Indigenous social and cultural capital within the service allows workers to draw on resources within the community. Their close networks with Indigenous families and communities in and around Brisbane enable Indigenous workers to understand what’s going on for clients, and increases the likelihood that they will find place-based solutions to a client’s difficulties. This point was made by an Indigenous community service in relation to managing child protection issues:

We see it quite a fair bit in child protection, where we’ve had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations working with a particular individual. They’ve been able to get the runs on the board, whereas they’ve sat with a mainstream organisation for a period of time with nothing, you know?

I think understanding some of that history, and who their families are, and their kinships, and who do they actually link with [is what makes the difference]. So Jimmy might actually be supported by Aunty Jackie, and such and such. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations know that they need to go and see Aunty Jackie, because they're looking after these particular individuals themselves. Whereas the typical mainstream goes, 'Okay, let's work with Jimmy, not Aunty, Daphne and Uncle Jack,' you know, that sort of stuff? I think that's the critical component that mainstream organisations, and particular government organisations, miss. They don't get that. (RQ13, Manager, Indigenous community service)

Respondents from both Indigenous and mainstream services expressed the view that Indigenous clients fared better when services were delivered by Indigenous-controlled services. There were many reasons for this, including the connections to clients' kinship networks.

#### **Flexible, responsive, community-led service-delivery models**

Most Indigenous services emphasised their relationship with community and place. They had strong networks with local Indigenous communities and Elders and worked hard to ensure that services were aligned with their realities and aspirations. They described the effort they made to establish strong connections with community stakeholders, spending time listening to their priorities and making sure services met needs identified within the community. While many mainstream services operated on a medical model, involving fixed appointments, clinical language and formal work environments, cultural appropriateness was associated with a flexible approach to service delivery and an emphasis on being embedded in the community, with strategies calibrated to community needs. The result is strong community support, which serves as an important resource for the service and facilitates broader community trust.

One of the things in the past couple of years that the Board, CEO and the community have really worked on, is having that community focus on the work that's being done ... To see if these services are fit, what community are looking for. And if not [fitting], it's not dismissing that, it's then going back and having a conversation to see how we're able to work those in. It's all about making sure that we have the overarching thing where the community and the Elder group are really supportive of those programs. I mean, that's probably your main difference from a mainstream organisation, whereas they would have their KPIs and everything set. (RQ6, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

This kind of responsiveness is apparent in the way one Indigenous service supported a group of young, Indigenous kids who were regularly getting picked up by the police because they were hanging out during the night at an inner-city parkland. Because youth facilities were often full, sometimes they were placed in adult prison cells overnight. In response, the Indigenous service obtained funding that enabled them to divert the children away from justice services. The funding was used to buy vans, and by setting up a sausage sizzle they established a relationship with the young people. The Indigenous service then worked with the young people to either return them home or to go to another place of safety.

This responsiveness is an aspect of being client-directed, because the service brings the services to the client rather than expecting the client to come to them. Indigenous services saw this as a critical feature of the service model and an essential strategy for improving access to homelessness services. Holding barbecues in public spaces not only helped to lower problems of drinking, it also provided an opportunity for clients to get to know staff and from there to trust the service. The service can then build on this as the basis for other services to be brought to clients:

We try and fund a barbecue ... and then what we try and do is get some services in there like the hospital, legal services and all those services to come in. Because they [clients] don't actually go to those services because they don't trust them. So, what this does is encourage them to come in there and then maybe we can arrange to bring them into the medical centre. (RQ2, CEO, Indigenous SHS)

Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, services emphasised the need to adapt to local requirements. Strategies and practices are adjusted to fit local client socio-demographics, such as ethnic mix and local service profiles.

All the Indigenous services stressed the importance of flexible service delivery. While they meet their statutory and contractual obligations, some Indigenous homelessness services stressed the importance of a holistic, client-directed approach, where the first requirement is the establishment of a trusting relationship. This relational approach requires a persistent focus on engagement that may involve significant commitments of time.

If clients don't want to sit in the clinic and have an appointment, we'll go for a walk with them and have a yarn. Things like that that are probably more flexible than mainstream services, to make sure clients feel comfortable. We'll also follow up with them quite a lot. We understand that there's some barriers for them accessing the service ... It might take six appointments to establish the rapport ... Clients can see us as often and for as long as they need. We don't exit them from the service unless they ask us to. (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

Service access is facilitated through a 'no-wrong-door approach', where clients are accepted even if the problem is not one the service is funded for. This client-directed philosophy is based on an understanding of the vulnerability of clients and the difficulty they have in accessing services, so even if they have come to the wrong door, the service will engage with them in order to connect them with appropriate services.

A number of Indigenous services also described having a soft-intake approach, where people can come in off the streets without an appointment and engage with the service informally. Reception areas are friendly and welcoming, and there is provision for children to be looked after while parents consult with workers. There is also a minimum of formal requirements, such as form filling and appointments.

When they walk in, it's very—we've got bush tucker—it hasn't got that clinical kind of feel to it, you know? Our main office is a house. We've got a bit of bush tucker and we've got an old bakery that we've done artwork around the walls. It's got a very relaxed feel to it, rather than walking in and sitting, it's got your two receptionists being there and a big counter, and a little couch on the wall while you're waiting to see somebody. I think that's a big point of difference for us. (RQ7, Indigenous youth service)

This approach is especially important for rough sleepers, where trust is often a substantial barrier to engagement.

Indigenous housing and homelessness services were not the only ones to take this approach. One mainstream service provider reflected on the difference a change in approach had made to the profile of homeless people engaging with the service. In previous years, the service had taken a soft-intake approach that involved an open-door policy. This resulted in a high number of Indigenous rough sleepers, who tended to be chronically homeless and with high levels of tri-morbidity. Changing the model to a more formal intake process had changed the profile of Indigenous clients to a broader group, involving a mix of early intervention, early homelessness and rough sleepers. While this change in approach fitted the service's efforts to become more preventative in its approach, it also raised the question of whether those chronic rough sleepers who were no longer accessing the services were accessing other services to meet their needs.

Both mainstream and Indigenous services emphasised the importance of culturally respectful relationships when working with Indigenous populations. This required staff who had some understanding of Indigenous culture and the relational nature of Indigenous engagement. It meant the willingness to spend time with clients in order to build the relationship, and knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them so that the person is engaged on their own terms.

I would say being really aware of our language, that we're talking about approach-wise, I think. Less clinical, less structured, less terminology and things like that we'd be quite aware of. Also being aware probably of our body language in consult, the way out of the room, so that it feels less intimidating. All of these kind of things—taking the client's lead, and their pace. (RQ19, Program manager, Indigenous health service)

### Assertive practice that follows the client

Problems of distrust and disengagement require a particular form of practice that involves assertively and persistently following up clients to get them off the streets and into homes. The intersectional nature of Indigenous homelessness means they are doubly hard to reach, as both homelessness and Indigeneity are characterised by a distrust of formal institutions. This lack of trust requires an awareness that, as well as ensuring cultural safety, it may be necessary to be prepared to stick with clients over the long haul. This was recognised by both mainstream and Indigenous respondents:

We all just need to do more work on racism because I think that cultural competency and all of that, is a little bit of a soft option. I think that everybody can feel cosy about it and be—what do you call it—politically correct about it. But when it comes to dealing with the reality, you might take five weeks to get the answer to something that would take one day with someone else. Because people are building that trust or aren't very sure if they want to trust you. You need a lot more practical support to win the trust of homeless people. I think that's true whether you're Indigenous or not. (RQ12, Mainstream SHS)

### Managing family and community connections

The corollary accompanying an Indigenous workforce was the need to manage client connections to workers. This was not identified as a problem by services who saw this as relatively easily managed through protocols on conflicts of interest, and strategies for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity—as well as careful management of community politics. Protocols include checking if someone knows the family, or is related to the client, and allocating to them *someone who is not close to their kinship network*.

We want to make sure that it's a high quality service, very professional, and that people feel safe here. We also want to reflect proper cultural protocols and be proud of that, and not participate in community politics or any of that kind of behaviour. I think the attitudes of management and staff certainly reflect that and where there are staff that don't reflect those views and values, they don't last long here. (RQ7, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

One mainstream service provider also suggested that some clients preferred a non-Indigenous service because they were shamed by their experiences and wanted to protect their anonymity:

Some people don't like going to ATSI services because they feel judged. So you've got educated Aboriginal people that have had great lives and have come through stuff [working for the service]. But then you've got the other ones that go to these services that haven't had that. But then there's all that shame and that judgement. (RQ17, Indigenous outreach worker)

The view of most respondents was that the existence of community and kinship connections worked both ways. Such connections could improve service access because of perceptions of cultural safety and familiarity—but because they also have the potential to threaten client privacy and confidentiality, some clients might prefer to access an alternative service. As one frontline worker put it: '... there are some who don't want to access the service because Auntie works there, but there are others who only want to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (RQ 17 Indigenous outreach worker). For this reason, there is a need for a diversity of service provision that includes both Indigenous and mainstream services.

## 3.4 Service coordination

### 3.4.1 Effectiveness of horizontal coordination and communication

While policy settings emphasise the desirability of strong horizontal coordination across services and sectors, the view of most respondents was that the rhetoric was not matched by the reality. There is now a peak body, the Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland (Housing Queensland) established in 2021, and at the time

of this research there were government-sponsored networks covering domestic violence and child safety. While a few services had formal partnerships with other services at that time, respondents emphasised the strength of their informal partnerships. This meant services get together on a 'need-to' basis, such as for funding applications or advocacy around a particular policy direction, with some local services attempting to meet regularly, as in the case of Under 1 Roof. Under 1 Roof is a case-coordination panel operated by Rotary in Fortitude Valley that brings together housing and community services with the goal of housing high-needs individuals and ending homelessness.

Although some respondents expressed the view that formal partnerships were time-consuming to establish and often limited in what they could achieve, it was also evident that part of the difficulty in developing strong coordination across services is the lack of funding for service coordination. The CEO of an Indigenous youth service remarked:

I was thinking of a comment that another CEO from another organisation made at a meeting I was in. She said, 'I'm so sick and tired of trying to reinvent the wheel and make my resources stretch even further.' (R7, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

Without targeted funding, many services are simply too busy addressing immediate demands and have limited capacity to develop formal partnerships and networks. This is especially the case given the constant change in the policy and service environment.

When I look at youth workers in our teams, and managers who support them, you've got something like the NDIS system that comes along and that just takes so much time and effort to learn how to navigate those systems, and then they're constantly changing. So we've got that landed in Brisbane, we've got the Housing Department doing a total business transformation, we've had Child Safety doing a review of their regional intake service. All these things are subject to fairly major and constant change ... So it's enormously difficult, on a system level, for some of that integration to happen. (RQ10, Manager, Mainstream SHS)

One respondent suggested there used to be state funding for this kind of capacity building but it is no longer available with the move to direct client care. Roles such as Indigenous Liaison officers were also no longer funded. This is partly due to the shift towards individual care packages, with service budgets shifting towards marketing rather than direct client support. The absence of structures and strategies to facilitate intersectoral and cross-sectoral relationships means relationships tend to be disjointed. Respondents who had been working in their field for years described discovering services they had never previously heard of.

You have the services you have good relationships with, but there is no effective integration and information sharing across the sector. (R7, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

### 3.4.2 Poor coordination between homelessness and domestic violence services

Areas where integration is especially problematic include:

- housing and SHSs
- domestic and family violence
- children's services.

While respondents reported some improvement in coordination between the Queensland government and domestic violence services—especially in relation to changing the allocation of leases from the perpetrator to the victim—there are critical areas where coordination is poor. The Queensland Government's Framework for Action targets Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence, but the focus is principally on remote communities, even though the rate of Indigenous victimisation in Brisbane is high. For many years, there was only one Indigenous-specific domestic and family violence service in Brisbane—and there is currently no Indigenous child and family service nor an Indigenous domestic violence portal. The statewide crisis phone service, DV Connect, does not

target Indigenous women, so when they phone, they are connected to someone who (at best) has done some training in Indigenous cultural safety—but who cannot provide the same level of cultural understanding as someone who is Indigenous.

Lack of coordination directly impacts on the safety of women and children, and on the number of children removed from their parents. Indigenous women and children fleeing domestic and family violence are often unable to access appropriate housing. If their housing is unsafe due to domestic and family violence, the children are at risk of removal, but they may also be removed if the mother leaves but is unable to access stable accommodation. Even if she places her children with other family members, they may still be removed if the household is assessed as unsafe.

Even if a mother manages to negotiate a safe housing pathway away from the perpetrator, she may wait months or years in transitional accommodation, located far from her support networks. When she does receive an offer, it may be in an area that she feels is unsuitable for children, or the property itself may be rundown, so she faces the unenviable choice of remaining in temporary accommodation or accepting housing she feels is problematic.

Inadequate housing is also a barrier to reunification, as reunification can only occur if housing is assessed as safe and appropriate by child protection services. If the mother is living in a property with insufficient bedrooms for returning children, she is often dependent on receiving an offer from social housing—which may not arrive in time.

### **3.4.3 Poor coordination between homelessness and criminal justice services**

People exiting jail or other forms of custody face substantial barriers to accessing and sustaining housing, which is why they comprise a substantial part of the homeless population. Given the very high rates of Indigenous incarceration, this is a critical area for policy attention—but remains a neglected area. There is little or no coordination between specialist homeless services and the criminal justice system. When people exit custody, there is no formal protocol for advising crisis accommodation services, nor any support for sustaining the tenancy. The result is a high level of tenancy failure, adding to the number of Indigenous people sleeping rough or couchsurfing, and being highly vulnerable to going back into the juvenile or criminal justice system.

Typically, you'll go into a hostel for a couple of weeks, with a whole heap of other substance-abuse users that are coming down, or [that have] mental health issues, and you don't stand much of a chance for those first two weeks. That's the same for individuals who are coming out of correctional facilities. What we find is that they fall off the wagon straight away ... They go back to the street and [our service] can't follow up because they don't know where they are. Next time we find them will be in court or the watch house. Sometimes people [also] just don't connect with the service and so don't follow through. (RQ13, Manager, Indigenous community service)

### **3.4.4 Inadequate referral information**

One practice that some respondents identified as impacting on the quality-of-service coordination was the failure to provide a full picture of the client when making a referral. The service accepting the client may then be unable to provide adequate supports for the client. This issue can result in a failed referral that damages the client's trust in the homelessness system. It also means the referring service is no longer trusted by the other service.

And so those organisations that don't give you the full story, you don't want to take referrals from them because we're not prepared and then all hell breaks loose here, and we can't have that mixture of people who have just come out of jail with mental health issues, substance misuse, and they've got a room right next door to [a] mum and her three little bubs. So the disturbances are huge and that's where we need to know, like, are we putting them in the right room? Have they got the right supports around them? Are we able to call someone if there is an issue? And it's all hidden from you and so there's a lack of trust as well. (RQ15, Manager, mainstream hostel)

### 3.4.5 Good practice coordination and cooperation

The following elements were identified as critical to good practice coordination.

- All respondents stressed the importance of developing and maintaining strong networks across the sector. This was seen as critical to providing effective services, and enabled both frontline workers and managers to negotiate the housing and homelessness system and to advocate successfully for their client. This was more than having good personal relationships and required a comprehensive understanding of both the system itself and the agencies and services that comprised it, as well as knowing which individual to contact for what, how to contact them, and what they can or cannot offer.
- To provide an appropriate and culturally safe service to homeless Indigenous individuals and families requires services to establish strong relationships with Indigenous and mainstream services. As one service provider explained:

Some of the strengths are when we've worked in partnership. I think it has been that relationship, showing that we're a good mob to work with. We're all right and we've all got the intent to support people. That's around our communication and how we present and relate [to other services]. (RQ1, Team leader, mainstream specialist homeless service)

- It is essential to have strong connections in the community. This ensures that stakeholders have input into the service, and that the service remains in touch with community issues and expectations, serves as a resource to negotiate community dynamics and to advocate for particular strategies, and facilitates the reputation of the service as a trusted provider for relevant client groups.
- Although substance use—both drugs and alcohol—is strongly implicated in Indigenous homelessness, Brisbane has no Indigenous rehabilitation services, and this is a substantial problem for other services. More generally, rehabilitation services are often full, resulting in missed opportunities to bring clients in when they are ready. Both mainstream and Indigenous services are seeking more responsiveness from rehabilitation services, so that there is no delay between a client being prepared to go into rehabilitation, and the service being ready to accept them.
- Early intervention for tenancies at risk of failure. The Brisbane Youth Service provides an example of this approach, where they have partnered with the Queensland government on a Sustaining Young Tenancies program. This involves providing mobile case management and support to young tenants at risk of losing their tenancy.
- Need for leadership from key agencies, including the relevant state government departments—one of which is the recently reconfigured Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy.

## 3.5 Strengthening Indigenous services

### 3.5.1 The relationship between Indigenous and mainstream services

There are many positive aspects about the relationship between Indigenous services and mainstream services. Communication was generally described as good, many services described strong informal partnerships and mainstream services appeared to understand the significance of cultural safety for Indigenous clients. They are committed to working with Indigenous services and see this as critical for effective service provision.

The situation for Indigenous services is somewhat different. While most have a positive view of mainstream services and there are also strong cooperative relationships with services that are strategically located in relation to one another, there is also a sense in which they are a minnow swimming in the same pond as some very large fish. This makes the competition for SHS dollars extremely uneven.

They've got so much money. They can afford to have professional submission writers ... and we have to make do with what they give us ... [There's] a lot of extra cost comes from funding, that they don't give us extra for, like vehicle maintenance or maintenance on building ... We have to make do with the money that they give us. (RQ3, Manager, Indigenous specialist homeless service)

The demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) resulted in the shrinking of the Indigenous housing sector—and this is reflected in the small number of Brisbane's Indigenous housing and homelessness services. Both mainstream and Indigenous services complained that there simply aren't enough Indigenous services to meet demand:

Just being able to partner with well-run, well-funded Indigenous-led organisations that can provide really effective and flexible and appropriate support to those households with very complex needs ... That's where I want to get to. (RQ14, Manager, community housing provider)

Another respondent described how a meeting to discuss the management of homelessness under COVID-19 was attended by about 30–40 services—but only two were Indigenous. Given the size of the Indigenous homeless population, this is deeply problematic. Mainstream services generally have significantly greater capacity and influence, and Indigenous services are left to feel they have little control over the direction of mainstream services, which are often not as responsive to their needs as would be desirable:

We can't get any traction at all [with mainstream services]. We can email and email, call, call, call. We just get the same response. There's very little traction we can get. (RQ7, Program manager, Indigenous youth service)

The funding captured by mainstream services is also seen as problematic, given the size of the Indigenous homeless population and the perception that although mainstream services acknowledge the need for culturally adaptive service provision to Indigenous homeless people, it falls well short in practice. One respondent put his views plainly:

Mainstream services do receive a big chunk of those dollars. If they're provided dollars to provide services to our communities, what are they actually doing? (RQ13, Manager, Indigenous community service)

Indigenous services can also miss out on initiatives that affect the Indigenous homeless population, as occurred with the Under 1 Roof initiative. Under 1 Roof is a consortium of homelessness, housing and community agencies based around Fortitude Valley—an area of high Indigenous need—but which doesn't include any Indigenous services.

Although Indigenous organisations may participate in high-level policymaking meetings, a number of respondents described this as effectively 'ticking the black box', because it doesn't translate to participation at the local level, nor does the inclusion of a single Indigenous representative reflect the size of the Indigenous clientele, which should require the presence of a larger number of Indigenous services.

One respondent also identified the problem of the black ceiling, where Indigenous workers located within mainstream services were never promoted above middle-management levels. Yet it is hard to see how mainstream services can provide effective cultural safety if Indigenous personnel are not included at every level of the organisation, rather than just as frontline workers or middle managers.

## 3.6 Strengthening the Indigenous homelessness service sector

### 3.6.1 Improving coordination

The most significant ways that the Indigenous sector could be strengthened is to fund strategies for improving the coordination of Indigenous housing, homelessness and related services and supporting the peak body for Indigenous housing and homelessness services and links to the national body. Also essential are strategies to build local networks within and between Indigenous and mainstream services in ways that facilitate partnerships and strategic relationships. As one respondent put it: 'When that doesn't exist, it's like cold-calling and it stays, often, at the local individual level' (RQ10, Manager, mainstream SHS).

### 3.6.2 Models of Indigenous service provision

One model for strengthening Indigenous homelessness services is for Indigenous community health services to play a larger role in the housing and homelessness sector. Their size and reputation—together with better funding, partly because medical services make a profit as a result of Medicare receipts—make this a realistic possibility, with one organisation in Brisbane already seeking to become a Tier 3 housing provider. Some respondents were keen to see such a development:

You've got the sort of governance structures there ... They've got that leadership and governance and they've been very effective at what they've done already. I think that would be a good platform to build off. (RQ14, Manager, community housing provider)

But others pointed out the extent to which the model for delivery of community medical services differed from that of housing and homelessness services:

- Housing services are heavily reliant on infrastructure and fixed assets, but have a flexible, client-directed approach.
- Medical services are more flexible but operate on a bio-medical model that is closer to mainstream services than the approach of an Indigenous housing service.

For example, Indigenous community health services operate on a referral and appointment basis, but this does not align well with the needs of Indigenous homeless people who often miss appointments and can be hard to reach. While the medical model has been integral to the success of Indigenous community health services, some respondents pointed out that this does not align well with models of community housing, which require a high level of flexibility in reaching Indigenous clients, as well as housing-asset management and tenancy management skills:

In ATSIC days, Aboriginal organisations operated as one-stop shops. You could go to the service and you'd be able to access medical care, Centrelink support, health needs. The only Aboriginal organisations today that are in a position to run that kind of thing are the Aboriginal health organisations, but what's that going to look like? But they're health organisations, not housing organisations? Not sure it will work or be appropriate. (RQ13, Manager, Indigenous community service)

A further concern is the importance of ensuring client choice. While there may be merit in this development of strengthening Indigenous health organisations, it is also important for a diversity of services to exist, and strengthening one service should not come at the expense of other services that have established reputations for being effective, over many years. The need for client choice should also extend to the continued capacity of mainstream services to provide appropriate responses to homeless Indigenous individuals, so that clients have a choice about whether they engage with Indigenous or mainstream services (or both).

## 3.7 Ways forward

Discussions with key informants interfacing with Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Greater Brisbane—which reaches to spaces and places beyond that area—identified several ways forward for policy, support and service delivery. Three key pathways stand out from the analysis of on-the-ground experiences.

### Targeted actions to reduce Indigenous homelessness

- **Crowding and unapproved occupants:** overcrowding remains a significant contributor to homelessness pathways and housing insecurity across Brisbane, and across Queensland. Current service-delivery approaches do little to resolve the multiple challenges overcrowding presents for tenants, unapproved occupants and services. Funding Indigenous services to provide intensive tenancy management is a way forward here, with workers supporting tenants to maintain their tenancy or establish a new one where necessary, as well as supporting unapproved occupants with their housing and related needs.

- **Recurrent homelessness:** recurrent or chronic homelessness was identified as a key characteristic of homelessness experiences for many Indigenous people and families in Greater Brisbane—the ‘revolving door’ of unstable housing and homelessness. Movement between state institutions and homelessness or housing insecurity was identified as part of such a revolving door for many people—particularly those connected to correctional services. The provision of housing-support and non-housing support must occur in tandem, focussed on supporting tenants to maintain rental payments and to manage other domains of life—including budgeting, cooking, keeping appointments (medical, NDIS etc.). Importantly, support must be provided for an appropriate period to ensure stability in people’s lives.
- **Assertive outreach:** the Housing First approach remains a critical way for supporting people to permanently move on from homelessness, maximising housing security and delivery of supports.

#### Ensuring cultural safety

- The cultural safety of services is critical for Indigenous people. It was clear from the Brisbane case study that cultural safety for Indigenous clients is a work in progress across the homelessness and interfacing services landscape, particularly among mainstream services. Higher level policy attention is needed to address cultural safety, setting standards and targets for governments and services (at both state and federal level).
- While there have been moves within Queensland’s housing and homeless policy to be more responsive, largely through the Partnering for Impact policy, and since this research was undertaken the establishment of the peak body Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland (Housing Queensland), it is early to see whether this can improve the cultural appropriateness of service delivery for Indigenous people in Queensland. The scarcity of Indigenous-controlled housing in Queensland, points to the need for major policy change—including targeted funding to build and renew the Indigenous housing and homelessness sector. Procurement policies are needed that prioritise Indigenous services. As long as funding continues to go to mainstream services that are characterised by a low level of cultural safety, Indigenous individuals and families will continue to fall through the cracks and the Closing the Gap targets will fail to be met.
- This case study highlights the widespread distrust that Indigenous people experiencing or at risk of homelessness have of formal institutions, including SHSs. This distrust is borne out of dispossession, trauma and the lack of culturally safe housing and support responses. Accordingly, there is appetite and need for person-centred funding and support, rather than program-centred or service-centred support.

#### Increasing cooperation between Indigenous and mainstream services

- There is clear need for better coordination and cooperation between Indigenous-led and mainstream services supporting Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, as well as between agencies involved in known pathways to homelessness—which includes state institutions. Specific attention is needed to support the development of area-wide networks between Indigenous and mainstream services, especially between SHSs and domestic and family violence, criminal and juvenile justice and child and family services. Key informants noted that the strength of connections between such agencies is entirely a matter for individual services to negotiate and establish. Sharing information—including discharge-planning information for people exiting institutions, such as prisons, hospital, mental health facilities—must be part of any strategic focus on service integration. Bottom-up community-led approaches are needed rather than state-led top-down impositions.
- One strategy likely to improve service coordination is to embed an Indigenous housing liaison worker in strategically located services, such as women’s shelters, prisons and juvenile justice centres, as well as Indigenous legal services.
- To maximise the success of service integration, current strategies need to be supported by increased resources—service delivery funding and brokerage, dedicated staff time—with specific roles (including leadership) and targets attached.

Finally, it is important to note that the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)* came into operation in its entirety in 2020 and has implications for homelessness in the state. In terms of Indigenous homelessness, the Act explicitly protects the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Although the right to housing is not protected under the Act, there are other rights that will impinge on housing and homelessness provision, including the protection of families and children and rights to health service and education. The Act provides a mechanism for holding to account public and community services receiving state funding in terms of right-based outcomes.

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## 4. Case study: Greater Darwin, Northern Territory

- **The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia. At the 2016 Census, the NT also had the highest rate of Indigenous homelessness.**
- **While the high rates of overcrowding in remote and very remote areas of the NT impact this data, some 79 per cent of homeless people in the Greater Darwin urban area are Indigenous people living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough.**
- **Indigenous homelessness is different. The drivers of Indigenous homelessness and the entry and exit points to accessing services are different.**
- **The notions of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ are culturally mediated. This does not mean less support but more, as there are intersecting vulnerabilities across all groups of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Greater Darwin.**
- **Women and children escaping violence, with some coming into Darwin from remote areas, are particularly vulnerable. A trauma-informed, culturally safe and deeply sensitive service response is required.**
- **Indigenous people transitioning out of prison are vulnerable, with many getting caught in a ‘revolving door’ of recidivism. Provision of secure and culturally safe accommodation support is essential. Trauma-informed wraparound support services that assist engagement with pathways out of risk in ways that are relevant and sensitive to Indigenous life-worlds and experience are also essential.**

## 4.1 Profile of urban homelessness

### 4.1.1 Patterns of urban Indigenous homelessness

#### Numbers

The Northern Territory (NT) has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, which at 599 per 10,000 people is 12 times the national rate of homelessness (49.8 per 10,000).

Of the total number of Indigenous people who were homeless in Australia on the night of the 2016 Census, 52 per cent (12,100) lived in the NT, despite only 9 per cent of Australia's total Indigenous people living in the NT (AIHW 2019a: 50). Indigenous people comprise just over a quarter (25.5%) of the population in the Northern Territory, yet over three-quarters (88.4%) of homeless people in the NT are Indigenous.

The estimated number of Indigenous people in the NT who were homeless on census night is likely to be an underestimate. This reflects:

- a relatively large under-enumeration of Indigenous people in the census compared to the total population
- cultural differences in the concepts of home and homelessness, as Indigenous peoples may not consider themselves homeless if they are living on Country or among kin (ABS 2017a; AIHW 2019a).

In keeping with nationwide trends, the proportion of people who were homeless in the NT based on the 2016 Census has declined slightly (2%) since 2006. In the NT, this decline in the homelessness rate is argued to be driven by both:

- a drop in the rate of homelessness among Indigenous people
- a rise in the rate of non-Indigenous homelessness (AIHW 2019a: 51).

Taking the size of the Indigenous population into account, the NT had the highest rate of homeless Indigenous people in the nation on the night of the 2016 Census. Over one in five (22%) Indigenous people (or 2,083 per 10,000 population) were homeless in the NT. Nationally remote and very remote areas have the greatest prevalence of Indigenous homelessness (13 times higher than non-Indigenous counterparts) but there also are significantly higher rates of Indigenous homelessness in major cities and inner regional areas (four times higher than for non-Indigenous counterparts) (ABS 2017a; AIHW 2019a).

In the NT, 81 per cent of the homeless population were living in 'severely' crowded dwellings in 2016. Severe crowding in the other states and territories ranged between 16 per cent (TAS) to 45 per cent (NSW). Compared to other states and territories, the NT also had a high rate of homeless persons in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out, at 48 per 10,000 persons. The next highest rates were in WA, QLD and NSW (each with 4 per 10,000 persons) (AIHW 2020a).

Over three-quarters of the NT's Indigenous population (79%) live in remote and very remote areas. Based on the 2016 Census, about 27,600 Indigenous people in the NT live in overcrowded houses, of whom 10,700 are considered homeless (see Table 7). According to the Homeless Operational Group data (see Table 9) Indigenous people comprise 96.8 per cent of the people living in 'severe' overcrowding in the NT.

The greater proportion of Indigenous homeless people in remote and very remote areas is thought to relate to severely overcrowded public housing dwellings, particularly in very remote areas. The NT has the highest rate of overcrowding, with 13 per cent of its public housing reported to be overcrowded compared to 10 per cent nationally (Productivity Commission 2020).

The rates of persons in supported accommodation for the homeless were highest in the NT (28 persons per 10,000 persons), followed by the ACT (20 persons per 10,000 persons). The rates in supported accommodation were significantly lower in the other jurisdictions (ranging from 4 per 10,000 in WA to 12 per 10,000 in Victoria). According to the summary of Homeless Operational Group data presented in Table 7, of all Territorians staying in supported accommodation for the homeless, almost 60 per cent (59.7%) were Indigenous.

Table 7: Profile of homelessness, Northern Territory, 2016 Census

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total population <sup>1</sup>		58,298	23.3	163,857	65.5	27,981	11.2	250,130	100.0
<b>All homeless persons<sup>2</sup></b>									
Gender	Males	5,844	85.9	750	11.0	210	3.1	6,804	100.0
	Females	6,276	90.7	512	7.4	133	1.9	6,921	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>12,125</b>	<b>88.4</b>	<b>1,257</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>13,720</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	<12 years old	2,971	24.6	121	9.8	17	5.3	3,105	22.9
	12-17 years old	1,528	12.7	40	3.3	51	15.8	1,568	11.6
	Adults (18+ years old)	7,569	62.7	1,068	86.9	254	78.9	8,891	65.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>12,068</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,229</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>13,564</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Homeless Operational Group</b>									
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)		802	73.2	261	23.8	33	3.0	1,096	8.0
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless		379	59.7	168	26.5	88	13.9	635	4.6
Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)		60	14.2	352	83.2	11	2.6	423	3.1
Persons living in boarding houses		170	35.3	115	23.9	197	40.9	482	3.5
Persons in other temporary lodgings		5	20.8	19	79.2	0	0.0	24	0.2
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings		10,709	96.8	342	3.1	9	0.1	11,060	80.6
<b>Total*</b>		<b>12,125</b>	<b>88.4</b>	<b>1,257</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>13,720</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Persons who are marginally housed <sup>3</sup>		4,425	78.2	1,199	21.2	34	0.6	5,658	-
<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>		<b>16,550</b>	<b>85.4</b>	<b>2,456</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>19,378</b>	<b>-</b>

Notes: \* Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) Based on place of enumeration. 2) 'All homeless persons' relates to the aggregated data from the six homeless operational categories determined for the census: Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers); persons in supported accommodation for the homeless; persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfers); persons living in boarding houses; persons in other temporary lodgings; persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. 3) Includes persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks, or living in crowded or improvised dwellings that are excluded from the Homeless Operational Groups' count.

Source: ABS 2018c.

A key feature of the Indigenous homeless population in the NT is that 37.3 per cent are children and young people under the age of 17 (see Table 7), compared with 21.1 per cent for non-Indigenous counterparts. Coupled with the higher proportion of homeless Indigenous females (90.7% of all homeless female Territorians), this resonates with respondents' concerns about the high correlation between homelessness and domestic and family violence. With almost three-quarters (73.2%) of those 'rough sleeping' being Indigenous people, the safety of homeless women and children remains a major issue in the NT.

### Geographies

The greater proportion (94.9%) of homeless Indigenous people in the NT are in areas outside Greater Darwin (see Table 8), with high levels of overcrowding in remote and very remote areas. However, while only approximately 6 per cent of Indigenous homeless Territorians are in Greater Darwin, several respondents felt that this demarcation between very remote/remote, regional and urban is an arguable—and some suggested artificial—split in the Indigenous homelessness context. Our respondents pointed to the ongoing high levels of mobility between remote and urban areas.

I don't know, they focus a lot on remote housing as opposed to urban homelessness ... people are coming into Darwin, crashing wherever they can, with family or sleeping rough ... do what they need to do, then heading off—that is if they don't get caught up or in trouble here ... (RD1, Manager, Community service organisation)

... a lot of people coming in from remote and they come in for all different reasons again, severe overcrowding in remote communities and lack of housing there, but then there might also be medical or other things that they need to attend to in town, or they might be coming in for family reasons. (RD2, Worker, Indigenous-specific health organisation)

Non-Indigenous notions of remote and urban may have little meaning for Indigenous Territorians, for whom embodied experiences of what it means to be 'home' can be quite at odds with the privileging of dwellings over access to services and familial connectedness.

Respondents explained that people are continually in transit or 'orbiting' in and out of areas as they look for services, access to healthcare or to visit kin and family in Darwin, which blurs the boundaries between 'remote' and 'urban' areas. This spatial categorisation of the data belies the deep and complex issues surrounding Indigenous people's socio-spatial patterns of behaviour, including mobility through and between regional areas, remote areas, and urban locations (Fantin 2003: 73; Long, Memmott et al. 2007; Memmott 2003: 29).

In cities and inner regional areas, the Indigenous homeless population was most commonly living in supported accommodation for the homeless (40% or 1,400 of people in major cities, and 33% or 700 in Inner regional) (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistical Survey (NATSISS) 2017). A gap in data collection and reporting means that it is unclear whether, for example, town camps and other informal dwelling arrangements are included in the Northern Territory's public housing figures or calculations of 'rough sleeping'.

Table 8: Profile of homelessness and marginal housing, Greater Darwin and rest of state, Northern Territory, 2016 Census

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>All homeless persons<sup>1</sup></b>							
Greater Darwin/Darwin SA4	770	43.5	854	48.2	152	8.6	1,772
Rest of state/Northern Territory – Outback SA4	11,350	94.9	411	3.4	197	1.6	11,956
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,120</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>1,265</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>13,728</b>
<b>Other marginal housing<sup>2</sup></b>							
Greater Darwin/Darwin SA4	181	17.8	811	79.9	19	1.9	1,015
Rest of state/Northern Territory – Outback SA4	4,233	91.1	382	8.2	19	0.4	4,646
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,414</b>	<b>78.0</b>	<b>1,193</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>5,661</b>
<b>Total homeless or marginally housed</b>							
Greater Darwin/Darwin SA4	12,125	88.3	1,257	9.2	338	2.5	1,3727
Rest of state/Northern Territory – Outback SA4	4,425	78.2	1,199	21.2	34	0.6	5,656
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,550</b>	<b>85.4</b>	<b>2,456</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>19,383</b>

Notes: Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) 'All homeless persons' relates to the aggregated data from the six homeless operational categories determined from the census: persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers); persons in supported accommodation for the homeless; persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfers); persons living in boarding houses; persons in other temporary lodgings; persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. 2) Includes persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks or living in crowded or improvised dwellings that are excluded from the Homeless Operational Groups' count.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

#### 4.1.2 Socio-demographic characteristics

Nationally, Indigenous people were 9.4 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to seek SHSs in 2017–2018. This has increased from 7.8 times in 2011–12 (AIHW 2019a: 51). Reasons for seeking SHS support in 2017–18 include:

- Risk of homelessness due to domestic and family violence—28%, or 9,100 clients nationally
- Housing crisis—16%, or 5,200 clients
- Financial difficulties—14%, or 4,550 clients.

The rate for Indigenous male clients of SHS was 8.7 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous males. The rate for Indigenous females was 9.8 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous females. However, rates of service use have increased over time for Indigenous clients of both sexes (AIHW 2019b: 56).

There was an increase in the number of older Indigenous people seeking assistance in 2017–18: 14 per cent aged 45+, compared with 11 per cent, in 2012–13. However, children under 5 years of age were the largest SHS Indigenous client group in 2017–2018:

The high proportion of children has been a consistent trend over time and reflects the high proportion of Indigenous family groups presenting to services for assistance. (AIHW 2019b: 57)

The NT had the highest proportion of Indigenous SHS clients (83%), compared with the national level (25%). Similarly, when compared to other states and territories:

... the NT had the lowest proportion of Indigenous lone persons (44% or 3,300 clients), and the highest proportion of one parent with child/ren (42% or 3,200) and couples with child/ren (8% or 580). (AIHW 2019b: 6--62)

Interview participants emphasised that this 'whole of family' homelessness issue in the Greater Darwin area was a major issue, as it highlighted inadequate support for sole parents, for those fleeing domestic violence, and for those 'cycling in and out of prison' or leaving care as young people.

But a lot of our clients ... well, we've got some rough sleepers, but most of the homeless, you know, there are a lot of women with kids, and lot of them are living with family, they're camping in yards, they're sleeping in their cars, that kind of thing ... (RD1, Manager, Community services organisation)

Table 9 depicts the profile of homelessness in Greater Darwin in 2016. The Greater Darwin region contains three local government areas: Litchfield, Palmerston, and the City of Darwin. The region covers a total area of around 3,100 square kilometres, or less than 1 per cent of the total area of the NT and includes approximately 148,900 people (ABS 2019).

Table 9: Profile of homelessness in Greater Darwin, 2016 Census

Greater Darwin		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Homeless Operational Group	Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)	414	79.0	95	18.1	15	2.9	524
	Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	140	43.8	129	40.3	47	14.7	320
	Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)	35	13.9	214	84.9	8	3.2	252
	Persons living in boarding houses	23	11.1	104	50.0	75	36.1	208
	Persons in other temporary lodgings	0	0.0	10	90.9	0	0.0	11
	Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	158	34.6	302	66.1	7	1.5	457
<b>Total</b>		<b>770</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>854</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>1,772</b>
Persons who are marginally housed <sup>1</sup>		17.8	811	79.9	19	1.9	1,015	181
<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>		<b>34.1</b>	<b>1,665</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>2,787</b>	<b>951</b>

Notes: Totals do not necessarily sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder.

1) Persons who are marginally housed includes persons living in other crowded dwellings, persons in other improvised dwellings and persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

The Homeless Operational Group data in Table 9 shows that at the time of the 2016 Census, nearly 80 per cent of those sleeping rough, living in tents or impoverished dwellings in Greater Darwin were Indigenous, compared to just 18 per cent of non-Indigenous counterparts. This extraordinary figure is even more stark when you consider that only 11.1 per cent of people living in boarding houses in Greater Darwin are Indigenous. The figures for Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous people living in supported accommodation for the homeless in Greater Darwin are more even, being 43.8 per cent for Indigenous people.

The data in Table 9 highlights that Indigenous people in Greater Darwin experience homelessness differently to non-Indigenous people. Factors raised by respondents to explain why Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in the rough sleeping category in Greater Darwin were:

- the over-representation of Indigenous people in the prison system
- higher rates of poverty
- mobility into the Greater Darwin region from remote areas seeking medical support, or to visit family and kin in prison or hospital
- the need to flee violence.

Fleeing domestic and family violence also came up repeatedly in interviews with respondents. As a recent study by Cripps and Habibis (2019: 1) identifies: 'Indigenous women and children have very limited housing pathways to choose from in the aftermath of domestic and family violence.'

In commenting on the problems for women and children experiencing violence, interview respondents highlighted how many women and children came into the Greater Darwin area desperate for safe housing in Palmerston, for example, but were forced to 'live on the streets', in camps or to seek shelter in crowded accommodation with extended family. This situation meant they were often under great stress, caught between the threat of having their children removed due to unsafe or insecure accommodation or being forced to return to a violent situation:

... people come in because they have to leave community when they're being sexually assaulted; they come in for counselling and other forensic services which they can't get out bush, and then maybe they can't go back because the perpetrator or, you know, the situation hasn't been resolved out bush ... (RD2, Worker, Indigenous-specific health organisation)

... you'll get an influx of women escaping DV [domestic violence] or just young couples with bubs that don't want to live on community anymore in overcrowded houses and try and do the best they can, and then they come into town seeking help. We do all we can, but we aren't funded for some of the support they need ... (RD4, Manager, mainstream SHS)

However, acute shortages in transitional and long-term housing in Greater Darwin mean that Indigenous women and children from regional and remote areas fleeing violence are routinely turned away from refuges and safe houses, which are at capacity. While respondents spoke with great respect and support for current services such as Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Service (DAIWS) for their proactive support for women, and Darwin Indigenous Men's Service (DIMS) and its Indigenous Family Violence Prevention and Healing program, they highlighted the urgent need for more support for women fleeing violence—including long-term secure housing options:

Well, I've just been on the phone to DIMS, which is why I was late coming in—we have lots of contact with them and DAIWS and Dawn House ... there are many times in our transitional accommodation where we've referred women out to DAIWS for support because there's been violence in the home—and at the moment that's what I'm trying to do with a young fellow living in transitional accommodation, to engage him in DIMS. These Aboriginal-led services are essential and should be expanded ... need more funding to expand as the demand is high ... (RD3, Senior worker, Indigenous-specific housing provider/services)

Respondents emphasised the critical nature of the 'criminal injustice system', citing exceptionally high rates of over-representation of Indigenous men and women in NT prisons as part of the 'revolving door' trapping Indigenous people in marginalised housing situations.

... most of the Aboriginal men coming out of prison from DV [domestic violence], they don't have any accommodation for them ... so often what they do is they just go homeless or they go ... and try and bunk down with families, which causes another set of problems. (RD5, Manager, Community services organisation)

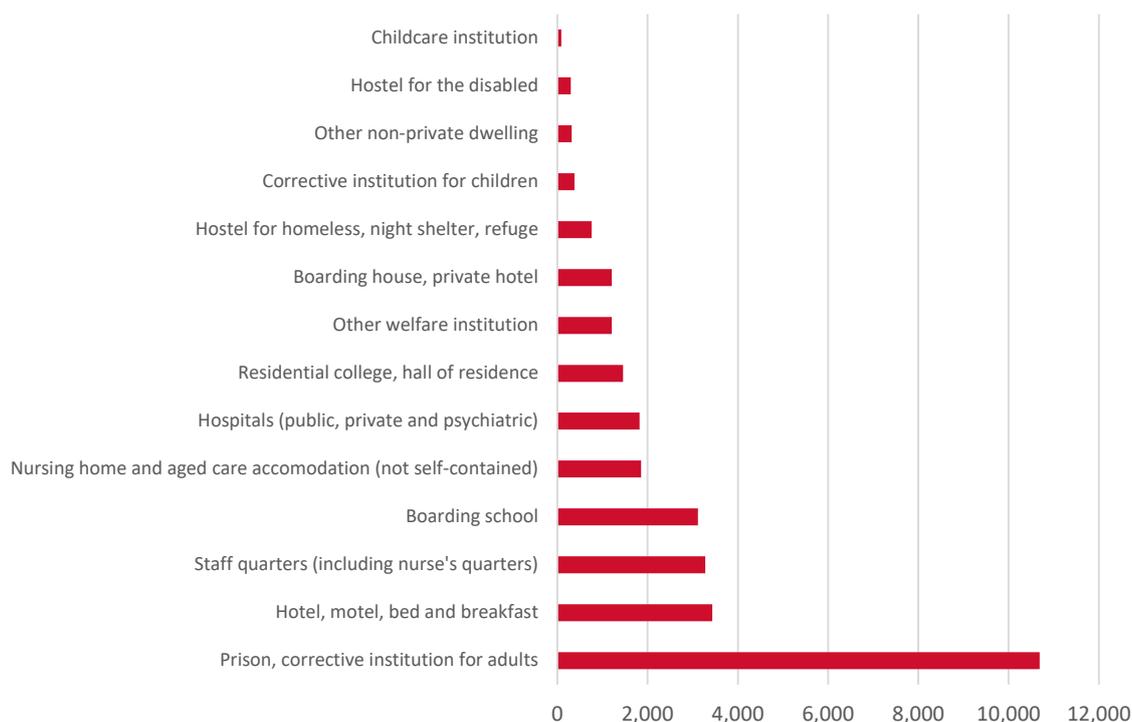
... people come in because they got family in prison, people come out of prison get stuck in town ... and it's easy for the cycle to repeat. (RD5, Manager, Community services organisation)

For some, sadly, the prison system becomes their 'home', a respite of sorts—a way of keeping warm with food and shelter. The recidivism is out of control ... I sometimes feel we are just criminalising Indigenous poverty, pain and homelessness ... (RD2, Worker, Indigenous-specific health organisation)

The NT has the highest imprisonment rate of any jurisdiction in Australia, at 986 per 100,000 people; the Indigenous imprisonment rate of 2,892 per 100,000 adult Indigenous population is the second highest in the country, with WA the highest (ABS 2021).

Such high rates of Indigenous incarceration in the NT underscore the vulnerability of many Indigenous people living rough or in insecure accommodation. As Figure 1 depicts from a national perspective—and as respondents suggest holds true for the NT—a major form of 'non-private dwelling' for many Indigenous Australians is gaol.

Figure 1: Non-private dwelling type on census night, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Australia, 2016 Census



Source: ABS 2018b.

### 4.1.3 Town camps and long grass

Respondents spoke of the important role that town camps can play. However, they had ongoing concerns about the camps: the levels of poverty, the failing infrastructure, the outbreaks of violence, the children in the camps. There are some 43 town camps across the NT, with six located within the Greater Darwin region (Memmott and Fantin, 2001). The NT Government plays a role through its Town Camps Futures Unit to:

... oversee the funding into town camps for housing and infrastructure services; accountability and reporting; support effective processes for engagement and consultation with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector; capability building of residents and Aboriginal controlled sector; remain the central coordination point for a whole-of-government approach to town camps reform; and develop and introduce service standards. (NT Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, 2021)

The NT Government's Town Camps Reform Framework 2019–2024 commits to major infrastructure and capacity building across the five-year period, with strong support for the Aboriginal community-controlled sector. Community-controlled organisations—such as Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation, which was established to work with the town camps in 2003—are servicing over 200 affordable and community housing properties in camps, outstations and communities across the Darwin region. No drinking or drugs are allowed onsite in the town camps.

Respondents recognised that having people sleep rough in the long grass around Darwin has been a longstanding practice, which brought challenges as well as opportunities:

There is a cohort that hangs out here, that camps out in the scrub out here, and they will usually stick to their particular areas, stick in sort-of bush camps and that's the ones that are usually sort of coming and going, but we have done some research in recent times where we've noticed—and we've noted—is that there have been people that have actually been living here in the long grass potentially for periods of years, and we're talking probably upwards of two to three years, who are doing it by choice because they don't necessarily fit in back in community, or don't want to go back to community, or there's reasons that they can't go back to community. They don't have anywhere to live here but they also don't have the means or the mechanisms to be able to get into housing here ... I don't think they're getting the appropriate service that's been, in a sense, properly co-designed with them ... (RD5, Manager, Community services organisation)

... the biggest problem is that if we were to try and house all the rough sleepers that are here in Darwin, that's all the long-grassers and everyone that are here, even those temporarily, there's nowhere near enough facilities for them. If we actually look at the core cohort—and at the moment under COVID-19 there's been a whole lot of people return to Country—we've sort of worked out the figures, it's a rough-cut but ... down to about 200-odd people still here in Darwin who are the ones who aren't going to leave, they're going to stay here no matter what ... because many can't go back to community, but can't get properly accommodated here ... we need more housing! (RD6 Manager, Community services organisation)

You do get those people, but then you also get those people who have been asked to leave their community or can't go back to community for maybe things they've done back in community, who might be just forced to be in the long grass. So not everyone in the long grass is there because they want to be in the long grass, it's extremely unsafe. (RD2, Worker, Indigenous-specific health organisation)

One respondent was particularly upset about recent NT Government announcements of intent to demolish a public housing area where over 30 Indigenous residents live, which the government claimed was rife with social issues and problems. Announcing plans for its demolition, NT Urban Housing Minister Worden said the area in Palmerston was 'a notorious hotspot for antisocial behaviour and at 35 years old, was past its use-by-date' Minister for Urban Housing, ABC News 'Notorious' NT Public Housing complex at Palmerston set for demolition', 18 March 2021 (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-18/dozens-of-public-housing-units-at-palmerston-to-be-demolished/13260120>). The plans include relocation of current tenants and a new future development to take its place.

We are trying to develop a housing continuum, but the lack of available accommodation means Aboriginal organisations cannot place waiting clients. In the meantime, rent and prices of houses keeps escalating ... and now an area of Indigenous public housing is being pulled down rather than repatriated ... people feel like they are just being moved on to a more uncertain future ... (RD3, Senior worker, Indigenous-specific housing provider/services)

Respondents highlighted the need for flexibility to develop a housing continuum and Support First pathways or integrated one-stop shops to provide Indigenous homeless people with wraparound support, including for their non-housing-related needs, so that they would be able to make the most of housing support in a sustained and meaningful way.

Most clients have multiple needs, including financial, health, welfare-related, parenting of children, or trauma distress related to experiencing violence. Ensuring people are enabled to make positive decisions and incremental steps is essential. During interviews, we heard of strong examples of transition support from Indigenous community-controlled organisations where clients were assisted with multiple needs as housing options were being worked on. Providing transitional housing options while personal circumstances stabilise is essential to long-term recovery towards achieving housing goals. Housing is a human right—it is not an optional extra.

#### 4.1.4 Poverty, housing exclusion and homelessness

Australia's colonial history has left a legacy of impacts on Indigenous Australians. The displacement from traditional lands, regimes of control, lack of access to services, racism and state-sanctioned exclusion over the past 230 years have been well documented (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation [NACCHO] 2020). This legacy of oppression remains one of the key structural barriers to progress for the nation, resulting in the shameful over-representation of Indigenous peoples as a cohort among the poorest, most incarcerated, and most medically, socially and financially disadvantaged in the nation.

Poverty contributes to challenges in finding secure, stable, culturally safe, appropriate and adequate housing:

The impacts of homelessness and inadequate housing can persist across multiple generations and contributes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being more vulnerable, distrustful, and resistant to engaging with government and mainstream services. (NACCHO 2020)

The impact of traumatic experiences transcends generations and includes:

- poverty
- low self-esteem
- poor physical, social and emotional wellbeing
- mental health issues
- welfare dependency
- poor living skills
- high levels of domestic violence and substance abuse
- low levels of educational attainment (AIHW 2019b:1).

Past cohesive community cultural norms that sustained wellbeing for millennia have also been weakened (Keys Young 1998; Silburn, Guthridge et al. 2018). Respondents spoke of the complex issues of families being at times overwhelmed with the influx of family visitors who they were culturally obligated to support. Homelessness affects not just an individual or immediate family, it has deleterious effects on wider kin, extended family and community wellbeing.

One respondent described the importance of recognising, respecting and supporting peoples' cultural obligations—both as clients of a service and as part of extended kinship networks:

We all need to understand there are significant cultural obligations and relationship obligations that mean we will always have visitor management issues in housing, what we call visitor management issues. That's around a general movement of people for funeral, for cultural reasons ... (RD2, Worker, Indigenous-specific health organisation)

Others spoke of concerns about 'lateral violence' because of poverty, and family at times being subject to Elder abuse as peoples' frustrations and pressing needs lead to behaviour that is not part of Indigenous culture. The theory about lateral violence is that it often results from '*disadvantage, discrimination and oppression, and that it arises from working within a society that is not designed for Indigenous ways of doing things*' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011). The notion of lateral violence is often described as a form of 'internalised colonialism'.

I think the abuse of Elders is getting more and more now because these guys are, they don't get reported—or if they get reported, the police get there too late and then it's just their word against granny or mum. So what we were trying to do was get five or six of the families to be very close together. Unfortunately public housing doesn't allow you to do that either ... (RD5, Manager, Community services organisation)

Some respondents saw this form of lateral violence as partly a result of financial desperation leading to—or exacerbated by—mental health issues, which they argued were disproportionately higher among their homelessness cohort:

And I've noticed ... people just throw their arms up and are giving up their public housing properties because they're being inundated with family. The woman I'm thinking about in the last two weeks that was in, it was her grandchildren, and all their friends were just trashing her house ... standing over her for money and she couldn't do it anymore, so she came to us to be housed at ... but it doesn't quite work like that. We ended up assisting ... but effectively she's homeless now, I mean she's in some accommodation but, yeah, that does happen a bit, it happens ... with some of our very vulnerable mental health clients, they're relinquishing their properties because they can't manage very abusive visitors—sometimes family and sometimes not, sometimes public, you know, just coming in and taking full advantage of them ... which is very sad. (RD7, Worker, Indigenous-specific housing provider/services)

The interplay of poverty, housing vulnerability and latent trauma resulting in such situations was also described by respondents as a symptom rather than the cause of homelessness. Such issues are not part of culture nor are they culturally supported. Elders are the backbone of community, and these examples show the long-term impacts of generational trauma, exclusion and frustration.

If greater attention could be paid to the holistic wellbeing of clients, through transitional accommodation and wraparound support to work on financial, as well as social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, education and employment at the same time as housing, then poverty and poor health might be arrested—or at least the negative effects better mitigated.

Some respondents also raised the issue of the impact of the Cashless Debit Card and the stress, shame and confusion it was causing vulnerable Indigenous homeless or at risk of becoming homeless people. Health researchers Baum and Duvnjak (2013), noted that the main Australian policy responses to poverty and social exclusion are:

... welfare payments and support for public housing. We note however that welfare payments to the unemployed have become progressively less generous and more conditional in the past two decades. (Baum and Duvnjak 2013: 1)

In describing a worrying trend based on 2016 ABS data, Altman (2017) similarly argues that, 'in the NT average Indigenous weekly income was just 26 per cent of the rate of other Territorians; conversely other Territorians earned nearly four times what Indigenous Territorians earned per week'. Based on this and associated trends, 'the level of Indigenous poverty in the NT has increased in the past five years—it has become deeper and more entrenched'.

Such worrying trends underscore the importance of renewed efforts to provide urgent and targeted assistance. As one respondent proclaimed:

We simply need more housing. I spent years screaming my voice hoarse to try and get housing sorted ... we need culturally appropriate support, and we need to be able to ensure that people can be secure, safe and well—it's a basic right. (RD1, Manager, Community service organisation)

#### **4.1.5 Indigeneity and definitions of homelessness**

Respondents were of a similar view that although the experience of homelessness for Indigenous people may be different in its originating factors—for example, a move into Greater Darwin to access health services or to stay with family, be near family in prison or to escape family violence—there were nuances about the non-Indigenous construct of housing and how it may miss important features of Indigenous life-worlds.

As discussed elsewhere in Section 4, Indigenous homeless people are prominent in the rough sleeping category in Greater Darwin, living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out. For some respondents this was deeply problematic, and linked with concerns about safety, wellbeing, mental health and social connectedness. For others this was observed as not negative but rather a way for people to congregate together, camp and spend time together—and hence to have some resonance with choice and being at home on Country.

The notion of 'home' in this context has many layers of meaning, not all of which are accessible to non-Indigenous sensibilities. The predominant feeling was that people need to have the right to choose, and to have control over their basic needs, including housing, and respect for their 'spiritual' and cultural notions of what was in their best interests. Strong concerns expressed by respondents over the NT Government's demolition of an area of Indigenous public housing epitomises the resistance of Indigenous people to the sense of 'being done to' rather than consulted or negotiated with over issues affecting their lives. Many expressed concerns that as Indigenous people they were simply not being fully consulted over their housing destiny.

While this research has revealed that non-Indigenous notions of homelessness and associated programmatic responses can miss matters of cultural subtlety and significance, Indigenous organisations in the field are well respected; they are capable and willing to provide the leadership and cultural sensitivity required to respond to the multi-layered complexity of Indigenous homelessness issues. By being close to community and understanding diverse language groups and experiences, Indigenous-led organisations—some with partnerships with other mainstream NGOs and services—are not only more effective but also more culturally safe.

## **4.2 Service delivery**

### **4.2.1 The systemic nature of barriers to accessing housing**

The most significant barriers to accessing housing raised in all interviews was lack of available public and social housing options—the desperate need for more housing. Long waiting lists—some respondents citing two to three or three to four years, and one citing over six years, are also a key issue that respondents raised as structural and unreasonable:

People can't afford it for a start, accommodation is very expensive and there's not a lot of affordable accommodation and public housing waitlists are around six to eight years, depending on what kind of house and where, so very long for that. And then a lot of people coming in from remote areas and they come in for all different reasons again, severe overcrowding in remote communities and lack of housing there, but then there might also be medical or other things that they need to attend to in town or they might be coming in for family reasons. (RD1, Manager, Community service organisation)

Another respondent witnessed discriminatory responses to Indigenous clients and expressed frustration at the blockages stymying peoples' efforts:

Part of the problem is that the transitional housing is always full and there's a waitlist for that as well as for public housing, and there's not enough affordable housing. And then when people try and get into the private rental market they can't for various reasons, either it's too expensive or it's discrimination. And so maybe there is something around that, the headleasing programs and things like that, whereby agencies put up money as bond security and things like that. (RD3, Senior worker, Indigenous-specific housing provider/services)

The NT Government has developed and recently launched its 2020–2025 Housing Strategy 'A Home for All Territorians'. It has an impressive array of aims and is clearly not intended to be a 'quick fix'. In relation to waiting times the Strategy document states:

Supply challenges also exist in urban and regional communities with 3844 applicants waiting for public housing. Wait time for public housing is between two to eight years or more, depending on location and type of housing required. (NT Government 2020: 9)

This waiting time is simply unworkable in terms of the level of demand and the high-risk, high-needs people requiring support. However, the strategy does feature a strategic commitment to 'create a housing and homelessness system that is contemporary, flexible and accessible' (NT Government 2020: 14). In line with national trends, it commits to working with key stakeholders to:

- reform tenancy management in social housing to align with best practice
- enhance the capabilities (and qualifications) of the social housing workforce
- work with NGOs to develop a model for community housing
- implement the NT Government's five-year homelessness strategy.

The previous and homeless specific strategy entitled '*The Pathways out of Homelessness—NT Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023*' (Northern Territory Government 2018) had promised to:

1. Strengthen interagency responses and support to reduce exits into homelessness from out-of-home care, health services and correctional settings.
2. Streamline and strengthen preventative support to people at risk of homelessness.
3. Improve the department's policy and practices to better respond to homelessness and the risk of homelessness.
4. Increase access to and supply of private rental, affordable and social housing.
5. Work with the SHS sector to strengthen service responses for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

*The Pathways out of Homelessness Strategy* is intended to be completed by 2023. Importantly, it promises to develop an integrated approach to intake, assessment, case management and referral. An integrated intake and assessment approach was advocated for by some respondents to speed up intake and ensure information was shared across services and agencies.

Indigenous homelessness is not a key feature of the Strategy and is discussed mainly in relation to remote areas and homelands. However, the Strategy makes a strong commitment to enhancing local Indigenous community decision-making, and partnership with Indigenous community-controlled organisations to work on the development of infrastructure for town camps, along with social and economic development.

While more housing and better coordinated social and community housing options are key to addressing homelessness, barriers to accessing housing or transitional accommodation support for Indigenous homeless people are related to more than supply issues. There are many constraints that prevent people having their needs met. As earlier discussed, the trauma and disruption of fleeing family violence makes accessing support difficult and fraught. Having a licence, a regular address and a record of financial capability are necessities when trying to access any form of support.

Although SHSs are crucial, culturally appropriate intermediary services to provide transition care and supported or transition accommodation are not always accessible. The intersecting and complex barriers to services can escalate for those Indigenous homeless people with a prison or similar court record. Indigenous organisation Yilli Rreung has recently taken over a former mining site to provide short-stay accommodation, where homeless Indigenous people can stay from 28 to 100 days before being transitioned to other accommodation. This model aims to have a one-stop shop providing legal support, social and wellbeing support, and help with fines. The agency has a memo of understanding with a range of other service organisations but, importantly, the service will remain Indigenous-led. Such models of multi-dimensional support provide wraparound holistic support within an embedded, culturally appropriate model. It will be important that such models are carefully evaluated for sector-wide practice improvements and shared learning.

#### **4.2.2 The revolving door of housing and homelessness**

This section has highlighted issues for very vulnerable Indigenous cohorts—women and children fleeing domestic and family violence; people leaving prison; young people exiting care; and those managing mental health concerns. For such cohorts, the ‘merry-go-round’ of constant requests and waiting lists and unsatisfactory living situations adds trauma to trauma. It is not just inconvenient—it can be soul-destroying.

Respondents spoke of women with children fleeing violence who are forced to make very difficult decisions. Without access to secure accommodation, their children can be seen to be at risk, or exposed to levels of risk. But if their only option is to return to a dangerous family situation, the risk is unacceptable and the cycle continues. Deaths of Indigenous women across Australia are at intolerably high levels. This national crisis demands a rethink of the link between family violence and housing availability, and a specific, sustained and trauma-informed response.

The need for support in transition and assistance with appropriate shelter options is essential for people leaving prison. In terms of avoiding recidivism, the revolving door needs to open one way forward, with relevant post-incarceration care.

### **4.3 Cultural safety**

The legacy of colonial processes of oppression and dispossession is a form of transgenerational trauma that does not go away quickly or easily.

Culture is a living process, and when there is strong cultural continuity, people become imbued with a sense of identity, wellbeing and life purpose. (Atkinson 2002: 204)

Cultural safety is a strengths-based approach to ensuring Indigenous people feel safe, secure, welcomed, respected and heard within organisations, in the receipt of services, and in the spaces where intercultural exchanges occur. The NT Government frames cultural security like this:

Our sense of self or self-concept is our subjective experience in the context of our social and personal relationships. Our self-concept is built on cultural, personal, and social identities. We often rely upon our cultural worldviews and references as the main source of our identity and self-concept. Cultural identity supports the development of our sense of self, by giving us meaning and purpose in our life. A strong cultural identity is essential for emotional and social wellbeing and

gives a sense of belonging and security. It provides access to social and community relationships with shared values and aspirations. Further, it builds resilience in the face of discrimination, racism, disadvantage, and hardship. Deep-listening and empathy are the building blocks of respectful and trusting relationships, and provides a strong foundation for culturally congruent practice. To get along well with others, we must have respect for and understand cultural differences and constantly imagine being in the other person's shoes. The practice and process of critical reflection and consciousness is a life-long journey that examines our personal, interpersonal, and cultural worldviews, and the ways that power and privilege is maintained and challenged in our personal and professional lives. When we engage in our own 'personal work' to explore Culture and identity, we are more likely to appreciate this dimension with others. Related to the need for critical reflection is the concept of Cultural Humility as an important mindset or stance from which to approach cultural identity with others. Cultural Humility involves developing relationships and mutual partnerships that redresses power imbalances and creating mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic practice and advocacy partnerships. Embodying an attitude of Cultural curiosity will seek knowledge about a person's unique histories, experiences, cultural values, needs and general way of being. (Hook, Davis et al. 2013)

Respondents spoke of the importance of homelessness services providing safe places for Indigenous homeless people to engage:

... the shift for them, the cultural shift from community into the urban environment where you don't know your neighbours and you don't, you know, life is different ... (RD5, Manager, Community services organisation)

... it's about being just culturally appropriate, and all our staff are trained in that. Most of us are long-term Territorians so, you know, we've sort of all grown up here and got a lot of quite great Indigenous friends so, you know, it's about just having that cultural appropriateness and if we can't basically assist, we will bring a male in to help-out to talk to the guys and stuff like that ... in all the years I've done it, you never stop learning. (RD2, Worker, Indigenous-specific health organisation)

While services were all concerned to ensure standards of 'deep listening', 'strengths-based' and 'compassionate' care, overall there was an awareness that Indigenous homeless people generally responded more willingly and maintained engagement more readily with Indigenous-led organisations.

We've got a problem with child protection ... that a lot of the NGOs put their hand up to deal with Aboriginal kids, child protection system, we can refer to the child protection system but they don't have the 'culturalness' to deal with them ... (RD3, Senior worker, Indigenous-specific housing provider/services)

Respect for the cultural safety of others and promoting cultural security is not learned by training alone, it requires an attitudinal shift in terms of deep understanding of the mutuality between people, the richness of cultural difference and the importance of reaffirming cultural identity. This way of being and working is made more complex by the multiplicity of Indigenous cultures living together in Greater Darwin.

There's no way I'm going to put Port Keats mob in with Galiwin'ku mob or, you know, Tiwi mob in with Daley River mob or, you know, there's all those considerations you've got to have. So, again, you would then need a facility that you can have people spaced out enough; you would need to be able to have spaces to. So when it comes to policy, unfortunately the policies that we tend to get out of government are sort of 'out of the box' solutions. They're just the standard cookie-cutter, 'This is the way we do it' ... (RD1, Manager, Community service organisation)

Working with Elders was mentioned as a priority in helping to engage communities and younger people in understanding cultural mores and respecting others.

I think we need to talk to the Elders and to the communities themselves to work out a better plan on how we can stop the amount of homeless there is ... (RD3, Senior worker, Indigenous-specific housing provider/services)

The development of capacity-building approaches across the system that promote cultural safety as a proactive, preventative and long-term investment require place-based solutions that are nuanced and not 'one-size-fits-all'. Overwhelmingly, respondents supported a focus on cultural safety as being important, essential and a worthy investment.

#### 4.4 Service coordination

A strength of the Greater Darwin—and indeed the NT—service environment has been the focus on service coordination. Peak bodies such as the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT) and Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APONT), along with the development of Aboriginal Housing NT, provide opportunities for networking across, within and between services.

Strength of NT is coordinating bodies— (RD6 Manager, Community services organisation)

Well, I think really the partnerships with Aboriginal-controlled organisations— and certainly that's something that our organisation is doing more and more—building the capacity around the service delivery. So I think there's been a lot done around governance and things like that with Aboriginal-controlled organisations, but we're trying to step into the service-delivery space, you know, build up the skills if they don't have them and then step back, and I think that that is a good model. There have been steps forward for the Department of Housing and, you know, it's sort of slow but steps towards hearing more Aboriginal voices in the decision-making side. I think they have regular meetings now with the Aboriginal Housing peak and others from APONT to try and feed people—I don't know, they probably focus a lot on remote housing as opposed to urban homelessness. So there needs to be more voices in the homelessness space as well. (RD1, Manager, Community service organisation)

This policy coordination also plays out to some extent on the ground, with services working as best they can to ensure clients receive the best possible outcomes—workers liaising across other services depending on peaks and troughs in demand. That said, there are still opportunities for a stronger Indigenous community-led and community-controlled peak presence at all levels of the homelessness system in Greater Darwin.

Given the understandable focus on remote areas in parts of government, the need for Indigenous voices that can speak up about the interaction between urban, regional and remote areas, advocating a one-system approach with a focus on Indigenous clients, would be timely. Given the disproportionately high rate of Indigenous representation in the homeless cohort, this also seems only just.

#### 4.5 Strengthening Indigenous services

Some respondents alluded to the sense of a gatekeeper syndrome still operating across the service system. Despite being a functional, and seemingly cohesive urban system working in a complex environment, there is a sense that mainstream organisations can outcompete Indigenous organisations and services for funding.

Strengthening Indigenous services means investing in the development and growth of such services. Adequate funding needs to be provided not only for the delivery of services but also for the capacity building of the homelessness sector in Greater Darwin. As researchers, we encountered some outstanding practitioners with visionary, rigorous and accountable practice, delivering culturally safe and outcomes-driven services.

However, service excellence for Indigenous clients requires mindful, proactive and affirmative support for Indigenous leadership, Indigenous-led partnerships, and opportunities for growth and development over the next 10 years and beyond. As the Indigenous population in the NT grows—which is predicted to be by between 1.1–1.3 per cent per year (ABS 2019)—this is of paramount importance. The learnings from the Canadian experience cited earlier in this report (see 2.5.2) provide some exemplar framing for forward directions.

## 4.6 Ways forward

Greater Darwin provides a very cohesive, if complex, urban setting for exploration of the interactions between service providers in the homelessness and housing sectors. Examples of good practice include:

- well-planned transitional housing with short stays and access to multi-layered health, financial and legal support
- strong Indigenous services infrastructure with Indigenous peak body leadership through APONT, AMSANT and related bodies.

However, such Indigenous-led community development on its own cannot substitute for adequate housing and clear destination pathways for the disproportionately high rate of Indigenous homeless people in Greater Darwin—especially among rough sleeper categories.

Particularly vulnerable target groups in Greater Darwin include:

- Indigenous women and children escaping violence or seeking to establish a stable, safe new family life for children
- Indigenous people leaving prison.

System investments are required as follows:

- The provision of dedicated, targeted culturally appropriate support for Indigenous women and children fleeing violence and gaining a fresh start. Such support must:
  - involve partnership with relevant DV and family violence services
  - be based on trauma-informed practice
  - provide respect for Indigenous client perspectives
  - focus on safety and understanding ahead of non-Indigenous concepts of home and culturally embedded imperatives.
- The provision of dedicated, targeted transition support for Indigenous prisoners leaving prison, which includes:
  - appropriately supported accommodation, with mentoring
  - access to education, employment and counselling advice
  - staged assistance with rehabilitation.
- The development of a clear partnership model to inform all funding decisions, which privileges the long-term development and capacity-building approaches for Indigenous engagement throughout the homelessness sector—working with Indigenous partners could become a priority for all service provision.
- The priority development of new social housing to urgently respond to the crisis in access to housing and long waiting lists in Greater Darwin.
- The development of governance models that prioritise the representation of Elders in the co-design of new initiatives, including a 10-year plan for Indigenising design, management and development of Indigenous homelessness services and related housing bodies. Build on the Indigenous management of town camps model to broaden Indigenous enterprise engagement in the delivery of services.

- The development of multi-layered, intersectional, multiagency responses to complex homelessness issues, including ensuring co-working among health, legal, finance, welfare and homeless services in flexible client-focussed service-delivery models.
- Following co-design principles with Indigenous language groups and, after suitable consultation, establishing models of advice regarding visitor management in multiple Indigenous languages and, if appropriate, a helpline.
- Establish a working group to map and analyse the interconnections between discrete regional and remote areas and demand on services in Greater Darwin to develop a more situationally responsive emergency response framework to address those experiencing homelessness during short-stay visits.

This section has mapped the socio-demographics and extent of Indigenous homelessness in Greater Darwin. Through explicating key themes and information, from the qualitative group and individual intensive interviews, it canvasses the key drivers of Indigenous homelessness in Greater Darwin, the links and differences between the urban, regional and remote areas, as well as service provider experiences of the movement of people between these areas. By learning from the experience of key Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, and practitioners, it is possible to identify areas for service improvement and see where key needs are not being met. While many facets are similar and themes common across the sites involved in this research, key distinguishing features of the NT Indigenous homelessness circumstances are highlighted. Finally, a summary of key points is provided that brings themes in Section 4 together—and makes suggestions for the way forward.

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## 5. Case study: Adelaide inner city, Port Augusta and beyond, South Australia

- **This case study presents data about Adelaide inner city and Port Augusta: two urban environments with significant attention on homelessness among Aboriginal people. These urban environments are strongly connected in terms of kinship, traditional patterns of mobility and pathways to and between services and supports.**
- **Rough sleeping/sleeping out is a dominant homelessness experience in inner Adelaide and Port Augusta, often linked with overcrowding in tenancies. Aboriginal homelessness has worsened because of unaffordable housing and inappropriate housing supply.**
- **Key informants challenged the relevance of the cultural definition of ‘homelessness’ for Aboriginal South Australians, particularly some people among those sleeping out. They noted that housing-led responses aren’t necessarily what people are seeking.**
- **A range of supports is needed for vulnerable people to ensure their safety and to support them to move on from homelessness.**
- **Both Adelaide and Port Augusta have responses to assist people sleeping out. But more capacity is needed in culturally specific outreach, transitional accommodation in inner Adelaide and surrounds. New models of housing provision are required that allow flexibility for large groups of people to attend at certain times of the year and for certain events.**
- **There is clearly scope in SA for greater capacity building in Indigenous services in the homelessness landscape, and for stronger service coordination between Aboriginal-controlled organisations and SHSs.**

- The pandemic has both reinforced and advanced this need, with examples of co-working provided—although greater involvement of Aboriginal workers and organisations was also desired by mainstream and specialist services.
- **Greater integration is needed for programs supporting homeless people in health, mental health, disability, aged care, and domestic and family violence services.**
- The Adelaide Zero Project in inner Adelaide and the Vulnerable Person's Framework in Port Augusta offered examples of valued practice in service coordination.
- **Homelessness in SA was in flux during this research. While there were mixed feelings about the reforms, there are some opportunities evident in terms of strengthening cultural capability and service integration for the benefit of Aboriginal people and services, including ACCOs.**

## 5.1 Profile of urban homelessness

### 5.1.1 Patterns of urban Indigenous homelessness

#### Numbers

Overall, according to ABS census data, South Australia (SA) has one of the lower rates of homelessness per 10,000 population, at 37.1 persons per 10,000. The rate of homelessness is also significantly lower than the national rate (49.8 per 10,000), with this figure strongly influenced by the exorbitantly high rate of homelessness per 10,000 in the Northern Territory (599.4 per 10,000). The SA rate of homelessness per 10,000 persons has remained relatively stable across the last four censuses (ABS 2018c).

The 2016 Census recorded 6,226 homeless people statewide,<sup>11</sup> 5 per cent of all Australians enumerated as homeless (Table 10). Factoring in people living in other marginal housing arrangements (4,473 people), there were nearly 10,700 people living in what can be described as precarious housing situations. These data included 796 children aged less than 12 and another 488 children between the ages of 12 and 17. Indigenous children accounted for one in four homeless children statewide.

Reflecting national trends, the majority among SA's recorded homeless population are people in severely crowded accommodation (34.4%), with people rough sleeping accounting for 6.2 per cent of the total homeless population recorded at the 2016 Census (385 individuals).

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<sup>11</sup> Figures vary slightly across ABS datasets and published analytics because of rounding and confidentialising small data.

Table 10: Profile of homelessness, South Australia, 2016 Census

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total population		34,184	2.0	1,557,007	92.9	85,467	5.1	1,676,65	100.0
<b>All homeless persons<sup>1</sup></b>									
Gender	Males	440	48.0	2,864	61.6	419	63.6	3,723	59.8
	Females	476	52.0	1,787	38.4	240	36.4	2,503	40.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>916</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,561</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,226</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	<12 years old	243	26.6	501	10.9	52	8.2	796	12.9
	12-17 years old	111	12.1	342	7.4	35	5.5	488	7.9
	Adults (18+ years old)	560	61.3	3,773	81.7	545	86.2	4,878	79.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>914</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,616</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,162</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Homeless Operational Group</b>									
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)		87	22.6	264	68.6	34	8.8	385	6.2
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless		344	24.1	72	50.5	364	25.5	1,430	23.0
Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)		90	6.8	1,212	91.1	29	2.2	1,331	21.4
Persons living in boarding houses		19	2.1	666	73.5	221	24.4	906	14.6
Persons in other temporary lodgings		0	0.0	35	100.0	0	0.0	35	0.6
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings		376	17.6	1,752	81.9	11	0.5	2,139	34.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>916</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>4,651</b>	<b>74.7</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>6,226</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Persons who are marginally housed <sup>2</sup>		454	10.1	3,967	88.7	52	1.2	4,473	-
<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>		<b>1,370</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>8,618</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>10,699</b>	<b>-</b>

Notes: Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) All homeless persons relates to the aggregated data from the six homeless operational categories determined for the census: persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers); persons in supported accommodation for the homeless; persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfers); persons living in boarding houses; persons in other temporary lodgings; persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. 2) Includes persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks, or living in crowded or improvised dwellings that are excluded from the Homeless Operational Groups count.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

Almost one in four homeless people statewide were living in supported accommodation for the homeless (23.0%); just over one in five people were couchsurfing (21.4%) (Table 10). Among the people marginally housed, people living in other crowded dwellings comprised the largest group.

In SA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise 2 per cent of the population—but almost 15 per cent of the total population of people experiencing homelessness (916 of 6,226 people) and 10 per cent of people in other marginal housing (454 of 4,473 people).

Examination of the distribution of Aboriginal people among the ABS Homelessness Operational Groups shows several noteworthy points (Table 10) that are particularly relevant in the context of this study and the SA case-study fieldwork:

- the over-representation of Indigenous people among all categories of homelessness and marginal housing compared with their share of the total population
- the over-representation of Indigenous people among the rough-sleeping population (87 of 385 people)—a point demonstrated in more detail later
- the large number and proportion of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in supported accommodation for the homeless (and lower numbers in boarding houses). This reinforced stakeholder observations about the inappropriateness of boarding houses as accommodation for Aboriginal people. Where Aboriginal people have been able to access supported accommodation, supporting individuals and households to move on to limited mainstream or even Indigenous-specific options is very difficult, because of the cultural inappropriateness of housing, discrimination and unaffordability.

The data tables also indicate the over-representation of people identifying as Aboriginal in crowded dwellings, with 376 of the 916 people of Indigenous background recorded in SA in the 2016 Census in 'severely' crowded dwellings (Table 10).

Consideration of the data discussed above as rates per 10,000 persons (ABS 2018c, Tables 1.5 and 1.7) further demonstrates the over-representation of Aboriginal South Australians among types and categories of homelessness:

- **Indigenous-identified persons who are homeless:** 273.8 per 10,000 persons, which is the third-highest rate per 10,000 in Australia (after the NT and WA).
- **Aboriginal persons among people recorded as in 'severely' crowded dwellings:** 111.7 per 10,000 persons, which is the fourth-highest rate behind the NT, WA and QLD.
- **Aboriginal persons in supported accommodation for the homeless:** 104.1 per 10,000, which is the highest rate by a significant margin, followed by the ACT and Victoria.
- **Aboriginal persons staying temporarily with other households:** 26.6 persons per 10,000, which is the second-highest rate after the ACT.
- **Aboriginal persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (rough sleeping):** 24.6 per 10,000, which is the fourth-highest after the NT, WA and Victoria.
- **Aboriginal persons living in boarding houses:** 6.7 per 10,000, which is the third-lowest behind the ACT and Tasmania.

Services consulted for this study confirmed the over-representation of Aboriginal people and families among their clientele, with the proportion of Aboriginal clients supported at any point in time, and across time, dependent on the type of service, service location, people's needs, trust and word of mouth within communities. All SHSs in SA have operated with a requirement that at least 20 per cent of their clients be Aboriginal for some years now, with many services reporting a much higher proportion of Aboriginal access to their services than this requirement. For example, the Northern Adelaide Generic Homelessness Service in the northern area of Greater Adelaide reports that more than 40 per cent of their clients are Aboriginal people, reflecting the 'significant proportion' of their clients who are Aboriginal families (RS1, Manager, community sector provider).

For some services, historical connections, sometimes dating back many decades, continue to determine deep associations and relationships between Aboriginal people (often as families and communities), agencies and particular workers, seeing people return consistently to services for a range of supports and advice. For example, one service has a historic connection with the Aboriginal community generally, and especially Ngarrindjeri, but also with 'urban' Aboriginal people, as well as Narungga and West Coast people, who are significant groups among their clients. However, the service notes that a less prominent relationship with so-called 'remote visitors' (discussed later in this section), who are less likely to use inner-city services in general.

Among services, it was evident that some Aboriginal people, groups and communities prefer to attend a particular service or group of services for support, rather than other services. This trend is also evident in relation to specific workers within agencies, and not for other workers within the same agency. The point is notable, as it was raised for a couple of key reasons: the pressure on some workers—including Aboriginal workers—to assist what can be at times large numbers of people with complex needs. Aboriginal workers particularly feel great pressure, due to their sense of cultural and moral obligation to assist people. Such a heavy sense of responsibility can be intense and impact on workers' wellbeing. However, this was also an indication of the small, close network of people some Aboriginal people, families and communities trust and value.

### Geographies

Greater Adelaide is the location of most homelessness in SA, with almost 75 per cent of all people recorded as homeless at the time of the last census enumerated in Greater Adelaide (4,643 of 6,224 people; Table 11). In many ways, this metropolitan-urban face to homelessness is unsurprising. Adelaide is the state capital and the largest city in SA by far; SA has very few larger regional cities, unlike other jurisdictions such as NSW and Victoria. Consequently, most services for people experiencing homelessness are in the metropolitan area. Non-homeless-specific services that people experiencing homelessness may seek or need are also predominately Adelaide-based—for example, health and mental health services.

For Indigenous people, census data indicate that the majority experiencing homelessness (508 of 894 homeless people, or 56.8%) are *not* located in Greater Adelaide, but rather in SA's remote communities, particularly Outback SA (Table 11), where overcrowding significantly influences homelessness experiences—for example, in Port Augusta. However, this means that a not-insignificant proportion of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness are 'resident' in Greater Adelaide. This reflects urbanisation of homelessness, particularly rough sleeping related to overcrowding, nationally (Parkinson, Batterham et al. 2019), with the proportion of people experiencing homelessness split relatively equally between the four Greater Adelaide regions (Table 11).

Within the sub-regions of Greater Adelaide, there is a mixed picture of the 'types' of homelessness experienced: rough sleeping is most common in the city and hills regions and basically non-existent elsewhere; people living in supported accommodation for the homeless are vastly over-represented in the south and west; and an almost equal majority of Aboriginal people are recorded as in supported accommodation and couchsurfing in the northern area of Greater Adelaide.

Key stakeholders confirmed such broad trends in data. Collectively, they noted that the 'types' of homelessness seen or experienced in suburban locations were more family or kinship homelessness, often related to family violence or overcrowded—and therefore at-risk—tenancies. Such experiences often result in people couchsurfing or staying in supported accommodation where such accommodation is available (including in the western and southern suburbs).

More 'individual' experiences of homelessness were also noted by stakeholders, often manifesting in couchsurfing in suburban areas, and rough sleeping in inner Adelaide. However, stakeholders tempered their comments about Aboriginal homelessness across Greater Adelaide with warnings about reading too much into point-in-time data, as it fails to capture:

- traditional 'ebbs and flows' in Aboriginal homelessness generally (Aboriginal mobility)
- specific trends in Aboriginal mobility in SA that have been occurring for centuries
- the importance of individuals, families and workers meeting cultural and kinship obligations, including for living arrangements and care
- the critical importance of connections between people, places, culture and Country.

5. Case study: Adelaide inner city,  
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Table 11: Profile of homelessness and marginal housing, Greater Adelaide and rest of state, South Australia, 2016 Census

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non-Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>All homeless persons<sup>1</sup></b>								
Greater Adelaide	Adelaide Central and Hills <sup>2</sup>	95	8.8	818	75.9	175	16.2	1,078
	Adelaide North	78	4.8	1,423	87.6	107	6.6	1,624
	Adelaide South	110	11.1	767	77.2	99	10.0	994
	Adelaide West	103	10.9	721	76.1	124	13.1	947
	<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>3,729</b>	<b>80.3</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>4,643</b>
Rest of state	Barossa—Yorke—Mid-North	6	2.4	189	77.1	26	10.6	245
	South Australia—Outback	470	67.3	178	25.5	46	6.6	698
	South Australia—South-East	32	5.0	514	80.6	82	12.9	638
	<b>Total</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>881</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>1,581</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>894</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>4,610</b>	<b>74.1</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>6,224</b>
<b>Other marginal housing<sup>3</sup></b>								
Greater Adelaide	Adelaide Central and Hills <sup>2</sup>	12	2.7	433	98.2	0	0.0	441
	Adelaide North	53	3.1	1,628	96.4	8	0.5	1,689
	Adelaide South	24	4.9	465	94.9	5	1.0	490
	Adelaide West	24	3.4	663	95.0	6	0.9	698
	<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3,189</b>	<b>96.1</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>3,318</b>
Rest of state	Barossa—Yorke—Mid-North	9	4.7	164	85.4	19	9.9	192
	South Australia—Outback	321	63.9	175	34.9	5	1.0	502
	South Australia—South-East	10	2.2	442	96.7	0	0.0	457
	<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>67.9</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>1,151</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>4533</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>3,970</b>	<b>88.8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>4,469</b>
<b>Total homeless or marginally housed</b>								
Greater Adelaide		499	6.3	6,918	86.9	524	6.6	7,961
Rest of state		848	31.0	1,662	60.8	178	6.5	2,732
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,380</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>8,575</b>	<b>80.4</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>10,671</b>

Notes: Totals do not add sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) All homeless persons relates to the aggregated data from the six Homeless Operational categories determined for the census: persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers); persons in supported accommodation for the homeless; persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfers; persons living in boarding houses; persons in other temporary lodgings; persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. 2) Includes Adelaide inner city (CBD) and North Adelaide. 3) Persons who are marginally housed includes persons living in other crowded dwellings, persons in other improvised dwellings and persons who are marginally housed in caravan park. Total comprised of 433 individuals in other crowded dwellings, 4 in improvised dwellings and 17 marginally housed in caravan parks.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

Notably, as in the other case-study locations, stakeholders challenged entrenched and preconceived notions of 'homelessness', which some openly saw as a 'white person's' construct and unhelpful to current debates about the 'problem' or 'challenge' of urban (or any) Indigenous homelessness and structuring support for people experiencing 'homelessness' (i.e. 'rooflessness'). This point is discussed in greater detail in subsection 5.1.4, as stakeholders saw it as critical in advancing understandings of urban Indigenous homelessness, and ensuring culturally appropriate ways of seeing and acting are advanced in this space.

### Inner Adelaide

Inner Adelaide comprises Adelaide's CBD and North Adelaide and is one of the chosen case-study locations for South Australia, along with the culturally connected regional city of Port Augusta (discussed later in this section). The inner Adelaide area aligns with the boundaries of the City of Adelaide local government area and encompasses the Adelaide CBD and adjoining suburb of North Adelaide (including the Park Lands) and an area within the Adelaide central and hills district of Greater Adelaide. As noted in the methodology section of this report, it was decided to focus on this area for the case study because of the uniqueness of the 'challenge' of Aboriginal homelessness in inner Adelaide, the links between inner-city, suburban and regional 'homelessness', housing and other intergenerational and exclusion issues, and because of the actions being undertaken through the Adelaide Zero Project (AZP) at the time this research was undertaken. The focus on inner Adelaide, and inclusion of AZP data and observations and partners among participants, means a bias towards commentary about rough-sleeping homelessness. The information we present here should be considered against this context, as the tip of a much larger (and multifaceted) iceberg.

Table 12 captures some finer grain data from the 2016 Census about Aboriginal homelessness in inner Adelaide. The core points shown by these data are that Aboriginal people are a significant cohort among people sleeping rough in Adelaide's inner-city area (38.9%), as well as among people couchsurfing in inner Adelaide (20.7%)—a notoriously difficult 'group' to accurately capture in point-in-time surveys. Aboriginal people are a much smaller presence among other categories of homelessness in the inner-city area, including among people in other marginal housing (0%), with this latter point likely to reflect the overall smaller number of people in marginal housing arrangements in the city.

Other datasets, and more qualitative research approaches—such as this study—capture these nuances much more effectively and with a greater depth of understanding (see Table 13).

Table 12: Profile of homelessness, Adelaide inner city, 2016

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons		Non- Indigenous persons		Not stated		Total persons
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Adelaide inner city<sup>1</sup></b>								
<b>All homeless persons</b>								
Homeless Operational Group	Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)	49	38.9	71	56.3	6	4.8	126
	Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	16	10.0	111	69.4	33	20.6	160
	Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)	6	20.7	23	79.3	0	0.0	29
	Persons living in boarding houses	7	2.3	218	70.3	85	27.4	310
	Persons in other temporary lodgings	0	0.0	5	100.0	0	0.0	5
	Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	0	0.0	22	100.0	0	0.0	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>69.0</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>652</b>
Persons who are marginally housed <sup>2</sup>		0	0.0	61	100.0	0	0.0	61
<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>71.7</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>713</b>

Notes: Person records, Place of Enumeration.

1) Adelaide inner city (CBD) and North Adelaide. 2) Persons who are marginally housed includes persons living in other crowded dwellings, persons in other improvised dwellings and persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder.

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Table 13: Key insights related to homelessness among Aboriginal people, non-Indigenous people and all persons, Adelaide Zero Project

Vulnerability/risk factor	All actively homeless people																							
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people								Non-Indigenous people								All persons							
	Female (max n=24)		Male (max n=27)		High acuity (max n=38)		All persons (max n=52)		Female (max n=13)		Male (max n=75)		High acuity (max n=69)		All persons (max n=90)		Female (max n=40)		Male (max n=120)		High acuity (max n=120)		All persons (max n=163)	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Overall high acuity	17/24	70.8	20/27	74.1	-	-	38/52	73.1	12/13	92.3	55/75	73.3	-	-	69/90	76.7	31/40	77.5	87/120	72.5	-	-	120/163	73.6
Chronicity	12/24	50.0	15/27	55.6	19/38	50.0	28/52	53.8	6/13	46.2	35/75	46.7	35/69	50.7	41/90	45.6	19/40	47.5	54/120	45.0	59/120	49.2	74/163	45.4
Domestic or Family Violence (DFV)	11/24	45.8	7/27	25.9	17/37	45.9	18/50	36.0	8/13	61.5	25/73	34.2	34/69	49.3	35/88	39.8	21/39	53.8	34/114	29.8	54/117	46.2	57/156	48.1
All violence	16/24	66.7	17/26	65.4	31/37	83.8	33/50	66.0	9/12	75.0	39/73	53.4	48/68	70.6	50/87	51.5	28/38	73.7	64/115	55.7	88/117	75.2	94/156	60.3
Tri-morbidity	5/24	20.8	15/27	55.6	20/38	52.6	20/52	38.5	7/13	53.8	38/74	51.4	45/69	65.2	46/89	51.7	14/40	35.0	64/119	53.8	75/119	63.0	79/162	48.8
Trauma	15/24	62.5	22/27	81.5	33/38	86.8	37/52	71.2	10/13	76.9	57/74	77.0	62/69	89.9	69/89	77.5	27/40	67.5	91/119	76.5	106/119	89.1	120/162	74.1
Disability	17/24	70.8	22/27	81.5	35/38	92.1	40/52	76.9	13/13	100.0	69/74	93.2	66/69	95.7	84/89	94.4	32/40	80.0	108/120	90.0	113/120	94.2	142/163	87.1
Mental health	12/24	50.0	21/27	77.8	30/38	78.9	33/52	63.5	13/13	100.0	67/74	90.5	66/69	95.7	82/89	92.1	27/40	67.5	104/119	87.4	108/120	90.0	133/162	82.1
Acquired brain injury	5/24	20.8	5/26	19.2	9/37	24.3	10/49	20.4	5/13	38.5	19/74	25.7	23/69	33.3	26/89	29.2	10/38	26.3	31/117	26.5	38/118	32.2	43/157	27.4
Prison interaction (prior 6 months)	2/24	8.3	11/27	40.7	10/38	26.3	13/52	25.0	4/13	30.8	31/74	41.9	29/69	42.0	36/88	40.9	6/39	15.4	50/120	41.7	46/117	39.3	55/157	35.0
Hospital interaction (prior 6 months)	20/24	83.3	19/27	70.4	33/38	86.8	39/51	76.5	11/13	84.6	43/74	58.1	56/69	81.2	69/89	77.5	33/40	82.5	90/120	75.0	101/120	84.2	124/162	76.5
Juvenile detention (ever)	4/21	19.0	5/27	18.5	7/33	21.2	9/46	19.6	0/12	0.0	13/74	17.6	9/69	13.0	13/85	15.3	4/36	11.1	20/113	17.7	15/111	13.5	16/151	10.6
Institutional care as a child	5/21	23.8	11/25	44.0	13/33	39.4	16/46	34.8	4/12	33.3	10/74	13.5	11/66	16.7	14/86	16.3	9/36	25.0	27/114	23.7	27/111	24.3	36/151	23.8
No meaningful daily activity	16/24	66.7	21/27	77.8	29/38	76.3	37/52	71.2	7/13	53.8	54/74	73.0	51/69	73.9	63/89	70.8	26/40	65.0	91/119	76.5	93/120	76.7	119/162	73.5
Remote visitor	11/24	45.8	11/24	45.8	16/38	42.1	24/52	46.2	0/13	0.0	0/75	0.0	0/69	0.0	0/90	0.0	12/40	30.0	13/120	10.8	12/120	10.0	26/163	16.0

Notes:

Data for all persons recorded on the Adelaide Zero Project By-Name List, mid-May 2019 to mid-May 2021 (extracted 20 May 2021).

Max n= is the highest number of responses for each cohort, i.e. max of 24 females identifying as Aboriginal at data capture point. As people reserve the right not to answer any or all questions in the VI-SPDAT n can equal fewer than the max n number.

N numbers are people on the By-Name List recorded as actively homeless (rough sleeping or temporarily accommodated) who have completed a survey.

High acuity = VI-SPDAT score of 10 or more, indicating high level of risk or vulnerabilities, and assessment for permanent housing with support.

Excluded from gender analysis is one person who preferred not to state their gender.

Chronicity calculated automatically by the Advance to Zero database that houses the Adelaide By-Name List. Aligns with definition provided elsewhere in the report.

DFV (likely under-representation) calculated from positive answer to Q8 (harm/risk harm from spouse, parent, relative or friend).

All violence calculated from positive answer to either Q9 and Q10.

Tri-morbidity is co-existence/presence of mental health, physical health and substance-abuse issues.

Disability is an aggregate measure incorporating positive response to Q28, mental health questions (see point below) and indicating Disability Support Pension as source of income.

Mental health, drawn from direct question about mental health diagnosis (positive answer to any of Qs 37-43).

Acquired brain injury per direct question about brain injury or head trauma.

Prison and hospital interaction in prior 6 months determined by any relevant answer to this across the data collected (i.e. Q1, Q2, Q7).

Remote visitor determined by answer to additional survey in Adelaide for visitors to inner Adelaide, which also captures information about home community and desire to return home.

Source: Analysis of Adelaide Zero Project By-Name List data, 20 May 2021.

Before moving on to more nuanced accounts of Aboriginal homelessness in Adelaide, it is worth reiterating concerns about known undercounts with the census (ABS 2017b), which are recognised in relation to:

- enumerating homelessness (Memmott 2015; Zufferey and Parkes 2019)
- coverage of the Indigenous population (AIHW 2019a; Griffiths, Coleman et al. 2019; Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019).

Census data should not be taken as the final word on homelessness, especially for Indigenous people. Additionally, the census is a point-in-time data capture and cannot account for the movement of people in, out and between categories of homelessness. Nor can census data be used to track entrenched homelessness—that is, chronicity, or people who remain in one or other category of homelessness for significant periods, months, or years. This is where other datasets offer additional insights, and Adelaide has the benefit of a near to real-time dataset known as the AZP By-Name List.

Adelaide's By-Name List captures useful granular data about Indigenous homelessness in Adelaide (Table 13), although it is fundamentally a tool for the triage and prioritisation of housing and support to end homelessness for people sleeping rough in inner Adelaide.<sup>12</sup> These data—particularly when considered at the individual level—support observations by participants in this study about Aboriginal homelessness in Adelaide:

- Homelessness among Aboriginal people in inner Adelaide is *distinctive* and *diverse*; there is no typical or heterogeneous 'homelessness' experience.
- The catchment areas for the inner city are broad, with Aboriginal people coming to the city centre from a range of locations.
- Aboriginal people 'visit' Adelaide's inner-city area, with or without plans to remain, for a range of reasons.
- Aboriginal people do not necessarily see themselves as 'homeless' while in inner Adelaide, and many assumptions seem to be made by others about their wants, needs, motivations or expectations.
- The total lack of properties—especially culturally appropriate properties—for Aboriginal people across Adelaide and most areas of the state.

Stakeholders described many geographies of Aboriginal homelessness in inner Adelaide. Such geographies take many forms, including the movement of Aboriginal people:

- between specialist homelessness and other services in the inner city (where they may have been temporarily accommodated should capacity exist, or received other supports)
- between services in the city and sleeping rough in the Park Lands surrounding Adelaide CBD and North Adelaide
- between inner-city services and Park Lands locations, and other areas of Greater Adelaide and beyond.

On this latter point, stakeholders noted a well-worn path between services and sleeping rough/sleeping out in inner Adelaide and places in the western and northern suburbs of Adelaide, where people have kinship connections and where some services for Aboriginal people—including accommodation-based services—operate but are often at capacity. Such geographies of homelessness apply, variously, across the two broad groups described among the population of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in inner Adelaide:

- urban-dwelling Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal people from regional and remote areas who, for a range of reasons, come to be among Adelaide's urban Aboriginal homelessness population.

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<sup>12</sup> With this focus deliberately framed as the first step in a broader movement to end all forms of homelessness across South Australia (Tually, Skinner et al. 2017).

Other identified geographies of Aboriginal homelessness relate to what is referred to, somewhat unpopularity, as 'remote visiting'.<sup>13</sup>

'Remote visiting' is the movement of people ('remote visitors') from community or homelands to the inner city and other areas of Greater Adelaide for reasons related to the health needs of family, social reasons, changes in seasons, work, study or cultural events or because of community business.

Such 'visiting', 'Indigenous urban drift' (Robinson, Cleary et al. 2012: 7; RS6, Manager, Indigenous-specific homelessness service) or Aboriginal mobility sees people, or, more often, kinship groups, come to inner Adelaide from communities across SA, especially the APY Lands, as well as areas of central Australia that extend across the SA, WA and NT borders. Longstanding patterns of travel exist from the west of the state and the far west coast—from the Yorke Peninsula extending across to Ceduna and up to the APY Lands through Port Augusta, as well as from Eyre Peninsula—and through a central corridor, via Coober Pedy. Or, as one stakeholder insightfully noted:

... we've got lines on the map that show which state is which, but they're not lines that the Aboriginal people conform to ... It's more circles. (RS2, CEO, short-term accommodation)

For this group, study participants emphasised that most lived 'freer', 'traditional lifestyles', where gathering in large groups and sleeping out in open spaces are commonplace:

... the communities up there, prior to colonisation they didn't exist, because Western Desert people were very nomadic, and even people that lived on the coastal fringes of Australia lived in places a bit longer, but they still moved around to follow mother nature and the seasons. So now we have this artificial life of, you know, 'Oh, you live in Amata,' or 'You live at Pipalyatjara—this is your house, this is your community,' when, you know, prior to colonisation we moved around with the seasons, you know, and mother nature ... [was] the whip that made you move. (RS11, Manager, Indigenous health service)

Stakeholders also noted that generally 'remote visitors' tend not to utilise available services in the same ways as other Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in Adelaide—or want to utilise available homelessness services at all. The groups staying in public places are highly visible and attract significant and often negative community attention from residents and businesses, yet there is no place for them to gather comfortably.

Anecdotally, stakeholders noted both increased numbers of remote visitors in inner Adelaide over the last couple of years, with recognition of the complexities and oddities of the COVID-19-impacted year that was 2020, as well as the tendency for large groups to be here for longer periods. Some services noted that there was now a much longer main 'season' for remote visiting, extending from October/November to March/April each year, rather than commencing almost exclusively in January as the longer-term trend had been. Particularly in the CBD, remote visitors are the most visible among people experiencing homeless, although anecdotal evidence suggests that the general public do not specifically realise that many—possibly most—Aboriginal people sleeping out in the Park Lands are visiting Kurna Land from elsewhere (and are not Kurna people), nor do they understand where the people have come from and why they might be sleeping out in the Park Lands. They are also the group for whom services, as they currently exist, do not seem to be working, as noted later in this section (see also Pearson, Tually et al. 2021).

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**13** Alternative descriptors for the term 'remote visitors' mentioned by stakeholders and in relevant research included people who are 'away from home', 'homeless away from home', or simply living unsheltered or on Kurna Country as 'visitors' or, less often, as people who are 'homeless'. We acknowledge that words and language play an important role in power imbalances, ongoing disempowerment and creating otherness in situations like these, and therefore use the term 'remote visitors' here as the generally accepted and understood term in the local context, at least as adopted by some services. The term is used without prejudice and in the hope that a more culturally appropriate and welcoming term will be found when Aboriginal people are consulted more widely and govern responses to remote visiting on Kurna Country.

Youth-focussed services identified a further group with some crossover with 'remote visitors': 'country kids'—although not always from remote areas—who come to Adelaide and live with a family member for a short period. Such youths are often seeking out 'greener pastures' as one stakeholder put it, exploring country and opportunities just as their non-Indigenous counterparts in regional Australia frequently do. They then either become homeless in the city because of household pressures, kinship or relationship breakdown, or because they simply don't have the means to get back home.

Data from the AZP (extracted 20 May 2021) quantifies the extent of such remote visiting, at least in the context of rough sleeping in the inner city. These data note that of the 909 individuals who completed a VI-SPDAT survey between mid-May 2019 and mid-May 2021, 115 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people indicated they were a remote visitor sleeping rough.<sup>14</sup> And, from the point at which there is accessible data (mid-May 2019) 38 home communities were represented among the 57 Aboriginal people visiting inner Adelaide recorded as sleeping rough. However, there are limits to these data that must be considered. These data do not capture people visiting from remote regions who do not sleep rough or connect with services participating in the AZP. But these data do provide some indication of the extent of remote visiting and the diverse home communities from which people come, which extend across borders, as well as into the remote regions of SA. Remote visiting remains an area of concern for a range of agencies (Pearson, Tually et al. 2021), especially the City of Adelaide (as discussed later in the case study in sub-sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.3).

There is an important point about the geography of visiting inner Adelaide and metropolitan Adelaide more broadly. Stakeholders reminded us that such mobility has been part of culture and community for thousands of years, with people from central Australia traditionally visiting cooler coastal Country, such as Kurna Country, for respite during the hot summer months. Stakeholders also noted that the movement of people between Country is highly motivated by the presence of essential medical services in Adelaide. Such facilities are not on homelands or in Alice Springs, so family accompany an ill relative receiving treatment but are often unable to find suitable accommodation near medical facilities or other supports.

Stakeholders commented that the geographies of Aboriginal homelessness in inner Adelaide often relate to pressured tenancies in the suburbs—overcrowding, tension, family violence, antisocial behaviour, neighbourhood complaints—and sometimes in regional or remote SA, such as Port Augusta, Ceduna or other homelands. Such pressures were noted as a foundation for some 'remote visitors' ending up sleeping out in the Park Lands or presenting to inner-city services for help, as arrangements with family were unsustainable and people could not find a workable alternative.

In some cases the presence of 'remote visitors' compromised living arrangements to the extent that the original tenants were evicted, threatened with eviction, or became homeless themselves because of an overrun tenancy. Notably, threatened tenancies are often social tenancies, which are highly sought after, and as social housing in many ways can be seen as the housing of last resort in the SA housing system, this makes it challenging for impacted tenants to secure housing in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> That is, data from the point of the second project Connections Week; the city-wide engagement effort by a large number of volunteers, to ensure all people sleeping rough in the inner city are accounted for in project data (with their permission). The 909 individuals recorded on the by-name list includes more than 500 people added during the COVID-19 Emergency Response for Rough Sleepers (CEARS). See section on effectiveness of service coordination for further discussion.

### Port Augusta

Homelessness is not purely an urban Adelaide 'phenomenon'. The qualitative and quantitative elements of the SA study confirm the 'high proportion' of homelessness in other urban environments in the state, as well as the connections between places, Countries, communities, and services. The major regional town of Port Augusta (12,896 residents at the 2016 Census, with 19.2 per cent of the population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) is a case in point here, with a rate of homelessness in the order of 83.8 persons per 10,000; significantly higher than the average for SA as a whole. Table 14 provides the data available on homelessness for Port Augusta and the region around it. Unfortunately, census data is not available at a more granular level, including a further breakdown for Aboriginal people among people recorded as homeless. However, the evidence from the fieldwork is that the majority of people in Port Augusta experiencing homelessness are Aboriginal people, which means a much higher rate of homelessness per 10,000.

Table 14: Profile of homelessness, Outback–North and East (including Port Augusta), SA, SA3, 2016 Census

All homeless persons*		N	%
Homeless Operational Group	Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (i.e. rough sleepers)	39	4.9
	Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	59	7.4
	Persons staying temporarily with other households (i.e. couchsurfing)	31	3.9
	Persons living in boarding houses	0	0
	Persons living in other temporary lodging	0	0
	Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwelling	321	40.3
<b>Total*</b>		<b>456</b>	<b>57.2</b>
Port Augusta <sup>1</sup>		108	23.7 <sup>2</sup>
Persons who are marginally housed <sup>3</sup>		34	42.8
<b>Total all homeless and marginally housed people</b>		<b>797</b>	<b>100</b>

Notes: Person records, Place of Enumeration.

Totals do not sum due to the ABS confidentialising data in small cells in TableBuilder. However, differences are small in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

1) Port Augusta is the largest of the five main townships in the Outback—North and East region, with 108 people recorded as homeless across all six Homeless Operational Groups. The remaining homeless people were recorded in the APY Lands (297 people), Coober Pedy (10), Roxby Downs (4), Quorn-Lake Gillies (3) and remaining Outback regions (32).

2) Percentage is of the Port Augusta homeless population of the total Outback—North and East homeless population.

3) Persons who are marginally housed includes persons living in other crowded dwellings, persons in other improvised dwellings, and persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

Source: ABS 2018c, Tables 5.1 and 1.3.

Port Augusta is 300 kilometres north of Adelaide, at the top of the Spencer Gulf, and described as the 'Gateway to the Outback'. It has long struggled with the 'challenge' of Aboriginal homelessness within the urban limits of the town and beyond.

A range of factors contribute to the homelessness 'challenge' in Port Augusta. One key factor is the difficulties Aboriginal people and families face in accessing suitable and affordable housing locally. Stakeholders consulted for this study noted the market locally is 'particularly unfriendly' to Aboriginal households, with discrimination, culturally inappropriate housing, and constrained social housing supply. This is a significant concern as almost 20 per cent of residents of the town identify as Aboriginal.

Port Augusta is a hub of health, social, employment and other services, as well as for shopping and recreation. It is also a road traffic and railway crossroads. This means that many roads through outback SA either lead to or converge at or near the town, making it a 'hotspot' of Indigenous population movement (Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011).

People are attracted to, or transit through, Port Augusta from a wide area, especially from the APY Lands but also from the NT down through the centre, including Coober Pedy, the Maralinga Tjarutja (MT) Lands, Ceduna in the far west, and from the Eyre Peninsula (Port Lincoln, Whyalla). Strong pathways and connections exist between Port Augusta and Kurna Country, especially inner Adelaide and Adelaide's western and northern suburbs. As Taylor and Westbury (2012: 15) note: Port Augusta is a place from which 'lines of social connection run in all directions'.

The 2011 work of Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. noted strong patterns of temporary movement of Aboriginal people in and out of the town and surrounding area, following historical and seasonal links. Such mobility has always aligned strongly with the summer season and people moving off home communities in the far northern areas of SA and beyond (e.g. the APY Lands, Coober Pedy), when temperatures are extreme. However stakeholders we spoke with for this study noted such patterns of mobility are now less temporary and less predictable:

... probably five years ago, it [seasonal visitation] was very, very strong. But then within 12 months it changed so it wasn't just summertime—it was winter, it was anytime ... it was really hard to predict. (RS20, Manager, Community sector provider; former Manager, Government)

These mobility patterns result in people sleeping out in or near Port Augusta, as well as pressured tenancies. This aligns with commentary about Aboriginal mobility from Adelaide presented earlier (see 5.1.1) and confirms the close links between these places and broader regional and remote places.

Port Augusta is also the location of a transitional accommodation facility, Lakeview, situated on Davenport Community Land, which acts as an attractor to the town and region in terms of mobility, and family and community connections.

In terms of geographies of homelessness, couchsurfing in Port Augusta was noted as generally more prevalent than rough sleeping—albeit with fluctuations in both 'types' of homelessness at times. Counter to general trends reported in inner Adelaide, couchsurfing is not predominantly an experience of youth, but is also experienced by individuals and families waiting for settled accommodation where there are few appropriate housing options. One stakeholder noted that among their clients, 'we have got a pregnant woman whose husband died four weeks ago, who has got two other little children, who is couchsurfing at the moment' (RS18, Manager, Community sector provider). The manager further explained:

There is definitely some rough sleeping in the town but it's not highly visible. So it would be down on the foreshore or down on the beach and there's definitely more in summer than in winter, but just from being on family safety framework meetings and stuff, we know that some of those people are rough sleeping in the town as well as couchsurfing, and of course couchsurfing depends on being able to find a couch for the night, so if you can't find one then you rough sleep. (RS18, Community sector provider)

Rough sleeping also occurs in Davenport, primarily in the sand dunes on the perimeter of Lakeview and sometimes at the community oval. Rules around drinking in Port Augusta (where there are Dry Zones) and Lakeview Centre (where people who have been drinking are not admitted) were noted contributors to rough sleeping in Davenport in particular. In addition to those sleeping rough, there are drinkers who 'basically live' at the sobering-up unit in Port Augusta:

Port Augusta is very lucky in a sense that we do have a lot of Aboriginal ... services. So we've got the Mobile Assistance Patrol van that drives around and picks up people between 2 o'clock and midnight and takes them up to the sobering-up unit to stay the night, gives them a feed and keeps an eye on them ... (RS20, Manager, Community sector provider; former Manager, Government).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> These structures mimic those in Adelaide: presence of a Mobile Assistance Patrol and sobering-up unit.

Notably, the introduction of the Centrelink debit card system in Ceduna (Vincent, Markham et al. 2020) was seen as a contributor to homelessness in the area, with people using a non-Ceduna (i.e. Davenport) address so they could receive their payments in the usual way.

People and families sleeping in cars is not uncommon within the urban limits of Port Augusta and beyond (Davenport etc).

### 5.1.2 Socio-demographic characteristics

Participants in the study identified several key socio-demographic characteristics among Aboriginal people approaching services—or known *not* to approach services, in some cases. They noted the presence of people or kinship groups presenting with immediate needs related to housing security, most commonly because of housing or financial stress generally—inability to pay rent, cover arrears, meet utility or living costs—or because of family violence resulting in an unsafe living environment. Such reasons for seeking support from services were common among women and families presenting to services for the first time, and among Aboriginal youth.

Alongside service users with immediate needs related to housing security, stakeholders also reported a consistently present group of service users—individuals and sometimes family groups—that have an at-risk tenancy because of:

- cultural obligations placing strains on relationships with kin or tenants
- the landlord/tenant relationship
- relationships between neighbours.

Occupying an inappropriate dwelling accounted for some of the pressure on relationships for this group, especially if the dwelling was:

- too small and inflexible to meet cultural needs for space and amenity for changing numbers of residents
- poorly located in relation to people's needs—cultural and other services, family and kinship connections
- in a poor-quality living environment.

These concerns included housing in both social and private markets. Pressured tenancies were a peculiarity of homelessness in Port Augusta, strongly reflected in homelessness estimates from the census (Table 14).

Prominent among the Aboriginal population experiencing homelessness is a group whom stakeholders (and the system) generally describe as chronically homeless. That is, people who have been homeless or in precarious housing arrangements for a prolonged period and who often 'bounce' or cycle repeatedly through different 'types' of homelessness:

- in and out of rough sleeping and couchsurfing
- spending periods of time in crisis or transitional accommodation in the inner city or suburbs
- spending periods of time in boarding houses or other accommodation, including social housing tenancies and, rarely, in private rental accommodation.

Many individuals in this group have housing or homelessness histories that include periods in institutional care as younger people or significant or repeat periods in other institutions (correctional facilities, the city watchhouse, mental health services, hospitals, supported accommodation). One stakeholder commented that this group of chronically homeless people was much larger in the recent past, comprising up to 20 people who had lived in Adelaide's Park Lands for many years, but almost all of the group had died (prematurely) because of chronic illness and the remaining two people were housed in accommodation for older people.

The AZP's By-Name List data provides insightful data on chronic homelessness in inner Adelaide, both for people sleeping rough and those temporarily accommodated who came to such accommodation from rough sleeping. Among actively homeless people identifying as Aboriginal on the By-Name List on 20 May 2021 were 67 people: 49 per cent (33 people) met the project criteria for chronically homeless,<sup>16</sup> which is a slightly higher proportion of chronicity than for the actively homeless population as a whole (42%) or chronicity for non-Indigenous people (46%). These levels of chronicity relate to the cyclical nature of homelessness for many Aboriginal people who are continually left with little option other than to be sleeping rough in inner Adelaide. Aboriginal people's long-term experiences of chronic homelessness also reinforce the perspectives captured in our data, of those who highlight how culturally inappropriate housing and support responses simply fail to meet the complexity of people's needs.

Data in Table 13, from the Adelaide By-Name List, confirms the strong message from fieldwork participants of the vulnerability of this group and their multiple and complex needs. The Vulnerability Index used by the AZP<sup>17</sup> to prioritise housing and support to meet people's expressed/assessed needs reveals the vast majority of actively homeless<sup>18</sup> Aboriginal people (73.1%) to be in the high acuity or most intensive needs category, recommended for assessment for permanent housing with some level and type of support (likely ongoing).

The prominence of high-acuity needs among Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness reflects the multitude of factors considered in the assessment of people's risks and vulnerability:

- age and gender
- co-morbidities and so-called tri-morbidities—co-presence of disability, mental health and substance-abuse issues
- experiences of trauma
- family and domestic violence
- exposure to other types of violence—including during periods of homelessness
- experiences of institutional care.

As shown in Table 13, such indicators of vulnerability and acuity are prevalent among people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness in inner Adelaide generally, but especially so among Aboriginal people for almost all factors—also with a significant gender dimension.

With regard to Aboriginal youth, stakeholders described two distinct groups of young people attending services:

- The first group of young people who are local or have roots in the state, but who can't stay with family for a range of reasons—including family breakdown, trauma, identity issues and cultural pressures. This cohort tends to be less 'visible' than other Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, and like non-Indigenous youth are more likely to be couchsurfing or staying somewhere other than in the Park Lands.
- The second group is one that youth-specific homelessness services do not see very often: young people or children connected to the larger kinship groups that might be transient between other regions of SA, NT and Adelaide—for example, 'coming from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek to Adelaide'—for reasons such as medical treatment, sorry business and other purposes. A worker in one inner-city youth-specific service noted that it's more likely the Aboriginal youth in this second group would be encountered through outreach—a non-youth-specific service that operates in inner Adelaide—and that it is 'very hard to approach and address' the needs of young people in this group (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS).

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<sup>16</sup> Defined within the project, and other 'end homelessness' efforts nationally, as a person experiencing three or more episodes of homelessness in the previous 12-month period, or currently experiencing a single episode of homelessness lasting for six or more consecutive months.

<sup>17</sup> An Adelaide-specific version of OrgCode's Australian Vulnerability Index–Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT).

<sup>18</sup> Actively homeless people in the AZP context being people sleeping rough or in temporary (crisis) accommodation.

Notably, like homelessness geographies, the socio-demographic characteristics of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in inner Adelaide vary, again at any point in time and over time. The seasonal nature of remote visiting to Adelaide, and the broad catchment from where 'remote visitors' come, means the socio-demographics (and needs) of the Indigenous population experiencing homelessness can be quite different during peaks of visitation—for example, December–March—compared with periods when fewer remote visitors are sleeping out in the Park Lands. This is an important point to consider, as it emphasises the need for flexibility in service responses and capacities, and the value of real-time data to capture people's needs and expectations.

### 5.1.3 Exclusion, poverty and homelessness

In the SA case-study locations, as in the other sites—and as resonates through Indigenous housing and homelessness research—social exclusion and poverty featured strongly in conversations about urban Aboriginal homelessness and 'homeless' pathways.

At the macro level, exclusion and poverty were noted in relation to the accessibility of local housing markets for Aboriginal people specifically. While Adelaide (and SA) is popularly considered an affordable housing market, particularly among commentators outside SA, housing costs continue to challenge lower-income households—especially households where there are no members in paid employment, and households living in poverty. Across almost all submarkets, house prices were on an upward trajectory pre-pandemic and remain so, counter to trends in some other parts of Australia (Pawson, Martin et al. 2021; also Brown 2021; Domain 2021). The reality for Adelaide is that rental markets have been tight for many years now and, in plain terms, remain impenetrable for many households. Study participants noted such impenetrability of the private rental market for Aboriginal households, for reasons that participants simply described as 'racism' and 'discrimination' and related to poverty.

Similar commentary was provided in relation to Port Augusta. Echoing the 2011 findings of Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al., respondents noted significant strain on the Port Augusta housing market, extending across public/community and private sectors. High levels of need were expressed for social housing properties locally, related to the unfriendliness of the private market for Aboriginal households specifically—and especially for households on Centrelink incomes. One respondent noted: 'our housing authority waitlists are massive' (RS19, Manager, Community sector provider). However, these realities for Port Augusta were juxtaposed with commentary about some of the smaller towns in the region, where there was perceived to be relatively less pressure on the housing market.<sup>19</sup> For example, while the wait for public housing in Port Augusta was a two- to three-year wait for Category 1 (highest priority) waitlisted households according to stakeholders, in Port Pirie the wait has generally been less than 12 months. Whyalla was also seen as an easier place to secure public housing, which may be the reason for a recent, rapid increase in people moving from the APY Lands to Whyalla.

Lack of suitable housing for people's needs was widely recognised as a key determinant of the social exclusion reported for homeless Aboriginal people. Culturally appropriate housing provides the stable platform people need to build community connections and to maintain, preserve and connect to culture and community—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life-worlds. Lack of the *right* housing, including the support people need and want, was re-traumatising, and magnified feelings of grief, loss, disempowerment and otherness.

... a lot of our kids that come through have lost their connection to culture ... You know, even with our service we really, we don't have the flexibility to offer, I guess, some of the cultural norms that would be beneficial. So, say like occasionally having maybe a fire-pit and yarning circles and visitors and, you know, supporting a young person's stay with us; we just don't have that, because we have residential facilities—it's like half of the children's residential facility and you have those sort of protections to put in. So just sort of flexibility for cultural allowances would be, I think, beneficial from our perspective. (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

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<sup>19</sup> Participants in the fieldwork worked in services based in and across Outback SA, including Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Whyalla and Port Lincoln, as well as working in or up to Coober Pedy, Marla and Oodnadatta.

One indication of the depth, impact and personal experience of exclusion is indicated by a question now systematically asked of people sleeping rough in inner Adelaide as part of the tool triaging people for housing and support:

Do you have planned activities, other than just surviving, that make you feel happy and fulfilled?

More than 50 per cent of Aboriginal people sleeping rough consistently report no meaningful daily activities in their life. This aligns with data for non-Indigenous people sleeping rough (see also Thomas, Gray et al. 2017).

Study participants were unanimous in their views that the lived experience of homelessness, and pathways to homelessness, are most often underpinned by trauma related to a range of life events and experiences:

- exposure to family violence in the home and communities
- lateral violence
- intergenerational trauma caused by colonial dispossession
- racism and discrimination
- periods in 'care' and custody
- exposure to homelessness as a child
- repeated and prolonged periods of homelessness over the life course—either as an individual or family.

Such experiences were clearly noted to impact people's sense of social and emotional wellbeing, and often manifest as poor mental and physical health.

#### 5.1.4 Indigeneity and definitions of homelessness

Acknowledgement by stakeholders of the qualitatively different lived experience of homelessness, and contributing pathways, for Aboriginal people in inner Adelaide, Port Augusta and beyond, brought to the fore questions about:

- the appropriateness of the normative Western conceptualisation of 'homelessness', specifically taken to mean 'rooflessness' or 'houselessness'
- how 'types' of homelessness are understood and addressed
- how homelessness services are structured, resourced and connected with other services.

Such observations were strongest in relation to remote visitors (Aboriginal mobility) and their 'homelessness', which most stakeholders agreed was better described as sleeping out or camping out (in the Park Lands in the inner Adelaide context, or other public places), rather than the more commonly used term, rough sleeping (see Grant, Zillante et al. 2017: 45; Pearson, Tually et al. 2021).

Many Aboriginal people sleeping out/rough wouldn't see themselves as rough sleeping—they are basically just setting up camp as they would normally: sit under a tree, grab a lounge suite and you know, have a kettle cooking on the fire ... and just engage in normal life while going about their activities [e.g. hospital appointments, visiting friends/family, holidaying]. (RS12, Manager, Indigenous health service)

The appropriateness of 'homelessness' as the conceptualisation of the housing situation where there was overcrowding also drew focussed commentary, with Aboriginal stakeholders adamant in their view that overcrowding is not homelessness, but rather the sign of systems and institutions that do not acknowledge the cultural obligations and realities of collective societies. Unlike the commentary in other areas, stakeholders were also clear that overcrowding should not be seen as a problem—'it's not a problem, it's a lifestyle' (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS). More important considerations are around people's safety and comfort, and managing inappropriate or undesirable behaviours, for and within kinship groups and neighbourhoods.

... overcrowding from an Aboriginal perspective is not overcrowding, it's just family visiting and you don't say, you know, 'You've got to go,' because they've sometimes come from interstate or [elsewhere] ... (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

Home-life is horrible and it's better to be, you know, they're safer at Auntie's or cousin's house than what they are at home. But in the Western society, it's overcrowding, it's too many people and then other factors come into it as well. (RS14, Program coordinator, Indigenous SHS)

Overcrowding and family breakdown and family violence is certainly where a lot of our referrals come from once things happen, and I don't think until there's a safety concern, I think once there's a safety concern or a triggering event, then it's not defining it as homeless isn't or, you know, overcrowding, isn't appropriate, or culturally appropriate, I think. But if, obviously, if there's a safety concern, that's when it does go, 'Well, there's a problem and I've got to get out.' So, yeah, I don't know if that answers it properly but I don't, it doesn't quite fit with the cultural [thinking], yeah. (RS14, Program coordinator, Indigenous SHS)

Some study participants also noted that overcrowding can and does have real impact on some existing tenancies, which again was framed as more about safety, comfort and behaviours, as well as the inappropriateness of housing stock in meeting the cultural obligations of Aboriginal kinship and cultural needs.

But there's also an element of homelessness in there as well, and that could be because a family group have come from remote communities and crashed on the tenancy, and the tenant doesn't want that and so they leave and go and sleep rough, they're homeless even though they have a lease with SAHA or something like that, but their tenancy is at risk. So that's one of the options. So I think it's really complex in terms of what we see, and what the community think is homelessness is not necessarily homelessness. And also, I guess, and as you probably find as you go through these sorts of things, what we think is homelessness is not necessarily what Aboriginal people think is homelessness. They wouldn't see themselves as homeless in this situation ... (RS3, Manager, government)

Further to this, study participants noted how Western conceptualisations of homelessness and the desire to address 'rooflessness':

- devalue the spiritual relationships Aboriginal people have with people, Country and culture
- ignore traditional cultural practices around gathering and sleeping out in open spaces
- fail to adequately see and address the complexities Aboriginal people face because of continued disempowerment and dispossession.

The attribution of the term 'homeless' to Aboriginal people basically is a denial of the fact that they are never homeless in their own Country, and to use that word towards them is to engage in systemic separation ... from their place and Country of ownership. (RS12, Manager, Indigenous health service)

[Defining or considering Aboriginal people as homeless] when they come to the city for treatment is such an insult because they are not. They are on their land; they are away from maybe their Country but this is Aboriginal Land and they're not homeless here. We're just not providing them [remote visitors] with the type of shelter that they need ... (RS1, Manager, community sector provider)

[This] isn't just about Aboriginal 'homelessness', this is about mobility and rough sleeping; people aren't necessarily homeless, they're in Adelaide for whatever reason but there isn't an appropriate place for people to be, so they end up in public spaces. (RS3, Manager, government)

And, as passionately expressed by another study participant:

I think society still sees Aboriginal people as the problem, you know? For some reason we're the problem but the rest of society isn't and ... we should just suck it up and we're a square peg trying to fit into a round hole, maybe we should shave off and be that round peg and just, you know, forget our culture, forget everything that's important to us and just go away with, you know, the colonisers of the day ... [And] you've still got a lot of other people that have got nothing to do with Aboriginal people or no understanding, there's no education in schools around Aboriginal culture and history. (RS11, Manager, Indigenous health service)

Commentary about the appropriateness of normative conceptualisations of homelessness for Aboriginal people generally translated to commentary about a homelessness lens not being the right lens for viewing some experiences of homelessness. That is, we need to step away from housing-led thinking for some Aboriginal people or groups. As one respondent noted: Aboriginal people sleeping out in the Park Lands don't necessarily see themselves as homeless 'and yet the only support we have for them is to access homelessness services' (RS3 Manager, government) to meet certain needs—so there's a gap in support offerings.

Another study participant offered similar sentiments:

The visitor issue is ... all thrown into the laps of the homelessness sector but it's really not [homelessness] at all. (RS5, Manager, government)

A couple of stakeholders raised the need for reframing of homelessness responses—away from housing-led solutions—the conceptualisation of homelessness as rooflessness—in relation to all 'types' of homelessness or apparent homelessness, seeing greater outcomes, value and logic instead in systems integration and coordination of services to meet the multiple needs of people experiencing homelessness, across a range of life domains—health, mental health, housing, disability services, aged care, family violence, drug and alcohol, sector-specific and culture-specific services. This thinking is the foundation of the discussion presented in subsection 5.4).

Discussions about the appropriateness of homelessness responses for some Aboriginal people and groups raised the importance of looking at the wants and needs of some Aboriginal people through a cultural safety lens, focussing service delivery and responses around the fundamental question: *What do you need right now (tonight, this week, while you are here) to be safe and well?*

It's a health response rather than a homelessness response [we need]. I think that's needed really, so that people are supported whether they choose to stay with family or sleep out, there's places where people can be and be safe and that there is a group of organisations that they trust that will look after them. (RS3, Manager, government)

AZP data captures some direct lived experience commentary about being safe and well, in the context of Aboriginal people sleeping rough in the inner city, including for the small number of remote visitors on the By-Name List. Analysis of these data is provided in Table 15, showing the clear prominence of shelter (including what can best be described as temporary shelter, although this is not always distinguishable from the commentary captured), accommodation (again, sometimes temporary) and housing (meaning mostly something more permanent).

Table 15: What people need to be safe and well, Adelaide Zero Project

Categorisation of safe and well comment	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (max n = 291)	Remote visitors (max n = 115)	All persons (max n= 909)
Housing/home	105	47	308
Support	5	2	12
Immediate needs	3	3	19
Safety	2	1	15
Don't know/nothing	1	1	9
Health response	-	0	7
Income/money/employment	1	0	3
Answered	174	78	573
<b>Total cases</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>909</b>
All mentions of shelter/accommodation/ housing (multiple answers provided)	501	73	173

Notes: Data for all persons recorded on the Adelaide Zero Project By-Name List, mid-May 2019 to mid-May 2021 (extracted 20 May 2021).

Source: Analysis of Adelaide Zero Project By-Name List data, 20 May 2021.

Comments provided in response to this question are an important window into people's wants, needs, aspirations, cultural obligations and desperation, and indicate where supports are needed for some people:

Accommodation that doesn't have a lot of room, so family can't move in and take over.

Accommodation where I don't need to look after all the rough sleepers and can just look after myself.

Not sleeping in the park.

Somewhere safe where my child can live too.

Housing where I can be safe with my partner and not have to sleep in the park.

Getting to the heart of what people want while they are away from their homeland was seen as the key here—recognising also that what people or groups want can shift rapidly and over time; there can often be a collective or group need, rather than an individual need.

However, accepting what people or kinship groups want may not sit well with non-Aboriginal cultural norms and expectations. In addition, housing may not be a primary want or a want at all—that is, in a homelessness landscape dominated by housing-led solutions, we need to listen carefully and respect what people say they want. One respondent spoke strongly about this, noting how service deliverers can impose Western or outsider decisions and views on people by not accepting that when they say 'no' to a particular service response they need to be listened to respectfully.

If an Aboriginal person gets the sense, I think, or any person, gets the sense that, 'If I say "no," someone's actually going to listen to me? I can actually say "no" and it's going to mean something?' Because if they get the sense saying 'no' means nothing, then they're not going to say 'no'. You are going to get a lot of 'yeses' to everything because they know it's a waste of time saying 'no' to a government who thinks it knows better than they do. So my suggestion around the consultation would be, 'Listen.' Do they want it? If they say 'no' to you, then don't try and change their mind; they just don't want it. They might want something completely different, or nothing. (RS12, Manager, Indigenous health service)

Another respondent contributed:

... for me I think it's around case managers being willing or able to work with clients where they're at. And it is understanding what it is that each client sees as homelessness or what they view as being appropriate accommodation. And I think a good example of that was recently during the COVID times, we had an elderly couple that were sleeping rough, camping in [town] and we tried to assist them where we could, provided ... firewood for warmth and cooking, and tents and shelter. And in this particular case, they were eligible to enter aged care and I think from memory that was certainly an option, that they could go into an aged care facility and not be sleeping out, outside. But that wasn't for these people, you know, for this particular couple, they were quite used to sleeping outside and that was their lifestyle. And so for us to—I think we've got to be very careful around, I guess, putting forward our own ideas and what we might think is appropriate; it's really about spending time getting to know people and what they feel is right for them ... they were quite elderly and still, for us you would never have your elderly grandparents sleeping outside, coming into winter, but for this family that was what was appropriate. (RS22, Program manager, Indigenous crisis service)

However, a culturally appropriate housing-led (Housing First) approach, is warranted in other 'homelessness' scenarios, and is what AZP data and engagements showed that some Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness do want—and this includes some people among the 'remote visitor' population. It is clear from the interviews conducted, however, that system and service improvements need to be made to support appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal people seeking homelessness (and related) supports or moving on from homelessness. Such system and service improvements are the subject of discussion in the remainder of this section.

Work done by Pearson, Tually et al. for the Adelaide City Council and SA Housing Authority (2021), under the auspices of the AZP and supported by SA's Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, describes potential ways forward for better understanding and support for Aboriginal people sleeping out in the Park Lands. Their solutions-focussed work posits the need for a Cultural Engagement Framework, an operational guide for the homelessness (and intersecting) sectors covering five core domains:

- engagement tools
- housing and support pathways
- data
- systems coordination
- services—programs and responses.

At a finer level of detail, the Framework should include targeted questions for eliciting what people want while in Adelaide, outline different approaches for eliciting information about people's needs (i.e. methods for building relationships and emphasising reciprocity) and ensuring person-centred supports for Aboriginal people involve more than a Housing First pathway. Helpfully, in the context of this research, and reflecting the uniqueness of remote visiting in Adelaide, the Framework posits three pathways to support Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness:

- *A Housing First pathway*: This is currently in existence, operationalised through the AZP. This approach needs to be improved to provide a more culturally appropriate response to the housing and support needs of Aboriginal people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness.
- *A Support First pathway*: This is partially in existence and involves better coordinating the non-housing needs of people gathering or sleeping out in the Park Lands.
- *A Cultural Engagement pathway*: This is to be created. This pathway recognises that many Aboriginal people visiting the Park Lands are just going about their everyday lives, and are not in need of support or housing, but coordinated cultural engagement strategies for welcoming, supporting and setting expectations for visitors on Kurna Land would be broadly beneficial.

The Cultural Engagement Framework has been tested with key stakeholders in relevant agencies in Adelaide and has attracted interest beyond Adelaide. However, the Framework recommendations need more broadly based consultation, explicitly with Aboriginal people with lived experience, and aligned with the evolving landscape of homelessness and related services provision in Adelaide and beyond.

Pearson, Tually et al. note this themselves:

The loudest message heard in this project is that Aboriginal people, workers in the sector and Aboriginal-Controlled Community Organisations need to be central to any efforts to better meet the needs of mobile/visiting Aboriginal populations. The challenge recognised here is that this requires capacity and resources and that there needs to be support for Aboriginal people and organisations to participate in policy conversations, service coordination and cultural outreach. Such opportunities are often not present or obvious. Additionally, there also needs to be greater support for Aboriginal workers in the sector, and for bolstered efforts to grow the Aboriginal workforce in the homelessness and housing sectors in particular. Alongside this, attention must be given to increasing partnerships and connections between Aboriginal workers within the housing and homelessness sectors (as the workers/agencies/sectors often supporting people gathering and/or sleeping in the Park Lands), other sectors supporting their social and cultural needs (i.e. the health, mental health, drug and alcohol services, for example) and the sectors 'dealing' with community concerns about people in the Park Lands such as justice, corrections and local government. (Pearson, Tually et al. 2021: 8)

## 5.2 Service delivery

### 5.2.1 The systemic nature of barriers to accessing housing

Without qualification, all stakeholders—whether representing Aboriginal-specific or mainstream and generalist services—reported access to housing as the core challenge faced by Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness. Fundamentally, this observation was framed as a simple supply and demand equation, or commentary. This finding is not surprising. However, there were important nuances to this commentary, for Aboriginal people in particular. Firstly, and as raised earlier, discrimination, racism and disempowerment were strongly linked to issues around housing access. In many instances, stakeholders noted that Aboriginal people—and some workers themselves—have given up on trying to secure private accommodation options for Aboriginal people moving on from homelessness—particularly in metropolitan Adelaide—as success rates are so low as to not warrant the energy spent in trying. PricewaterhouseCooper's (2018) *Triennial Review* of the South Australian Housing Trust 2013–14 to 2016–17 drew similar stark conclusions:

Feedback from Aboriginal representatives and stakeholders in the housing system was that Aboriginal people have difficulty firstly entering the private rental market due to the high market prices and secondly being provided with a fair rental price due to the categorisation of Aboriginal people. For these reasons Aboriginal people are less likely to access the private rental market and it is critical that the public and Aboriginal housing system is there to cater for the needs of Aboriginal people. (2018: 106)

While stakeholders in our study noted a range of reasons for low success rates—high levels of demand, people not having the requisite identification documents in many cases, no or poor rental references, being blacklisted (sometimes from social housing)—they also noted that how 'clients' had experienced what could be seen as discrimination from landlords/agents, as they met standard market criteria, presenting references, had good housing histories and had workable household incomes relative to rents and living costs.

Social housing was considered the main option for Aboriginal people seeking housing, although there were challenges related to the following:

- Supply constraints, especially culturally appropriate social housing supply, particularly housing where there is flexibility to accommodate visitors or larger families. Addressing such supply constraints was a way of supporting conditions to address the non-Aboriginal concept of 'overcrowding'.

The presence of a waitlist for residence in Lakeview Transitional Accommodation Centre in Port Augusta was also noted in terms of supply constraints around social housing options (including larger properties to accommodate bigger family groups), with a call for further investment in housing for the centre, preferably linked to a supply of social properties in Port Augusta where people could transition to as their circumstances stabilised.

- Access processes and the recognised under-reported need for social housing among Aboriginal people, with some stakeholders noting the overwhelming and overly bureaucratic forms and processes required for establishing and maintaining eligibility, and compiling relevant evidence for a tenancy should one be offered.
- The hardness and hardening of existing social housing policies around allocating houses for people previously evicted (for whatever reason), especially those with prior debts to housing providers.
- Managing people's housing needs and preferences regarding dwelling type, location and connections—to place, family, services—in an overstretched system.
- Poor visibility and clarity around Aboriginal-specific housing and the seemingly non-existent pathway to such housing. There is some hope the new SA Aboriginal Housing Strategy will specifically address this.
- Balancing 'neighbourhood considerations', especially where there are complex needs present in a tenancy.

A number of these observations were also raised in the *Triennial Review* of SA's public housing authority (PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting 2018).

The housing register is predominantly composed of Category 3 applicants in the public and Aboriginal systems, together these account for over 55 per cent of the total public and Aboriginal housing register. Feedback from stakeholder groups is that there is also 'under-reported need', particularly guardianship Aboriginal people, who should be considered Category 1 but have been unable to complete the necessary application process/forms to be recognised as such (i.e. due to language, access to services, or other barriers). (2018: 36)

Statistics show that Aboriginal people housed through the SAHT's public or Aboriginal housing programs experience higher levels of overcrowding than both other jurisdictions and non-Aboriginal people. Tenant support officers who work closely with Aboriginal people indicated that it is common that extended families stay within the same dwelling therefore requiring large houses. The SAHT stock has only a small portion of large houses with four or more bedrooms and most are already being tenanted. (2018: 99)

A stakeholder in our study added further nuance:

...there's ... Aboriginal people out there [on the streets], that have had, previously, housing tenancies, who are being precluded from housing because they've got a poor history of housing, you know, and they've got all these other complexities going on. So they're the ones I'm interested in that are forgotten and that the minute their file is brought up [in social housing] they go, 'Oh, well you were evicted 12 months ago'; 'Oh, you've actually got a \$5,000 [debt]'; 'Our policy states if you've already been evicted in the last 12 months we wouldn't be offering you another tenancy.' The CHPs [community housing providers] are very reluctant because of the high-risk, the bottom-line around, you know, rental payments and property conditions etc, you know. So you've got a housing system that actually is not geared up to provided housing outcomes for this group; it's actually restrictive and prohibitive. (RS5, Manager, government)

An exception in terms of access to the (sometimes quasi-) private market were boarding houses in Adelaide—although services were wary of this housing option due to the potential for moving people near to negative influences and the quality of accommodation and types of support offerings at some facilities. These concerns translated to workers referring clients to only specific boarding houses in the city, facilities where other clients described positive experiences, where residents had a guaranteed length of tenure and facilities providing or linked to a range of supports, including linking people with future housing pathways.

Appropriate boarding-house options were noted as in high demand and short supply in Adelaide, making this pathway also a difficult one for many people for whom it might be an option (which AZP data shows some people specify as their preferred next housing option). The collaborative government/non-government organisation effort that has been brought to fruition, The Waymouth supported boarding-house accommodation in inner Adelaide, was raised as a positive location for inner-city rough sleepers, adding new capacity to the system and consistently providing accommodation alongside case-management support for Aboriginal people seeking to move on from rough sleeping.

While the Waymouth model and its operations were not without criticism—for example, because it was a housing 'readiness' rather than a Housing First model—stakeholders appreciated the facility's foundation as a lower-barrier facility, providing (rare) accommodation for couples experiencing homelessness and people/couples with their pets. Consistently, at any given time, at least 30 per cent of tenants of the facility are Aboriginal—at one stage 100 per cent of tenants were Aboriginal people—which shows the need for lower-barrier options for this group, and for people sleeping rough generally. This also both highlights and confirms the capacity issues across the emergency accommodation system that stakeholders spoke about. In many ways, this model is proving not only the need for such accommodation among Aboriginal people, but also the workability of a collective, low-barrier, transitional housing model, with positive post-transitional support housing outcomes for dozens of Aboriginal people over the first year of operation of the service—which also intersected with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Adelaide.

Speaking with stakeholders about more culturally appropriate understandings, conceptualisations and holistic homelessness responses also brought to the fore consideration of ways of seeing, knowing and working. And, while homelessness agencies noted increasing focus on being trauma-informed and culturally competent and responsive, such important ways of working with Aboriginal people are clearly a work in progress for the sector generally, and an area of great variability between agencies.

Aboriginal-controlled organisations intersecting with 'homeless' people were at the leading edge of practice here, but reported resource and capacity issues given high levels of ongoing demand and significant fluctuations in demand at particular times. Much more needs to be done within the homelessness sector, and with intersecting sectors and agencies, to recognise that the needs of Aboriginal people are not just related to housing. These agencies include mainstream and Indigenous-specific or Indigenous-controlled health, mental health, disability, and aged care, alcohol or drugs (AOD), domestic and family violence, child protection, youth, children and families, justice, and corrections. Pathways to stable and appropriate housing should be a core focus of homeless sector service delivery. In fact, for remote visitors sleeping out in the Park Lands, stakeholders working directly with this group—including through outreach—noted that housing was not actually what some wanted. Such observations translated to earlier discussion about ensuring we ask the right questions to elicit the needs of Aboriginal people sleeping out in the Park Lands, that we listen to and respect these needs, recognising also that a housing-led response, which the homelessness sector is well versed in steering people towards, is not what everyone desires.

The SA homelessness sector reform process was ongoing during the course of this research (and alongside the impacts and responses of the COVID-19 pandemic). The reform offers some promise around the greater involvement and capacity building of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the homelessness landscape, with the involvement of ACCOs/ACCHOs preferenced in the new alliances landscape rolling out regionally (four alliances: country north and south, metro north-west and metro south) and through a statewide domestic and family violence alliance (SAHA 2020a, 2020c). The alliances offer a new structure for collaboration, including across Adelaide's inner city (metro south alliance). Alliances are discussed further in Section 5.4.

## 5.2.2 The revolving door of housing and homelessness

SA's housing and homelessness sectors continue to operate without a definite no-wrong door approach, as has been seen in other jurisdictions nationally. The lack of this open-access systemic structure and principle, alongside ongoing lack of cross-government coordination of the sectors/systems/services/supports people need to maintain stability in their housing and life circumstances (see Section 5.4), contributes to the revolving doors of housing instability and homelessness that many Aboriginal people face.

The revolving doors in the system see people supported through different responses at different times, depending on their presenting circumstances, program eligibility and service capacity. Stakeholders noted that it is not uncommon for Aboriginal people to move between rough sleeping/sleeping out; crisis, transitional and boarding-house placements (where these options exist); and other, usually short-term, private accommodation arrangements, including staying/couchsurfing with family or friends (more prominent among Aboriginal youth). AZP data is beginning to bear these trends out, capturing valuable (but by no means comprehensive) information about the multiple moves many people make during their homelessness journeys. A deeper examination of this data would likely show greater movement through the system among Aboriginal people, given the widely recognised and discussed challenges Aboriginal people face accessing and sustaining housing in the mainstream market.

Stakeholders noted how there remains a (perhaps slightly slower) revolving door for some in the social housing sector. However, should they or kin secure a tenancy, sustaining tenancy presents other challenges for many Aboriginal people for reasons discussed earlier:

- culturally inappropriate housing
- neighbourhood challenges
- moving in with limited possessions
- feeling different from neighbours and peers.

Social housing can be another state-based institutional exit point to homeless for some Aboriginal people, alongside known pathways to repeat homelessness from the health and corrections systems. Periods in institutions of the state—hospitals, mental health and drug and alcohol services, prisons and other custodial settings, youth training centres—feature strongly in 'housing' pathways for Aboriginal people. Exits from such institutions have been seen by stakeholders as both direct and indirect paths to homelessness or repeat homelessness.

The AZP adopted both a no-wrong door approach and Housing First as founding principles, and the collaboration has been working actively to systematise the system, so that homelessness sector responses are people-centred and that no matter where someone enters the SHS system, they receive a consistent housing or support response. This has been difficult to achieve and remains a work in progress, for a number of very practical reasons:

- The SHS system remains 'program first' in focus; a consequence of past competitive and shorter-term funding arrangements.
- The time it has taken to build genuine trust and collaboration to support service integration in a multiagency landscape. The AZP has been credited with advancing this in ways not previously seen, and a blueprint of sorts for greater service coordination within and outside the SHS sector has been developed recently to address some of this challenge (Pearson, Faulkner et al. 2021).
- People's homelessness pathways intersecting with several other systems—for example, correctional services, justice, health and mental health services—and poor coordination of responses and pathways between (and arguably within) these institutions, their responses (which include outreach and housing placement support in some cases) and homelessness services.
- The complexity of people's needs and agencies' and workers' capacities—skills, resources, time to build relationships with clients and other services—to meet these needs. (See discussion of the NDIS in subsection 5.2.3.)

- Insufficient pathways to housing exist, especially to Housing First options, as one ‘gold standard’ in supporting people moving on from chronic homelessness—especially where mental health or trauma histories exist. Arguably, the SA housing and homelessness systems are far from genuinely Housing First in structure. As with most of the stakeholders we spoke with for this study, we would argue there is a housing-led flavour to activity generally, but housing-led, like Housing First, is meaningless without enough housing—or, more critically, the right housing. In the context of Housing First, this means housing with the depth and longevity of support that people need to maintain tenancy and wellbeing. In the context of this study, it means applying cultural understanding to housing and support, centred around individual and family needs.
- Lack of (or time-limited) post-housing support provided for people moving on from homelessness (or attempting to), including for people with complex housing/homelessness and institutional histories. Stakeholders were very clear that post-housing and post-crisis support remain the key to success in terms of sustainable tenancies and stable lives. Without support tied to needs—that is, longevity of tailored support—stakeholders felt that we are setting people up for failure, or for cycles of failure.

Participants in this study based beyond Adelaide similarly noted the importance of strong service coordination in addressing the revolving door of homelessness and housing, drawing clear links between tenancy failures and need for coordination of support across and between providers in the local landscape (and often beyond)—particularly coordinating mental health, substance abuse and trauma supports to maximise people’s chances of maintaining their tenancy or tenancy obligations.

The Aspire Social Impact Bond has produced clear evidence (and financial returns) that prove the value of intensive and longer-term post-housing/post-crisis support for people experiencing homelessness and social support systems—beyond homelessness, reaching into health, corrections and employment—in the metropolitan Adelaide landscape, including for rough sleepers.

Based upon the avoided services detailed above [hospital bed days, convictions, and SHS accommodation periods], the Aspire Program has generated total SA Government savings of \$5.69 million over the three years to 30 June 2020, which is 210 per cent of the initial plan. (Social Ventures Australia 2020: 18)

Reform of the SHS landscape in SA offers some promise of addressing these challenges with collaboration between SHS, other agencies and the SA Housing Authority (formalised through alliances) to:

- determine new ways of working and doing
- embed ways that are already having impact
- develop innovations to address particular system gaps/concerns
- improve cultural capability.

Of course, how this plays out remains to be seen. And there remains a clearly unresolved piece of the puzzle in the reform landscape around influencing other sectors, systems and agencies to also take responsibility for the needs of people who end up in homelessness, who are too often defined by the label ‘homeless’ and not by other needs, such as:

- a person with disability needing a disability-sector response
- a person with mental health issues needing a community-mental-health response
- a prematurely aged person needing an aged-care sector response.

For Aboriginal people, all such responses must recognise cultural needs, and there remains much work to do around understanding and providing for these needs across the system in SA as it is currently constituted.

### 5.2.3 Impact of the NDIS

As observed in our Brisbane fieldwork, the watershed change that is—or was expected to be—the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was raised in many discussions as having a standout impact for people experiencing homelessness and the homelessness services landscape. In many instances, commentary around this emerged organically and was not directed by the researchers. It was raised in relation to younger Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, as well as older Aboriginal men and women. It was also raised in relation to non-Aboriginal people, which indicates the depth and breadth of individual/family and systemic impacts, as discussed in the remainder of this section.

Disability services provision and the NDIS were raised in parallel to conversations about the sustained high numbers of clients presenting for support generally in inner Adelaide over recent years. Stakeholders noted that not only are the number of people seeking support unacceptably high, but people are ‘presenting in a more complex situation’, with conditions such as intellectual disabilities, mental health issues and exiting guardianship. It was felt that in the past (‘maybe five years ago’, RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS) such situations ‘would have been pretty rare to encounter here, and now it’s standard’ to have clients present who would be best served by the disability sector. But because of their lack of accommodation, and due to the inability of the disability sector to provide or facilitate this—for example, through the emerging Supported Disability Accommodation or Medium Term Accommodation markets—people end up homeless or ‘stuck’ in a lack of disability support/homelessness cycle (RS10, Team leader, mainstream SHS). This reality poses problems because although homelessness service and staff are often social workers, they are not—‘none of us are’—trained to work in the disability area and so ‘it’s the services that are not suitable for the clients’ rather than vice versa (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS).

A range of very practical challenges with the NDIS and disability support for people experiencing homelessness was raised by stakeholders, evidenced from many, many client experiences. These included witnessing the difficulties people have in navigating the NDIS system, even with support from advocates where services themselves provided this or people were linked with external support providers / brokers / coordinators / advocates. There are also operational shortcomings, such as people ‘getting lost in the system’—for example, ‘the file has not been passed over and then suddenly somebody who’s had a severe disability for 18 years rocks up here’ (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS).

Some stakeholders felt that some highly vulnerable Aboriginal people are ending up in crisis situations due to the disability support system not supporting them in the way it should. Some services have responded to these challenges by piloting NDIS navigators within their agencies as a means for building agency or system capacity to support people with complex disability needs and health-related needs. Securing recurrent funding for such services remains a challenge, although there is emerging work within the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to better recognise the specific disability and homelessness intersection. This action offers some promise, depending on timeliness, scope and connections between sectors.

While not raised as often by participants, criticisms could be levelled at the aged care system, where there is a rarely used and difficult pathway to aged care support for Aboriginal people from age 45 where they have experienced homelessness precipitating premature ageing (see Tually and Goodwin-Smith 2020 for data, and for more about Aboriginal people within the AZP).

### 5.2.4 Youth

Reflecting the agencies willing to participate in our research and the much younger profile of the Indigenous population generally, homelessness among Aboriginal youth was a focus within fieldwork discussions. For example, in one mainstream community services agency in Port Augusta, Aboriginal youth consistently make up over 85 per cent of the young people supported by their service. In inner Adelaide, mainstream youth services reported upwards of 20 per cent of clients seeking support are Aboriginal youth, with people coming to services from beyond the metropolitan area seeking support with a range of life domains and circumstances.

Support for this 'cohort' is provided in both inner Adelaide and Port Augusta—as well as regionally—by both mainstream services and ACCOs assisting families in crisis, generalist services and, mostly, by youth-specific support services, which generally support people aged up to 25. As with the adult homelessness services described elsewhere in the case study, the majority of SHS are mainstream, but ACCO services also exist, with dynamics around cultural safety and culturally specific services and client choice echoing those discussed in Section 5.3—that is, uptake/service use is mixed, whether based on cultural safety, availability or other factors.

Study participants noted how Aboriginal youth clients face specific challenges, making them a cohort worthy of particular focus. Such challenges relate to cultural factors, as well as systemic barriers and experiences of our systems. Conversations centred on the qualitatively different experience of homelessness—and therefore support responses—for Indigenous youth, with navigating relationships a particular factor in the pathway in (and out) of homelessness. Stakeholders noted how young people seeking assistance within the homelessness sector have needs that are not solely housing-related, and which at the best of times are likely to be met by a range of intersecting, though not always connected or communicating, agencies and sectors.

In Port Augusta, while youth were primarily 'locals' rather than people passing through, services reported being skilled in supporting young people presenting from remote areas and elsewhere, facilitating people's return to a safe place in their home community or family if possible. Family breakdown was noted in both Adelaide and Port Augusta as a major driver of young people accessing homelessness services:

... most of the referrals we get are from family, ironically, or family members expressing concerns about a young person. So they may bring them into us, so that's where the journey starts. We do have Aboriginal workers in our team, so when we have particularly young males who may be a little bit more traditional, they will be allocated to that worker who takes more of a traditional approach when meeting with the young person in the questioning. We also know a lot about the families ... and work very closely with them. So our service has got quite a good name in Port Augusta and that's why we get referrals from family themselves when they're having issues with young people. (RS23, Program manager, Mainstream community sector provider)

Key challenges specifically identified for this cohort were the impact and prevalence of intergenerational homelessness, time spent under guardianship, and the inability or failure of the system as currently structured to accommodate non-Western family structures and norms in their responses.

### Intergenerational homelessness

The perception (at a mainstream youth SHS) was that a clear majority of the young people they see have family history with the homelessness or housing service system. Although such challenges are not unique to Indigenous youth or to youth only, young people whose lives have intersected with institutions and out-of-home care are significantly over-represented among those seeking assistance from these services. Workers from the youth-specific services that participated in this research reported a lack of adequate coordination and care among custodial systems and agencies that are, in turn, failing highly vulnerable young people (see also subsection 5.4.2).

In addition to the challenges already facing young people leaving guardianship, is that some of them are, or are soon to become, parents themselves, often without a support system in place, and this perpetuates the cycle of child removal, which links onward to intergenerational homelessness.

As one respondent from a youth service related:

We, especially at the moment, seem to have a huge number of young Aboriginal women who've had babies removed at birth, pretty much, and just the lack of supports for that young person afterwards—like pretty much the baby is removed and they're sort of just left to try and work out what supports they need and, yeah, it's been a tricky spot to be in with that client group. (RS10, Team leader, mainstream SHS)

Among these young mothers, many have been removed from their own families and have been in guardianship for some periods of time or in foster care:

... as soon as they're pregnant they're already a bit higher risk for DCP [the Department for Child Protection] to look into their case but because they're also homeless, they are even a higher risk. So we've got those women coming to us asking for support; we are mandatory notifiers and because of the situations we often have to report but that just like sparks the whole circle again where young women, if it's because they're Aboriginal or not, the system just places them in a category that is really higher risk, and so I get the feeling, and I don't have data on this at all, but I've got the feeling that if you present here pregnant and you are Aboriginal, you've got a higher risk of losing the guardianship of your child. That's really my feeling, personal. (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS)

Instances of a mother in such a position who is able to keep her child, or who is reunited with her child, are seen to be rare. For these service providers, questions are raised about the part they may be playing in reinforcing trauma through generations: 'isn't it against everything that we are trying to do in the matter of reconciliation?' (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS). Furthermore, the lack of adequate emotional or other support and guidance in place for young women once their child has been removed led this respondent to comment that, 'grief work' is needed, asking, 'What does healing look like, spiritual healing, emotional [healing]'? (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS).

#### System challenges/inabilities accommodating non-Western family structures

Indigenous family and kinship norms were not seen as a 'problem' by participants in this research, but workers in the youth services explained how these can pose extra challenges for young people attempting to access services and housing within the Western cultural framework these operate in.

One example shared in this context concerned a small group of girls who are from 'a bit of a more traditional background ... than we normally would have in our service' (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS), and for at least one of whom English is most likely not her primary language. The eldest of the young people is 17 and looking after younger family members. She is not their legal guardian, with the young child a close family member but not a sibling. Leaving an unsafe environment in the home of a parent where they were staying along with the young relative, they obtained 'somewhat safe accommodation in a service but now of course they're not eligible ... because the child is not legally theirs and then they're back to square one' (RS10, Team leader, mainstream SHS). The system is not set up to allow this sort of arrangement:

For those girls, taking care of their niece is the most normal thing in the world and also the group where they are coming from, this is the expectation, this is the norm and this is something they are happy to do. Legally, that's a nightmare. You've got a 17-year-old girl that's got a child not in her care, she's not the guardian, and then we were trying to get supports for her and you've got questions like, 'Oh, who is the legal guardian? Who gets the money for the kids?'—everything. Like, we don't have answers for this and the kid doesn't have answers for this and it doesn't fit into the picture [system] either. (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS)

Further complicating matters, under such circumstances the service is required to notify the DCP, prompting the observation that sometimes it would be better not to interfere as the resultant separation could be more harmful than letting them stay together. For the study participant, this raised the question of how the principle of 'do no harm' might or should apply to social work practice.

Ultimately, safety is seen to be the most important factor. However, the way the system is currently structured, even if the person is in a safe environment being supported by relatives—a situation that works for the family and child—in order 'to get all the supports and needs [met]' they are classified as 'homeless' or at-risk when that's not necessarily accurate (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS). Furthermore, not having a fixed abode, as in the case described, makes engaging with services like education, healthcare and other opportunities (work, etc.) more difficult—even accessing mental health services requires an address, so 'it really doesn't cater for the homeless population' (RS10, Team leader, mainstream SHS).

## 5.3 Cultural safety

### 5.3.1 Cultural safety within mainstream services

The homelessness sector in Adelaide does not include an Aboriginal-controlled or Aboriginal-led agency specifically focussed on the delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness only. Rather, the sector includes three ACCOs/ACCHOs that have—or have had—some involvement in direct service delivery, but as part of range of non-homelessness-focussed service delivery. A mainstream SHS agency in the city provides the main Aboriginal-specific homelessness service and has done so for many years. Relationships exist between SHS agencies and non-homelessness sector ACCOs/ACCHOs, or ACCO/ACCHOs that would not see themselves as primarily SHSs, although they provide services to Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, as well as meeting other intersectional needs.

Within the homelessness sector, there are a small number of Aboriginal-specific or Aboriginal-focussed programs, with program priorities determined by federal, state, philanthropic or combination funding arrangements. As noted earlier, all SHSs in SA operate with a longstanding requirement that 20 per cent of the clients they serve should be Aboriginal—although to what extent this is upheld or meaningful is unclear, and many agencies note that a much higher proportion of their clients are Aboriginal.

Cultural safety is supported in several ways by agencies in the homelessness sector working with Aboriginal people to secure housing and support outcomes in the current system. All agencies understand that Aboriginal men, women, youth and children are *significantly over-represented* among people experiencing, and at risk of, homelessness—and especially among people sleeping rough in inner Adelaide. Alongside this recognition, mainstream agencies noted their awareness of and links with the relevant ACCOs/ACCHOs—predominantly health or family-focussed agencies—and let people know about those options, also supporting Aboriginal people within their general service offerings—for example, case management, housing access assistance, therapeutic and life skills programs. Links between agencies and relevant ACCOs/ACCHOs were noted as strong and formal among some agencies, but more causal among others, with connections sometimes on a case-by-case basis related to the needs or desires of a particular client.

One of the mainstream services noted that while their agency and ACCOs/ACCHOs talked to each other at times in relation to a particular client's needs, ACCOs/ACCHOs weren't connected to the networks 'we seem to go to'—meaning that their voice and expertise was absent from such forums—for example, the AZP. Relationships between particular SHS and ACCO/ACCHO staff seemed to define agency interactions in many instances, and was a key way in which SHS workers and agencies extended or filled deficits in culturally safe practice, all oriented to achieving better outcomes for clients.

In some instances, the consistent presence of Indigenous clients—in particular Elders—among people using SHSs was taken to indicate that people appreciate, trust or 'like' a service (their programs and offerings), or that people otherwise feel comfortable and safe. 'We often have Elders here as well, so that's encouraging for others to come in—they know that they're well-represented and if an Elder stays here, that usually means it's safe for them to stay here, and they have family' (RS2, CEO, short-term accommodation). However, the opposite may also be true. For example, respondents from a significant inner-city service have had feedback over the years that their service is not culturally appropriate for some clients due to rules around drinking/AOD and lack of provision for social or kinship groups. While they would like 'to be able to provide a bed for everybody that needs it', that is difficult to manage and unlikely to happen within the current structure (RS8, Manager, SHS).

While there is clear practice commitment to cultural safety and cultural appropriateness among the agencies interviewed, the extent to which this is formalised in plans, policies and programs varies. Some agencies identified having provided cultural awareness training for staff and a small number had provided more intensive cultural safety training. Respondents currently working, or with previous experience, in the government sector mentioned cultural safety and awareness training opportunities, and some of the other services noted this as well, as part of induction for new staff. However, it was not clear that such training is required as a standard across the SHS at this stage. Trauma-informed care practice was regarded as an important part of cultural safety practice in the agencies.

A small number of agencies had a Reconciliation Action Plan as a vehicle for assisting with building cultural capability, with this information offered up by agencies themselves, rather than being canvassed within the research. One respondent who works at a state government agency noted involvement with a Reconciliation Action Working Group and cited their organisation's 'commitment as an agency to Reconciliation' as a significant part of intentional shifts taking place within the agency's structure and culture. The focus on reconciliation action was challenging all employees, and especially leadership, to think holistically about cultural understandings and cultural safety, raising questions for agency (internal) and system (outward) consideration, including:

- 'what does that [reconciliation action] mean for our staff that work with us that are Aboriginal?'
- 'how do we actually drive a really important intent around reconciliation with our customers and ... what does that look like?' (RS5, Manager, government).

At another organisation, although 'for a while it was a document somewhere in a folder' (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS), their Reconciliation Action Plan is now being taken more seriously. Implementation of the plan has raised a series of questions about how to make the service and its management more approachable for Aboriginal people working with the agency and also for future Aboriginal employees. Implementing the plan has also shone light on the importance of recognising lived experience in service delivery, and provided the imprimatur for actively looking for the gaps in agency offerings, networks and connections. Aligning with the observations from on the ground in Brisbane, this respondent added that the energy behind such reconciliation action and cultural safety efforts tends to be 'grassroots or ground-level driven'—often the result of just a staff member or two who are dedicated and push forward on these issues.

In Port Augusta, cultural safety was framed and practised somewhat differently. The profile of homelessness in Port Augusta and the region is different, as noted earlier, as are the demographics of communities. Port Augusta has a higher proportion of Aboriginal residents, but also attracts Aboriginal people from remote and other regional communities. In acknowledging these features of the local community, there was general agreement among participating stakeholders that cultural representation and inclusion are essential in the design, staffing and delivery of services. Stakeholders agreed that to operate successfully and to build and maintain trust, services need to have a workforce that understands and is part of the community—in both the sense of being 'local' and culturally safe. Stakeholder views were strong and aligned:

If we don't do the right thing by them, as in the Aboriginal people, we won't have a service. (RS23, Program Manager, Mainstream community sector provider)

How do we provide a service that's actually culturally appropriate? We do our best with what we've got, but I think we could do—a lot more can be done to make it more culturally appropriate, I think. We do the competencies and the training and all that stuff, I'm not sure it's quite enough to really be able to service an Aboriginal community from what they think needs to happen. I think we still impose our, not us ... but government, our agencies who get funding, impose these views. (RS23, Program Manager, Mainstream community sector provider)

As non-Aboriginal people, we have to work a lot harder, but we don't get the in-depth—what's the word? The in-depth trust or the ability to build such a strong relationship with the community because we're not part of it. If anything, we probably would be looked upon as being the opposite, and someone that you shouldn't trust. So it takes a long time for us to build that relationship if we were to work in the community, and even then I don't think it's at the same level someone from the community who's maybe an Aboriginal person can develop that trust with, with the client. (RS23, Program Manager, Mainstream community sector provider)

Stakeholders again noted the importance of having Aboriginal workers among the employees of mainstream and Indigenous-led services:

I think we sort of try to have both [staff who are Aboriginal and staff who have lived experience]. The knowledge, the local knowledge was really great and from the Aboriginal staff that we had, or we have still there. Like they had you know varying degrees of knowledge of the APY as well as local people ... and they ... also have their own grief and loss and mental health issues and child protection issues within their own families. There were people who were related to a lot of people on the APY so they had that family connection. There were some staff that said that that was a benefit, some saw that as a not great thing. But I always encouraged it to be a benefit in that respect—but they were quite hurt when they're abused by drunk people, you know, if they were family, but then we always made them apologise the next day, you know, when they're sober because people are different when they're sober. So yeah, I think it was really important that we did have the Aboriginal staff there. (RS20, Manager, Community sector provider/former Manager, Government)

While having an Aboriginal workforce is essential for developing trust with clients, sometimes people prefer to see someone who isn't Aboriginal or who doesn't share their cultural background, and there are other reasons why they might prefer to see a non-Aboriginal worker or someone from a different community.

If you do have workers from the community ... sometimes we will get young people who don't want to work with a certain person because they're from the community or they're from a different group to them, they don't get on with that particular family or whatever it might be. So that's where it's also good to have people who aren't necessarily from their cultural background of that particular area. But it's really hard to get, I suppose, one rule for everything, because it doesn't work and there's so many different Aboriginal families within Port Augusta in particular that their, all their needs are similar, but also quite unique. And it's very difficult for a service to meet all those needs. So we sort of try and do something in-between. (RS23, Program Manager, Mainstream community sector provider)

In relation to cultural safety in a broader sense, some interviewees voiced the belief that services would be better placed to make a difference to the challenges people are facing if homelessness were re-framed as a health, wellbeing or safety issue. That is, if the challenges of homelessness are viewed through a health lens and a safety lens, linking with social determinants of Aboriginal health framing. For some respondents, focussing on homelessness—meaning 'houselessness' or 'rooflessness' in this context—as the central problem their clients are facing is reductionist—not because houselessness or rooflessness is not important, but because it does not exist in a vacuum.

While other services can meet some of the non-housing needs of clients and there is collaboration to some extent, a much more holistic approach is needed. And, while this point could also be made in relation to non-Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, especially rough sleeping homelessness, it is particularly important to acknowledge intersectionality for Aboriginal people: the interplay between colonisation, intergenerational trauma, violence and racism. On this point, one Aboriginal worker in the system noted that in terms of Aboriginal homelessness, 'we' still don't ask the right questions about what Aboriginal people want and need when they come to the city to visit or live, thus we don't have the 'right' data to inform solutions.

While there are clear commitments—albeit variable and clearly a work in progress—towards cultural awareness and culturally safe practice in mainstream services in inner Adelaide, Port Augusta (and beyond), the overwhelming perspective among interviewees was that there remain large gaps in the culturally appropriate service delivery and programs. Such gaps extend from, among other things:

- the ethos and practices of agencies/workers
- highly practical (and surmountable) barriers like the number of Aboriginal workers in mainstream services and availability of service delivery in language; that few workers in the sector speaking Pitjantjatjara is 'a really significant barrier' (RS6, Manager, Indigenous-specific SHS)

- the need for deeper understandings and flexible conceptualisation of Aboriginal ‘homelessness’ and cultural obligations, and how these impact people’s life-worlds, including housing and support needs
- the strongly emphasised point that we simply do not have culturally appropriate responses for people visiting Kurna Country, whether visiting temporarily or looking for more permanent living arrangements.

However, there is an important postscript to the cultural safety of mainstream SHS conversation in SA generally. This postscript was slowly unfolding at the time of writing and relates specifically to the reform of the homelessness sector statewide into geographically defined ‘alliances’, and a statewide domestic and family violence alliance.

In May 2021, the SA Government announced the successful tenderers for the reformed homelessness alliances landscape. The successful alliance covering the inner-city area, the Toward Home Alliance, put forward an alliance structure involving a new ACCO, and may also subcontract another Aboriginal-led organisation. Alliance partners will support the new ACCO in the homelessness landscape in order to:

- build culturally appropriate approaches to divert and prevent people from homelessness
- access housing
- resolve homelessness
- maximise people’s wellbeing.

The Toward Home Alliance also includes a specific Aboriginal stream, Wardli Ana (Toward Home) and has committed to supporting the AZP and many of its structures for the 12 months post the alliance coming into effect (1 July 2021), including efforts to advance the agenda around Aboriginal homelessness and intersectionality. The country north alliance has also been announced, covering the Port Augusta area and beyond, into remote areas of the state. The alliance is expected to work with the Aboriginal-controlled organisations in the area to orient service delivery to support better and more sustainable outcomes for clients, via stronger collaborative and culturally safe action.

### 5.3.2 Good cultural practice: Indigenous-led services<sup>20</sup>

The small number of Aboriginal-led organisations operating in the Adelaide CBD providing services that intersect with the homelessness and housing sector was highlighted as an example of valued culturally safe practice. However, it is widely acknowledged that they are overstretched, especially when there are large numbers of people sleeping out in the Park Lands, and therefore referral pathways were sometimes difficult. Such agencies spanned health and wellbeing, domestic and family violence, AOD and legal and justice-related services—all of which are critical areas of intersection with homelessness.

Alongside our research, other recent research (Pearson, Faulkner et al. 2021; Pearson, Tually et al. 2021) conducted in the context of the inner-city services landscape and remote visiting in inner Adelaide notes the following as elements of good cultural practice among ACCOs/ACCHOs identified in the fieldwork:

- co-designed programs and responses, including assessment/intake and evaluation tools—adherence to ‘nothing about us, without us’
- relationally based engagement methods, valuing the time taken to build trust and rapport with people
- prominence of Aboriginal workers across all levels in organisations, including in frontline roles, with strong commitment to the health and wellbeing of staff

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted here that while the perspectives of Aboriginal agencies and workers were sought for this research, it proved hard to secure a broad representation of such views given the limited number of Aboriginal staff in the SHS sector generally (five stakeholders among our respondent group in Adelaide self-identified as Aboriginal). Additionally, the pressures on staff (especially Aboriginal staff) because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and specific responses to keep Aboriginal people safe across Adelaide, suburbs and the state, clearly impacted people’s involvement in our research.

- person-centred practice that follows the individual *and* incorporates family/kin/community to the extent desired by all involved
- flexible, adaptable service delivery, including assertive outreach for so-termed ‘hard to reach clients’, including some remote visitors and some people sleeping out/rough sleeping
- case-conferencing across services involved in people’s lives, framed in terms of promoting people’s social and emotional wellbeing
- roles for Aboriginal peer support and lived-experience workers
- reflective practice and constantly learning from other examples of service delivery—for example, the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in Queensland.

Notably, these elements are also important for mainstream services, given the discussion in this section is also about the preference among some Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness to approach mainstream services for support (see also Stefanson and Goodwin-Smith 2019). Most stakeholders who participated in this study recognised the lack of a specific homelessness ACCO as a limitation in terms of the services landscape, and felt that resourcing an Aboriginal-led SHS agency is a possible way forward for greater Aboriginal self-determination, stronger cultural practice, and cultural safety in the SHS system—this could be a new agency or a more formal or specific focus within an existing agency. A smaller number of participants, mostly in the youth homelessness sector, raised the same issues in relation to the absence of a specific youth Aboriginal-led service, noting the need for different culturally safe practice for this group, given the significant prevalence of homelessness among Aboriginal youth, coexisting with intergenerational trauma and experience of care and care-leaving. Ongoing calls for the re-establishment of an Aboriginal Housing Authority were also part of the discussion with some participants. This was discussed particularly in terms of self-determination (see also subsection 5.4).

There was a general feeling among stakeholders that the cultural safety afforded by Indigenous-controlled or staffed services goes beyond what mainstream services can provide in many cases, even where a non-ACCO/ACCHO is committed to culturally safe practice. The two Aboriginal youth workers interviewed in Adelaide, who work in a youth homelessness program within an ACCO/ACCHO, noted how Aboriginal staff provide a different level of understanding and connection because of their shared cultural backgrounds and experiences: ‘sometimes there’s conversations that young people have with our Aboriginal staff that would just never eventuate with a non-Indigenous or some other staff member’ (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS). Mainstream services, on the other hand, ‘really don’t look at the cultural concept of things’ and instead are underpinned by a focus on ‘policies and procedures’, that often don’t accord with the ways of seeing, knowing and doing for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture (RS14, Program coordinator, Indigenous SHS).

In the experience of some respondents—from both ACCO and mainstream organisations—there are situations where a client or potential client states a preference for using a non-Aboriginal service, although it was noted this did not apply to most cases. As one worker in a youth-specific mainstream service noted:

A lot of the clients surprise me actually, because I will ask them if they want to be referred to an Aboriginal-specific service and a lot of the time they decline. (RS10, Team leader, mainstream SHS)

Another respondent offered a similar observation:

... a lot of people actually that come here specifically say, ‘I do not want to be working with Aboriginal workers or with Aboriginal-specific services.’ But you can’t generalise it, and it’s good to have that option available for people who want it. (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS)

This reality of person-centred support is a reminder of the need for diversity in system responses and structures, as well as the need for cultural competency (ideally cultural safety) in mainstream services. Also the need to ensure that all clients and potential clients are asked for their service preferences as part of intake and assessment processes, and throughout the duration of their support. Preference for mainstream support could possibly indicate people

self-selecting out of an ACCO prior to referral to a service. The manager at one mainstream service offered further perspectives on the potential reasons for some clients preferencing mainstream services. He outlined the experiences from the perspective of his agency, which has historically sought to connect with the Aboriginal community, offers some Aboriginal-specific programs and whose clientele as an SHS is in the order of 60 per cent Aboriginal people:

... there would be people we would see regularly coming into the [service] and they would see that as community, and that would include some people that have had problematic behaviours and probably don't connect necessarily well in other parts of their community sometimes. (RS4, Manager, Indigenous-specific SHS)

Examples of Aboriginal self-determination in this space would be the operationalisation of 'nothing about us, without us'. This means inclusion of Aboriginal people at both operational and leadership levels within service organisations. It also means giving these people:

- the power to ensure that their contribution to how systems can work best is heard and included, and not overlooked or minimised
- the autonomy to make culturally informed operational decisions as required.

Where appropriate organisations may choose to engage external Aboriginal people with expertise in the specific area they are trying to improve for advice to ensure that best practice is being enacted, this may look like external consultancy, short-term employment or board/leadership positions. Given that Indigenous homelessness is a complex area, there may be a suite of solutions required to ensure appropriate Aboriginal engagement and integration of Aboriginal knowledges. 'Understanding family and community connections in Aboriginal service delivery' later in this subsection provides further context.

### Indigenous employment

Aboriginal employment was an important theme in discussions with stakeholders, following on from discussions about limited Aboriginal-specific capacity in the SHS system. For mainstream services, respondents noted while they are keen to employ Indigenous staff, and some do, there were challenges with achieving or increasing this.

In reality, there are very few Aboriginal workers across any level of service delivery or agency management in SHS in Adelaide. There are a range of reasons for this. A certain level of education may be desirable or required for many, if not most jobs—even though formal qualifications may not reflect the other skills a person could bring to the job—and there is a relatively small pool of Indigenous applicants holding these qualifications (RS4, Manager, Indigenous-specific SHS). Hiring applicants without the desired skill set means that a service has to train them, and their ability to do this may be limited by time, money and available staff. One mainstream service that had no Aboriginal staff at the time of interview stated that, in theory, they would be receptive to training someone. However, due to a very small number of existing staff, the capacity just is not there, so employees 'have to be ready to go as soon as they walk through the door' (RS2, CEO, short-term accommodation). Another respondent, from a mainstream service delivering Indigenous-specific services, acknowledged that the allocation of jobs in their agency is based on the privileging of 'white qualifications', which are themselves a product of privilege, then asked pointedly, 'How do you privilege Aboriginal knowledge in a way that trumps a Diploma in Community Services?' (RS6, Manager, Indigenous-specific SHS).

On the other hand, while another mainstream program requires a degree in relevant 'formal' education, some of this is negotiable if they find the right person, with 'other skills and experiences that make up for some of that part', especially 'the interpersonal connectivity, the understanding, the cultural expertise, that's hard to learn', a critical consideration in their recruitment processes. This agency also commented that, 'You can spend 10, 15 years over books and you don't know half that' (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS).

Other services had recently deliberately increased their Aboriginal workforce. One agency had created positions for staff to support tenancies taken up by people from remote areas who had moved to Adelaide, with cultural knowledge seen as essential in this program, shaping their recruitment of staff with personal connections to remote areas of SA and who speak language(s). Language was also an issue raised by a number of respondents in relation to supporting people from remote areas in particular. In Port Augusta, one respondent noted:

... for the traditional people coming to—from the Lands, it's really beneficial to have someone that knows the language and knows the right words to use to break it down and make it simpler for them, instead of them just saying, 'Yes, yes, yes.' So that's really, really important. (RS23, Program manager, Mainstream community sector provider)

However, sensitivities were noted around language, tying back to thinking about cultural safety and respecting social and cultural norms. This remains an area where more attention is needed to find respectful ways of working, knowing and understanding.

... you've got to be so careful that you don't cross the languages over and say the wrong thing in the wrong context ... I used to sit and get lessons from some of the people that were staying [in service] but I would never go on and repeat it, it's just so complex ... Staff didn't generally speak many things apart from the basic languages back to a customer because it is a bit disrespectful if you're not actually from that group to be speaking it when you're from a different group. (RS20, Manager, Community sector provider/former Manager, Government)

Among the small number of Indigenous-led services involved in our inner Adelaide fieldwork, we noted both a more significant proportion of Aboriginal staff across organisation structures, but similar concerns about securing (and retaining) Aboriginal staff as raised by mainstream organisations. The ACCO involved in SHS delivery had over 50 per cent Indigenous (Aboriginal) staff. The agency has a strong foundation in Aboriginal values; their model of operation emphasises the 'connection of culture and understanding' (RS14, Program coordinator, Indigenous SHS), is empathetic and non-judgemental. The agency representative interviewed noted that the agency remains accountable to Western operational and managerial norms, enforced through the requirements of their funding (e.g. KPIs). However, their culturally grounded understanding means that they can also be more direct, open and honest, which enables them to 'cut through the mollycoddling—our favourite word' (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS), which can be an advantage for relationship-building. The involvement of staff with lived experience enhances connection between staff and clients, and helps build relationships and rapport. Whereas if someone is 'from the opposite end of the spectrum, where you've probably never experienced a difficult day, that can really come through and it can be a struggle for our clients to connect with' (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS).

Concerns were raised about the pressure placed on Aboriginal workers, across Aboriginal-led and mainstream agencies, because of workers' own trauma experiences, their own and client experiences of racism, discrimination and trauma—for example, in the housing market—and the deep impact workers feel when they are not able to meet clients' needs (properly or at all), reflecting the strength of the principle of cultural obligation. Managing kinship connections was also raised as a concern at times, placing cultural obligation and other pressure on scarce or overstretched staff, as noted in the following section.

### Understanding family and community connections

As in the Brisbane case study, managing family and community connections was an important theme in the Adelaide and Port Augusta fieldwork. This was for two core reasons:

- Recognising the importance of family and community in-service responses for people experiencing homelessness, including supporting and involving family and community to the extent desired by a client and their family or community.
- 'Managing' family and community connections in relation to a client and their circumstances, including family or community connections to the worker involved with a client or clients.

Such considerations extend to both Aboriginal-led and mainstream services, and across the range of services supporting Aboriginal people seeking support. A number of stakeholders commented on the need for more flexibility in responses (resource-wise, ethos-wise and accountability-wise) to allow for this more family-connected or community-centred element to service delivery, and saw this as a key feature of culturally safe, relational and adaptable practice.

On the ground, understanding—maximising and managing family and community connections—unearthed a couple of different perspectives. The ACCO delivering homelessness support agency workers occasionally found that ‘the connotation is there’s the, like, the Nunga grapevine and if they have a family member that works in a particular organisation and they’re not wanting to share whatever is happening ... they would often rather go to a mainstream [service]’ (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS).

The research team would also suggest that perhaps diversity in terms of ACCOs might change this desire among some Aboriginal people preferring a mainstream response. Port Augusta and Adelaide can be small places, as are the remote communities where some people come from, and there is ‘close connectivity between people’ (RS1, Manager, community sector provider). Such connectivity can be a challenge to service delivery where there is fear of stigma or shame and fear of ‘getting taken advantage of by other people’ attending services (RS1, Manager, community sector provider).

On the other hand, sometimes agency staff know the family (or community) of the client, and this can be helpful in supporting them to end their period of homelessness through family reunification or return to Country, finding other housing with family, or other accommodation options. For the most part, workers find that once people have come to them and are receiving services, accommodation or support, they tend to want to stay. Such trust in a service often results in ‘self-referrals... [of] ... friends of friends or family members of people who have stayed’ (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS) because a program (or service) has gained a reputation as a good place to approach for help. This scenario was particularly noted in relation to one distinctive program offered by a mainstream service in the inner city (with few Aboriginal workers on staff). One stakeholder reflected on the success of this service in the mainstream landscape, noting how it is ‘the service that responds most effectively and probably most appropriately to Aboriginal people and the clients love it’. The respondent attributed this position to the structuring of the program, a ‘care and housing’ response, to involve family where possible, and the deliberate longer and slower time frame to support, which allows clients to ‘have choice and to make the choice’ about services. These approaches have seen the program divert people from crisis ‘a lot’ and reflect the preventative model developed, which is ‘much more about the whole person and the ecosystem around that person’ (RS1, Manager, community sector provider).

## 5.4 Service coordination

### 5.4.1 Effectiveness of horizontal coordination and communication

#### Existing structures

Improving service coordination has been a particular area of focus in SA’s homelessness and housing landscape for the past couple of years. And, while there has generally been a level of coordination between SHSs and, arguably, to a lesser extent between SHSs and the non-SHS agencies interfacing with homelessness or housing and support outcomes for people moving on from homelessness, this has been an area where most government and non-government agencies agree there is much more to do and achieve through better horizontal coordination and collaboration. The recent focus on service coordination has been advanced in the following ways:

- through the new and revised policy settings articulated in key statewide housing and homelessness sector policies/strategies: *Our Housing Future 2020–2030*, the 10-year housing, homelessness and support plan for SA (SA Housing Authority 2020b) and *Future Directions for Homelessness, South Australia’s Homelessness Alliance* (SA Housing Authority 2020a). Core underpinnings of the reform ‘package’ announced for SA being:

- an understanding that past policies and competitive funding arrangements for SHSs have stifled authentic collaboration and reinforced silos within the homelessness sector (at program/service-delivery level)
- the reform process will address these challenges by developing and supporting alliances as a strategy for greater service coordination, through collaboration and innovation in service delivery. The alliances were left to the sector to self-determine, forging partnerships between SHS services and, following successful tendering, with the SA Housing Authority as the key alliance partner.
- through, by and within the collective/network driving the AZP for the inner-city area specifically
- through, by and within the agencies driving the COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Response for Rough Sleepers (CEARS) in inner Adelaide—profiled later in this section—and other collaborative responses developed in response to COVID-19.

The statewide Aboriginal Housing Strategy has a critical role to play here, as the strategy outlining policy directions, incorporating structures for accountability and driving action in Aboriginal housing and the SHS sector that has been missing but requested for many years now.

The strategy is a way forward to ensure greater self-determination in housing, where Aboriginal communities can set their priorities, co-design housing services and be supported to strengthen housing management frameworks. The strategy is about more than just housing—it requires government, Aboriginal communities, and the broader housing sector to work in partnership to create culturally safe, secure, and affordable housing outcomes, economic development opportunities and to strengthen local decision-making frameworks to enable Aboriginal peoples in SA to thrive. (SAHA 2021: 4)

Aligning with the earlier articulated calls for greater Aboriginal community control over housing and homelessness service delivery, the strategy has a strong emphasis on capacity building for the 'Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing sector' in the two years post-implementation (from July 2021). This work is to culminate in the development of 'An independent Aboriginal Community controlled Housing Organisation (ACCHO) operating with financial independence, under a bespoke community-controlled service model' in year eight of the strategy (approximately 2029) (SAHA 2021: 7).

In reflecting on the effectiveness of horizontal service coordination, participants noted that a range of formal structures also exist in the homelessness landscape (and extending beyond), including the Aboriginal Housing Managers Group and networks in other areas of metropolitan Adelaide and beyond. The importance of these networks, which generally support collective advocacy and make referral pathways visible, was summarised by one respondent:

The homelessness sector is very much a networking sphere ... I just don't think it would work without it. (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

Service coordination in the context of the structures outlined above is about building and strengthening connections and co-working between: mainstream SHSs and their service offerings; between mainstream and Aboriginal-led agencies;<sup>21</sup> and, especially in terms of the AZP's focus, between SHSs and other agencies interfacing with homelessness—particularly health, corrections, SA Police, local government, domestic and family violence services and a range of housing providers (i.e. system coordination as opposed to sector coordination).

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<sup>21</sup> The homelessness-reform landscape stipulated a clear preference for the involvement of Aboriginal-led organisations in the five alliances to be formed. Each of the five successful alliances announced in early May 2021 include either one (or more) Aboriginal controlled organisation among alliance members or, in the case of one alliance, will subcontract a number of Aboriginal-controlled organisations for various aspects of service delivery.

These connections have been identified widely as sub-optimal (weak, underutilised or lacking), sparking significant interest in building connections (AZP) or reform (SA Housing Authority/SA Government). In the case of the AZP, service (agency to agency) and system (sector to sector; for example, homelessness sector and health sector) coordination has been a strong focus of action for the project's Implementation Plans (AZP 2020; 2018). It has also been the rationale for a recent report on inner-city services coordination auspiced by the Project and funded by the City of Adelaide and SA Housing Authority (Pearson, Faulkner et al. 2021) and captured in many of the findings of the Aboriginal Mobility Data Project (Pearson, Tually et al. 2021; also auspiced by the AZP and funded by the City of Adelaide). It is worth noting that the service and sector coordination work of the AZP, like in other networks, has largely been agency-directed and resourced, i.e. agencies providing cash or in-kind resourcing for AZP functions for service coordination functions, including:

- a highly valued Inner-City Community of Practice to discuss strategic matters related to service and system coordination
- a multi-provider housing allocations structure/process to triage and prioritise housing for rough sleepers on the AZP By-Name List
- a multiagency Coordinated Care group, undertaking detailed assessment of the most vulnerable clients on the AZP By-Name List, with the express purpose of ensuring the right support is lined up alongside people to ensure a good housing and support outcome when they receive a housing allocation.

The Coordinated Outreach Framework developed by the AZP collective is also a key structure for service coordination —specifically in the context of assertive outreach services provided in the inner city (Pearson 2020). The framework assists in visibility of outreach services<sup>22</sup> and their scope, particularly in the context of service delivery related to extreme weather events and supporting remote visitors.

In relation to vulnerable clients, lining up these elements is critical to the AZP end-homelessness model. It is also challenging work, as noted by most stakeholders involved with such work. Many barriers exist to smooth transitions and positive outcomes for the most vulnerable people linked to gaps and capacity issues in service offerings, especially housing. There is also the need for better integration and coordination of systems, as the levers for ending homelessness sit beyond the control of the homelessness sector; this applies also in the disability and aged care sectors, the health and mental health sectors, and women's safety services. There is also a critical need for joined-up responses to housing and support for people leaving guardianship and state institutions such as prisons, youth detention centres and out-of-home care.

A range of other structures and programs within or supporting the homelessness sector have similar collaborative focusses. The Aspire Program, funded by Australia's first homelessness-focussed Social Impact Bond, offers one approach for more effective service coordination, although not without some acknowledged challenges, particularly related to a pipeline of appropriate housing.

The Aspire Program is based on the 'Housing First' intervention model, and has been designed to focus on strengthening community engagement and employment participation. Under the Aspire service model, participants are provided with stable accommodation, job readiness training, pathways to employment and life skills development. Importantly, they also have the long-term support of a dedicated 'Navigator' to help them connect with wider support services and identify and achieve their aspirations. (Social Ventures Australia 2021)

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<sup>22</sup> The core outreach services in the inner city are Street to Home, Aboriginal Connection Program through Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia, Mobile Assistance Patrol run by the Aboriginal Sobriety Group, Hospital Avoidance Team within the Central Adelaide Local Health Network, and outreach as part of South Australia Police Operation Paragon.

To date, the program has demonstrated positive outcomes for the target group, made cost savings for the government, and brought together a range of agencies in Adelaide to ensure joined-up service delivery in housing and support. Such services include:

- the core inner-city SHS delivering the program
- other inner-city SHSs—referrals)
- social housing providers—housing
- several state agencies—Treasury, SA Health, SA Housing Authority, Department of Correctional Services, SA/NT DataLink and Office of Data Analytics
- employment services and other support providers as needed by clients.

Referrals have also been via the AZP. As the Aspire Program is funded by a Social Impact Bond, impact investors are another key group among the partnership. Aboriginal people have comprised between 9 and 27 per cent of Aspire participants (Social Ventures Australia 2020; 2019; 2018).

Returning to the statewide context, Homelessness Connect SA, the centralised gateway to the SHS system and other support pathways, delivered as a partnership between two SHSs, also demonstrates service coordination, connecting people experiencing homelessness to domestic violence and Aboriginal family violence services, youth services and mental health support. Similarly, RentRight, the newly funded statewide homelessness prevention and diversion service delivered by an SHS based in the inner city, is strengthening service coordination among other agencies—connecting tenants, landlords and a range of services, including legal services, to preserve or restore ‘tenancies at risk’.

The more tightly defined and localised services landscape in Port Augusta—which includes service reach and connection into the region beyond—elicited different responses about service coordination in and about the town. Respondents noted strong interconnections, especially among the non-government organisations, but also generally among government agencies. Referral pathways to services in Port Augusta for people seeking or needing support were generally to SHSs and other agencies supporting people experiencing homelessness from non-government services, as well as from:

- schools—related to attendance issues
- health services—especially specialist drug and alcohol services
- ACCOs/ACCHOs.

Services and agencies in the community talk to each other regularly and have a good idea of the services landscape. Another participant noted the connections here, as well as the opportunities collaboration presented in terms of emerging collaborative practice and support for family and kinship units.

For homelessness I would say I think NGOs would be the biggest one to be honest, referrals in because generally that’s who is seeing people at the forefront. So it’s either counselling; it’s school counselling; it’s things like Davenport school attendance. It could be drug and alcohol so all of those different agencies. Like we will talk to each other, and we absolutely know who’s got what services, which would be very similar to Adelaide, so we can do some of that. I know there is a big shift at the moment towards more of a restorative practice-type model as well for some of those events that could cause or result in people being homeless, and I know that that’s a really big focus in Ceduna at the moment, but I think generally across the board it feels like that restorative practice, and the trauma-informed approach as well, is something that is really coming across quite strong in social services at the moment, and I think that will probably—I am predicting that will have a pretty big impact. So, more around letting—like, obviously the families will be taking charge of some of those decisions and that intergenerational homelessness that perhaps happens as a result of kids leaving, or not having safe or stable environments that they are growing up in if they

choose to leave that. So I think I can see that perhaps having a bit more impact and drawing in all of those different types of services to support around in that, 'Look, this is what we need as a family, to then, you know, restore our family back to or create that stable environment.' (RS19, Manager, Community sector provider)

The presence of a major regional prison in Port Augusta, as well as the District Court for much of the mid/far-north of SA also factored into service coordination conversations.

... the other part too is, in Port Augusta, we have also got Port Augusta Prison; you have also got the District Court, so a lot of the time people are having to travel to District Court, so then as a result of that, whether they have been locked up for a short period or a long period or travelling back in and then they're stuck there, and they haven't necessarily had a home previously or they just wanted to get away and think, 'You know what, I am going to leave everything I had there and start up fresh here,' but there is not necessarily housing to support them. So that does play into it, as well as a broader picture because there is a requirement for people to obviously travel to District Court. (RS18, Manager, Community sector provider)

Stakeholders in Port Augusta and Adelaide noted the need and opportunities (see also the following section on opportunities and subsection 5.4.2) for greater service coordination around prisons and courts, to minimise homelessness among Aboriginal people related to prison release or attending court hearings:

... [people] can be released then and there on the day and not know that that's going to happen and so they've got no housing, no plan of how they are going to get back to Country. (RS18, Manager, Community sector provider)

Another area where it was evident service coordination and capacities could be improved was in relation to known movements of people to the town from the APY Lands for cultural events, including for sorry business. Flexibility and capacity to plan for influxes of families was limited and this presented service coordination challenges when people arrived, including accommodation pressures (overcrowding, sleeping out) and placed demands on emergency relief and, in some instances, return to Country services.

In Port Augusta, the relatively recently established Vulnerable Person's Framework, coordinated by Davenport Community, was singled out as an important mechanism for service coordination, locally and further afield. This framework is in operation in a small number of locations in SA, and was in place in inner Adelaide, but evolved into the Coordinated Care and Inner City Community of Practice (ICCoP) structures in the AZP; the support and strategy forums alongside housing allocations (discussed earlier in this section). The approach is action-focussed and allows open discussion of opportunities for and barriers to supporting the highest risk individuals in a community, by the relevant agencies supporting or interacting with people. As one stakeholder in Port Augusta noted:

Port Augusta is quite big, so the Vulnerable Person's Framework, which is relatively new—there's one in Port Augusta and one in Ceduna, and I think there may be one in metro ... so they have the monthly Vulnerable Person's Framework [VPF] meeting and although it's not only Aboriginal people, it has a very large representation of Aboriginal agencies so everyone who basically gets Aboriginal funding, related funding for services, sits around that table...[It's] a really great place to network in agencies. But Port Augusta has [on the VPF] the health service, with Pika Wiya health service and the Aboriginal Community Constables through the SAPOL MAPS, the Mobile Assistance Patrol, City Safe, they have an alcohol management group as well that's led by Aboriginal agencies ... pretty much every service that has a component that focuses on Aboriginal people and wellbeing and health and yeah ... I ... think it's just second nature living here and working here, like yes, there is a very high Aboriginal focus, but I don't know, I'm just used to it I suppose, I don't see it any different than working with a non-Aboriginal person in that sense, even though I suppose in my head I know the difference. Like the vulnerability factors are quite high and the risks of [to] your families. (RS20, Manager, Community sector provider/former Manager, Government)

On the whole, perspectives on the effectiveness of service coordination varied. Some participants felt great strides were being made in this area, demonstrated through the structures outlined above, particularly action-focussed collaborative networks representing multiple human services and health sectors. The AZP collaborative structures, for example, were helpful, albeit not the answer to everything, and some felt them worth replicating in other places. For the small number of Aboriginal workers interviewed, it was evident that they felt more needs to be done to join up (and resource) agencies and programs, to improve capacities and outcomes. Health and correctional services were identified as critical players in advancing outcomes in this regard. Discussions with stakeholders also demonstrated that service coordination can only go so far in terms of outcomes for clients in the system as currently constituted. The inadequate supply of culturally appropriate housing, systemic racism and discrimination, resourcing, workforce composition/development and the lack of high-level accountability for (poor) outcomes remain as barriers to further advancing action/progress.

### Opportunities

The existing structures discussed offer clear avenues, opportunities and learnings for deeper service and system coordination. The COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Response for Rough Sleepers (CEARS) is an important example of this occurring. CEARS was an unprecedented effort to accommodate all people sleeping rough in inner Adelaide during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which occupied many SHSs and other agencies for a large part of 2020.

Leveraging and augmenting the strong collaboration underpinning the AZP, the CEARS response brought together the core SHSs supporting people sleeping rough in the inner city, working with SA Housing Authority, SA Police and SA Health to rapidly move people off the streets and into hotels, motels and other temporary accommodation to ensure individual and community health and safety (Dobrovic, Tually et al. 2020). More than 511 people were supported during the course of the response, which began on 25 March 2020 and continued to take people sleeping rough into temporary accommodation until 30 June 2020. During this time, people were supported with their mental health via partnerships with community mental health services, health through SA Health, along with other needs. Altogether, 282 people were subsequently connected to 'permanent' housing (loosely defined) and other supports to stabilise their lives and help them sustain housing post-homelessness (Ennals, P., Neami National, pers. comm. 17 March 2021).

An important feature of the CEARS response was the inclusion of an up to 12-month intensive case-management support 'package', which was a significant improvement on the time-limited (generally three-month) post-housing support offering for people moving on from rough sleeping. This feature of the program was included following significant advocacy to Treasury from services and the housing authority. However, it was not available to all, but limited to people remaining in the program when it was closed to further intakes and coinciding with the general relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions after the first wave of the pandemic in SA (March–June 2020).

Such structuring of the intensive case-management support as part of the program meant two things:

- anyone who had 'fallen out' of the response prior was not eligible for support
- the timing of the 12-months support began before some people were linked to housing.

The first point is important in the context of this study, as Aboriginal people and kinship groups comprised a significant proportion of the people who left the program early, pointing to the unsuitability of the response for their needs and circumstances. Many among this group reappeared on city streets, facing increased public attention in the face of a public health crisis and decreased system attention while the CEARS response continued, and available houses were prioritised for people in the designated response rather than vulnerable people on the AZP By-Name List per prior practice in the inner city. Aboriginal people comprised 45 per cent of people supported through the response overall (Neami National 2020).

Reflections on the CEARS program by those involved strongly emphasised the importance of commitment to collaboration and to service coordination in reaching the outcomes achieved. Participants valued the clear common goal of the program and the ability to depart from conventional service-delivery practices by working around commonly encountered barriers when supporting people to move on from rough sleeping. Support included:

- getting the necessary documents in order to qualify for a lease
- being permitted or encouraged to take people to property viewings
- finding some flexibility in the public housing authority in circumstances where people have prior debts or other factors preventing them from holding another lease.

Two other more focussed and smaller-scale pandemic-related responses are summarised in Box 5. These responses involved Aboriginal people experiencing homeless or who would otherwise be homeless, in the sense of being away from home, community and Country. These programs also provide examples of service and sector coordination, and were identified by multiple stakeholders in our research as examples of better practice (shared goals, approaches) specifically aimed at supporting Aboriginal people.

Further opportunities to extend or embed greater service coordination exist via current and forthcoming programs or structures in the evolving homelessness landscape. The Housing for Health intensive congregate site of social housing and support program for people moving on from rough sleeping with multiple and complex vulnerabilities is one such opportunity, with 18 units (Richards 2021). This program involves an SHS, SA Health, mental health and AOD services in a collaborative and culturally safe team approach to service delivery. The target 'group' for the program is one known to have limited options available among current housing and homelessness responses—people with high-acuity VI-SPDAT scores on the AZP By-Name List who engaged with the CEARS response but did not stay with the program. The model emphasises both flexibility and assertive practice and is expected to assist a significant number of Aboriginal people, given what we know about people for whom the CEARS response was not suitable and given the prominence of Aboriginal people among those with the highest needs.

Box 5: COVID-19 responses consolidating service connections: the Mylor and Strathalbyn responses

**Mylor Adventure Camp Anangu Accommodation and Support Program**

The Mylor response, officially the Mylor Adventure Camp Anangu Accommodation and Support Program, was a collective effort 'thrown together really quickly' (RS6, Manager, Indigenous-specific homelessness service) in the midst of a fluid and rapidly changing situation. It was an arrangement in which around 60 women and children, all Anangu and from the APY Lands, plus some Adelaide-based family of those people, some of whom were from overcrowded tenancies, stayed at the Mylor Adventure Camp site in the Adelaide Hills. Many of the people who stayed at Mylor were unable to return to their communities due to restrictions on entering the APY Lands because of the potential impact of COVID-19 (with restrictions imposed via the *Biosecurity Act 2015*). The Mylor site was not a designated quarantine facility. As such, anyone wishing to return to the Lands once restrictions lifted was still required to undergo quarantine at an appropriate facility before the transition back to remote lands (Port Augusta, Coober Pedy).

The Mylor response was initiated by SAHA and contracted out to Baptist Care, who own the campsite and had already been running camp programs there—mostly for children. It was well set up to host the group, with family-sized accommodation and rooms, common kitchens, big firepits, natural space and areas for children to play. Additional services, including education and health, were provided by a number of other organisations, including ACCOs and ACCHOs. Baptist Care partnered with the Adelaide-based Anangu organisation Iwiri in an advisory function, which attended the camp to advise and support 'their own community about what was going on', particularly 'the health message [which] was really important' (RS6, Manager, Indigenous-specific homelessness service).

Health was a major focus of service delivery at Mylor, and this was an opportunity to address many 'highly treatable health problems that were untreated' such as ear and chest infections, scabies, etc. (RS6, Manager, Indigenous-specific homelessness service). It was also an opportunity for some people to be treated for more complex health presentations, such as high blood pressure, heart and eye issues. The ACCHO Nunkuwarrin Yunti established a primary care outreach service at the site (funded by the Commonwealth), providing 'immediate clinical, cultural, social, child and maternal care' to the camp residents with the assistance of other local organisations and businesses and an APY-based ACCHO, Nganampa Health Council (Nunkuwarrin Yunti 2020: 9).

Stakeholders noted a number of learning points about the response:

- It has prompted ideas for future emergency responses, should they be needed, and for conversations around transitional accommodation in Adelaide and statewide. Such ideas value places or sites with individual rooms or units, plus large common areas for visiting groups (RS3, Manager, government).
- It showed the need for congregated living environments, strong cultural input plus education, health, housing assessment (RS5, Manager, government).
- Men were excluded from staying at the site to minimise safety issues, and there were groups (couples, heavy drinkers) who could not be accommodated on site (RS5, Manager, government).

### **Wirraway**

An additional response to the first wave of COVID-19 statewide in SA was initiated by SA Health/Aboriginal Health at the Wirraway Homestead in Strathalbyn, on the Fleurieu Peninsula, south of Adelaide. There Baptist Care ran a short-term quarantine-type solution for Anangu people who had been in Alice Springs to give birth and for other medical purposes. This response was carried out as an official quarantine process was not yet in place for Anangu away from the APY Lands when restrictions on movement were declared by the state government to protect Elders and other vulnerable people in remote communities. Around 30 people were flown to Adelaide, and then stayed at Wirraway for 15 days as part of this response and were then able to return to the APY Lands via charter flight.

A further notable opportunity with potential to improve horizontal service coordination in the SA homelessness landscape is the recently funded structure, the Lived Experience Engagement Service. Overseen by an inner-city-based SHS, the Lived Experience Engagement Service is about capturing lived experiences of the homelessness and housing systems, including the impacts of homelessness sector reform, which includes bold changes to the service-delivery landscape. The service includes a Lived Experience Reference Group and an Indigenous Lived Experience Reference Group (which was recruiting members at the time of writing) to assist with 'perspective, advice, advocacy and feedback'. Such structures have been missing across the SHS and housing sectors to date, with lived experience involvement something a small number of participants in our study identified as a missing component within service delivery and coordination (see also Australian Centre for Social Innovation 2019; Pearson, Faulkner et al. 2021; Pearson, Tually et al. 2021; Stefanson and Goodwin-Smith 2019).

As noted earlier, the reform landscape offers further opportunity to strengthen service and system coordination, extending beyond the collaborative structure of each alliance (SA Housing Authority 2020a; 2020b). For example, the five alliances will be linked together through an Alliance System Steering Group, which comprises members of each alliance and the SA Housing Authority. The Group's remit includes:

- 'developing shared vision, leadership, cross sector collaboration, prevention strategies and workforce development
- facilitating cross alliance partnerships and involvement of Aboriginal-controlled organisations
- developing and implementing an outcomes measurement framework' (SA Housing Authority 2020a: 10).

The great hope of the SHS sector is that the Alliance System Steering Group, and each alliance, are also able to develop, preserve and augment formal partnerships with the range of agencies and services across government and non-government sectors that people need to prevent or to end their homelessness. How effective this will be as a vehicle for the homelessness sector and broader system coordination will also depend on resourcing, approach and accountability.

#### 5.4.2 Gaps in horizontal coordination and communication

For all the strengths and positives in pushing the service and systems coordination agendas forward in the homelessness sector in inner Adelaide, there remain several gaps or deficits in horizontal and vertical coordination and communication. Many of these 'gaps' leave imprints on the lives of the Aboriginal people sleeping rough/sleeping out in inner Adelaide who are most vulnerable or chronically homeless.

Gaps in service coordination and communication were identified in terms of:

- the role of particular agencies as either touchpoints on homelessness pathways for clients (i.e. potential places for prevention or diversion from homelessness) or direct contributors to pathways into and out of homelessness
- the need for the consistent presence and direct involvement of a broad range of decision-makers and operational staff in particular programs and collectives and networks to drive action in preventing or ending homelessness—for example, the Steering Group or Coordinated Care mechanisms for the AZP
- understanding (and evidencing) the complex backgrounds of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, including the root causes, contributing and protective factors and what support needs, including housing, look like
- poor coordination and communication in relation to processes for supporting client outcomes.

Factors such as the following contribute to gaps in service/system coordination:

- inadequacy of detail in referrals—for example, housing and health histories
- how referral processes work between agencies, for example, from:
  - SA Health to SHSs
  - SHSs and agencies supporting children leaving care, in the case of Aboriginal youth.
- highly practical challenges, such as not having requisite identification documents—a particular challenge among people rough sleeping/sleeping out.

Challenges also include:

- overstretched services that may lack service capacity in language
- the need for more Aboriginal workers across mainstream and Indigenous-specific SHSs
- the need for more Aboriginal workers across sectors/agencies intersecting with homelessness—health, mental health, housing, domestic and family violence, AOD, disability, aged care, corrections and justice, youth and care-leaving services.
- ensuring services remain wrapped around clients for the funded period—and ideally for longer in the Safety First and Housing First landscape espoused by the new alliances landscape.

Key areas where stakeholders noted need for focussed attention in terms of new or bolstered connections and processes are outlined below.

#### Health and mental health

I don't think we collaborate well enough with [SA] Health. (RS5, Manager, government)

While stakeholders generally noted intersections with health and mental health services in the context of their operational work, there was a clear appetite for strengthened connections with the relevant multiple areas of SA Health—including hospital inreach and outreach services, and especially community mental health.

Collective efforts involving SA Health during the COVID-19 pandemic had such thinking forefront of mind for most, including in the context of how health services can better engage with Aboriginal people sleeping out in the Park Lands. However, safety considerations of such engagement were raised, aligning with views about outreach and inreach services for this group.

The recognised pathway from hospital to rough sleeping, or back to rough sleeping, was another area where the need for stronger coordination of SHSs and health services was raised. As one respondent noted:

... when someone comes down to Outpatients appointments at the Royal Adelaide ... we've got to build that linkage with them [SA Health/the Royal Adelaide Hospital] much more strongly because that's often a pathway to homelessness too. (RS5, Manager, government)

Health services and health workers were also seen as a potential window to identifying factors that place some Aboriginal people's tenancies at risk of homelessness. For example, where someone is on dialysis and in an overcrowded tenancy, SA Health workers may be the first or only people to know this, and with better service coordination and linkages, referrals could be made to rectify tenancy issues and ultimately prevent homelessness. Similarly, health workers can often be one of the key people aware of someone who is in Adelaide for health reasons or treatment, with or without accompanying family, and can notify relevant services of the presence of visitors and their housing or homelessness circumstances.

The prevalence of chronic health issues among Aboriginal people sleeping rough/sleeping out in Adelaide's inner-city area makes addressing this identified gap/capacity issue all the more pressing.

#### State care system and leaving care

As noted in subsection 5.2.4 'Youth', experience of state care was common—and seemingly increasingly so—among Aboriginal youth experiencing homelessness. AZP data points to intersections with state care among many Aboriginal people sleeping rough (young, mid-life and older). Study participants noted how such experiences of the child protection system often intersected with repeated experiences of other state institutions, including correctional services, youth detention and mental health services, as well as intergenerational experiences of these systems and of homelessness.

A key point where systems are not connecting, which was raised by many participants in the study, was at the point of care-leaving. Here the risk of homelessness was commonplace:

... we often see people coming through with no [care-leaving] plans or even before they turn 18, DCP is giving us calls like, 'Oh, this person needs accommodation by the 20th.' 'What do you mean?' They have had government support for the last 10, 15, 18 years sometimes. How come they end up in homelessness now? That should not happen. It's like when it happens we still try to support of course, but this is not how it [pathways from care] is supposed to function. (RS9, Manager, mainstream SHS)

Child Protection unfortunately sort of weaves through every aspect of our young Aboriginal people's lives including homelessness ... [A] huge component of young guardianship Aboriginal kids [end up in SHSs when they've left guardianship at 18]—about 25 per cent. (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

Supporting care-leavers was noted for the complex and multifaceted process it is, requiring the connected input of a range of workers and therapists, most of whom sit outside (and should sit outside) SHS services.

Knowing the pathways to the right and multiple supports that care-leavers need and linking these with supports across other critical areas of people's lives—such as culture, reunification, trauma—is critical in disrupting initial pathways to homelessness and working to ensure stable, long-term housing and support outcomes.

#### **Criminal justice and correctional services**

Study participants noted a clear pathway for many Aboriginal clients from the criminal justice system to homelessness. It may not be a direct exit from prison or remand to the street, but the lack of support at exit from a correctional services facility can put people on a path to precarious housing.

... the same with Justice ... there's stories of kids, you know, they've got nowhere to go, their bail is up, they're out and, you know, 'There's your belongings, good luck.' ... Even pregnant women. (RS13, Manager, Indigenous SHS)

There's something there that still desperately needs work on; we can't keep promising these men freedom and then failing because we haven't got the right model, it needs a much more intensive model than we've got. But we've tried, and we're putting it on the table that this needs to be looked at, because the prison systems are choking and we just can't fix it with a boarding-house model. (RS2, CEO, short-term accommodation)

The core disconnect identified in relation to the criminal justice system was connection to appropriate housing, with participants interviewed (largely SHSs) critical of the lack of planning, notice and thought about what is an appropriate housing outcome—which needs to also minimise risks of reoffending by thinking through negative influences that may result from certain housing settings—and how support fits alongside this. Stronger connections between housing providers, SHSs and correctional services were seen as critical to resolving challenges. How existing Correctional Services' Housing Officers can work in a more integrated way with SHSs and structures for preventing homelessness is an area ripe for further thinking.

#### **Domestic and family violence services**

While many SHSs referred clients to domestic and family violence services for support, there was appetite for broader coordination between SHSs and domestic and family violence services, particularly around therapeutic interventions.

The AZP has the involvement of Women's Safety Services in high-level strategic and governance discussions. However, service representation below this level is piecemeal. Tensions remain evident between the sectors, seemingly related to competition for scarce housing resources for people exiting crisis. Better service coordination and communication was seen as a necessary path forward for both sectors, given the prominence of experience of domestic and family violence among Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, and especially among Aboriginal women sleeping rough/sleeping out.

Support for male victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence was raised as an area where clearer pathways to support are also needed.

#### **NDIS and My Aged Care**

The strength of connections with the NDIS and My Aged Care was also raised in the context of broader service coordination discussions. Stakeholders involved in the AZP noted intentions to pursue representatives of these structures to sit on operational and strategic working groups to uncover pathways to support for clients.

Services also noted increasingly working with the NDIS particularly, and My Aged Care in service delivery, reflecting the specific needs of clients, with an Aboriginal-specific disability program offered by one SHS, and an aged-living project offered by another, with a significant proportion of Aboriginal people among the residents in that program.

### Integration

Hope for greater visibility and integration of efforts between SHS sectors and other sectors and agencies lies in the new alliances, and particularly capacity building in Aboriginal-controlled organisations and service delivery. Whether and how particular structures to support service coordination will be resourced in the reformed landscape remains to be seen.

A high-level 'Rough Sleeper Coordinator' to hold to account people in executive positions across government departments for the poor outcomes of individuals is needed (as proposed in *Ending homelessness in the inner city through service coordination: feasibility study*; Pearson, Faulkner et al. 2021).

Other integration roles could include Aboriginal assertive outreach workers to assist people sleeping out in the Park Lands, as per the recommendations in Pearson, Tuallly et al. (2021), and Aboriginal-specific liaison officers/system navigators.

### 5.4.3 Good practice coordination and cooperation

People are labelled homeless, and so they 'need' a response from the homelessness system; when before they were homeless, they were in prison, they came out of the child protection system, they had mental health issues. You know, they were failed in all the other systems before they were homeless. (RS3, Manager, government)

While discussions about service coordination in the context of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness did not identify a single model or models of good practice, study participants noted the value of the many of the elements of the AZP in strengthening service coordination, particularly highlighting the collaborative work of the Coordinated Care<sup>23</sup> and Housing Allocations groups in the broader project. In Port Augusta, the Vulnerable Person's Framework approach (see subsection 5.4.1), coordinated by the Davenport Community, was also highly valued as a method of good practice service coordination. The CEARS response was also noted as an exemplar of service cooperation, albeit it in exceptional circumstances and a different resource environment to that generally seen in the homelessness landscape. Observations about service coordination captured here and in other relevant recent work (Pearson, Faulkner et al. 2021), identified the importance of the following:

- Action-oriented networks of relevant service providers dedicated to achieving good housing and support outcomes for clients. For the Coordinated Care group, the driving network includes a broad range of agencies involved in the provision of *support* for people experiencing or moving on from homelessness. Ideally, it involves a diverse range of *housing* providers. This also applies to the Housing Allocations Group.

The involvement from the outset of relevant ACCOs/ACCHOs among the networks was seen as critical although, as argued throughout this case study, this is an area where there remains need for capacity building and authentic engagement across the SHS sector. ACCOs/ACCHOs were seen as an important way of linking with community (but not 'community' as necessarily representative of all Aboriginal communities), for ensuring culturally safe practices and responses, and Aboriginal voice and perspectives in service design.

- Commitment to both understanding and providing what people want in terms of housing and support, determined in consultation with Aboriginal people with lived/living experience of homelessness.
- Understanding what service coordination aims to achieve and what agencies can bring to the table, clearly articulated shared processes (referrals, prioritisation etc.), clarity on who decision-makers are (and their presence at networks), and honest reflection on how things are or are not working.

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<sup>23</sup> Built on the foundation of a prior service coordination mechanism in the inner city homelessness sector: the Vulnerable Persons Framework.

## 5.5 Ways forward

As in the other case-study locations, there was a clear appetite for both stronger working relationships/coordination between mainstream and ACCOs, and for strengthening Aboriginal-led services within the SHS landscape. For mainstream services, such observations were made in the context of awareness and understanding of their limits in terms of culturally appropriate, and, especially, culturally safe service delivery. Building their capacity, including better resourcing, was also something desired by the small number of ACCOs connected with for this case study. Commentary by study participants here, which was reflected in various ways by other participants, included:

I go to so many meetings about this issue [Aboriginal homelessness in the inner city] and there's often not an Aboriginal person around the table. (RS3, Manager, government)

It does feel like the Aboriginal-specific services are kind of under-resourced when you think about how the regionalisation of the homelessness services [works], there's one in every region [of the state] but there's one Aboriginal-specific service that's meant to cover the whole of ... metro Adelaide and I'm not sure how they're meant to do that! (RS10, Team leader, mainstream SHS)

The comment above was made specifically in the context of an SHS with a significant number of Aboriginal clients wanting to better connect with ACCOs and to authentically support Aboriginal voice, control and self-determination in service delivery. This same participant noted the need to consciously build and resource greater Aboriginal-controlled capacity into the sector, as well as leveraging the skills, experiences and expertise of ACCO/ACCHOS that interface with people experiencing homelessness.

These clear desires within the SHS sector (and beyond) are reflected in evolving structures in housing and homelessness generally:

- Through the opportunities presented in the recently released *South Australian Aboriginal Housing Strategy 2021–2031*. The strategy (SAHA 2021) is underpinned by six strategic pillars, three of which are centred on driving change via culturally informed housing and service sector reform, by capacity building, and by increasing opportunities for economic participation by Aboriginal businesses and communities. The other three pillars are centred on the housing continuum, across crisis/homelessness sector reform, increasing supply of and access to culturally appropriate housing, and home ownership.
- Through the homelessness-sector-reform landscape, which, as noted earlier, has seen SHS agencies collaborate more widely/specifically with ACCOs, including non-traditional players in the landscape, with a view to building agency and sector, and the cultural safety of service delivery/responses. Alliances have been given the ability to co-design their regional homelessness service landscape, including the 'cohorts' in focus, and how better outcomes for people experiencing and at risk of homelessness can be achieved and *sustained*.
- Through the involvement of Aboriginal people with lived experience in the assessment of homelessness policy and programs, per the Lived Experience Engagement Service (subsection 5.4.1).
- For the inner city, specifically, through the continued focus of the AZP (as part of the Toward Home Alliance), including pursuance of the recommendations of key work supported by the project, and largely supported by the City of Adelaide, to rethink understandings and approaches to people sleeping out in the Park Lands —especially remote visitors.
- Non-Indigenous organisations may need to put in place mechanisms to ensure accountability for enactment of culturally informed advice, so that reports and advice from Aboriginal subject-matter experts are not sought and then left unacted upon. Transparency and accountability will be key tools in disrupting the cyclical nature of the complex issues raised through this research.

These outcomes-oriented structures will hopefully support delivery or scaling up of the range of options (and others) increasingly being called for in SA, including:

- managed alcohol facilities (low barrier)
- culturally appropriate assertive outreach/more assertive outreach delivered by Aboriginal workers/ACCOs
- a transitional accommodation facility in an inner-city location (or multiple facilities in the city or nearby locations)
- an expanded or new Aboriginal Elders village—specialist aged care for prematurely aged Aboriginal people
- an adequately resourced Return to Country program
- trials of housing that can be flexibly configured to accommodate larger family or kinship groups—for example, relocatable or temporary units in the backyards of social housing properties or co-located dwellings where multiple families can reside and share spaces for gathering/yarning
- packages of support to promote people's ability to settle successfully in their homes
- case navigators or liaison workers to join up the multiple responses/systems Aboriginal people need to access and sustain housing and support, including when circumstances change and there are cultural obligations to meet.

In SA there is hope that the current reform process will genuinely shake things up, resulting in the necessary bravery, and system and service coordination needed to see ACCOs and mainstream services work together for better outcomes for the unacceptable number of Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

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## 6. Policy development options

This research investigated four questions in order to deepen our understanding of the current situations with regard to urban Indigenous homelessness:

1. What are the causes, drivers and cultural contextual meanings of homelessness for Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
2. What do culturally safe responses to homelessness look like for Indigenous Australians?
3. How are homelessness, family and child support, health and wellbeing, and housing programs targeted, coordinated and operationalised to support Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
4. How are Indigenous community-controlled organisations and governance bodies engaged with/in the provision of homelessness support?

In answering these questions, three key themes emerge. These themes link to the research questions as follows:

Theme	Research questions
Indigenous homelessness is different	1
Inflow into Indigenous homelessness requires situationally specific and culturally appropriate responses	1, 2, 3, 4
Exits from Indigenous homelessness require situationally specific and culturally appropriate responses	2, 3, 4

This report identifies the following most salient implications and guidelines for policy and practice under each of the themes:

### Theme 1: Indigenous homelessness is different

- Cultural responsibilities and expectations can result in fluctuating levels of crowding, and mobility between communities and localities that can result in situations that would be captured under ABS definitions of homelessness, but which may not be homelessness from an Indigenous perspective. Culturally appropriate responses must respect Indigenous perspectives and focus on safety and understanding ahead of non-Indigenous concepts of home and culturally embedded imperatives.
- ACCOs/ACCHOs need to be central to efforts to meet the needs of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. This requires resources, and needs to be supported.
- Co-designed programs and responses to Indigenous homelessness are critical: in this context, as an expression of the need for self-determination, 'nothing about us, without us' is an important principle.
- Lived experience of Indigenous homelessness needs to be recognised and supported as a key form of expertise within the homelessness workforce.
- There needs to be a targeted, resourced strategy at both Commonwealth and state levels that establishes goals, standards and frameworks for supporting the cultural safety of homelessness services.

### **Theme 2: Inflow into Indigenous homelessness requires situationally specific and culturally appropriate responses**

- As with the broader population, domestic and family violence is the largest driver of homelessness for Indigenous women and children, which indicates the importance of enhanced links between homelessness and domestic and family violence services.
- To reduce inflows from public housing into homelessness, one approach would be to support Indigenous services for intensive tenancy management, so that the established tenancy is sustained, and unapproved tenants are supported towards establishing a pathway out of homeless.
- The revolving door of unstable housing and homelessness that characterises some Indigenous homelessness groups makes it essential that housing is accompanied by support—for up to at least six months. This means supporting tenants to maintain rental payments, to budget, to manage daily living needs including cooking, and to keep medical and other appointments.
- Culturally appropriate assertive outreach based on a Housing First model is a critical component for reducing rates of Indigenous homelessness where housing is the appropriate outcome. Stable housing creates a virtuous circle, in which the impact of problems such as mental and physical illness and substance use are improved, and this in turn improves the capacity of people to sustain their tenancy.
- People's homelessness pathways intersect with several other systems—for example, correctional services, justice, health and mental health services—and the responsibility and potential of these systems and institutions to reduce inflows into homelessness needs to be understood as a key to engaging with the complexity of Indigenous homelessness.
- Knowing the pathways to the right supports that care-leavers need, and linking these with supports across other critical areas of people's lives—that is, culture, reunification, trauma—is critical in disrupting initial pathways to homelessness and working to ensure positive, stable long-term housing and support outcomes.

### **Theme 3: Exits from Indigenous homelessness require situationally specific and culturally appropriate responses**

- Different Indigenous people experience homelessness in different ways and require different responses. These responses need to include:
  - Housing First pathways that provide a more culturally appropriate response to the housing and support needs of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness
  - a Support First pathway with better coordination of the non-housing needs of people in crowded or rough sleeping situations
  - a Cultural Engagement pathway which recognises that many Indigenous people perceived to be homeless are just going about their everyday lives, and are not in need of support or housing, but could benefit from coordinated Aboriginal cultural engagement strategies for welcoming, supporting and setting expectations for visitors.
- There is potential to strengthen connections between homelessness responses and NDIS and My Aged Care funding opportunities.
- Supply constraints, especially of culturally appropriate social housing, need to be addressed. In addition, eligibility criteria and application processes need to be examined for cultural exclusion risks, and attention needs to be given to the suitability of social housing types and locations for Indigenous people.
- The following have the potential to enhance the suite of responses to Indigenous homelessness:
  - culturally appropriate and low-barrier transitional accommodation facilities
  - an expanded or new Aboriginal Elders village
  - an adequately resourced Return to Country program
  - trials of housing that can be flexibly configured to accommodate larger family or kinship groups.

### Final remarks

This research speaks directly to an urgent need to refocus attention on the national shame that is the experience or risk of homelessness among Indigenous Australians. However, such a focus on Indigenous homelessness must account for differences across geography, and for the range of local, cultural and other factors driving homelessness, its multiple conceptualisations, meanings and understandings.

This research is one project among the many needed to provide a full picture of the complexities and cultural geographies of homelessness among Indigenous people. It is timely given the increasing trend towards urbanisation of homelessness nationally. It is also particularly important given the far-reaching impact of homelessness on people's lives and the changing landscape of homelessness in the emerging post-COVID-19 housing, homelessness and social support landscape. There needs to be a stronger link here to action not merely refocussing attention—but meaningful action for real change.

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# Appendix: Evidence review method

The starting point for this review came from the primary, interlinked research questions for this project, in particular the first and second questions:

What are the causes, drivers and cultural contextual meanings of homelessness for Indigenous Australians in urban settings?

1. What do culturally safe responses to homelessness look like for Indigenous Australians?
2. Based on these overarching questions, scoping questions were developed that guided identification of relevant literature and research resources.

Guided by the broader approach adopted by Bainbridge, McCalman et al. (2018), a targeted, desktop search was made of peer-reviewed literature, including AHURI reports, grey literature, and data (ABS, demographics, etc.). The emphasis was primarily—but not exclusively—on literature from the past 10 years (2009–2020), as well as some key literature published before this period. The search was conducted via academic databases, government websites and also mainstream search engines, including: Google Scholar, APO Online, ATSIHealth/Informit, AIATSIS: Indigenous Studies Bibliography/Informit, FAMILY-ATSIS/Informit, Indigenous Collection/Informit, Sociological Abstracts/ProQuest, Indigenous HealthInfoNet, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, and in Canada the Homeless Hub and National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.

Descriptive and analytical material on Indigenous homelessness, with emphasis on the urban context, was also sought from other countries, in particular Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand, which have ‘experienced colonisation events similar to those of Australia’ (Salmon, Doery et al. 2019: 1). In each of these countries, Indigenous peoples are not only over-represented within urban homeless populations, they are disproportionately affected by a range of interlinked inequalities, including in health and in housing (Distasio, Sylvestre et al, 2005; Lawson-Te Aho, Fariu-Ariki et al. 2019:2). Despite policy, practice, and cultural differences, in each context the pathways into homelessness for Indigenous people are linked to the ongoing effects of colonisation and historical intergenerational trauma.

Overall, scholarly literature with a specific focus on Australian Indigenous homelessness is scant in comparison with the body of work on homelessness more broadly. Reviewed literature draws on a number of disciplines that have contributed to research into the complexities around homelessness for Indigenous Australians in urban locales, including learnings around the intersection of culture, Country and community. This reflects the findings of Long, Memmott et al. (2007: 104) on the inherently multidisciplinary nature of Indigenous housing research as opposed to non-Indigenous housing research, which they found tended to be concentrated in sociology, economics, urban geography and planning studies. As with housing issues, the nature of Indigenous homelessness is complex, with multiple themes and subthemes.



**Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute**

Level 12, 460 Bourke Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

Australia

+61 3 9660 2300

[information@ahuri.edu.au](mailto:information@ahuri.edu.au)

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