

CONCURRENT SESSION

## **C12 Indigenous homelessness – state and territory approaches**



University of  
South Australia

# Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing

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# The Research

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise **3 % of Australia's population** yet are **15 X more likely** than non-Indigenous people to be homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- This research starts from a clear recognition that dispossession, racism, profound economic disadvantage and cultural oppression shapes the lived experience of Indigenous Australians today.



- Indigenous Australians are disproportionately over-represented on all measures of socio-economic disadvantage nationally, including the high prevalence as people experiencing homelessness in urban settings.
- To respond to the ‘challenge’ of urban Indigenous homelessness we need to deepen our understandings of the many ‘drivers’ of such homelessness: cultural dispossession, intergenerational poverty, mobility, sociality, cultural responsibilities, and extended kinship care.



- 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.



- 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 support services – ie Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations - and homelessness support services can generate more holistic and culturally safe responses.



# Research Questions:

Building on the 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, this AHURI research project addresses four 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?





# Methodology:

- The research team's underlying principles for research approach acknowledged the diversity of Indigenous experience and also that the distinctions made by non-Aboriginal people about urban, regional and remote contexts may not be shared by First Nations Australians.
- In addition the research is framed in an end homelessness/Housing First approach which also acknowledges the need for an intersectorial approach to achieving a more holistic service model.



- These approaches posit that:
  - more than housing is needed to assist vulnerable populations experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.
  - intersectoral approaches that build on the well-developed whole-of-life, community-driven work within Indigenous health and wellbeing spaces, grow understanding of the intersections of culture, Country and community. 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 are relevant when considering Indigenous homelessness.



# Methodology:

- A multi-methods research design was adopted for this project incorporating:
  - Desktop review of research, policy and practice on urban Indigenous homelessness.
  - In-depth research on International best practice approaches – particularly in Canada.
  - Service and stakeholder mapping at case-study sites to identify the following in each target area:
    - » key institutions and community organisations engaged in homelessness systems
    - » key Indigenous institutions and organisations engaged with homelessness systems
    - » key governance and community-controlled representative bodies
    - » service provision re 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
    - » models of culturally respectful and adaptive services.
- Mapping of the service and stake-holder landscape helped identify capacity options; as well as how best to connect with services in case-study locations for field engagement.



# Methodology:

- National and jurisdiction data analysis to quantify current Indigenous homelessness trends, and inform the case studies.
- Qualitative interviews with stakeholders in case-study sites to provide a nuanced picture of urban Indigenous homelessness.
- Semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups with Indigenous people and others people engaged in wider service systems in the case-study sites.



# Case Study sites:

Four urban case-study sites were chosen:

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



- In each case study field site there were different and distinct features – however we were systematic in organising the data analysis, service mapping and qualitative interviews around the following topics:
  - Profile of urban homelessness
    - » Patterns of urban Indigenous homelessness
    - » Socio demographic characteristics
    - » Exclusion, poverty and homelessness
    - » Indigenous definitions of homelessness



- Service delivery
  - » The systematic barriers to accessing housing
  - » The revolving door of homelessness
  - » Impact of the NDIS
- Cultural Safety
  - » Cultural safety within Mainstream services
  - » Good Cultural practice: Indigenous led services
- Service Coordination
- Strengthening Indigenous services
- Strengthening the Indigenous homelessness sector
- Ways forward



# Policy Development Options

- **In addressing the four 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 services operationalised to support Indigenous Australians in urban settings?
  - How are Indigenous community-controlled, family and child support, health and wellbeing, and housing programs targeted, coordinated organisations and governance bodies engaged with/in the provision of homelessness support?
- **Three themes emerged:**
  - *Indigenous homelessness is different*
  - *Inflow of Indigenous homelessness requires culturally appropriate responses*
  - *Exit from Indigenous homelessness requires culturally appropriate supports*





# Policy Development Options

1. ACCOs/ACCHOs are central to efforts to meet the needs of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.
2. Co-designed programs and responses to Indigenous homelessness are critical
3. Lived experience of Indigenous homelessness needs to be recognised and supported within the homelessness workforce.
4. There needs to be a targeted, resourced strategy at both Commonwealth and state levels with goals, standards and frameworks for supporting the cultural safety of homelessness services.
5. Culturally appropriate assertive outreach based on a Housing First model...
6. People's homelessness pathways intersect with several other systems—for example, correctional services, justice, health and mental health services
7. Strengthen connections between homelessness responses and NDIS and My Aged Care funding opportunities.



# Policy Development Options

8. 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.





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