Australian Homelessness Conference 2024

Gathering Momentum

MC5 Cultural right to mobility

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Mobility as a cultural right:

Navigating Homelessness: Unveiling Realities and Embracing Mobility as Cultural Right in NT and SA Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Communities

Skye Thompson, CEO Aboriginal Housing NT

Who are we?

Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT) is the NT peak body for Aboriginal housing.

We represent and support 16+ member organisations, non-profit Aboriginal community-controlled providers of housing or related services based in the Northern Territory, and we advocate for **more** and **better housing** for Aboriginal people.

Mobility as a cultural right

01

Mobility goes beyond physical movement; it's about preserving cultural identity, traditions, and connections.

02

First Nations communities have ancestral lands, sacred sites, and cultural practices that span geographical regions.

03

The ability to move freely is crucial for maintaining these cultural bonds and practices.

Mobility maintains:

- Kinship and social connections
- Cultural identity, responsibilities and ceremony.
- Connection to land
- Passing down culture to our children

These are our strengths and must be central in solutions to homelessness

The NT context: mobility driven by poor government policy

- Legacies of colonialism, 'Protection' laws and the NT National Emergency Response ('the Intervention') have displaced Aboriginal people against their will.
- Mobility can be driven by other external factors enacted through policy change– lack of access to housing, healthcare, aged care, NDIS and employment opportunities in remote locations (Moskos et al, 2024).

- Homelands example:
  - NT government push for Aboriginal people to move away from their traditional lands and live in large townships or communities to centralise health, housing and education services.
  - We are starting to see a policy shift with **new additional homelands funding** for repairs and maintenance announced for the next 3 years and push for new housing to be built after that.

Supporting cultural mobility through housing design

- Where there are high levels of mobility, there is a need for housing design that will allow for mobility and culture to be supported. They should consider appropriate size and options for communal living.

- Designs should include:
  - well-designed wet areas and external living options,
  - large and well-screened verandah spaces,
  - adequately sized living spaces,
  - more toilets and showers to allow for outside sleeping,
  - consideration of alternative energy sources to maximise passive heating and cooling, and
  - appropriately sized rainwater tanks (Memmott et al 2006).

Supporting cultural mobility through social housing services

There is a need to improve the way the social housing sector responds to Aboriginal mobility.

This can be done through:

- Better understanding of the service population and mobility patterns,
- availability of short-term accommodation in regional centres,
- tenancy sustainment support for residents, and
- changes to restrictive tenancy rules that facilitate penalties and evictions
    - It goes against Aboriginal culture to turn away family who need housing which can lead to ‘overcrowding’. We need to rethink social housing tenancy rules to accommodate for cultural obligations.

References

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