Homeward Sisters

Reducing barriers to housing for Aboriginal women leaving custody

Legal Aid NEW SOUTH WALES

Homes NSW



Artwork: Luke Penrith © Legal Aid NSW 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

The Larrakia people, who are acknowledged as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Darwin and Palmerston region.

We pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging

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Need for a new approach



In March 2026

429 Aboriginal women in custody

44.6% female population

Aboriginal women in custody

Up 21.2%

From March 2024-March 2026

The imprisonment rate of Aboriginal people is over 10x that of non-Aboriginal people

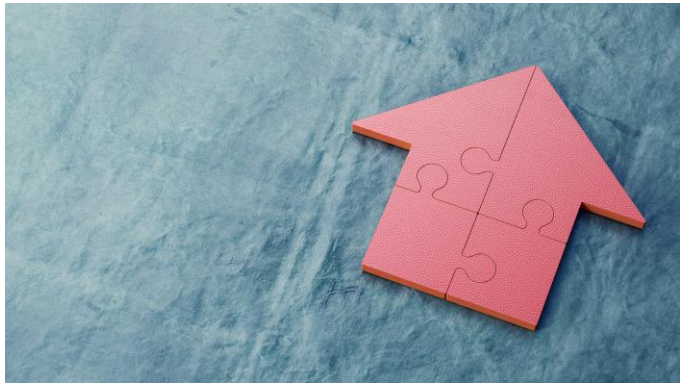
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High demand in a housing crisis

Our work at Legal Aid NSW has a strong focus on prevention of homelessness.

- Significant increase in housing work for the Civil Law Division
- Housing consistently the most common legal problem for clients
- Housing barriers faced by Aboriginal women in custody persist



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The need for the Program and designing with our clients

- Experience working with Aboriginal women in custody
- Trusting relationship between client and lawyers
- Meaningful consultation in the design process
- Flexible and client centered approach
- Pre-existing systems in place for communication with clients



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How we worked together

START

1. Project information to Aboriginal women in custody

2. Participants sign Consent

3. Referrer forwards Consent to Legal Aid NSW

4. Legal Aid contacts participants for instructions

5. Legal Aid NSW assess participants as 'eligible'

6. Legal Aid NSW provides details to HOMES NSW

7. HOMES NSW assess participants against principles

8. Homes NSW communicates outcome to Legal Aid NSW

9. Legal Aid communicates outcome to participant

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The agreed Principles

- Formulated around:
  - Navigating the social housing system
  - Former negative classification
  - Former tenant debts
  - Evidence needed to be approved
  - Access to priority housing waitlist



Some examples

- Homelessness status prior to and exiting custody can lead to priority status on the NSW Housing Register
- Negative classifications for previous Homes NSW tenancies
- Outstanding debts from former tenancies
- Applications removed from the NSW Housing Register due to non-response



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Evaluation

Highlights from the findings

- Positive housing outcomes for Aboriginal women in custody who participated
- Extensive reach resulting in a high number of referrals
- Streamlined approach enabled timely outcomes
- Reduced administrative burden and delay for clients and solicitors
- Increased trust in both legal and housing systems



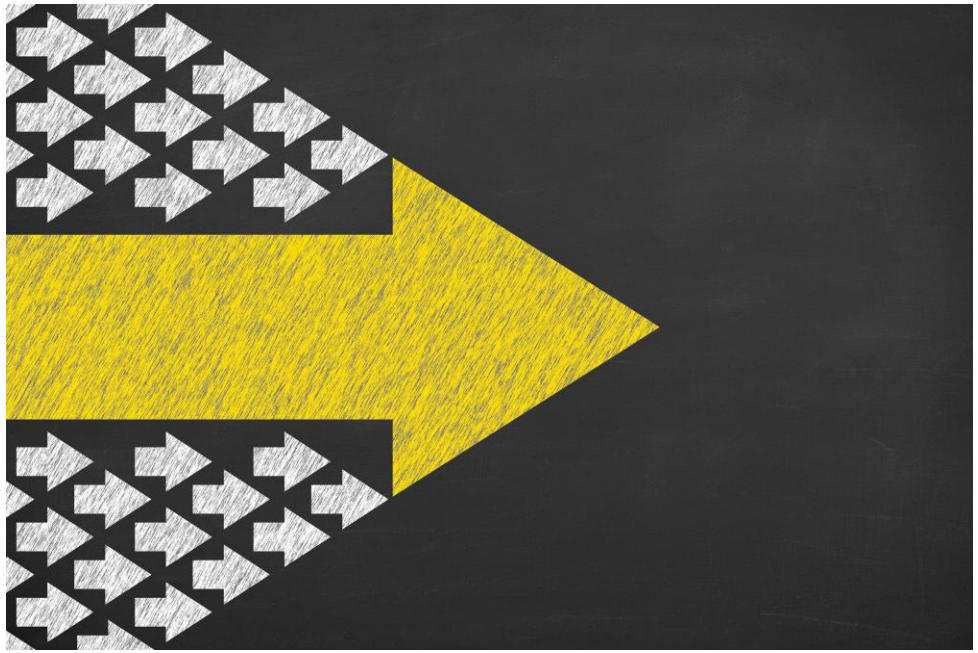
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Learning

The pilot allowed us to try a new way for Homes NSW to do business, including:

- A clear focus on clients
- Identification of policy barriers
- Implications for clients
- A pathway forward



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What's ahead for Homes NSW

Pilot principles implemented into Business-as-Usual practice

- Aligns with the Homes for NSW Strategy – 10-year plan.
  Priorities include:
    - Customer driven service
    - More and better homes
    - Improving maintenance
    - Making homelessness rare, brief and not repeated
- Engagement with the Community Housing Sector



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Outcomes

Homeward Sisters program housed 57 Aboriginal women

Type of issue resolved	Number of women assisted	Percentage of matters (completed)
Approved for Priority housing	263	83%
Debt waived	89	28%
Former tenancy negative classification removed	122	39%



*Data that is available to date

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i feel grounded