Final Report

Indigenous homelessness

authored by

Christina Birdsall-Jones, Vanessa Corunna, Nalita Turner, Gemma Smart and Wendy Shaw

for the

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
Western Australia Research Centre

March 2010

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Australian Housing
and Urban Research Institute

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was commissioned by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) to undertake a comparative analysis of Indigenous homelessness in the contrasting settings of major cities and regional country town centres. The research sought to compare the understandings of Indigenous homelessness held by Indigenous homeless people, and those of the providers of services to Indigenous homeless people. It offers an analysis of the relationship between homelessness, household overcrowding and mobility patterns in the context of Indigenous culture.

The broad policy context according to which this research was commissioned was: 'to understand the place, house and home needs of Indigenous peoples and to identify actions required to address these needs through housing and other service responses that secure sustainable solutions and support stable life conditions' (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2008).

To this end, an anthropological consideration was undertaken of the social and cultural drivers of Indigenous homelessness. In order to understand 'the place, house and home needs' of Indigenous people, it was necessary to differentiate those aspects of Indigenous culture which structure the Indigenous response to homelessness from the forces of the wider Australian society which act on the ways in which Indigenous people solve the problem of housing in the context of poverty and a shortage of affordable housing.

Method

Data for this research was gathered through ethnographic interviews yielding text which was subjected to thematic analysis. Interviews were conducted in the Western Australian towns of Broome and Carnarvon and in the state capital city, Perth. Participants were sought from within the Indigenous community and among practitioners working in relevant service organisations. All of these organisations were non-government organisations (NGOs).

Understandings of homelessness

The initial analysis of the data revealed that the way homelessness is understood by homeless Indigenous people often differs from that of Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners. Practitioners place the greatest emphasis on the ways in which life circumstances in general interact with structural features of the wider society. Their concern is the degree to which the structural features of government and departmental policy, agency practice, the Australian economy and the available facilities either hinder or help Indigenous people to exit the homeless state.

In contrast, the primary concern of Indigenous homeless people is the way in which their own specific life circumstances impel them into the homeless state and thereby place them in the path of key institutions in the wider society and how these institutions: (1) raise conflicts between themselves and their own social world; and (2) prevent them from exiting the homeless state. For Indigenous homeless people life circumstances which impel Indigenous people into homelessness often flow from a lack of access to (suitable) housing, substance misuse and violence.

Practitioners and Indigenous homeless people agree that household overcrowding acts both as a hedge against primary homelessness and as a force which can impel people into the homeless state. That is, while achieving shelter with housed kinfolk will stave off more obvious homelessness, conditions of overcrowding can become intolerable, leading to eviction of the visitor(s), or even household breakdown.

Sometimes, householders lose housing rights through eviction based on lease violations because of household numbers.

Remote area homeless men

There is evidence that the most disadvantaged people in Indigenous society with regard to accessing housing are Indigenous men from remote area communities. There exists a division of responsibility and associated knowledge in Indigenous society according to which housing becomes a woman's responsibility. Indigenous tradition-oriented men feel shamed if they have to act on their own behalf to obtain housing. This is partly because they associate it with women's work, and partly because they have only a very limited understanding of how to go about the process of obtaining housing from the public housing provider. This may be one of the reasons that men are apparently better represented among the primary homeless particularly in the north of the state.

Homelessness and kinship obligations

The obligation of kinfolk to provide help to one another in time of need is deeply embedded within the structure of Indigenous society. This obligation acts to shape the structure and idiom of the Indigenous response to the need for housing and the experience of homelessness. Those in need of housing for a wide variety of reasons will most often resolve this need by approaching their kinfolk prior to considering any other means of finding shelter. Most often, their housed kinfolk will take them in. There would appear to be no prioritising of housing need, and therefore those who are actually without housing are taken in according to the same patterns as those who are merely visiting from other places where they have homes of their own.

Visiting is an extremely important institution among Indigenous extended family groups and is undertaken regularly for the general purpose of strengthening and maintaining the bonds of kin relationships, as well as fulfilling cultural obligations revolving around Indigenous law and custom. There also exists a widespread practice among older adolescent boys and young men of engaging in a period of travelling which takes in a very broad region and usually encompasses a period of years. For reasons such as these, there is always a substantial proportion of any extended kin group travelling for the purpose of visiting kinfolk.

Not all visiting is undertaken for cultural reasons; however, that which is culturally based is regarded, in general terms, positively in Indigenous society. In contrast, homelessness does not have a cultural basis in Indigenous society and the drivers of homelessness are linked to the wider Australian society. Homelessness is one of the primary drivers of Indigenous overcrowding and it is the most serious. Unlike visiting, sharing housing with kinfolk because of homelessness is of such a long-term nature that it becomes semi-permanent.

Overcrowding

This research demonstrates that among Australian Indigenous people overcrowding patterns are reflective of certain kin-based responsibilities and ways of coping with changing economic circumstances. This study of Indigenous homelessness provides a detailed analysis of Indigenous secondary homelessness. By focusing on Indigenous secondary homelessness it has been possible to develop an analysis of the ways in which Indigenous socio-cultural organisation structures Indigenous homelessness in response to the forces of the wider Australian society.

Tertiary homelessness

This research also includes an analysis of tertiary homelessness and spiritual homelessness. It was found that tertiary homelessness, involving residence in a hostel, boarding house, or caravan is not common in Indigenous society. While Indigenous people may be resident in specific-purpose hostels, particularly dialysis hostels, none could be discovered in a boarding house or caravan. For this reason, the definition of tertiary homelessness was broadened to include substandard housing. The justification for this is that until the Australian Census of 2001, people living in housing that lacked a functioning shower and toilet were counted as homeless. A consideration was made regarding whether such housing was best represented as homelessness or as substandard housing. It is argued that while substandard housing may be the result of housing overuse from visitors or housing homeless kinfolk, the problem of substandard housing is best considered as a problem of housing amenity rather than of homeless persons.

The concept of spiritual homelessness was examined in an effort to define it more specifically than has heretofore been the case. Cases of spiritual homelessness involving two groups are presented and evidence of mental illness was clearly present in the membership of both groups.

Policy implications

The Federal Government's current policy initiatives in Indigenous affairs call for enlisting the support of Indigenous communities in the management of issues connected with community development and housing (Macklin 2009). This research supports such policy initiatives by presenting an analysis which points out aspects of Indigenous culture with which policy might be designed to engage. By designing policy to engage with relevant aspects of Indigenous culture, it may be possible to develop more effective programs in response to the needs of Indigenous homeless people.

Government should investigate ways of utilising the institutions of Indigenous society in the development of policy, the kinship system in particular. The ways in which kinship structures all aspects of Indigenous life are demonstrative of the resilience of Indigenous kinship over the arduous history of colonisation, protection, assimilation and so on. By paying particular attention to the ways in which policy and programs work either with or against the fabric of Indigenous society, policy responses can be adjusted for greater effectiveness.

For example, household overcrowding in a situation of a shortage of both public and affordable private housing is unavoidable. If government recognises the service rendered by Indigenous households to their homeless kinfolk it may find ways of managing household overcrowding to the advantage of both Indigenous households and their neighbouring households.

Further policy responses are called for which have the objective of interrupting pathways to homelessness. Examples of these pathways occur in the areas of managing perpetrators of domestic violence, debt to the public housing provider, housekeeping practices and men's access to the process of acquiring housing.

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The policy context

This research commenced prior to the introduction of the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH). However, the policy context which the project was designed to address was relatively broad. Primarily the requirement of the research was 'to understand the place, house and home needs of Indigenous peoples,' and secondarily, 'to identify actions required to address these needs through housing and other service responses that secure sustainable solutions and support stable life conditions' (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2008). In order to meet these requirements, this research recruited as participants both Indigenous homeless people and professional practitioners whose work either directly concerned Indigenous homelessness or whose services were relevant to the needs of Indigenous homeless people.

The research sought to identify:

→   reasons, motivations and triggers for homelessness;

→   the experience of Indigenous homelessness and how this compares with housing aspirations in terms of location, type of dwelling and tenure, including any aspirations for home ownership;

→   the role of factors such as kin connections, life stage, and lifestyle on the occurrence of Indigenous homelessness;

→   the role of forms of housing assistance, such as public housing and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) in the experience of Indigenous homeless people;

→   the use of formal and informal supports by Indigenous homeless people in the conduct of the homeless lifestyle; and

→   the need for and nature of further applied research on Indigenous homelessness.

The research aimed to:

→   build Indigenous research capacity, which included the employment of two Indigenous researchers (Corunna and Turner); and

→   build on existing and completed AHURI research to provide a consistent view of Indigenous homelessness.

1.2   Research sites

1.2.1   The research sites

The research was carried out in the Western Australian regional centres of Broome and Carnarvon and in the state capital city of Perth. The research analysis utilised previous AHURI and other research in order to achieve a broader picture of the Indigenous homeless situation. These are Memmott *et al.*'s study of service responses to Indigenous homeless people (Memmott 2003 et al.) and Memmott and Chambers' study of Indigenous homelessness in inner-city Sydney (Memmott and Chambers 2005). A small amount of material was also made available from four Sydney practitioners.

1.2.2 Perth

In keeping with its status as the state capital, Perth is the largest city in Western Australia. It is situated on a narrow sand plain on the south-west coast, roughly at a climatic divide between the relatively arid wheat belt region and the comparatively well-watered south-western corner of the state. In the 2006 Census there were 1,445,079 people resident in Perth, which is more than half the population of Western Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007a). Perth has a population of 21,323 Indigenous people, which is the largest single population of Indigenous people of Western Australia. However, at 1.5%, Indigenous people form only a small proportion of the total Perth population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007a). Indigenous people in Perth are fairly well distributed throughout the greater metropolitan area, although not in the affluent riverside and coastal suburbs, and with concentrations occurring in central Perth and Fremantle and in the suburban areas of Kwinana, Armadale and Belmont.

The public housing provider for Perth and the rest of the state is the Department of Housing (DoH). At the time of fieldwork for this research, the National Affordable Housing Agreement had not yet been brought in and the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement was still in force, providing funding for some public housing to be provided by approved community housing providers (Commonwealth of Australia 2003). In Western Australia, Indigenous community housing organisations (ICHOs) are administered through Aboriginal Housing within the DoH. This will change under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, which will phase out the ICHOs, bringing all public housing under the administration of the DoH. The National Partnership Agreements on Social Housing and Homelessness also came in after the completion of fieldwork for this research. Under these partnership agreements, Indigenous homelessness is a key priority. Indigenous public and community housing tenants accommodate their homeless kinfolk in their own homes, often in contravention of the terms of their rental leases and the DoH thus provides de facto housing for many Indigenous people who would otherwise be without shelter options. It remains to be seen whether or not these various agreements will have an effect on the housing and homelessness experience of Indigenous people

There are a variety of services for homeless people in Perth run variously by religious organisations, community groups, and community housing organisations; some of these were funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP was a service of the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. It has now been replaced by A Place to Call Home under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

Regarding what it is possible for us to say concerning the size of the homeless population in each of the field sites, we point out that cities are less accessible to the detailed fieldwork that is possible in the country towns. For the same reason, while we can make statements about the relative size of primary versus secondary homelessness populations in the regional field sites, it is not possible to make any statements in this regard for the metropolitan region on the basis of our research. In consequence, for the metropolitan region we are reliant solely on the data derived from the Australian census by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003b) which is based on the 2001 Australian Census. While the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released Chamberlain and MacKenzie's analytic report on homelessness nationally for the 2006 Australian Census, a state and territory analysis is not yet available (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2008).

1.2.3 Carnarvon

The town of Carnarvon is located on the coast, 904 kilometres north of Perth at the mouth of the Gascoyne River. Its location on the river notwithstanding, the Gascoyne region is arid desert country. On the ABS remoteness index[1], Carnarvon is classified as very remote. It is an old town, founded in 1839 and has the characteristic broad main street in the town centre, originally constructed to accommodate the turning circle of carters' teams of bullocks. The climate is monsoonal but temperate. The major source of the town's income derives from fruit and vegetable farming and tourism. The total population of Carnarvon is 5,682 of which 1,086 are Indigenous. Indigenous people make up 19% of the town's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007b).

Carnarvon fieldwork included a discrete Indigenous community within the local government boundary. This was Mungullah, located just north of Grey's Plain in the industrial zone on the outskirts of Carnarvon. Mungullah was founded in 1981 on Crown Land held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT). Its location is given as Boor St. Up to the time Mungullah was established, the general area of Boor St. was low-lying flat lands on which homeless Aboriginal people camped. This area, on the outskirts of Carnarvon, was then and is now largely undeveloped land and it is adjacent to the General Industrial Zone. The population of the community was made up of the former Boor St. campers and the former residents of the (cancelled) Aboriginal reserve who are also the local traditional owners, the Ingarda people. The exact population of the community in 2009 is not known because of long-established visiting patterns between Mungullah and the associated community of Burrungurrah, approximately 500 kilometres east of Carnarvon. The Mungullah community has a total of 43 dwellings. If we assume the average occupancy is four people, this gives a very rough estimate of a population of 172. Depending on season and circumstance, this population can swell or reduce considerably. At the time of this research housing at Mungullah was managed by the Mungullah community as a community housing provider.

The only organisation which provides services to the homeless in Carnarvon is the Carnarvon Women's Refuge. There is no service for men, and children can only be accommodated by the Refuge with their mothers and in the case of boys, only to the age of 13. Carnarvon has no SAAP provider.

In Carnarvon, according to the estimates of primary homelessness (that is, those living completely without housing) by practitioners, there were no more than nine Indigenous people living in primary homeless situations. This compares with Chamberlain and MacKenzie's estimate on the basis of the 2001 Australian Census of a total of 10 homeless Indigenous people of all categories of homelessness for the entire Gascoyne subdivision (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003b). Practitioners have not made a count of Indigenous people living in situations of secondary homelessness (that is those homeless people who have found housing with friends and relations) but practitioners acknowledge that probably more than half the Indigenous households in Carnarvon were subject to overcrowding to some degree. This amounts to roughly 160 households (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). [2]

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[1] The ABS introduced a remoteness classification in 2001. It divides Australia into six broad regions called Remoteness Areas as a means of differentiating between 'city' and 'country' where the defining difference is distance from goods and services (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).

[2] The definitions of various types of homelessness are discussed in detail in our positioning paper (Birdsall-Jones and Shaw 2008) and again in Chapter 2 of this report.

1.2.4 Broome

The town of Broome is located on the far northern coast of Western Australia approximately 2200 kilometres from Perth. Like Carnarvon it is an old town, founded in 1883. It is situated on the landward side of Roebuck Bay where it is relatively protected from the cyclones which hit during the rainy season. Like Carnarvon, Broome is monsoonal, but experiences extreme heat and humidity in "the wet". In Broome, the Indigenous population of 3,558 form 27.25% of the total population of 13,060 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007c).

Marna Jarndu, the women's refuge, serves the western Kimberley and is the only provider of accommodation for the homeless in Broome. There is no accommodation service for men but the Men's Outreach Centre provides a daytime drop-in service which includes a breakfast service, laundry facilities, counselling and advocacy. Young people are assisted by Narrambuk which has some transitional housing and provides advocacy to obtain public housing from DoH for young people.

In Broome, there is a strong presence of primary homeless Indigenous people, most of whom are campers. Estimates of the size of the Indigenous primary homeless population tend to vary from a low of 178 for the entire of the Kimberley (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003b) to a high of around the same number for the town of Broome alone (Strain 2008). On the basis of a rough estimate of the numbers observable in the makeshift camps around the town, our view of the situation at the time of our field work (July 2008) is that there were 200–300 primary homeless Indigenous people in Broome. Regarding secondary homeless people, which is represented by overcrowded households, practitioners could not give an exact proportion of overcrowded Indigenous households, but there was generally an agreement that 'most' Broome Indigenous households were overcrowded. According to the 2006 Australian Census, there are 686 Indigenous households in the Broome Indigenous area (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a).

Carnarvon and Broome share a number of features in common. They are both major regional centres in relatively remote areas of the state. They are both old towns (in Western Australian terms), established in the latter half of the 19th century. Currently they have thriving tourist industries, although Carnarvon less so than Broome. They may also be said to have well-established local industries which are resilient to economic downturns. On the ABS remoteness index, Broome is classified as remote while Carnarvon is classified as very remote (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003).

1.2.5 Housing in Western Australia

Between 2001 and 2008, there occurred a period of rapid economic growth in the mining industry. During this period, according to the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), Australia experienced national 'land boom'. The increase in land values was led by residential land values (Australian Local Government Association 2007).[3] This research took place in July–December 2008, at the very end of the previous economic boom in the mining industry. This was around the beginning of the global economic downturn.

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[3] Unfortunately no information of substance was offered without fee on the ALGA website for the 2008 State of the Regions report.

2 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & PERSPECTIVE ON INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

Participants were recruited to the study through links established in the course of previous research on Indigenous housing careers (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008). In the course of the housing careers project, participants were informed of the planned homelessness research. They were asked if they had any family currently experiencing homelessness and whether or not they would be willing to provide introductions to their homeless relatives. All participants in that study stated that they had one or more homeless relatives to whom they would introduce the researchers. From these introductions, the present research recruited further participants using the technique of cumulative referral.

Homelessness is a presence in Indigenous lives in a way that it is not in the wider society. Most Indigenous people have relatives who are homeless, and homelessness forms a part of the housing careers of many Indigenous people. Therefore, a valid way to make contact with Indigenous homeless people is to approach Indigenous people who have housing and seek their help in contacting their homeless relatives. Our view is that using a careers approach makes it possible to provide models of paths to and from homelessness, further developing the understanding of Indigenous homelessness presented in established AHURI-funded research. We have therefore taken a two-pronged approach to investigating indigenous homelessness. Our data supports the view that in the explanation of Indigenous homelessness both the experiential and the institutional dimension must be considered. The experiential dimension takes into account life history, image of self and felt identity. In contrast, the institutional dimension takes into account the relationship between the individual and the institutions of the wider society.

In order to adequately capture data reflective of the institutional dimension, professionals from key community organisations were approached to provide their experience of working with Indigenous homeless people. According to ethics requirements, these professionals were assured that their anonymity would be protected. Therefore, none of the organisations where our participants were working are named in this report. However, we can report that all of the organisations whose staff members acted as participants in this research were non-government organisations. The services provided included financial counselling, health, age- and gender-specific mental health needs, aged care, housing, emergency housing and community development.

Within this perspective, it was possible to examine transitions between types of homelessness, the transitions from overcrowding to lack of shelter, from child homelessness to adult (dysfunctional) itinerancy, and in the cases of violence, pathways to family homelessness. To a limited extent, it has also been possible to examine the role of social and government institutions in homelessness careers.

In general terms, this research method belongs to that larger group of methods collectively referred to as 'qualitative', a term that has been used so extensively that it now means only that the analysis relies on data that is in the form of words rather than statistics. In this project, data will take the form of interview transcripts. Analysis of the data will employ the thematic method, in which overall patterns will be identified and related according to themes. This involves a rigorous process of relating the components of individual experience to form a comprehensive picture of collective experience (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Spradley 1979). This process will result in an

analysis which speaks to individual experience and contextualises it within the social framework in which individual experience originates.

This study will have its foundation firmly in established anthropological methods with regard to fieldwork and data collection and will call on sociological understandings of self in relation to society in the process of analysis. The reason for taking this approach is to arrive at a method of analysis which will situate personal or individual experience in the wider social context which structures individual experience. The conduct of this study is governed by the ethics requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007a; 2007b) and the Code of Ethics of the Australian Anthropological Society (Australian Anthropological Society 2003).

The data were gathered using ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979). In this context, the ethnographic interview means an unstructured or semi-structured interview focused on eliciting information which constitutes a cultural interpretation by the participant for the interviewer of his or her own story of, or experience with, housing and homelessness. This method is uniquely suited to the task of collecting data appropriate for the development of typologies as a means of understanding socio-cultural phenomena. It is important to recognise both the limitation and the advantage of textual data derived from interviews. First, interview data does not represent 'unbiased' information. Rather, it is interpretive information in that it represents the interpretation of the situation by the subject, and as such the subject stands between the interviewer and the experience, and bears witness to that experience. However, this witnessing arises from the collective nature of the subject's life experience, and interview data is therefore a true and accurate representation of how the experience is to be understood in the context of the subject's everyday life.

2.1 Data collection

A schedule of interview topics was drawn up to ensure comparability of data across the research sites (Appendix 1). According to the situation, the interviewer could refer to the schedule in hard copy, completing it in the interview setting, or if this was not appropriate, the interviewer would cover the same topics within the interview without reference to the hard copy schedule. Interviews were open and not restricted to the topics covered by the interview schedule.

Collection of interview data occurred in a three-stage process.

1. The researchers described the study by taking the participant through the description of the project as it was set out in the ethics instrument.

2. The clearance form was signed by both the participant and the senior researcher. With this, the individual formally became a participant in the research. The ethics instrument with both signatures and the researchers' contact details was returned to the participant.

3. The interview commenced.

During such interviewing, it was necessary to forestall the initiation of the interview until the signatures had been obtained and participants had been fully informed of their rights over the information contained in the interview, and the researchers' obligations to protect the participants' anonymity.

Most interviews lasted about an hour, with the shortest being half an hour and the longest taking more than two hours

2.2   Perspective on Indigenous homelessness

In our positioning paper, we reviewed several perspectives on Indigenous homelessness (Berry, MacKenzie, Briskman and Ngwenga 2001; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992; 2003a; Keys Young 1998; Memmott 2003). We noted that these definitions reflected three things. First, they reflect the developing understanding of Indigenous homelessness; second, they reflect the method of data gathering and analysis; and third, they reflect the nature of the particular research questions that the various studies were designed to address. The most influential appear to have been the understandings established by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) and Keys Young (1998).

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992, 2003a) sought a means of counting the homeless generally and did so by differentiating categories of homelessness based on access to a "minimum community standard of shelter/housing which consisted of the equivalent of a small rented flat with a bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom" (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003a: 12). They distinguished between primary homelessness (those without accommodation), secondary homelessness (those with no homes of their own who moved among the homes of friends and relations, refuges etc.), and tertiary homelessness (those with housing which is close to but below the normal standard). Their tripartite definition was adapted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for use in the 2001 Australian Census (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003a) which it has continued to use. Chamberlain and MacKenzie take a population view of homelessness as a sociological phenomenon and seek to describe homeless populations through descriptive statistical analysis.

Of significance is Chamberlain and MacKenzie's effort to take account of cultural differences in the application of homelessness categories, noting that there exist culturally recognised exceptions to the typification of homeless states which include 'seminaries, gaols, and student halls of residence' (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003a: 12). This recognition of cultural exceptions which are understood by the wider society sets a precedent for the recognition of cultural exceptions understood by minority cultural groups.

Keys Young's purpose was to provide a critique of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program against the background of Indigenous homelessness as it was understood by both practitioners and Indigenous homeless people. To this end, heconducted a program of qualitative interviews across of a range of Indigenous communities and organisations, including key government departments representing all states and territories. In the results of this research he introduced the notion of spiritual homelessness which has since remained a part of the general understanding of Indigenous homelessness.

Other studies have taken the understandings and definitions developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie and Keys Young and utilised them for the further development of categories which can be used to describe the Indigenous homeless experience.

Berry *et al.* (2001) conducted a number of workshops in Victoria aimed at providing input to the Victorian Homelessness Strategy in particular, and to investigate the nature of Indigenous homelessness in Victoria generally. Their report emphasised that Indigenous culture leads to the distinctiveness of the Indigenous experience of homelessness. Berry *et al.* queried the utility, or appropriateness, of Chamberlain and MacKenzie's (1992) tripartite definition of homelessness. They note the possibility that the experience of homelessness may vary among cultural groups, querying whether or not the imposition of one policy definition can really account for the cultural variety

of experience. Berry *et al.* (2001) raise the matter that this approach has the potential to become an issue of access and equity in service delivery. This is reflected in their workshops with Indigenous participants, in which they found that the focus of concern was with the ways in which the Indigenous experience of homelessness raised a range of issues and needs that current modes of service delivery did not address.

Memmott *et al.* (2003) present a typology which they derived both from their own previous research and that of the key sources referred to above. Like Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) they distinguish homeless types according to access to secure and adequate housing, and like Keys Young (1998), they include a category of spiritually homeless people. Under the category of insecurely housed persons, they include a subcategory of 'dysfunctionally mobile persons', which was alluded to by Berry *et al.* (2001).

Memmott and Chambers (2005) conducted a detailed study of Indigenous homelessness in inner-city Sydney. Their study investigates both primary and secondary homelessness; however, its greatest strength is its presentation of Indigenous primary homeless group life. The presentation of their data is detailed and we will therefore use their report in presenting a comparative analysis of the situation in Western Australia and Sydney.

There is no study of Indigenous homelessness that provides a detailed analysis of secondary homelessness, nor is there a study which provides a reading of the ways in which Indigenous socio-cultural organisation structures Indigenous homelessness. These two points constitute the original contributions of this research. We present these in the context of case study material of the Indigenous experience of primary and secondary homelessness.

Tertiary homelessness, housing which is close to but below the community standard, is dealt with as a separate issue in this report. There exist entire Indigenous communities which could be included within this category of homelessness. One such community is Nillir Irbanjin in the Shire of Broome. This community will be discussed in Chapter 5.

2.2.1   Secondary homelessness

An indication of the incidence of Indigenous secondary homelessness can be drawn from the statistics on household overcrowding (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2009). The proportion of Indigenous adults who experienced household overcrowding during 2004–05, in remote and very remote regions such as Carnarvon and Broome has been put at nearly 30%; in the major cities 11.3%; and for the whole of Australia, 17% of Indigenous adults were experiencing household overcrowding.

Table 1: Overcrowding by remoteness, Indigenous persons aged 18 years and over, 2004–05, (per cent)

Major cities	*Inner regional*	*Outer regional*	*Remote or very remote*	*Australia*
11.3	8.9	16.1	29.2	16.9

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009b): 35

It was therefore important to make it clear that we were seeking participation across a range of shelter provisions, not only those living rough, and this facilitated the recruitment of a participant group made up of both practitioners and Indigenous homeless people. We sought to recruit participants to our study who were experiencing either primary or secondary homelessness (cf. Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992), that is:

1. those who were without conventional housing, or 'living rough'; and

2. those who had found temporary accommodation with relations.

Including members of the Aboriginal community and practitioners, we interviewed a total of 76 participants.

Table 2: Participants by place, gender and professional status

Number of participants	Indigenous women	Indigenous men	Professionals employed by service providers	Total participants
Perth	12	0	2	14
Carnarvon	7	2	18	27
Broome	13	8	14	35
Total	32	10	34	76

3 PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS

How do Indigenous people become homeless? The primary difference between practitioners and community participants in responding to this question was that practitioners focused first on structural features including lack of facilities, inappropriate use of facilities, issues of policy and practice, and prevailing economic conditions, and then linked sociological problems to these structural features. For practitioners, the central point of the narrative was getting people out of the homeless state. Community participants focused on their own stories involving overcrowding and family conflict, poverty, gaol time, unemployment, substance misuse, cultural responses to death and responses to the removal of children by child protection authorities. For the Indigenous homeless themselves, the central point of the narrative was how they had become homeless.

3.1 The practitioners' narratives

The narratives regarding pathways to Indigenous homelessness according to professional practitioners employed by NGO service providers expressed four distinct themes. These were:

→ life circumstances; those aspects of the individual's life experience which were considered to be significant in the context of homelessness;

→ local policy and practice; local management of Indigenous homelessness by service providers and local government.

→ facilities; local shortage or lack of housing or shelter options; and

→ economy; the way the national economic trend affects the local housing and employment markets.

The last two points include circumstances in which services which said to be available are not provided due to the failure of local service providers.

Practitioners view life circumstances as being imposed upon by the other factors, which are completely external to and thus impervious to change by Indigenous homeless people. One such circumstance is imprisonment.

The number of Indigenous prisoners rose 37% between 2001 and 2008. The number of male prisoners to female prisoners was 6,129 to 565 in 2008. Western Australia has the highest number of Indigenous prisoners in Australia (Fitzgerald 2009). The high rate of Indigenous imprisonment may explain why time spent in gaol was mentioned so regularly by our participants. The dominance of men in the gender balance of the Indigenous prison population may explain why it was that, while our informants were aware of the incarceration of Indigenous women, those of our participants who had been prisoners were all men. Most of the Indigenous people we spoke to had a kinsman who either was in gaol or had been in gaol, and practitioners cited it as a significant factor in explaining homelessness among Indigenous men. Both participant groups commonly referred to the problem of time spent in gaol as 'gaol time'.

3.1.1 Failure of pre-release services

If a man is illiterate and if, while he is in prison, he is without the support of someone who can read him his mail and help him to manage the fallout from bills, and other unmet obligations, he may default on rent payments to his public housing provider and his lease is therefore cancelled. There are a variety of support services offered to prisoners, both during the whole of the period of imprisonment and targeted services

prior to release which include obtaining legally acceptable identification, making application for housing and so forth. Centrelink, for example, employs Prison Liaison Officers whose task it is to provide a pre-release service assisting prisoners who are 21 days away from release in making application for the appropriate Centrelink payment (Australian Government (Centrelink) 2008a; 2008b). If, when the man goes to prison, the various support services which are supposed to operate within the prison do not reach him for various reasons, then upon his release from gaol, he may be destitute, have no legal identification, and be homeless. His partner and children may have had to move on if they were evicted when the rent was not paid, and he must now apply for housing as a single man. He finds himself well down the list of prioritised applicants for housing. If unsupported, this man will certainly be homeless for at least 18 months and during this time he may return to a cycle of drug and alcohol abuse, and potential recidivism. His drug and alcohol issues, and the loss of his partner and children, are a matter of life circumstance, but the effect of these circumstances have been exacerbated by the collective failures of practice, of poor policy follow-through, and a lack of housing fallback facilities such as a hostel or halfway house. Together these act to shape his life circumstances in less than appropriate ways.

3.1.2   Failure to reintegrate

A variation on this narrative is that when a person is released from either prison or from drug and alcohol rehabilitation, he or she is supplied with transportation to the town nearest their home. However, arrangements are often not made for reintegration into the community by way of supported housing, counselling, or education and training. With no other particular goals, and no means of ongoing support, the released prisoner or rehabilitated addict might return to the lifestyle they led prior to prison or rehabilitation. As well as a renewal of drug and alcohol dependency, one of the results of this is often homelessness.

3.1.3   Alcohol and violence in child homelessness

On account of alcohol abuse, the home may become the venue for gatherings which result in intoxication, and sometimes violent behaviour, which may include the physical and sexual abuse of women and/or children in the household. Children are sometimes at risk from visitors as well. In response to these circumstances, children may leave home. Sometimes this is only temporary and when the circumstances improve, the children return. However, if the home continues to operate as a venue for alcohol and/or drug abuse, these circumstances may drive the children away permanently, in which situation they find shelter with various relations around town. In the process they have learned to protect themselves through fighting, and to support themselves by engaging in humbugging, and robbery through breaking-and-entering. In the process of fending for themselves by these means, they commit crimes. Hardened by their home-lives as well as the lack of it, gaol is not necessarily a fearful prospect. Indeed, prison can represent a semblance of stability. Some say they look forward to it because of the provision of regular meals in prison, or by entering the juvenile justice system.

Practitioners do not see this as an inevitable cycle because children could be supported by services including emergency housing, counselling, education and training. These are often not available, and so through the failure of practice and facilities, one of the few ways in which structural factors might be brought to bear on the individual's life circumstances in a positive way, is lost.

3.1.4 Alcohol and violence in domestic violence

A woman who is subject to domestic violence may eventually leave her partner. If she has children then, nearly always, she takes her children with her. She may be able to find shelter in a refuge and from there apply for and obtain another public housing home. However, a man sometimes pursues his partner under these circumstances, and the woman may be forced to move several times. This process can take a year or more, during which time the woman has had to flee, leaving all her goods and chattels behind. The woman accumulates debt through broken leases, and sometimes damage to the property. If she reports the damage to the police and obtains a police complaint file number she may be excused the debt, but often women are fearful in these circumstances; they tend to simply flee rather than reporting any incidents to the police, who are also sometimes feared.

There is some discretion allowed for in the decisions of DoH officers when there is no police report of either domestic violence or damage, but the nature of this discretion is not described in the DoH policy and guidelines manual (Western Australia. Department of Housing 2009). However, Broome and Perth practitioners said that DoH requires domestic violence victims to repay half the cost of damages done by the partner. If this is the case, it may be one expression of this power of discretion. In any case, practitioners clearly regarded the practice of DoH officers wanting in this situation.

The linked factors in the domestic violence pathway to homelessness are similar to those in the case of homeless Indigenous children who have survived abusive home-lives. However, it is harder for practitioners to change the domestic violence narrative because, unless the woman herself makes a formal complaint to the police, they have no way of dealing with a woman's violent ex-partner. Clearly there are a variety of other factors imposing on this narrative.

For example, the booming economic conditions have created a shortage of low-rent private housing, which has forced more people into the public housing system. This has had the flow-on effect of creating a shortage of public housing (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008). There was already an Australia-wide shortage of public housing because of the policies of the former Federal Government which funded CRA in preference to maintaining the supply of public housing (Perrett 2008; Tenants' Advice Service 2007). Practitioners interviewed for this research reported that women in refuges seemed to be waiting for increasing amounts of time before they could obtain public housing and found it more difficult to access low-rent private housing. Despite the global economic decline in early 2009, the situation of housing shortage and high rents is still current and while the Federal Government has announced a multi-million dollar program of Indigenous public housing construction, this will take time to have an effect on the public housing shortage (Macklin 2009).

3.2 Place-specific factors in homelessness pathways narratives

There are place-specific turns on these narratives. For example, Broome has no dedicated men's hostel, but it does have the Men's Outreach Centre (MOC) which provides a day service for homeless Indigenous and non-Indigenous men starting with breakfast, laundry and shower facilities, and a kitchen, dining and lounge room that are available to clients until the close of business. MOC also provides a counselling service which assists men in the Broome Prison with public housing applications, organising identification documents, and registering with CentreLink preparatory to release. As well, counsellors try to interest prison inmates in literacy training and

further and technical education. They provide general counselling and evening seminars to any man around the town who is interested in hearing about topics such as personal banking, literacy, men's health issues and so on.

In this regard Broome is better situated than Carnarvon where there are no men's services. Practitioners in Carnarvon see this as a crucial weakness in their capacity to ameliorate the problem of homelessness in the town because men's issues of substance abuse and violence are an important element of the linked factors in pathways to homelessness. The practitioners are in discussion about how to achieve a men's service. At the time of this research the utility of a men's shed versus a pickup service for inebriated men were being considered.

As stated in several interviews, funding had been granted to establish a Sober Up Shelter in 2003, but by the close of the financial year in 2008 the funding was still unused and so it was returned to the State Office of Crime Prevention. The problem was finding a site for the shelter which was agreeable to the non-Indigenous community and the Shire. There are similar circumstances in the Redfern area in Sydney, where the NSW State Department of Health has, for over a decade, tried to establish a facility that deals with various kinds of substance addictions, but the facility remains subject to a 'not in my back yard' (NIMBYism) syndrome, that continues to thwart the plan (Shaw 2007).

Carnarvon practitioners cited the town's 'move on' policy as contributing to, rather than solving, homelessness. However, given the town's lack of shelter facilities, other solutions are difficult to find in Carnarvon.

Carnarvon also has lost its old age facility. The Olive Laird aged care facility was closed in 2007 (Baston 2007). All residents were transferred to aged care facilities in the town of Geraldton which is 380 kilometres south of Carnarvon. Elderly Indigenous residents have found the move distressing and some have since returned to Carnarvon to live with family. However, these elderly Indigenous people were in aged care because their age-related health problems made it difficult for their families to look after them at home. In a small number of cases, this has resulted in the elderly person becoming 'primary homeless'. Other Indigenous former residents of Olive Laird have found their own ways back to Carnarvon and occasionally enter a state of primary homelessness.

Elderly people often find it distressing to be shifted from facility to facility but the attachment to place that is such a crucial element in Indigenous identity compounds the distress. For this reason, the lack of an aged care facility within an Indigenous person's home country can become a pathway to homelessness.

The issue of lack of shelters or hostels of various kinds is an issue common to practitioners' concerns in all research locations except Perth. The reason for this may have to do with inter-agency communication in country towns as opposed to the city. Given the smaller size of the professional community in a country town, and the limited number of food, shopping and similar outlets, the members of a country town professional community are very likely to meet frequently and exchange views, with the result that a consolidated viewpoint on a particular issue will quickly develop among them. In the city, the far greater size of the professional community and the wide geographical spread of agencies throughout the metropolitan area make it correspondingly unlikely that regular and frequent casual contact among practitioners will occur. They are therefore more likely to develop discrete agency viewpoints as opposed to the integrated, issue-focused views which were expressed in the country towns. In any case, while expressed in parochial terms, the need for short-term, emergency, transitional or problem-focused housing is viewed as an important factor

inhibiting practitioners' capacities to interrupt the links among factors which form pathways to homelessness.

Broome practitioners made some statements of interest regarding the flow-on effects of the Northern Territory (NT) Emergency Response, popularly referred to as the 'Intervention'. According to their experience, when a community in the NT is placed under the Intervention, the conditions placed on that community apply to its members regardless of whether they are living in the community or not. Some visitors to Broome found that they could not access their bank accounts because income sequestration was one of the conditions placed upon their home community. They were therefore without means of support or means to access transportation back to their home communities.

Some Broome practitioners felt that a significant component of homeless Indigenous people had come into Broome in response to the sanctioning of full-strength beer in Fitzroy Crossing or Halls Creek. That is, people from these communities came to Broome specifically to obtain full-strength beer. However, other practitioners disagreed with this. According to these practitioners, patterns of mobility in and out of Broome had not really changed very much since the alcohol restrictions had come in. People from a wide range of communities have been coming into Broome for some time on a seasonal basis. A lot of movement occurs around law time[4], which is in December to January. Just as the law season begins, quite a number of older boys and young men come into Broome, apparently to flee from elders who want to put them through the law. As the season finishes, people come into Broome prior to returning to their home communities. One practitioner said that she had noticed that Indigenous community visitor numbers were at their lowest just before the tax rebate cheques are issued every year and then built up again quickly after they had been issued. Community people also come in numbers to Broome for cultural festivals and sporting events. The field work for this research was carried out in early July of 2008 which is just prior to the issue of tax rebate cheques. It was confirmed by several participants that the number of Indigenous visitors from remote communities had dropped significantly about this time.

Practitioners in both Broome and Perth cite traditional aspects of Indigenous people's background as making it difficult for Indigenous people to manage housekeeping and bill payments. In both places, loss of housing through mismanagement of bills and failure to carry out housekeeping constituted one pathway to homelessness. Broome practitioners said that some of their traditional background clients remember the homemakers' service that was provided by the old State Welfare Department up until around 1980. According to practitioners, a number of their clients regretted the loss of this service and asked if it might be brought back as a means of preventing Indigenous public housing tenants from losing their homes on account of non-payment of rent and utilities or for more lenience regarding the state of properties.

An important statement about matters of policy, which is general to both WA and NSW, was made by a Sydney Practitioner who reported that what Aboriginal people feared most was change to policies of the state housing department (Housing NSW) and CentreLink.[5] This echoes longstanding research findings (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; Birdsall 1990). Specifically, changes in policy mean rearrangement of

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[4] 'Law Time' refers to that time of the year when Indigenous people carry out their major ceremonies, particularly the rites of male initiation. The precise timing of these ceremonies varies around Australia. In north-central Arnhem Land this occurs September/October, just before the start of the dry season (Altman 1987). In the Gascoyne, the Pilbara and the western Kimberley, it occurs during the summer school holidays, roughly from the beginning of December to around mid-January.

[5] Thanks to Wendy Shaw for this information.

departments, new acronyms, reallocation of responsibility for various programs and services among existing departments, agencies and officers and all of this must be learned again by those who use these services. Relationships with various departmental officers and agency personnel are carefully developed by Indigenous clients because if practitioners know their clients: (1) there is no need for the client to reiterate his or her story each time the service is accessed; and (2) it is possible that the practitioner will come to know and care about the client, resulting in the continuity of service provision. It is burdensome to lose these relationships and have to rebuild them with different departmental personnel.

3.3 Pathways to homelessness according to Indigenous homeless participants

Indigenous homelessness narratives are personal stories, and the teller does not usually relate his/her story in a way that draws on a wider, or group experience of homelessness among Indigenous people generally. In this way they are distinguished from practitioners' narratives in which generalisations are one of the signal features of the narrative. Indigenous participants' stories are differentiated according to the status of the teller. These statuses are couples with children, single mothers, single men (who may be late adolescent boys or younger men aged into their 30s), mature-age single men (40+), and single women of all ages. In the narratives of Indigenous homeless people, the forces which structure the experience of homelessness are:

1. the family and other cultural matters

2. violence

3. alcohol and drug issues

4. employment status

5. the real estate market

6. time spent in gaol, and

7. public housing-related issues

3.3.1 Family and other cultural matters

Deserting the home is a well-known response to a death in the family in some north Australian Indigenous communities. However, the participants in this research reported that this practice was generally restricted to very closest members of the departed's family. One man from a Kimberley community, for example, had been brought up from a very young child by his older sister who was like a mother to him. When she died, he said that he simply could not go on living in the home he and his partner and children had shared with her. They decided to leave their jobs in their community and go to live in Broome.

Some of the 'boys', the older adolescent boys and younger men from the community accompanied them. They were some of the man's cousins and brothers, and came along so that the man would not be too sad while he was getting over the death of his sister. He had a particularly close relationship with these cousins and referred to them as his 'cousin-brothers'. This is a common expression among Indigenous people in the north of WA, and women likewise will refer to their cousin-sisters.

They went first to the woman's aunt's house. The others came to the aunt's house too. Once in Broom, they wanted to get drunk and have parties. When this started, the aunt requested the man and his wife to make the boys leave. Because the boys had come with them especially to be with their cousin-brother, the man and his wife felt

obliged to leave the house with them. They had nowhere else to go and so they arranged with the aunt that the children could remain with her and took the boys with them and they all made a camp together in the sand hills across the road from the big hotels along Roebuck Bay.

Figure 1: Homeless man, Broome, July 2008

Photo: Birdsall-Jones

Figure 2: Young men visiting Broome, July 2008

Photo: Birdsall-Jones, Broome, 2008.

In the same camp was another couple with a very different story that ended in the same form of homelessness. The woman's father had come to Broome for dialysis and wanted his daughter to accompany him. A few of the boys came along after them. They started drinking and her dad didn't like it, and so he asked her to take them away and they too went to live in the camp in the sand hills. She and her husband joined the others from their community who were already at the camp. Her father comes to visit every day, and she and her husband go to his place every day to shower, do their laundry and make his dinner.

Although Indigenous people depend on their families for support in a wide variety of circumstances, there are some families in which such support is not always forthcoming. In one example, a single mother's children were taken into care because of family alcohol abuse in her home. She turned to her family for help in curtailing her drinking so she could get her children back and in her words, "they just laughed at me." They apparently had no interest in helping her to stop drinking. She became clinically depressed, walked away from her public housing home, and lived "rough", that is, in a state of primary homelessness without improvised shelter, for around 18 months. In the end, it was family that helped her, but not the relations she had been so close to and who had come to her house to drink.

Single mothers generally depend on the support of their mothers and other senior women in their extended families. When this support is absent for one reason or another, single mothers become vulnerable to stress and related mental health issues which can lead to homelessness. Single mothers of adolescents may find themselves unable to guide or control their children, whose behaviour sometimes places them in danger. Mothers can become very worried and despondent about the welfare of their adolescent children. Clinical depression is not uncommon; with depression it becomes difficult to manage bills. If rents go unpaid, evictions may and often do proceed. Some of these women find shelter in refuges or the homes of their relations, and others live rough.

Single mothers may have first left home when they were adolescents in response to family violence, well before they have children. Once they have children, they may come to depend on the families of friends, who offer shelter for a time. They occasionally find shelter in refuges, waiting for an offer of public housing from the 'wait turn' list. Women escaping domestic violence also go to refuges; however, for these women the situation may well be complicated by the child's father. On occasion, rejected men have been known to kidnap children. Some men seek out their fugitive partners in order to continue their violent relationships. Fear of these events has driven women to desert the home, and seek shelter elsewhere. Whether she chooses to go to a refuge or the home of relations depends on whether she considers that her best chance of protection is to stay within the community of her family, or alternatively that her best chance is in a refuge.

In either situation, if she does not notify the public housing provider that she has deserted her home, then she will be charged rent until she either returns to the home or notifies the public housing provider that she and her children have left. We are unable to say how frequently this happens, but given the frequency of our contacts with such women over the course of several research projects, we believe this is not an unusual course of events (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; McKenzie, Rowley, Brereton, Phillips and Birdsall-Jones 2009)

3.3.2 Violence

When family violence, domestic violence or child abuse occurs in the family, it constitutes a destabilising force. In some of the accounts, women who are the victims

of domestic violence have taken their children and left their men, which often leads to all becoming homeless. Children who are the victims of abuse will sooner or later leave home. It is significant that Indigenous women and their children constituted the most frequent users of SAAP services, with the Northern Territory and Western Australia constituting areas of particular concern in this regard (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008; 2009).

The attitude of young single mothers versus the adolescent boys and young men contrasts sharply. No single mother we interviewed had anything good to say about being homeless, or that she considered she had chosen to be homeless. However, a few of the boys/young men began their interviews by saying 'I'm not homeless really, I'm just travelling around'.

One of the young men left home at 10 for reasons not given. He did not return until 10 years later, aged 20. He left home again at some point on account of family violence and is now aged 25. Generally, this man sought to represent himself as having a very good time, but he did appear to have serious health issues. He stated that he had been drinking heavily for long enough to have reached the stage where he cannot eat properly.

> Mainly don't eat. I eat I vomit. I can only eat when I'm real drunk. I don't eat breakfast. No dinner, only supper (Broome, July 2008).

At the time of this interview he was sleeping at his sister's house but he was apparently there on sufferance because he could not remain there during the day. He lived rough when he was kicked out of his sister's house altogether and had discovered that this is a hard and dangerous way to live. He found that he couldn't find anywhere to sleep at night, nor could he remain in one place for any length of time, without the risk of being set upon and beaten up, or attracting the notice of the police. When he lives rough, therefore, he has to walk the streets until daybreak and then look for someplace to sleep where he is unlikely to be moved on by the police.

This young man was one of a small group of brothers and cousins, two of whom said that the reason they had left home was to get away from the fighting that went on in their homes. They travelled together, found shelter together, ate together and generally watched out for one another. One had had a traineeship as a ranger in their home country, and one had recently graduated from an Indigenous sports academy. Before they had left home, these two had good job prospects.

In addition to violence of the kind that occurs within the household, violence can also occur among the extended kin group. Feuding may be an intermittent event, but ongoing fighting that occurs among the extended kin group does not occur within households. Feuding can be a kind of vendetta and so it is pursued over time and distance. Accounts for this research reveal little about the causes of feuding, which is mostly beyond the parameters of this research. However, the outcomes of feuding, which may result in homelessness, are relevant to this research. The effects on a household that is victimised in the course of feuding may include homelessness.

> All his cousins used to come around and get drunk and fight and smash things. We told them to go away and not to come around but they came anyway. We called the police but we got no help there. We were in a block of flats and the neighbours were all white. The neighbours all complained to HomesWest[6] and so we got evicted. We lived with his nanna for a while (Broome, July 2008).

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[6] The WA public housing provider was reorganised with the change of government in 2008 and is now the Department of Housing. The corporate entity HomesWest has been discontinued, but because the change is so recent many West Australians still refer to the public housing provider as HomesWest

In 2007, this couple lived in Perth. In the course of the feud, their first child was born. When they lost their home they went to live with the man's maternal grandmother in another suburb of Perth. Moving to another suburb was not enough to resolve the feud. In the course of further feud-related violence the man was seriously injured. They moved to Broome and sought shelter with his mother. Shortly after this, their second child was born. They now live in Broome with his mother, in one bedroom with their two children. They hope to have a home if their application to DoH is eventually granted. Until then, they will live in a situation of secondary homelessness. At the time of this interview, they had lived this way for nearly a year. The feuding has not followed them to Broome.

In another example, a single mother who had been the victim of domestic violence became a target during feuding. As a result of the need to flee that accompanies both domestic violence and feuding, she became homeless and acquired a considerable debt to the public housing provider. This debt was a combination of unpaid rent and the costs of damage to her house which, because it had been left vacant, was taken over by squatters. After a period of secondary homelessness, she acquired housing through an assisted housing program and has paid off her debt. The issue now is to have her tenancy record amended to show she is a competent tenant, so that she can leave the assisted housing program.

3.3.3 Alcohol and drug issues

According to the participants of this research, 'the drink' (i.e. excessive alcohol consumption) interacts with other factors in pathways to homelessness. Boys, or young men, may leave home on account of family violence, but then disqualify themselves as desirable visitors through excessive alcohol consumption. A woman may lose her children because her relations use her house for drinking parties; she may also have a drinking issue, which might result in the loss of her home due to unpaid rent. A household which vacates the home on the death of an important relation may find shelter with other relations, but if drinking cousins and brothers follow them, they risk absolute homeless.

The young men interviewed for this research tended to talk about their homelessness and their drinking lifestyle as a kind of adventure. However, interviews with older men who have lived with alcohol issues for a long time suggest that as they grow older, the young men will find that repeatedly being told to leave their various relations' homes tends to become burdensome. Below is a short history of a 50-year-old man's movements over a period of two years.

> I been here (at his cousin's house) for two weeks. I was living with my sister, she's up on the corner there, but she asked me to move out. Before that I was living with my daughter but she kicked me out, on account of my drinking. I was in Carnarvon before (Broome, July 2008).

This man had a succession of partners who maintained a home and raised the children. By the time he was in his late 30s, his last partner had left him and he has had no home of his own since then, although he has had more or less regular work. It was clear that his situation of secondary homelessness was of considerable concern to him. This concern is echoed in the interview of a Carnarvon man, aged in his mid-30s.

> I want a flat on my own … I'm living in my mother's house here. Lived here all my life … I thought I'd get a flat on my own with my brother. Instead of getting kicked out all the time every where I go (Carnarvon, August 2008).

The men we interviewed did not cite their drinking as a reason for their housing troubles. The women who engaged in a drinking lifestyle tended to be very clear that their drinking was a problem in that it was the cause of their homelessness or the result of being made homeless, the removal of their children, or domestic violence. However, there were exceptions to this representation and there were women who did not see their drinking as a problem.

> Everybody complains about the house party. Surely you can do that in your own place. Have a party. I'd rather get a house away from here where no one can complain, about my music and the noise. If I got a house I'd want to have parties, people come in. Maybe if I lived on my own, it would be better. People could come in, we could still have a party, have people around. Might be getting kicked out in a month or so (Carnarvon, August 2009).

3.3.4 Employment status and the real estate market

> He's working for the shire, main roads and that. It's decent money, but they don't supply housing to the ordinary workers, just the professional staff. They don't seem to care about the operators like him (Broome participant, July 2008).

The problem for this woman's partner is that the man's income makes them ineligible for public housing. In Broome and Carnarvon, the cost of private rental is very high and it would be difficult to afford. It is within their means for them to meet the cost of private rental, however, they cannot gain approval for tenancy from real estate agents. In Perth, where the rents, although high, are more affordable than in the north, they would still have difficulty being approved for private tenancy. This is caused primarily by the high occupancy rates being experienced across the state. Although there are few complaints of the kind of racism reported in the regions, anecdotal evidence suggests strongly that those most likely to gain private tenancy approval are non-Indigenous 'white' Australian professional couples with no children and no pets while the least likely to be approved for private tenancy are young, single people and Aboriginal families.

There is also the problem of obtaining employment. There are far more jobs and opportunities for licensed machine operators in the north of WA than in the south. Therefore, even if men and their families were to come south for the lower rents, they would have far less chance of finding employment. These households are therefore living in situations of secondary homelessness. They find accommodation with a series of friends and relations, the parents and children living altogether in one bedroom, or split between different households.

> I got kids in Derby, with their mum. I can't have them to stay with me because I got no place for them. Me and [his partner] have been together 4 years but we don't live together. I sleep here [at his mother's] on the back veranda behind the fridge. She stays with the kids over at her dad's. We want to get priority listing for her and her baby. Can't. We been two years just on the wait turn list. HomesWest does a survey every six months to see if people still want a place. What are they, simple? What do they think, we want to keep living like this? Course we still want a house. Every three months we have to put a letter in to stay on the list. We live split up because we're homeless. It's too cold for the kids outside at night time, they couldn't stay with me here. [His son], he's 4 years old. Maybe put him on the list when he's 12, maybe he'll get a house when he's 18 and we can go live with him (Broome, July 2008).

This young man's mother has tried to arrange her house as best she can to fit in those of her children, cousins, siblings and their children who are homeless. She has filled

every room in her house with beds and bunk beds. Her carport and her back veranda have also been pressed into service. Her sons are employed, but the nature of the real estate market in Broome prevents them from obtaining housing for their own partners and children. Their incomes are in excess of the eligibility limits for public housing, bond assistance and CRA. The only remaining way they can obtain public housing is through applications made by their partners who must apply as single mothers.

Employment therefore can place Indigenous men in difficult positions. They have obtained work and should therefore be in a position to provide for their families, but they cannot fulfil this most basic need. There is a feeling of having been cheated among these young men. As one of our participants exclaimed:

> I came up here to work, they want Aboriginal people to work, I kept my part of the bargain. Why can't they keep theirs? (Interview, Broome, July 2008).

3.3.5 Time spent in gaol

"Gaol time" was cited by some of the research participants as the reason why some men were currently homeless. While we are aware that Indigenous women also become homeless following release from gaol, none of our participants mentioned gaol time in relation to women.

Three men talked about their experience of secondary homelessness following gaol time. Their experience varies according to each man's capacity to navigate the public housing application process.

One man had been released from gaol a number of years previously and it would appear that he has lived in a condition of secondary homelessness ever since.

> I was in Roebourne but I left there. I was in trouble with the law years ago, that's why I went there. There's nothing to do there. I thought I'd get a flat on my own with my brother. Instead of getting kicked out all the time every where I go. (Carnarvon, August 2008)

Another man had been released from prison 7 months previously and had to fight hard to obtain housing.

> I was just on wait turn and the minimum wait for that is five years. About my priority listing, the woman on the counter said oh you missed out, you have to wait another year. What was I supposed to do for another year? So I had to appeal that … I went everywhere trying to get help. I'd go down to HomesWest there, and go to all of them; Centrelink, Centrecare, parole officer. I went back to my parole officer and told him about it. Re-entry couldn't help. I had to do it all myself. (Broome, July 2009)

One of the things that drove this man's effort to obtain housing was his need for a place to live with his son. He could not retain custody of his son unless he had housing acceptable to the Department of Child Protection (DCP. As well, he wanted to be able to live properly with his partner, and provide her with a home for her own children.

Finally, we have the situation of a man who had been released from prison a few days earlier. He had found temporary housing with some relations and was in the process of working his way through the application process.

> Just came on Tuesday from Casuarina. Did 12 months … I saw AVS [Aboriginal Visitors Scheme] when I was in prison, they come and visited me … I never put in for HomesWest… I seen peer support… I come down to

see HomesWest for a house. I got the form to get ID. Went to legal aid there, to get my birth certificate. (Broome, July 2008)

One difference between the man from Carnarvon and these two Broome men is their contact with practitioners. The Carnarvon man had sought no contact with any practitioner. He had made an application for public housing some years previously but clearly had never followed it up nor had he responded to any correspondence from the public housing provider. The Broome men have been proactive in obtaining housing. While it was too early to know whether the most recently released man would succeed in obtaining housing, he appears to be aware of the need to seek assistance. If he continues to utilise the services of relevant agencies, and if they make him aware of the ongoing requirements he must fulfil, then his chances of eventually exiting secondary homelessness are in his favour.

3.3.6   Public housing-related issues

Public housing-related issues most often are related to a lack of supply and, correspondingly, to the length of waiting lists. As noted in the discussion above, there are people experiencing secondary homelessness who are currently living in the overcrowded homes of their relations and are on the public housing waiting lists. Some people seem able to manage the public housing process better than others. The process includes application, acceptance, and placement on either the ordinary list (the 'wait turn' list) or the priority list. The public housing provider periodically sends out letters to applicants enquiring whether they wish to remain on the list. If no answer is received to one of these letters within a specified period of time, the applicant is removed from the list. When an application proceeds to the top of the list, applicants are warned that they must respond to an offer of housing within two days of receiving the letter of offer. There are appeals allowed regarding rejection of the application, placement on the priority list, being removed from the list and failing to respond in time to a letter of offer.

Among the participants for this research, the people who best managed the public housing waiting lists were women. By and large, they were cognisant of the process requirements. This is by no means a universal rule and we interviewed parents and childless couples who were clearly struggling with the process, but some were being assisted by practitioners from the NGOs. The people who had the least awareness of the process were young men, mature-age single men and women who were experiencing domestic violence or were leading a drinking lifestyle.

Earlier research demonstrates the deleterious effect of violence of all kinds on the individual's capacity to manage the public housing system or other aspects of personal and household affairs (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008). People whose daily lives are affected by any one of the various forms of violence outlined in this report are at risk of homelessness because of their diminished capacity to manage their affairs, that is, pay rent and other bills. Violence tends to drive the victims away from their homes, resulting in non-payment of rent, and sometimes results in damage to the property. The debt built up in this way renders the leaseholder – who may have fled the violence – ineligible for public housing either until the debt is paid off or until some arrangement to pay the debt in instalments is accepted by the public housing provider.

Among single men and adolescent boys, there was little understanding of the public housing process beyond the point of making the application. Some did not realise that the application needed to be accepted in order to be entered on the waiting lists. Few realised that letters from the public housing provider must be answered.

I put a application in up there, a couple years ago. I never heard nothing. (Carnarvon, August 2008).

A practitioner who was herself Indigenous explained some of the background to this problem.

It's very hard for them to get a house. A lot of the men from the communities, the last thing on their mind is to go to HomesWest because that's a women's issue. They trash it and the woman's left with tenant liability. Housing is a big issue, and the men don't like to get involved in it; full bloods that is.[7] Half caste men, yes, they're acclimatised to Western society (Broome, July 2008).

According to this practitioner, housing is a women's issue. The idea that housing is a woman's domain is consistent with the experiences of other researchers which suggests that urban-based Indigenous people are more likely to be aware of the process of obtaining housing than are Indigenous people living in both remote communities and town-based discrete Aboriginal communities (Memmott, Moran, Birdsall-Jones, Fantin, Kreutz, Godwin, Burgess et al. Forthcoming). Therefore, in a continuum of decreasing capacity to engage in the process of obtaining public housing, it is likely that the most disadvantaged people in Indigenous society are, in general terms, tradition-oriented men from remote area communities.

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[7] Indigenous people may use the terms 'half-caste' and 'full-blood' to describe cultural and historical differences among them. However, these terms are not open to use by non-Indigenous people and appear in this report only in the context of extracts of interviews.

4 THE NATURE OF THE HOMELESS EXPERIENCE

Broadly speaking, the nature of the homeless experience is shaped by whether or not the individual has access to housing, or shelter, which is off the street. If the individual lives rough, or on the street, or in a makeshift shelter, the experience may be categorised as primary homelessness. If she or he has been taken in by housed relations on a temporary basis, the experience is classified as secondary homelessness. Each form of homelessness presents its own set of problems, and there are qualities within each form which can significantly alter the experience. In primary homelessness, the most important issue is whether the individual has any shelter at all, versus no shelter. In secondary homelessness, the most important issue is whether or not the house is one in which the drinking lifestyle is allowed. This research indicates that both types of homelessness are significantly modified by the presence or absence of a drinking lifestyle.

4.1 Primary homelessness

Table 3: Primary homelessness risks and effects identified by research participants

	Street dwellers	*Campers*
Risk to person	Fighting, being mobbed	Likely to be sheltering with kinfolk, some protection
Risk to property	Easily robbed of clothing, belongings, particularly when asleep or intoxicated	• Shelter liable to be dismantled, removed or burned by council authorities or police • Difficult to do laundry, clothes become ruined
Health risk	• No way to bathe, wash clothes regularly • Exposure to weather • Unlikely to see doctor, undiagnosed physical, mental illness	• Known camps visited by health workers, who inform campers of access to bathing medical and laundry facilities • Moderate protection from weather
Drinking	• Humbugging often leading to assault • Health risk rises over time • May be stripped of clothes etc. if asleep	• Humbugging, but not as dangerous • Health risk rises over time
Conflict	May increase through short temper brought on through stress, drinking, drugs	May arise through short temper brought on by stress, drinking, drugs
Effect on children	• No children in this situation in participant group • Reports of children being removed	• Illness through exposure • At risk of any violence occurring in the camp • May be removed by DCP • Children may live separately from parents, with housed kinfolk
Effect on self	• Depression • Suicidal thoughts	• Depression • Shame, feel as if not in control • Spending too much to replace

• Tired of feeling/smelling dirty	spoiled clothing, food
• Ongoing sickness	• Nowhere to go when you get off work

In situations of primary homelessness, 'street dwellers' refers to those who are homeless and have absolutely no shelter. 'Campers' are those who had managed to establish a camp with varying degrees of furnishings. The most basic camp consisted of a tarpaulin hung to make a tent, and a campfire (see fig. 1).

Figure 3: Basic homeless camp, Broome

Photo: Corunna, Broome, 2008

The best consisted of one- or two-person tents for sleeping, tarpaulins hung to produce shade, and cooking facilities consisting of a campfire with a cooking grate, a board for food assembly, an ice chest for short-term food storage, a frying pan and some pots, cutlery and cooking tools, and cups and plates. The residents of each camp were kinfolk from the same communities.

Figure 4: Best homeless camp, one of five two person tents, with wind breaks

Photo: Corunna, Broome, 2008

Figure 5: Best homeless camp, shade tarpaulins

Photo: Birdsall-Jones and Corunna, Broome, 2008

Figure 6: Best homeless camp, cooking tools storage area

Photo: Birdsall-Jones and Corunna, Broome, 2008

Those living on the street reported more fear of assault. They also admitted to committing crimes such as shop-lifting because of hunger. Street dwellers reported being robbed of their few possessions, and general deterioration of health. Bathing and clothes washing is also difficult on the street.

All of the street-dwelling participants for this research were alcohol abusers, and although not mentioned, the abuse of drugs was also present. Participants reported that drinking worsens violence of all kinds, particularly the likelihood that humbugging will escalate into assault. Drinking can also lead to loss of possessions. Intoxication sometimes led to loss of outer wear, that is, trousers, shirts, skirts/dresses and shoes, through theft. None of the street dwelling participants had dependent children with them. One Perth woman's children had been taken from her by DCP and this was the reason that she became a street dweller. Also in Perth, another woman followed her adult homeless children, occasionally visiting kinfolk before going back to live on the street with her children.

The effects of this lifestyle on street dwellers are both physical and emotional/mental. Because of the lack of capacity to bathe or launder clothes, self esteem can suffer, particularly – as participants often mentioned – if they feel dirty, or as some described, 'smelly'. Street dwellers reported that illness was common, and in the absence of medical attention, their health would often deteriorate. Depression was commonly reported in these circumstances, and some expressed suicidal thoughts.

Campers reported their circumstances much more favourably than street dwellers. They were likely to be camping with relatives, which provided all with some measure of security. The risk of loss of property was still high because councils and police sometimes destroy the camps, with no notice provided. In Broome, camps have been burned and cleared while the campers were away during the day. This was very costly for the campers, who only acquired the makings of their camp gradually, using their fortnightly pensions to purchase their equipment piece by piece. In Redfern, homeless Indigenous people sometimes establish shelters on the footpath out of cardboard and similar materials. These shelters are not burned, but they are regularly removed by the rubbish collection service (Memmott and Chambers 2005).

The health risk to campers is reduced through the vigilance of visiting health and community workers who inform them of accessible laundry and bathing facilities, breakfast programs and soup kitchens, and health and medical services. The camps provide moderate protection from the weather.

The presence and abuse of alcohol will put campers at risk, through health- and violence-related concerns. Humbugging has been identified as a major problem but is less likely to rise to the levels of danger encountered by the street dwellers. While not all campers were drinkers before they became homeless, they sometimes resorted to alcohol use and abuse during the course of long-term homelessness.

There were no children among the campers who participated in this research. The parents among them had made other arrangements for their children as soon as they became homeless. Even if campers had become unwelcome at the homes of their relations, few of their housed relations turned children away from their homes.

4.2 Secondary homelessness

Table 4: Secondary homelessness risks, drinking versus non-drinking household

	Non-drinking household	*Drinking household*
Risk to person	Minimal	Possible physical conflict
Risk to property	Minimal	Possible loss of clothing, goods through 'borrowing' and outright theft
Health risk	Normal for Indigenous population	• Exacerbated through increased risk of violence, failure of domestic economy • Visitors coming and going through the night • Food gets stolen
Room density	• Although parents and children may all have to share one bedroom, their space is respected • May be able to put older boys to sleep in lounge room if in a non-drinking house	• Parents and children may have a room for themselves, but alcohol-affected people don't respect privacy • Cannot allow children to sleep in lounge room because of party behaviour at odd hours
Personal autonomy	• Householder makes the rules, you have no say • If important family members come to visit, you have to shift to someone else's place, give them the room • Limited privacy	• Householder makes the rules, you have no say • Very little privacy
Affect on kids	• Insufficient privacy for adolescents, girls in particular • Lack of focused parental attention because parents often stressed in this situation • Risk of behaviour problems • Behaviour problems can cause conflict among children and adults	• Often no breakfast • No privacy • Older kids may take up drinking • Younger kids stressed, behaviour changes for worse, trouble at school • May leave school because parent(s) unable to provide enough support • Very little chance of protecting children from abuse • Children likely to stay away for increasing periods of time until they take up primary homelessness, occasionally living with other kin
Affect on self in drinking household	• Shame, sharing room if kids too old • Depression • Get short-tempered, try not to hit kids	• Shame, not being able to provide basic safety, privacy for family • Shame, have to hide food away in order to guarantee supply

• Overcrowding, lack of personal autonomy lead to feeling of resentment toward host	• Spend too much money replacing stolen goods, eating out for every meal
• Guilt because cannot provide family with own home	• Depression
	• Short tempered, risk of family violence

For research participants who were experiencing secondary homelessness, their circumstances were modified by whether or not they were living in a drinking or a non-drinking household. Family members who would normally take in extended family were less likely to do so if that person happened to be a substance abuser. People who have a record of substance abuse with DoH are also less likely to be placed in public housing. Practitioners stated that in their experience, some homeless people turn to substance use (including alcohol) to survive the harsh conditions of living on the street. If they are suffering from a mental illness, this exacerbates the problem of substance abuse.

None of the participants were living in situations that conformed to standard room densities (Western Australia. Department of Housing 2009, Allocations Policy p.4). Among those who had been allocated bedroom space, at best they had a bedroom, which was shared by both parents and children, regardless of the children's gender or age. This was overwhelmingly regarded as the best option, under the circumstances. In other words, it was a 'liveable' short-term situation but was open to modification for the worse in drinking households.

To say that a household was a non-drinking household did not necessarily mean that no one could drink there. In some households, it did mean literally that no alcohol could be consumed on the premises and people who were drunk could not go there. In others, a non-drinking household meant that people could drink if they were 'quiet'. Quiet meant that they did not invite outsiders to the house to drink with them, did not hold parties, and were never violent. If the drinking began to be accompanied by any of these behaviours, the householder had to be a strong enough individual to ban the behaviour and evict those involved. If the householder (usually a woman) was not able to enforce the rules, the house would almost certainly turn into a 'drinking place'.

Among households that were not overcrowded, some allowed the drinking lifestyle and some were non-drinking. There were considerable advantages to being in a non-drinking household. The health risks were lower and there was a more predictable pattern to the days and nights. A non-drinking household would tend to settle down around the same time every night and so the older boys could be put to bed in the lounge/dining room. This reduced the shame attached to everyone sharing the same sleeping spaces, which was particularly important for adolescent girls and boys. It was also possible to run the household economy on a fair and equitable basis. Among the research participants, only the leaseholder paid the rent, but everyone else would 'chuck in' for utilities and food. There was no theft of food, clothing or other property reported in non-drinking, non-overcrowded households. However, there were still strong negatives involved in this situation of secondary homelessness. Parents keenly felt their inability to provide their children with a home of their own and this was likely to stress relationships between the parents and children. With limited privacy, children sometimes presented behavioural issues at school.

In non-overcrowded households where alcohol was consumed, the primary disadvantages arose from the decreased predictability of the living pattern. It was not possible for the older boys to sleep in the lounge/dining room because this space was

often used for other purposes, which includes alcohol consumption. Acquaintances of the householders would know if it was a 'drinking' household and sometimes visited at any time, no matter how late, looking for a drinking party. This increased license to visit the household at any time was reported to put adolescent girls at risk. Some of the risk came from alcohol-affected males who walked into the family bedroom without invitation or notice. However, the general laxity of control over the comings and going in the drinking households seemed to encourage adolescent boys to walk into the house during the day seeking out the girl known to be living there. Girls in this situation were reported by their mothers to be seriously upset by such behaviour. One mother reported that her teenaged daughter had begun drinking as a result of such stress. In this situation, parents might seek to protect their daughters by sending them to live elsewhere, such as with their relations. While this was effective in securing the safety of the girls and prevented them from taking up a drinking lifestyle, some mothers reported other concerns, such as lack of supervision with the result that the girls had stopped attending school.

There was very little chance for research participants in this secondary homeless situation to exercise budgeting – meals were often 'fast food'. Replacing stolen or missing clothing, and other items, also tends to place further strain on household budgets. The lack of cash flow and budgetary organisation often resulted in direct impacts on children, who might go to school without breakfast for instance, or attend school unprepared – without requisite school uniforms, shoes or books. Additionally, children sometimes missed out on food or sleep. Respondents also reported that food and clothing were often taken from such households, and the Carnarvon participants reported incidents of 'snowdropping' (stealing washing from clotheslines).

Indigenous people experiencing secondary homelessness in an overcrowded household in which alcohol abuse is present find that they cannot tolerate this situation for more than a few weeks and other research reports the same thing (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; McKenzie, Rowley, Brereton, Phillips and Birdsall-Jones 2009). Such households arise in a variety of ways, and it is not always homelessness, per se, which is the founding factor in their establishment.

On the occasion of a funeral, relations and friends gather from a range of destinations. Generally the household which was home to the departed is opened to the funeral visitors and on these occasions the house will be filled to its extreme capacity, sleeping as many as 10 or more to a room with many others in the lounge/dining area (Birdsall 1990). The relevance of this to homelessness is that among the number of relations who come to stay, homeless drinkers are usually not excluded from the extended kin group. These visitors sometimes stay on after the funeral because their alternative is primary homelessness.

A reported phenomenon among the Indigenous communities of Broome and Carnarvon is a situation in which drinkers come to live in the homes of their parents and grandparents as an alternative to primary homelessness. Occasions were mentioned where a two-bedroom non-drinking pensioner's flat has become a crowded drinking household. The resolution of this situation depends on the elderly pensioner's capacity to persuade the visitors to leave (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008). If the elderly person cannot do this, then the DoH may cancel the lease and that person thus becomes homeless. Practitioners in Broome report this having happened twice to one elderly man.

This said, it is important to understand that overcrowding is not an Indigenous cultural phenomenon. Household overcrowding arises anywhere that a severe, long-term housing crisis occurs. This has been shown to be the case both nationally and internationally.

In the Pilbara mining town of Karratha, there is a housing shortage compounded by extremely high rents and home purchase prices. This situation is long-standing and a variety of solutions have developed for this situation locally. One such solution is called 'hotbedding' and was developed by male mines employees on fly-in-fly-out contracts. A house is rented by one mine worker who rents to roughly twice the number of housemates as there are beds in the house. The beds are in use throughout the day and night as shift workers finish their shift and return home, and others begin their shifts and leave for work at the mines. In extreme situations, the house may have as many beds in it as the rooms can hold, far exceeding the terms of the lease (McKenzie, Rowley, Brereton, Phillips and Birdsall-Jones 2009).

American research demonstrates that overcrowding is a precursor to homelessness. Two American studies from the mid-1990s refer to a deliberate strategy followed by low-income African Americans, which they termed 'doubling-up' (Bolger 1996; Dehavenon 1996). A double-up is 'a living arrangement in which two or more families share the same space, for which the host family pays the rent to the landlord and the guest family does not' (Dehavenon 1996: 51). The objective of the practice is to absorb kinsfolk who are on the verge of becoming homeless (Bolger 1996; Dehavenon 1996). More recent studies confirm this, showing that household overcrowding is one of a number of housing-related predictors of homelessness (Nunez 2001; Rumana 2008; Shinn, Baumohl and Hopper 2001).

In Australia, living in an overcrowded home is a common part of Indigenous housing careers as people seek to help their homeless relations. In the Indigenous experience, the housing shortage is far from new, and this was reflected in a statement by a participant:

> In this house I've got me and my husband, our three kids, my sister-in-law and her four kids and her nephew. I've been in this house nine years and I've always had a houseful, but you learn to manage. A lot of people grow up with wall to wall beds. They got their grandparents, their aunties and uncles, their cousins and all their brothers and sisters – all waiting for years for a house (Broome, July 2008).

5   TERTIARY HOMELESSNESS

In the understanding of the WA DoH, tertiary homelessness is:

> …where people are living in insecure accommodation such as boarding houses, caravan parks or rooming houses (Western Australia. Department of Housing 2009).

None of our participants were living in these circumstances, and no one knew of any Indigenous person who was. In a survey of homelessness in Broome undertaken in 2007, only non-Indigenous people were found to be living in boarding houses, caravan parks or rooming houses (Strain 2008). Regarding boarding houses and rooming houses, this conforms to our understanding of Indigenous society in that given the way in which kinship underlies definitions of self and others, a solitary shelter solution is unlikely to be taken up by Indigenous people. With regard to caravans not being used by Indigenous people, we have no particular explanation of this and it may be that the question can only be approached through specific research.

There is a broader definition of tertiary homelessness which defines it as 'housing that it close to but below the community standard' (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003a). This somewhat more embracing definition may be helpful in dicussing situations that have certain characteristics of homelessness involved in them which should be included in this report. This chapter discusses two such cases of tertiary homelessness. The first is the community of Nillir Irbanjin, also called One Mile, near Broome. The second is Mt. Welcome House in the town of Roebourne.

5.1   Nillir Irbanjin

Nillir Irbanjin is a small community of 10 houses (one of which is used as the community office) located 1.6 kilometres from the town of Broome, going north along the Broome Road. It is on 11.3 hectares of Crown Land and is gazetted as a town reserve. The land is held by the ALT and leased to the community (Aboriginal Lands Trust 2009). The informal and popularly used name of the community is the One Mile, because its distance from the town is approximately one mile in the old reckoning. The base population is somewhat variable, but is generally thought to be between 70 and 120 people.

Figure 7: Layout of the Nillir Irbanjin community, Broome
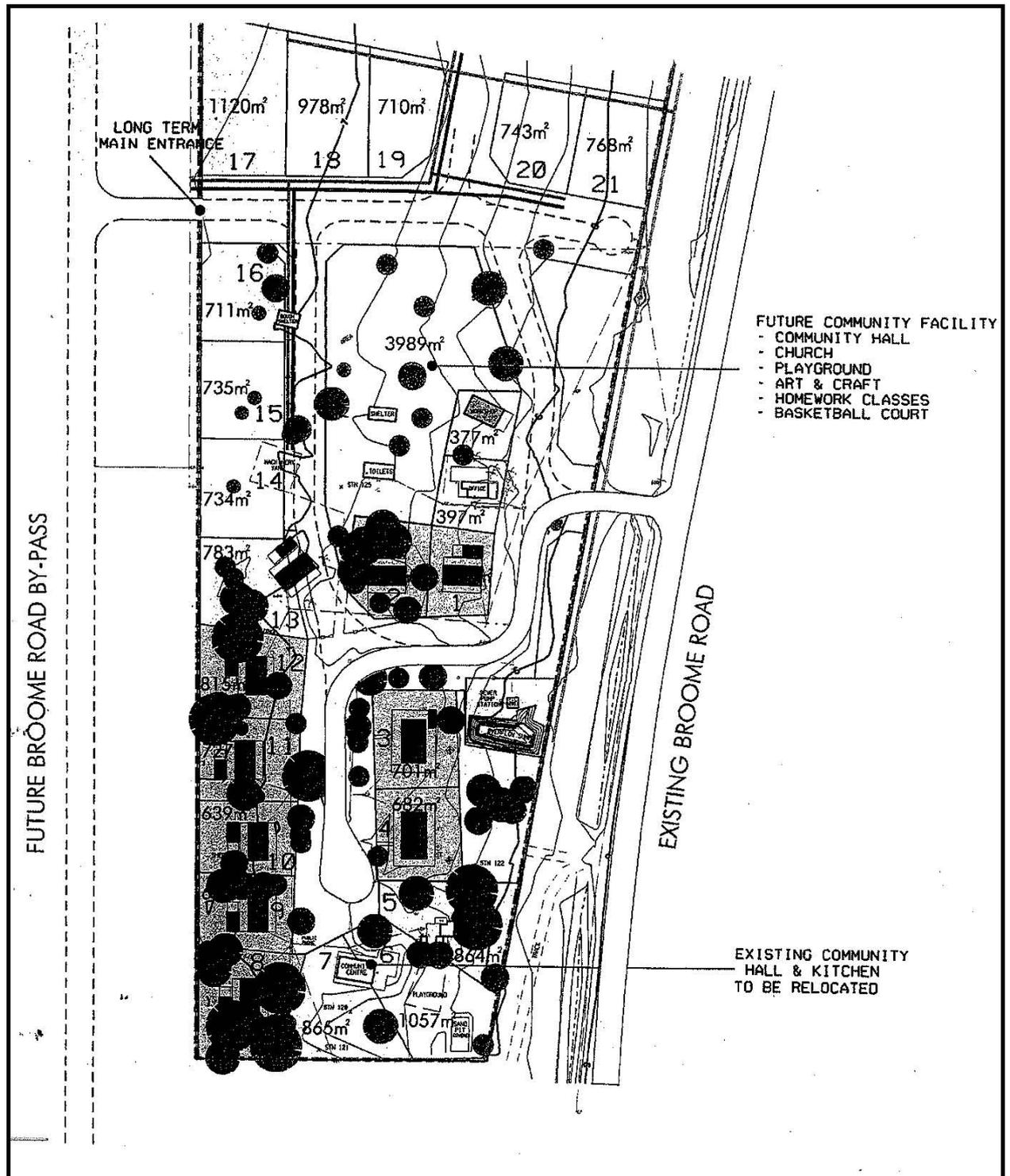
Source: Nillir Irbanjin (One Mile) Issues and Environmental Health Report, Kullari Regional Environmental Health, 2009.

Nillir Irbanjin has a reputation among Broome practitioners as a place with very serious problems caused primarily by the fact that it is one of the places where people visiting Broome from Kimberley Aboriginal communities go to find temporary housing during their stay. Its relatively isolated position means that despite its apparent

proximity to Broome, the community does not have easy access to the town's services including health, education, shopping and other amenities, and policing.

At the time of our fieldwork, it appeared that all the non-residents present in the community were visitors from related communities in the Kimberley region. That is, these people were not homeless, and had homes of their own in their home communities. While one might construe these visitors as being in a situation of secondary homelessness, it would not be strictly accurate to view them in this way.

It is difficult to characterise the housing at Nillir Irbanjin as being 'close to' the community standard. Perhaps a more embracing description of tertiary homelessness might be housing that resembles the community standard but is lower than that standard. Housing at Nillir Irbanjin certainly resembles the community standard in that the dwelling structures are recognisable as houses. The houses are constructed of a kind of coloured, corrugated steel commonly known as 'Colorbond'. This material is being used widely in newer house construction in the north of the state, because of its resistance to termite infestation. However, a closer look reveals the drastic contrast between Nillir Irbanjin housing and the community standard.

Figure 8: Colorbond housing, Nillir Irbanjin, Broome

Photo: Corunna, Broome, July 2008

Figure 9: Coping with overcrowding, Nillir Irbanjin, Broome

Photo: Corunna, Broome, July 2008

On 17 December 2008 a health inspection of Nillir Irbanjin was undertaken by the Kullari Regional Environmental Health Officer. Of the housing, the officer reported that:

> The majority of houses are experiencing wastewater blockages (toilet, shower and/or sink) and most have unfunctioning toilets. At least four out of the ten houses currently have no hot water, and a number of houses complained of low water pressure. All houses inspected had leaking plumbing, and many shower recesses were permeable to water. Water damage to wall panelling in the bathroom/toilet/laundry/kitchen outhouse was obvious through the community housing. There is a serious concern regarding the electrical safety of the houses, many indicating faulty or damaged power points and one electric stove top which smokes and trips the house power. Approximately half the housing is not provided with functioning hot plates (majority of kitchens are installed with hot plates only, no oven). A number of houses have no security, due to damaged or missing external doors, windows or wall panelling. For each house, pest management (e.g. mosquitoes and cockroaches as vectors of disease) is an issue, due to lack of window glass or louvers and damaged fly screens (Kullari Regional Environmental Health 2009).

At the time our fieldwork there was a considerable quantity of rubbish sitting uncollected in bins and littering the ground. The outdoor drains appeared to be blocked (see fig. 10). The responsibility for waste collection was with the company contracted by the DoH to provide management services to the community, the Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation. Mamabulanjin has been responsible for a number of communities around Broome and the West Kimberley, providing rent collection, accountancy, maintenance and repairs, and waste collection. There

recently had occurred a hiatus in waste collection because Mamabulanjin had ceased to pay for the service. The reason for this was not known at the time; however, at some point in 2008, the DoH had directed Mamabulanjin that rent monies should be spent only on the maintenance and repair of housing (Kullari Regional Environmental Health 2009). By May 2009, the DoH had withdrawn responsibilities from Mamabulanjin and taken over all responsibility for the community (Interview, Broome, July 2009).

Figure 10: Blocked external drain, Nillir Irbanjin, Broome

Photo: Corunna, Broome, July 2008

Town communities are not rateable and are therefore not serviced by the town. Some communities, like Mungullah at Carnarvon, have community-owned enterprises and therefore have access to an independent source of income with which to fund services such as waste collection in addition to the repair and maintenance of housing. At communities without such developments, the sole source of income is rents which are insufficient to meet the cost of both housing maintenance and waste collection. For example, at Nillir Irbanjin, the annual income in 2008–2009 from rents received was $14,000 and the cost of rubbish removal was $10,000 (Kullari Regional Environmental Health 2009) which leaves a residue of $4,000 or $400 per year per house for maintenance and repairs. At Mungullah, the average annual cost of maintenance per dwelling was $770 (Interview, Mungullah, August 2009.). Supposing that it is unlikely that the average maintenance cost per dwelling would be substantially less at Nillir Irbanjin, then after paying the cost of waste collection, the Nillir Irbanjin Community can fund around half of the work required on housing. Therefore, the condition of the housing will be subject to continually worsening wear and tear, making the maintenance and repair costs more and more expensive, in an escalating cycle of deterioration. If the community does not pay for waste collection, then it has $1400 annually per house with which to fund repairs and maintenance. However, to cease the waste collection service has immediate consequences for community health and wellbeing.

Figure 11: Rubbish skip, Nillir Irbanjin, Broome

Photo: Corunna

According to the Kullari Regional Environmental Health Officer's (2009) report, conditions at Nillir Irbanjin have not always been this bad.

> The community has experienced a decline in recent years. This change has been attributed to a number of factors, including the removal of CDEP [Community Development and Employment Program] (Nillir Irbanjin community would put their hours and associated funding towards community maintenance and repair, including public spaces), the cessation of funding for a Community Project Officer (governance and community capacity) and unfilled Environmental Health Field Support Officer (through Kimberley Population Health Unit)(Kullari Regional Environmental Health 2009).

According to newspaper reports in late 2009, the community turned to the Shire of Broome for assistance, in addition to conducting a general clean up of the community grounds (Thomson 2009). The Shire in turn contacted the ALT, and receiving no response by August of 2009, threatened to condemn the houses at Nillir Irbanjin as being unfit for human habitation (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2009).

5.2   Mt. Welcome House, Roebourne

This discussion is drawn from data collected by Birdsall-Jones and Turner for a research project studying housing market dynamics in resource boom towns (McKenzie, Rowley, Brereton, Phillips and Birdsall-Jones 2009). It is re-analysed here because it is directly relevant to our understanding of tertiary homelessness in Indigenous Australia.

Roebourne was established in 1866 and is the oldest surviving town in Western Australia north of Geraldton. Until 1975 Roebourne was the seat of local government in the Shire of Roebourne. In that year the mining company town of Karratha was brought under normal WA local government administration and in consequence of this, local government moved from Roebourne to Karratha. Along with local government, most commercial activity shifted to Karratha.

Roebourne is dominated by public housing, and the majority of tenants are Indigenous Pilbara people with the dominant language groups being Ngarluma and Yindijibarndi who are also the native title claimants in the region. The Ngarluma people have been

granted native title rights over Mt. Welcome station, including the original Mt. Welcome station house which is located in Hampton St. on the eastern edge of the town.

The Mt. Welcome station house is listed in the WA Register of Heritage Places as Mount Welcome House. It is described as "a good example of North-West vernacular architecture, designed to meet local climatic conditions" (Heritage Council of Western Australia 1998). It is made up of a set of closely aligned single-storey timber-framed and corrugated iron buildings with barrel-vaulted roofs.

Figure 12: Mt. Welcome House, Roebourne

Photo: Birdsall-Jones

The house was sold to the Commonwealth in 1974 along with the station itself for the use of the Ieramagadu Group representing the traditional owners. The house was used for meetings and was occupied by caretakers until 1996, when community conflict led to its being left vacant. The heritage assessment documentation describes the condition of the house in 1998 as 'fair due to lack of care and maintenance over past years,' and notes that it had been vandalised (Heritage Council of Western Australia 1998).

In 2008 Mt. Welcome House was occupied by a varying number of elderly Ngarluma people. On the occasion of a funeral in late March of that year there was estimated to be around 30 people in the house, but this was for a limited time of perhaps 10 days to two weeks. Ordinarily, the number of residents varied from around 10 to 20 people. The residents were all local people whose families are well represented in the town. According to some of their relatives, they were not homeless and would be welcome at the homes of their children and grandchildren. Their relatives had tried to get them to come home and live with them, but apparently the old people would always go back to Mt. Welcome House.

Their relatives worried about these old people because they were living in conditions which threatened their health and safety. The house had no water or power supply and therefore had no functioning toilet, laundry, kitchen, washing facilities or

sewerage. The only available water supply was a tap at the property boundary near the road.

There is a day centre for the elderly near the house where residents went regularly to shower and do their laundry. Because they were elderly, they also received Meals-on-Wheels. Not a great deal of drinking was done on the premises, but the residents would regularly leave the house to participate in drinking parties elsewhere in the town. They performed no housework and had a number of dogs which were not housetrained and which therefore left faeces and urine around the interior and exterior of the house. These living conditions conform to the established understanding of domestic squalor (Snowdon, Shah and Halliday 2007).

The Ngarluma community of Roebourne was deeply concerned about the situation, and felt it was important to stop the elderly people from living in Mt. Welcome House. However, they had no way of achieving this. Consequently, when in September of 2009 the Shire of Roebourne resolved to declare the house unfit for human habitation and move for the eviction of the residents with the view to them being found alternative housing (Shire of Roebourne 2009), the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation supported the shire council (Thomson 2009).

In our positioning paper (Birdsall-Jones and Shaw 2008), we noted that:

> The 2001 census guidelines for collectors in remote communities made a significant change from the 1996 guidelines. In 1996, the category 'improvised dwelling' included dwellings without a working bathroom and toilet. In 2001, any dwelling that was intended to be both permanent and for the purpose of housing people was noted as a permanent dwelling for census purposes. Chamberlain and MacKenzie note that as a result of this change, the number of improvised dwellings in Indigenous communities in 1996 was 8,727 as opposed to 823 in 2001 (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003a: 22). The significance of this changed definition is that because the improvised dwelling is not proper housing, this category is not included in the assessment of housing need that is drawn from the census figures. By reducing the number of improvised dwellings included in the improvised dwelling category, the Indigenous housing need may be reduced (Birdsall-Jones and Shaw 2008: 4).

The ABS had retained the understanding that tents and other forms of improvised shelter should be recognised as homelessness, but had done away with the idea that housing that was unfit for habitation should be considered a form of homelessness. Therefore, neither Nillir Irbanjin nor Mt. Welcome House can be counted in the census as incidences of homelessness. The case studies presented here demonstrate that were the residents of these places to be counted as homeless, it would obscure the true nature of their circumstances.

We need clearly to distinguish between the problems of homelessness per se and the problems arising from other causes. The problem at Nillir Irbanjin is not homelessness; rather, it is the enormous strain placed on the community socially and with regard to its infrastructure by the flow of visitors through the community. This flow of visitors is an expression of the Indigenous cultural phenomenon of mobility which itself arises out of a variety of causes. In some circumstances, people are forced to become mobile because they have become homeless, but this is not the case at Nillir Irbanjin. By and large, the people visiting Nillir Irbanjin have homes elsewhere and are at the community because they need accommodation while they are in Broome on other matters. There is no provision made in Broome for these remote-area visitors and so people must either camp out in the sand hills and other locations around the town, or go to Nillir Irbanjin.

An unknown but certainly significant proportion of secondary homelessness in Indigenous society may be obscured in the figures on Indigenous household overcrowding. At least some of the household overcrowding is due to visitors, as was the case at Nillir Irbanjin. It is difficult to see how these two situations can be accurately determined by any means other than direct questioning. The need to distinguish between visitors and homeless Indigenous people is demonstrated both at Nillir Irbanjin and in the case discussed in Chapter 3, Pathways to Homelessness.

The contrast between this case and the situation at Nillir Irbanjin illustrates a further subtlety in the visitor phenomenon. The boys who accompanied their cousin-brother who was in mourning were with him primarily out of family feeling. The man in mourning and his wife were wholly in support of their behaviour. The people who were visiting at Nillir Irbanjin had become a burden on the community because the numbers in which they come are beyond the community's capacity to manage either in terms of infrastructure or socio-cultural organisation. They were not wanted.

The phenomenon demonstrated at Nillir Irbanjin which is of the greatest interest in the context of this research is that of Indigenous mobility. Patterns of Indigenous mobility present a complex of motivations, arising out of a range of cultural, social and economic drivers. Of first and foremost importance in understanding Indigenous patterns of housing, the use of housing, and resource use, is the obligation of kinfolk to look after one another. The power of this obligation in structuring Indigenous housing-related behaviour must be understood and accepted if Indigenous housing-related needs are to be adequately and appropriately served.

Utilising the obligations of kinfolk to arrive at housing and shelter solutions is a part of the deep structure of Indigenous culture and cannot be viewed as a problem to be solved. It is not likely that there are any measures that agencies can take that will have the effect of inducing Indigenous people to abandon a practice that is so thoroughly embedded in their cultural structure and organisation. However, the situation of Nillir Irbanjin clearly demonstrates the importance of the need for government to respond to Indigenous mobility in ways that reduce the likelihood of communities being overwhelmed by visitors to the extent that the limits of Indigenous social mechanisms to accommodate visitors are exceeded to the point that the community is in danger of collapse.

5.3   Spiritual homelessness

Although the situation at Mt. Welcome House has also reached the point at which the liveability of the housing has collapsed, the problem here is a very different matter. The old people who live there could be housed in much better circumstances with their relatives but they choose not to be. The only reason their relatives can find for this behaviour is that these old people want to be together and they want to be at Mt. Welcome House because they feel at home there, having worked on the station in their young days. In part, therefore, this can be seen as an expression of spiritual homelessness. Although the shire council has undertaken to facilitate the process of rehousing the residents, there is no certainty that this will resolve the issue of spiritual homelessness. Given past experience, the old people may well choose to return to Mt. Welcome House even if they are supplied with alternative housing of an acceptable standard.

Another situation of spiritual homelessness exists in Perth. This arose as part of the result of the closure of a designated Indigenous community in the metropolitan region in June 2003 (Nola 13 June 2003). The community was located in the city's eastern suburbs. It was closed in extremely controversial circumstances following court action against a small group of men, one of whom was finally gaoled for his offences in 2008

(Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2008; 2009a). The closely related residents of the community were relocated in public housing throughout the metropolitan area. Owing to the extreme sensitivity surrounding the activities of this small group of men, the community will be referred to pseudonymously as the Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community.

Within the year following the closure of the community, a small proportion of its former membership withdrew from their public housing homes and formed a homeless group in the Perth city centre. Their situation is somewhat akin to that of the old people at Mt. Welcome House in that like the old people, this group has family who would give them homes. However, unlike the Mt. Welcome House old people, this group of former Swan Valley residents is multi-generational. Two of the younger men took up homelessness immediately after the closure of the Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community. Their mother followed them a while later. One of this woman's cousin-sisters turned to homelessness and was followed by several of her children and grandchildren. This cousin-sister died around two years later, aged 38. Her children and grandchildren have remained on the street.

They spend their days moving around the city centre and sheltering in secluded places around the city by night. They may camp in a laneway or behind a skip. For meals, they go to a soup truck in Wellington Square in the early morning. Occasionally, the younger ones aged up to 25 can go to the YMCA's Jewell House in Goderich St. and there are other night shelters which will take in homeless people. On pension days they sometimes put their money together and buy the makings of a barbeque. Then, weather permitting, they may take the ferry over to the South Perth foreshore and cook their meat on the public barbeques. There's also the area called the Bull's Paddock in the city where they sometimes go for their barbeque, which they get to by using Perth's free inner city bus service.

However, this is a dangerous lifestyle and people have been knifed for their blankets, or mobbed in running battles. These are sometimes brought on by other homeless groups, but may also be perpetrated by groups of young people of whom the Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community group knows nothing. Other dangers come from substance abuse, principally sniffing; solvents, spray paint, glue; and drinking methylated spirits with lemonade. These are cheap forms of substance abuse and ordinarily, they are all these people can afford, although when they can, they will drink beer.

Now and then, some of the group will go to one of their relations' homes and stay for a few days, to do their laundry, shower, rest and then they leave again. So far, the only way any of them have been made to leave the street permanently is an illness so serious that it is completely debilitating, such as a series of strokes. Then, they are placed in a nursing home and because they are now disabled, they do not leave. Others have died on the street.

As with the relations of the old people at Mt. Welcome House, the relations of these homeless people worry about them very deeply. Their explanations of why some Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community residents have taken to the street are various. In a very few cases, the person is acknowledged to have been suffering from emotional problems before the community was closed, and having taken to the street following that, their condition worsened. In the case of the rest of this homeless group, the only explanation they have is that when the Community closed, it 'broke them', they 'have no drive, nothing to live for', and they 'yearn to get back to where they were'(interview, Perth, June 2008).

There are clearly mental health issues involved in these cases of spiritual homelessness. In the case of the old people at Mt. Welcome House, there may be some age-related mental health issues and these require specialist care and management. With regard to the former members of the Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community, their circumstances may arise from traumatic stress syndrome. They have been through a long and difficult experience which began in 2001 with the accusations against the community's senior men, a state commission of enquiry (Gordon, Hallahan and Henry 2002), the closure of the community and eviction of the residents in 2003, the conviction of one of the senior men in 2008, and the process of appealing against the closure of the community which is ongoing (interview Perth, June 2008). In addition, there may have been pre-existing issues within the community which constituted a threat to mental health for some community members.

This chapter has examined some of the more difficult aspects of Indigenous homelessness; those of having a home that is so structurally compromised that it no longer functions as a house, and spiritual homelessness. In the case of the dilapidated and deteriorating homes of the Nillir Irbanjin community, we have shown that the situation calls for a response to waves of visitors coming to Broome from outlying Indigenous communities in the Kimberley and beyond. Our view is that this is not a situation of homelessness because the people coming to Broome will state frankly that they are only visiting for a variety of purposes and have their own homes in the outlying communities. They are not searching for homes, only temporary accommodation during their stay in Broome. However, Broome has no such accommodation accessible to these Indigenous visitors.

The situation at Mt. Welcome House may at first appear to be the same problem, and indeed the house is similarly unfit for human habitation. However, these old people choose to live at Mt. Welcome House over other readily available, far healthier, options. They are old and lonely for the days when they were young, as are many elderly people. However, in the case of these old people, their loneliness and yearning for the old days has a tangible, occupiable symbol in Mt. Welcome House. It is clear that they require specialist aged care, but it is not clear how they will be prevented from going back there.

The problem is similar for the homeless people from the Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community, except they have been barred from returning home and must live with the fact that they will never get their home back. At this point, it seems unlikely that they will choose to give up living on the streets of Perth. These people need counselling and ongoing services which will ameliorate the rigours of their homeless lifestyle.

Linking all of these situations is the element of choice. The visitors to Nillir Irbanjin, the old people at Mt. Welcome House and, in a different way, the former residents of the Eastern Suburbs Aboriginal Community have all chosen to be where they are. This does not in any way diminish their respective needs for housing or shelter solutions. However, it does demonstrate the fact that situations of homelessness of all kinds cannot be taken at face value, because to do so may result in an incorrect definition of the problem. If the problem is misunderstood then whatever policy or program is developed in response will be unsuccessful in resolving the situation.

6   INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND MOBILITY

The primary difference between the non-Indigenous overcrowding practices referred to in Chapter 4 (McKenzie, Rowley, Brereton, Phillips and Birdsall-Jones 2009) and the Indigenous situation in Australia is cultural. Houses may become overcrowded in response to shortages of affordable housing. However, in Indigenous society, overcrowding occurs according to patterns created by kin relationships, which are highly regulated. In this report, we will discuss those to which our participants refer in research interviews. The rules behind these patterns pertain to the individual's access to housing and to the householder's obligations to accept kinfolk into the home. These rules can be discerned in the statements of our Indigenous participants in which they explain the bases on which housing has been granted or denied to homeless kinfolk, and in some instances granted but later rescinded.

An aboriginal mother is not going to kick her son out on the street. She can't do that.

This statement was made by a man who was living with his mother in an overcrowded house in Broome in order to explain why she had taken him in even though they both knew that to do so would make her overcrowding problem worse – she was liable to lose her public housing home should the DoH wish to enforce the terms of her lease. His statement speaks specifically to the strongest set of rights and obligations pertaining to housing, those between a mother and her children. Other research has demonstrated the way in which this plays out in the wider field of kin-based relationships (Birdsall-Jones and Christensen 2007; Birdsall 1990). The focus of the injunction to look after each other derives from relationships founded in the process of child-rearing. In general terms, an individual who aspires to long term residence in a household must have been reared by or with the leaseholder, or the individual must be one of the people who helped to rear him/her.

You can't say no to your family.

The injunction requiring kinfolk to look after one another is the reason 'you can't say no to your family'. This can explain why a householder continues to accept people into her household when it is already overcrowded. It also explains why people allow themselves to be disadvantaged in this way. The couple living in one of the sandhill camps in Broome had been asked to leave the home of the man's aunt because they had been accompanied by six young male cousins of the man. The couple had come to Broome to mourn the man's departed sister who had acted as a mother to him. This was their duty and it was also a matter of sincere feeling. The young men came to 'keep him company'. Although the boys were enjoying themselves, they also had a duty and a matter of sincere feeling. They had to watch their brother-cousin to make sure he did not become 'too sad'. Part of the mourning response to the death of very close family in their Indigenous society is that the principal mourner may not eat properly. One of the women informed us that for some period of time that a person who is so sad will not feel able to eat meat and will choose to eat only fish. If this goes on too long, someone has to do something about that, and the way that happens is that someone must push some meat into his face so that he'll get the smell of it and he'll want to eat meat again. The one who would do this would most likely be one the man's cousin-brothers. In the photo of the man (fig.1), this is the significance of the fish he is holding.

In any case, the man's aunt did not want the young men to drink alcohol in her home and told the couple to take them away. The couple also had to leave the house – not because of the aunt but because of the expectation that they and the boys would stay

together as a domestic group. The couple were bound culturally to accept responsibility for these young men as long as they reasonably could. Even though they were camped in the sand hills instead of living with their children in the aunt's house, they accepted this. Smiling, the woman said, 'You can't say no to your family,' and the man nodded, and repeated after her, 'You can't say no to your family.'

However, there are circumstances which make it more likely that people will say no to their family. Research into Indigenous home ownership has revealed that Indigenous people who own their own homes are more likely to deny housing to their homeless relations and also to relations who are casual visitors and who have housing elsewhere (Szava and Moran 2008). Indigenous people who are in employment and who have housing have also reported controlling access to their homes in the same way (Birdsall-Jones 2007). This is not a complete denial but rather controlled access. However, it is not surprising given the way that kin obligation is embedded within Indigenous culture, that both employed Indigenous people and Indigenous home owners have difficulty in explaining their reasoning to their relations who expect to be housed upon request.

> Sometimes it is hard to own a place: it goes against trying to help your family and people; I can starve to pay the loan but how do you explain that to other people? [i.e. family] (Szava and Moran 2008: 33)

You have to have respect for your family.

The aforementioned couple is from a remote area community in the Kimberley, but their situation is not unique to Kimberley Indigenous culture. Indigenous practitioners in Sydney reported the same phenomenon among their Indigenous homeless clients.

> Speaker 1: …Aboriginal people, they go home – like family they take em in and give em a bed and a feed and…

> Speaker 2: Yeah cause that's what we're, that's what Aboriginals, what we're all about. We do that (Sydney, December 2008).[8]

The Sydney practitioners are speaking to the same general injunction: Indigenous people who count each other as family are obliged to one another, using much the same terms as the couple in Broome had used. Sydney Indigenous people can also be disadvantaged (in housing terms) by adhering to the rules governing Indigenous family rights and obligations in the same way as the Broome couple. If Indigenous Sydney householders have children who were under care orders from the NSW Department of Community Services (DOCS), then they were liable to be in breach of the care order by taking in their homeless relations.

> Speaker 3: But they do have a problem with it if they've got DOCS, they've got kids in DOCS care. You know if they do take them in, they're in breach of DOCS. Yeah because you're not allowed to have any there that DOCS doesn't deem as being okay (Sydney, December 2008).

To be in breach of a DOCS care order will threaten parents' access to their children, and yet, they are bound to take in their homeless relations; not to do so would express disrespect not only for those relations in particular, but would express disrespect for a basic tenet of Australian Indigenous society.

How then, as occurs in some circumstances, do some Indigenous people manage to ask their homeless relations to leave, and having been asked, what leads the homeless relations either to accede to this request or, alternatively, refuse to leave?

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[8] Thanks to Wendy Shaw for these Sydney interviews.

I like to help the family but I want to have my own place.

Indigenous people are obligated to take in their homeless relations, but there are limits. Householders have the right to say what goes on in their own homes. If a householder does not want her home given over to the pursuit of 'the drinking lifestyle' she has the right to ask the visitors to leave. If asked, it is respectful to leave under these circumstances. However, this does not always occur and there is little recourse for enforcing such a request. People have been driven out of houses in the course of feuding and the violence that can accompany alcohol abuse, but the only other solution is to call the police to evict the visitors. Some Indigenous householders will do this but it is unusual because it is contrary to the ethic of respect. The fear of ramifications on their standing in the family community is strong. Indeed, some householders will leave the house themselves before they will call the police (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008).

For a lot of men from the communities, the last thing on their mind is to go to HomesWest because that's a women's issue.

Although this issue was discussed in the previous chapter, we note it here because it demonstrates a division of responsibility in Indigenous society. In Indigenous society, housing tends to be women's responsibility. Men therefore tend to be less informed about the process of obtaining housing. The centrality of women to their households and their children's lives explains why women are unlikely to refuse shelter to any of their own children or extended family, particularly those of their siblings whom they have helped raise (Birdsall-Jones and Christensen 2007; Birdsall 1990).

The Indigenous experience and management of homelessness is subject to conditions that distinguish the various kinds of homelessness in a physical sense. Primary homelessness includes street dwelling where people have access to no shelter at all; and camping in which homeless Indigenous people who are more or less related establish a campsite of makeshift shelters. Secondary homelessness among Indigenous people almost always means that the homeless individual has been granted access to one of the homes of his/her close relations. The quality of this experience depends on whether or not 'the drinking lifestyle' is allowed in the home. The risks to person, property and health are all higher if the experience of homelessness includes alcohol abuse.

6.1   Mobility

Mobility is an important element in Indigenous society and Indigenous people travel regularly and often. The pattern of movement is defined by the location of relations within a region which includes, but is not limited to, traditional country. This is what Memmott et al. (2006) termed the 'mobility region'. This is true in metropolitan areas no less than in remote and regional Australia (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones and Shaw 2008; Birdsall 1990; Memmott and Chambers 2005). While traditional country tends to form the 'heartland' of the mobility region, it should be remembered that long-standing patterns of intermarriage combined with the assimilationist policies prior to 1972 open a much wider and more varied basis for regional association than traditional country. The research suggests that the widest travel within a mobility region is associated partly with age and gender and partly with alcohol dependency and long-term homelessness. Travel around the mobility region is often motivated by the need for shelter when relations can no longer support the individual, and he/she must move on to visit relations elsewhere.

The drinking lifestyle is clearly not the only cause of homelessness. Women who are victims of domestic violence take their children and leave home to take refuge with

kinfolk or in a women's refuge. Children leave home if they become victims of abuse, and/or if their homes become taken up by constant drinking parties. Whole households will leave home if they become caught up in the ongoing violence involved in feuding.

As a result of ancient patterns of inter-marriage, and the more recent transport of Indigenous people to places far distant from their homes, the mobility region is not always a contiguous set of places. Kimberley people were transported to the southwest of Western Australia, for example. This has provided many people with dual connections to country and a good many Broome people are also Nyungar people from the state's southwest. When feuding drove one of our participant couples out of their Perth home, they eventually sought refuge in the home of the man's mother, in Broome. The farthest afield of any of our participants was a single mother in Perth who had come from Queensland to escape family violence. Earlier research reveals that there are Western Australian Indigenous people among the Indigenous homeless populations of Sydney who were similarly escaping violence (Memmott and Chambers 2005). However, these last two instances are unusual and most homeless Indigenous people remain within the region known to their own family communities, even in the process of escaping from violence.

People will also follow or accompany one another to other places, which can have consequences for the relations they have followed. If there are too many people seeking accommodation in the same household, or if the visitors try to follow a drinking lifestyle in a non-drinking household, then all the visitors may be asked to leave.

Mobility is a characteristic feature of Indigenous cultures and society; it is used to facilitate and maintain contact among the family community. Indigenous people will utilise this facility in resolving the problem of homelessness to a greater or lesser extent depending upon the origins of the individual's homeless state. We will return to this subject in our conclusion.

6.2   Local distinctions in patterns of homelessness

The nature of the Indigenous community in the urban hinterland is an important influence on the kind of Indigenous homelessness prevalent in the town or city. In all our research sites excepting Carnarvon, there was a strong presence of primary homeless Indigenous people. In Carnarvon, there were fewer than 10 Indigenous people living in a condition of primary homelessness.

Carnarvon was the only research site whose hinterland was not characterised by a large number of Indigenous communities, either resident in the surrounding towns or suburbs, or in remote area Indigenous communities. There are more than 200 remote Indigenous communities in the Kimberley region for example (Western Australia. Department of Indigenous Affairs 2007). In comparison, in the Murchison-Gascoyne there are 16 remote Indigenous communities (Western Australia. Department of Indigenous Affairs 2007). Most of the primary homeless Indigenous people of Broome are from outlying communities throughout the Kimberley. In Sydney, other research indicates that most primary homeless Indigenous people are from regional and remote NSW (Gray 1989; 2004; Memmott and Chambers 2005). In the city of Perth, some of the primary homeless are 'refugees' from Indigenous communities to the north and east of the central metropolitan area which have been closed by the state government. Others come from further a field in the south-west of WA, and a very few from other states.

The patterns of mobility referred to earlier have created a particular situation in Carnarvon. The most influential factor is the historical practice of transporting Western Australian Indigenous people around the state for imprisonment, incarceration in missions and settlements, or for employment. In the post-World War II era the major restrictions on Indigenous mobility were lifted and most of the special Aboriginal legislation was revoked (Birdsall 1990; Biskup 1973; Haebich 1998). Accordingly, many of those who had been transported to distant areas of the state began to return home. Because of transport infrastructure at the time this process brought them through the coastal towns and cities. A number of these people remained in the coastal towns and others continued on their way north or south. The result is demonstrated in Carnarvon, where there exists a diverse Indigenous community with which many WA Indigenous people are connected through kinship. Because of the cultural injunction to provide for one's kinfolk, most Indigenous people who travel through Carnarvon can approach relations in the town and obtain shelter for varying periods of time. Further research needs to be carried out on this pattern of mobility in relation to place, and the ways in which it compares with mobility patterns in other regional and metropolitan centres. This is the focus of other upcoming AHURI-funded research (Improving Housing Policy Responses to Indigenous Patterns of Mobility–Project 40526).

6.3   Sydney

There have been two studies of Indigenous homelessness in Sydney carried out in recent years. One was carried out by Memmott and Chambers (2005) in the inner-city area and the second by Hunter (2006) carried out in the Penrith local government area, in western Sydney.

Indigenous homelessness in Penrith is dominated by secondary homelessness. Overall the situation Hunter describes compares with that which prevails in our field sites, with a notable difference. Hunter's participants describe a practice they referred to as 'couch surfing', and which Hunter referred to as 'transience'. In this situation, people move regularly between the homes of friends and family, and crisis accommodation. Those engaging in this practice are people recently released from gaol, young people and women with families who are escaping violence in the home. This form of transience was reported in very few instances in WA and the term 'couch surfing' was not used by any of our participants.

Primary homelessness did not figure largely in the Penrith study and Hunter's evidence suggested that it was mostly limited to Indigenous 'youth' (unfortunately Hunter does not specify gender) who leave home owing to issues of violence in the home and family, and personal dysfunction following from substance abuse (Hunter 2006: 67). In this regard, Penrith is unlike Broome and Perth, but a comparison may be drawn with Carnarvon, where Indigenous primary homelessness is limited to the specific problems of a particular age group. In Carnarvon, the few Indigenous primary homeless people are elderly men whose mental health is compromised by age-related problems exacerbated by alcohol abuse. This situation is reflective of a local issue, the lack of an aged care home in the town. Perhaps in Penrith, the fact that primary homelessness is restricted to a particular age group with a particular set of problems reflects some a deficit in local services or a localised social issue. Seeing as the problem is so well defined, it might be possible to provide a service which would go some way toward alleviating the specific issues that lead these young people into street life.

Memmott and Chambers' (2005) study is useful because of its portrayal of Indigenous primary homeless groups. The study of these groups is typically made difficult by the

issue of entre. Entre is an issue for all researchers employing methods which rely on direct contact with participants in the setting of their everyday lives. Understandably entre is more difficult to obtain regarding Indigenous homeless groups because they are under constant threat from virtually all elements of the city: law enforcement, city council, perpetrators of random acts of violence, the weather, and so forth. Because of the multi-dimensional nature of the daily threat under which they live these groups become highly defensive and closed to outsiders. Without some connection with members of a group, their participation in a research project is difficult to acquire. In our study, one of the researchers (Corunna) had a connection with the kinfolk of the homeless group of the Perth city centre described in Chapter 5. Memmott and Chambers (2005) were able to obtain the services of field researchers who were connected in similar ways to several Indigenous homeless groups of inner-city Sydney.

Memmott and Chambers found six distinct groups of Indigenous people in primary homelessness in inner-city Sydney. Each of the groups had its own particular territory, held strong group identity and each had a set of rules governing interpersonal behaviour. Although all groups were seen to have a view of themselves as being 'family', or 'like family', they were differentiated according to whether or not the basis of the group was kinship. There appeared to be a continuum among the groups which went from one group which was made up entirely of actual kinfolk, to another which included both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in its membership. It seemed that most of these people came from outside the Sydney region, but from within NSW. A large majority of the membership of the Sydney homeless groups were suffering some form of mental health complaint, primarily depression. While spiritual homelessness was noted to be an important concept in understanding the problems of Indigenous primary homeless people, none of the Sydney groups arose out of spiritual homelessness and none of the participants were regarded as suffering from this problem in particular.

As in Perth and Broome, alcohol addiction occurs across the range of primary homeless Indigenous groups in Sydney. In Sydney, drug use was prominent. In both Perth and Broome, drugs were not mentioned by any of our participants, either practitioners or homeless people. Practitioners stated that while drug abuse was not often mentioned by clients, and they rarely saw signs of it, they suspected that it did occur. Participants were seen drinking and openly discussed alcohol, but we neither saw nor heard any evidence of drug abuse. We would take this to indicate that the drug problem is greater in Sydney than in either Perth or Broome among Indigenous homeless people.

Memmott and Chambers (2005) state that violence and sexual assault were constant features of Sydney Indigenous primary homeless life. In Perth and Broome, group life appeared to offer greater protection, particularly for women. In our research, the only women in primary homelessness who talked about sexual assault were leading solitary lives and were not members of a primary homeless group. In Sydney, women appeared to be at serious risk even if they lived as members of a group.

The most significant difference between the Sydney homeless groups and the Perth group is the issue of spiritual homelessness. The Perth group actually did arise as a response to the loss of place which identifies Indigenous spiritual homelessness. They are all former residents of the same community, and are all closely related kinfolk. They are regarded by their housed kinfolk as being in serious need of counselling. Their kinfolk think it unlikely that they will ever give up living on the street, but consider that their ongoing misery could be ameliorated nonetheless through counselling and a support service that supplied ongoing access to laundry and toilet facilities as well as meals.

7 CONCLUSION — DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN THE CULTURAL AND THE SOCIAL IN CONCEPTUALISING INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

7.1 Considering the cultural as opposed to the social

When we seek to understand Indigenous homelessness ethnographically, we find that it is a highly nuanced phenomenon. This leads us back to the point we made in our positioning paper, that the definition, or understanding, of Indigenous homelessness must depend on the nature of the question we put. We are not seeking to subject Indigenous homelessness to a statistical analysis, as Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003a, 2003b, 2004) have done. Chamberlain and MacKenzie made perhaps the most fundamental distinction in any homeless population, and that is the distinction between those with access to some form of conventional housing and those without. In the context of this research, we are seeking to understand Indigenous homelessness in the context of Indigenous culture and society which itself sits within the confines of the wider Australian society. For this purpose, we should consider an approach which will permit us to understand Indigenous homelessness according to the signal characteristics that define it.

In order to do this we must understand two things at the outset. These are mobility and overcrowding, because as we have already discussed, both are the result of intrinsic elements of Indigenous culture. In regard to Indigenous behaviour in the contexts of homelessness and visiting, we must distinguish their social from their cultural origins. If we consider the factors which give rise to homelessness in Indigenous society, we note that none of these factors are cultural; that is, the origins of homelessness are not to be found within Indigenous culture. All of the drivers of Indigenous homelessness are the result of the forces of the wider Australian society. In contrast, visiting may be either social or cultural in origin.

A practical reason for seeing this distinction is to do with policy and planning. First, if visiting is distinguished from homelessness it will lead to more effective programs for dealing with each. Visitors do not need long-term solutions to their shelter needs, or housing in other words. They need somewhere to stay that will serve their needs on the occasion of their visit with regard to amenities that will promote their own health and safety for the term of their visit, as well as that of the community which they are visiting. The homeless do need long-term solutions to their shelter need. They should not be expected to remain in a dependent situation in the homes of their relations over the long-term. Homelessness and visiting should therefore be distinguished from one another in any analysis of housing and shelter needs.

The reason for distinguishing social causes from cultural causes is so that we can properly understand Indigenous mobility. Mobility that arises from cultural motivations generally serves to strengthen the fabric of Indigenous society by permitting people to perform their obligations to their kinfolk in a positive way. Mobility that arises from social causes, that is, from the Indigenous response to the ways in which the wider society impacts deleteriously upon the Indigenous world, may not serve such a constructive purpose. Indigenous people must depend on their network of kin in time of need, but they must spend their own social capital in order to do so. As well, the kinfolk on whom they rely are placed at a disadvantage with regard to housing amenity and household economic organisation when this happens. We have shown that there are indications that both regular employment and home ownership may

have the effect of narrowing the range of kinfolk from whom requests for housing may be granted. This would have the effect of reducing the incidence of loss of housing through violation of Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and it might also have the effect of reducing the risk of homelessness through loss of housing amenity.

It is also relevant to distinguish the social from the cultural with regard to household overcrowding. Generally speaking, cultural visiting is of limited term, although the visit can extend to months. Going to live with kinfolk for socially legitimate reasons such as loss of housing, can be long-term because of waiting lists for public housing, repayment of debt to DoH, and so forth. However, loss of housing amenity through non-payment of bills usually introduces a shorter length of time because it is limited to the time it takes to repay the debt, at which point people return to their own homes.

If an ethnographic view is taken of the factors contributing to homelessness, it is possible to develop policy responses aimed at those factors in particular. By breaking down the total phenomenon of homelessness into social versus cultural components, and by recognising the role of mobility in Indigenous homelessness, it may be possible to introduce policy responses that are targeted rather than general and which therefore have a higher chance of success.

7.1.1 Categories of Indigenous homelessness

One of the aims of this research was to test the categories of Indigenous homelessness developed by Memmott et al. in their 2003 AHURI study of this topic (Memmott 2003), against the results of our analysis.

Table 5: Categories of Indigenous homelessness according to Memmott *et al*. (2003).

Category	*Description*
1. Public place dwellers	Living in a mix of public or semi-public places (as well as some private places, which are entered illegally at night to gain overnight shelter) e.g. parks, churches, verandas, carparks, car sales yards (under cars), beaches, drains, riverbanks, vacant lots, dilapidated buildings.
1.1 Public place dwellers – voluntary, short-term intermittent	These people are often staying in conventional accommodation (e.g. a relative's house) and may have their own residence in a rural or remote settlement. When they socialise in public urban places, they may or may not decide to camp out overnight, usually with others, despite the availability of their accommodation.
1.2 Public place dwellers – voluntary, long-term (chronic homeless)	Residing continually in public places (including overnight); acknowledge they have another place of residence in a home community but uncertain if and when they will return.
1.3 Public place dwellers – reluctant and by necessity	Residing continually in public places, and who (a) wish to return home but need to remain in urban area due to a service need or to support a hospitalised relative or similar; or (b) wish to return home but no funds for travel and/or capacity to organise travel.
2. Those at risk of homelessness	At risk of losing one's house or of losing the amenity of one's house.
2.1 Insecurely housed people	Residing in adequate housing but under threat of loss of such; lack of security of occupancy; possibly due to circumstances of poverty.
2.2 People in sub-standard housing	Persons whose housing is of a sub-standard architectural quality, possibly unsafe or unhealthy housing (but the standards need to be defined – the issue of cultural standards.)
2.3 People	Persons whose housing is crowded, but crowding should be defined

experiencing crowded housing	as involving considerable stress (and not assumed by density measures alone).
2.4 Dysfunctionally mobile persons	In a state of continual or intermittent residential mobility including temporary residence (e.g. crisis accommodation) that is a result of personal and/or social problems (e.g. violence, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of safety or security in a social sense, personality or 'identity crisis', lack of emotional support and security).
3. Spiritually homeless people	A state arising from either (a) separation from traditional land, (b) separation from family and kinship networks, or (c) a crisis of personal identity wherein one's understanding or knowledge of how one relates to country, family and Indigenous identity systems is confused.

Source: Memmott et al. (2003). Categories of Indigenous 'Homeless' People and Good Practice Responses to Their Needs [Note: references in the table refer to sources used by Memmott et al. not all of which are available to the authors of this positioning paper.]

Memmott *et al.* begin by recognising the general distinctions between solutions to the problem of shelter; access to some kind of conventional housing as opposed to no such access. They define those with no access to conventional housing as public place dwellers, living in a mix of public or semi-public places. They recognise four sub-categories of public place dwellers according to distinctions that revolve around the elements of choice and time, which means that they include those who have lost access to their own housing along with those who have a home but are away from it while visiting for one reason or another.

Their second category is made up of those who have access to some kind of conventional housing. These people are at risk of homelessness either because:

1. they risk losing the house itself; or

2. the house is at risk of losing its amenity; or

3. the house has become overcrowded; or

4. for reasons connected with mental health, violence and substance abuse. This category includes both the victims and the perpetrators of violence.

Memmott *et al.*'s third category is spiritual homelessness, a condition which arises out of the individual's separation from traditional land and or kin, or as a result of insufficient personal knowledge of one's own country and/or kin.

Initially, we point out two respects in which Memmott *et al.*'s (2003) scheme of categories differs from our analysis. First, Memmott et al. (2003) include visitors within their understanding of homelessness. Second, they include victims of violence in their sub-category of dysfunctional persons.

7.1.2 Visitors versus homeless persons

We see a necessary distinction between people who are visiting and have homes elsewhere, and people who have no homes of their own. This distinction is important because the needs of these two groups are different, the Indigenous understandings of the two groups are different, the socio-cultural processes through which their circumstances arise are different and the resulting policy and planning responses should therefore be different. The theme of mobility is useful in clarifying these differences.

In our positioning paper we differentiated among various drivers which pattern Indigenous mobility (Birdsall-Jones and Shaw 2008). Broadly speaking, the drivers of Indigenous mobility patterns may be divided into cultural and social forces. Cultural

forces arise out of the nature of Indigenous culture, whereas the social forces at work have their origin in the wider Australian society.

People visit one another for a variety of reasons. Generally the reason and mode of visiting is reflective of gender and time of life. Women visit their adult daughters to maintain a strong role in the upbringing of their grandchildren. If the daughter is living in a place dominated by her in-laws her mother will visit her to ensure that her rights are protected. These rights include the right to respect, personal safety, the economic integrity of her household, and the mothers' right to hold the primary authority in regard to her children. Women visit their mothers reciprocally and also their sisters. Older adolescent boys and young men spend a number of years travelling widely, usually around the broad region known to their own extended family, but some may travel more widely still. Usually there comes a point at which young men judge that this time of life is over and they return to their home communities and more or less settle down. Some men become involved in Indigenous law matters and may continue to travel extensively around their region, particularly during law time. The most general reason for visiting is for funerals, which concerns all age groups of both genders. All of these reasons for travelling are expressive of Indigenous culture.

However, people may legitimately need to travel for a variety of social reasons. They may need to visit kinfolk who are in hospital or in prison, or for reasons connected with their own or their children's health, education, sporting events and so on. These are socially legitimated reasons for travel.

Another socially legitimated form of mobility occurs when people are forced to travel, not to visit their kinfolk, but to live with them. The majority of Indigenous people live in poverty and have little or no reserves of savings to draw on in the event of an unexpected expense, which happens from time to time over the career of any household. When this happens in Indigenous households it may lead to the loss of housing through non-payment of rent or because the house is rendered uninhabitable through non-payment of water, gas and electricity bills, leading to the loss of these utilities. On such occasions, Indigenous people ordinarily will call on their housed kinfolk to provide them with housing. They use the kinship structures and the rules governing kin-based relationships in Indigenous society in this process. However, the need itself does not arise out of Indigenous social structures but out of the relationship between Indigenous society and the wider Australian society. The visiting they have done on the basis of Indigenous culture and society serves to strengthen the relationships that Indigenous people call upon in time of need. This is regarded as a legitimate way of using kin relationships.

Clearly Indigenous homelessness is a complex phenomenon and, at least in the context of an ethnographic analysis, it is perhaps too complex to be dealt with analytically through a strategy of labelling each manifestation of homelessness. For example, an extended period of travel and a certain amount of irresponsible behaviour is an expected aspect of behaviour for older adolescent boys and young men. They not unusually drink to excess and can be noisy and unruly in consequence. Within limits this is within the expected range of normal behaviour in Indigenous society. However, their behaviour quite often goes outside the limits which households can be expected to tolerate and the boys must be moved on. For the period of their grand tour, they appear to be homeless; however, they could go back home any time they wish. This situation displays characteristics of homelessness as well as visiting, and a culturally legitimated range of normal behaviour as well as a socially non-legitimate imposition on the domestic resources of their extended family group.

People may also take up a lifestyle in which substance abuse becomes the dominant theme. As a result, they abuse their kin-based relationships as well as their substance

of choice. Children whose parents are devoted to this kind of lifestyle may leave home because of the violence and disorder that occurs in the wake of drinking parties and drug-taking. While these children may begin by moving among the homes of their kinfolk within the town, some will travel far more widely around the region of their extended family as they grow older.

Meantime the adults who are leading the lifestyle that goes with substance abuse can easily lose their homes through non-payment of rent or violation of the Acceptable Behaviour Agreement that all public housing tenants in WA must sign along with their lease agreements (Western Australia. Department of Housing 2009). They will have to call on their housed kinfolk to obtain shelter. Given their compromised lifestyle, their presence in a household is too disruptive to be tolerated in the long-term and after a time they will be asked to move on. Because they have no homes of their own they travel widely around the region of their extended families staying with various of their kinfolk, progressively wearing out their welcome and moving on as they go. Rarely, they may refuse to move on and back this up with violence or the threat of violence. In these circumstances, the inhabitability of the home declines and individuals may desert the home to find safer shelter elsewhere.

The substance abusers are utilising the same network of kin relationships as those who have fallen on hard times. However, this way of using kin relationships is not regarded as legitimate, and despite the fact that kin relationships structure the pattern of mobility among substance abusers, this behaviour is often not regarded as an expression of Indigenous culture by Indigenous people (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008). However, our research is not conclusive in this regard. We discovered that there may be differences among groups. At Mungullah and Carnarvon, Indigenous people regard the use of the network of kin relationships in servicing the shelter and support needs of substance abusers as illegitimate, and in Broome we found the same viewpoint among people from the Fitzroy Valley region. However, we encountered some people from the south-eastern Kimberley who see no problem with this practice, even if it results in the loss of housing for the kinfolk on whom they depend. This issue requires further research in order to clarify it. In general terms, we see here two patterns of mobility that are culturally and socially legitimated and a third that is not so legitimated.

Table 6: Culturally versus socially legitimated drivers of mobility and associated housing requests

Culturally legitimated visiting	Socially legitimated housing requests	Non-legitimated
To maintain strength of relationship among kinfolk	Loss of housing through unexpected expense, unable to manage household economy, failure to pay rent/bills	Loss of housing through failure of household economy, domestic order owing to substance abuse lifestyle
Law business	Loss of housing amenity	Inability to secure ongoing membership in a household because of effects of substance abuse
Funerals	Abandonment of home through need to escape: violence or abuse	
Deserting the home of an important family member who has died		

Visiting of the kind listed in the table above under the heading 'culturally legitimated visiting' has the effect of strengthening the bonds of kinship and Indigenous culture. The practice of providing shelter to kinfolk in need of housing, under the heading 'socially legitimated housing needs' is one of the reasons that the bonds of kinship and culture must remain strong and the process of strengthening them must be ongoing.

Then, there is a third pattern of mobility, under the heading 'non-legitimated', which is connected with the substance abuse lifestyle and which utilises the same Indigenous social structures as the first two. However, this third pattern of mobility puts great strain on the network of kin relationships and expends the resources of households to no good purpose. Kin networks which experience this kind of strain may be unable to perform some of the most important functions of Indigenous extended family groups which include principally the support of family members who need help, most particularly women and children escaping from violence or who have suffered the loss of their own housing through other causes.

All of these patterns of mobility can lead to household overcrowding. However, some of this overcrowding is for a limited term, while some of it is long-term. For example, we should consider the experience of getting 'stuck'. This is what happens when people who intended to make a limited-term visit for some legitimate purpose find they have no money for their return journey. Their car breaks down and they can't afford to have it repaired, the people they got a lift with become unavailable for the return journey, or they haven't the money for the return bus fare, or some similar event. While they are stuck, they must either rely on their relations' continued willingness to house them or live out of doors.

7.1.3 *Victims of violence vs. dysfunctionally mobile persons*

In relation to sheltering kinfolk escaping violence or other abuse, we note that Memmott et al. place victims of violence in their sub-category 'dysfunctionally mobile persons'. While the violence against them may well have been perpetrated by persons who are dysfunctionally mobile, victims of violence should be distinguished from this group. They are the victims, not the perpetrators, and by virtue of this their needs are quite separate from those of the perpetrators. We refer here to violence of various kinds including family violence, violence against women and children, feuding and neighbourhood violence already discussed in Chapter 3. As discussed in that chapter, people attempting to flee violence more than likely will use their network of kin relationships throughout the region of their extended family to find housing. This is a legitimate use of kin relationships in contrast to the use of kin relationships by people engaged in a lifestyle of substance abuse. Substance abusers might justifiably be referred to as 'dysfunctional', but it seems out of place to regard the victims of violence according to the same terminology.

7.2 Pathways to homelessness in the context of Indigenous housing careers

An earlier report by Birdsall-Jones and Corunna (2008) demonstrated that homelessness is common enough in the experience of Indigenous people that it forms a normal part of Indigenous housing careers. This is confirmed by the present research. A period of time spent in a condition of secondary homelessness is an ordinary feature of the early housing careers of young Indigenous families. During this period of time, young families may live with parents or other members of the extended family in the expectation of acquiring their own housing from the public housing provider. Other periods of homelessness may arise at any stage of Indigenous

housing careers on account of violence, failure to manage household finances, leading to eviction through non-payment of rent and utilities, or through failure to administer domestic cleaning arrangements, leading to eviction through excessive household disorder.

The continuum of Indigenous housing careers needs to be seen in relation to the isolation of Indigenous people from elements or the whole of the wider Australian economy, and the ongoing shortage of public and low cost private rental housing. There is a major problem in accessing private rental housing for Indigenous families where one of the parents is in employment. In the regional towns and cities, it is extremely difficult for Indigenous people to gain acceptance as private tenants. There is an evident unwillingness on the part of real estate agents outside the capital city to approve Indigenous families for tenancy. It seems likely that, at least in part, this is owing to institutional, society wide prejudice against Indigenous people as householders. Another issue is that CRA is said to be insufficient in offsetting the higher cost of rental in some regions.

This is demonstrated in the case of Indigenous men employed as licensed machine operators by mining companies. They earn too much to qualify for public housing. Families who find themselves in this situation have no choice except to request shelter from housed kinfolk. Household overcrowding can be seen as an objective indication of secondary homelessness among Indigenous people, who regularly house their homeless relations. It is likely that this practice accounts for the greater number of overcrowded Indigenous households. This being so, the actual rate of secondary Indigenous homelessness is concealed in these figures. By virtue of the fact that it results in the substantial reduction of the numbers of Indigenous primary homeless people, this practice of housing otherwise homeless relations is a public service.

There are several policy approaches that could address these points:

→ State departments of housing should revisit the idea of the old homemaker service with a view to redeveloping the service for the present context. The service should embrace a range of household skills, including domestic cleaning and basic household repair and maintenance skills. It is often not clear to Indigenous public housing tenants what the public housing provider's obligation for repairs and maintenance consists of, leading to the erroneous belief that all repairs however minor or however they may have occurred, are the Department's responsibility. Taking control of repairs and maintenance to a limited extent would serve to reduce the dependence of Indigenous tenants on the public housing provider. Empowering Indigenous people in this way can play a part in moving out of welfare dependency.

→ A limit should be placed on rental and utilities arrears and this limit should trigger intervention by state departments of housing before the situation gets to the point of either eviction or extremely high debt levels. The increase in the level of arrears should be understood as a possible warning sign that something is seriously amiss within the household such as alcohol or drug misuse, family or domestic violence, or child abuse. The intervention should be aimed at determining whether there is such a problem underlying the mounting arrears, the nature of the problem, with resulting referrals to appropriate agencies for aid. If indeed the only problem is a lack of personal organisation skills, referral to financial counselling is indicated.

→ State departments of housing should investigate the idea of managed overcrowding, characterised by a plan to which both the department and the secondary homeless residents of the household commit themselves. There should

be some kind of advantage for householders to reveal their overcrowded conditions which enables them to fulfil their cultural obligation to help their homeless relations to find housing.

→ State and Federal Departments of Indigenous Affairs, Public Housing, and Families should consider a marketing approach aimed at improving the public image of Indigenous people as householders.

→ The Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs should consider payment of CRA according to a formula that includes regional variations in the housing market.

7.3 Key factors in variations in the experience of homelessness

7.3.1 Place

The character of Indigenous homelessness varies according to location. In places where the urban hinterland includes a large number of Indigenous communities, there may be a higher rate of primary homelessness. This is the case regardless of the remoteness of the town or city. The character of homelessness is also dependent on the kin connectedness of the Indigenous people coming to the city or town. On account of policy histories, the Indigenous residents of some places have a wide set of kin connections with Indigenous people over large areas of the state. Indigenous people coming to the city or town may be far more likely to be in situations of secondary homelessness, living among the homes of their kinfolk.

Local distinctions in the character of homeless Indigenous populations lead to differences in local views as to the solution to the problem of Indigenous homelessness. In Broome and Sydney, the call of service providers and local government was for shelters because of the perceived need to move the homeless Indigenous off the streets. In Carnarvon, in contrast, Indigenous homelessness is characterised by secondary homelessness, and there was little call for shelters and the measures called for by service providers pertained more to the lack of crisis accommodation and services for men.

The composition of homeless groups varies according to the degree of remoteness of the setting and the kind of homelessness. With regard to primary homelessness, in remote and very remote settings, most homeless Indigenous groups are composed of more or less closely related kinfolk. In the major cities, while many of the members of a primary homeless group will be kinfolk, there may also be people unrelated to one another included in the group. Alcohol misuse occurred in all primary homeless groups. In this research there were fewer women than men among the ranks of Indigenous primary homeless people.

→ Programs of social support and facilities should reflect local needs and conditions. For example, Broome has a serious and ongoing need for short-stay facilities for visitors from outlying communities, whereas there are no indications that Carnarvon has a similar need.

7.3.2 Kinship, gender and lifestyle issues

Secondary homeless groups, living in overcrowded households, are most often made up of kinfolk, although a few such groups arise out of close friendships among women who are unrelated. Most of these are non-drinking, or managed drinking, households. Among those overcrowded households which are regarded as 'drinking' houses daily life is extremely difficult and the danger to children of all ages is acute.

Homeless Indigenous men, particularly those from remote area communities are disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge in accessing public housing. The process involved in making a successful application to public housing departments is traditionally regarded as a female task. This prevents Indigenous men from applying for houses on account of lack of knowledge and shame.

Violence is an important precursor to homelessness and there is a need for services which deal with the flow-on effects of violence. Most of the existing services are specifically for women; however, the need is more acute for men and boys because of the relative scarcity of services specifically for men and older adolescent boys. Without counselling and support services for men who commit the violence, there is little hope of reducing the incidence of family and domestic violence in Indigenous communities. Indigenous women are often unwilling to report violent men to the police, and will choose homelessness as the preferred solution.

→ State departments of justice should establish short- to medium-term residential facilities which would offer support and counselling to men whose partners have reported them to the police. While these men would not be tried for their offences, residence would be contingent on a report to the police which results in enough evidence to bring the case to court. Alternatively, any man who self-identifies as committing domestic violence should be offered support and counselling without fear of arrest.

→ Prison pre-release programs should be assessed with regard to whether or not they are achieving full coverage of the prisoners eligible for such programs. As part of these programs, prisoners should receive information on agencies in the place where they are to be sent on release which will provide them with help and information in making the transition from prison to everyday life. Together these agencies should provide the necessary information on accessing housing, banking facilities, identification documents, job training, health care and so forth. They should also be able to provide specialised counselling according to gender.

→ In liaison with Indigenous community organisations and related services, departments of justice should also seek to establish community services for men. Men's outreach facilities should be strengthened where they exist and established in places where they do not.

7.4 Exploring the potential of a managed overcrowding approach

In the final report of their research concerning Indigenous housing careers, Birdsall-Jones and Corunna (2008) discussed overcrowding. Also in that report, Birdsall-Jones and Corunna pointed out that increased household occupancy levels in response to a shortage of housing is not an Indigenous phenomenon but is common across cultures and, to some extent, economic circumstances. Indigenous overcrowding is distinguished by the way it is managed within Indigenous society according to obligations and patterns arising out of kinship. As well, Indigenous household overcrowding is distinguished by its frequency. In this report and in the housing careers report, we connect Indigenous household overcrowding with Indigenous homelessness.

Indigenous overcrowding appears to occur for two reasons:

1. the lack of housing through loss of housing, loss of housing amenity, or inability to access housing; and

2. visiting patterns pursuant to culturally based law, custom and kinship obligations.

7.4.1 What kind of household should receive support?

Those who lack housing and those who are visiting will request accommodation from their housed relations. In Chapter 7, we differentiated between requests which are legitimated according to Indigenous culture and social organisation, and those that are not. Requests that are not so legitimated are generally associated with some form of substance abuse. In Chapter 4 we discussed the impacts of living in a drinking versus a non-drinking household, seeking to make the point that a household that is given over to a substance abuse lifestyle is too compromised to be considered viable. We made the point there that the idea of a non-drinking household need not go to the extent of teatotal, only that the household must be run according to the dictates of Indigenous social organisation and not a lifestyle committed to the pursuit of substance abuse.

The means of managing household overcrowding open to Indigenous people are limited and consist chiefly of the apportioning of sleeping space according to rules governing the appropriate combinations of people according to age, gender and conjugal status, and the expectation that those who have been granted shelter by the householder will contribute equitably to household running costs.

Even in situations in which the overcrowded household is run as well as it can be, there are stresses. Public housing is not generally constructed for these excessive occupancy levels and the health hardware of the house (bathing, toilet, laundry, kitchen facilities) wears out and becomes a health hazard. The occupants of the house are aware that they are violating the terms of the lease with DoH and that neighbours could complain about the level of noise created by children, entertainment equipment, and day to day living.

For these reasons, it should be expected that an overcrowded household will present with some degree of disorder. Households should not be excluded from receiving support simply because of perceived disorder. Rather it should be recognised that households which are not involved in substance abuse and related activities could be made viable if they are supported. We do not propose that providing support to overcrowded households should be perceived as a substitute for normal housing, or that the fact that such households may be managing relatively well should indicate a reduced housing need.

7.4.2 What kind of support might be useful?

In this section we provide some examples of measures that might be considered in response to Indigenous household overcrowding. This discussion is not exhaustive

Formal recognition by DoH that the tenant is providing shelter to relations who would otherwise be homeless would be helpful in eliminating one source of stress on those living in overcrowded housing. This is the stress caused by fear of eviction through violation of the terms of the lease. Overcrowded homes could be assessed to determine whether they are providing housing to homeless relations or visitors. If the overcrowding is due to providing housing to homeless relations, a further assessment could be made to determine whether or not the household is viable, or potentially viable with adequate support. Viable here means that the situation is not complicated by a substance abuse lifestyle, and that residents can be maintained in a reasonable standard of livability. A reasonable standard of livability means that the homeless parent(s) have a bedroom to share with their younger children, with older children able sleep undisturbed in the lounge room. This recognition might qualify the household for various support measures in recognition of the welfare benefit of housing homeless relations.

DoH might consider allowing the tenant to continue paying rent at the rate stated on the lease rather than increasing the rent commensurate with increased occupancy. This arrangement could be limited to a projection of the time it takes the homeless relations to obtain housing. DoH might also consider providing a suitably skilled professional to support the household through the period of overcrowding. The professional's support would consist of helping the household to cope with stressors and problems that will arise on account of overcrowding.

An ongoing problem in Indigenous household overcrowding is the response of neighbours to the disorder that not infrequently accompanies the increased number of occupants. This can lead to violation of Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and the eviction of the entire household, thereby increasing the rate of Indigenous homelessness with the burden most likely falling on the relations of those evicted. At least part of the problem is household management.

Household management in overcrowded situations is more demanding and different from normal household management. The stressors involved include the need for more frequent cleaning and the reduction of personal privacy. Households which cannot deal with these stressors are threatened with collapse, leading to the need for the homeless family to find new housing which will impact on children's school performance and mental health. If overcrowded households can be aided in dealing with higher than normal stress, the likelihood of the household surviving intact until the homeless obtain their own housing is improved.

It may be helpful to revisit the tenant's existing Acceptable Behaviour Agreement with a view to finding ways to meet their obligations under the circumstances of overcrowding. It is possible that some reconciliation process may be entered into with neighbours. Such intervention is unlikely to take place without professional help.

The professional can provide a link between the homeless relations who have been taken in by the householder and DoH. This would facilitate educating the homeless about the process of making an application to DoH. Single men in particular may be unaware of an applicant's ongoing obligation to respond to DoH correspondence. There are various categories of Indigenous people who may have more than the usual difficulty accessing housing of their own. This report has highlighted the situation of one such category: mature single men.

There are some men in any Indigenous extended family who never form a conjugal partnership. They may have children but they have little to do with them. Instead, they have close ties with their sisters, sister-cousins, and their nieces and nephews and tend to travel frequently among the homes of their female relations. This frequent change of housing interferes with their participation in employment, as well as making it difficult for them to maintain a place in CDEP or other training program.

These men are dependent on their relations for housing; however, at least some will express a wish for their own homes. In our experience, these men are not well equipped to manage the process of applying to the DoH for housing. If such men are actively helped in the application process they might acquire their own housing, which would contribute to reducing the frequency of their travelling, improving their capacity to retain employment or a place in a training scheme such as CDEP. Obtaining and retaining stable employment has flow-on benefits regarding lifestyle, in that men who know they must go to work in the morning tend to drink to excess less often.

7.4.3 Overall benefit of this approach

In developing ways to work with overcrowded Indigenous households the DoH will be doing two things. One is that in identifying households that qualify for support in the

terms outlined above, it will acquire an understanding of the level of secondary homelessness in Indigenous society. This will provide a more realistic assessment of housing need than is currently available. The second is that in supporting these overcrowded households, the DoH will be developing ways to access the great strength of Indigenous society in resolving housing issues.

The great strength of Indigenous society is the kinship system which has proven resilient to the pressures of the wider society. An example of the workings of this system is provided in Birdsall-Jones and Christensen (2007). Within the workings of this kinship system Indigenous political, economic and social life is carried out. In their report on Indigenous housing careers (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008) the authors point out that while Indigenous people are well-connected within their own social world, they are distinctly lacking in connections with the wider society and economy. It is important to the economic development of the Indigenous community that such connections be developed. By engaging with Indigenous households which seek to cope with the problem of homelessness among their membership, the DoH will be facilitating the connectedness of Indigenous society with the wider social and economic sphere.

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APPENDIX: BASIC DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENT

Indigenous Homelessness

For the Interviewer:

What kind of homelessness is this person experiencing?

☐ No place to go

☐ Improvised shelter

If they're in a house/flat:

☐ Living with relations

☐ Living with friends

1. General Information

a) Date

b) Place

c) Gender

d) Are you homeless all on your own, or are you trying to find shelter for your children, partner, parents, others?

e) If trying to find shelter with family and relations or friends, describe in relation to main participant:

Age	Gender	Relation

f) This is the participants' own household. What is the participant's role in their own household (mother, sister, father etc.)?

g) About your education; what's your highest year in school?

h) How about the education of other members of your household?

Partner:

Children	Year at school
1	
2	
3	
4	

Parents	Year at school
Mother	
Father	

Siblings	Year at school	Siblings' children	Year at school

2. The Current Situation

a) Describe the situation the participant is living in at the moment:

b) Nature of the dwelling, eg. house, flat, vacant house or building, improvised shelter (describe), no shelter (describe situation)

2.1. For dwellings:

a) Where do you sleep?

b) How many people are you sharing that room with?

c) How many people live in this place?

Adults: Teenagers: Younger Children: Couples:

h) What's the general condition of the home?

i) Are there any people with health issues in your own little household? (disabled, heart, diabetes, frail elderly, people sharing colds or other ailments etc.)

j) What about in the big household, for this whole place? Do they have any health issues?

2.2. For improvised dwellings:

a) Apart from your own household, are you sharing your shelter with anyone?

Adults: Teenagers: Younger Children: Couples:

b) Do any other groups of people have shelters nearby?
If so, how many?

Can you say how many people are in each shelter?

Adults: Teenagers: Younger Children: Couples:

c) What's the general condition of the shelter? Do you have access to clean water?

d) What about food? Do you cook here?   How?

Or, are you just getting takeaway?

e) Are there any people with health issues in your own little household?
   (disabled, heart, diabetes, frail elderly, people sharing colds or other ailments
   etc.)

f) What about for this whole place? Do they have any health issues?

2.3 No shelter

Food:

Water:

General safety: eg. sleeping

Health issues:

2.4. Household Income

a) Do you have a job, or does anyone in your household have a job (only if anyone
   else if of working age)?

How much do you/they earn?

	Type of job	Wage
1		
2		
3		

b) If yes, what work are you/they doing?

c) Are you or anyone else in your household on government benefits?

	Type of benefit	Amount of benefit
1		
2		
3		

3. What is the participant's story?

AHURI Research Centres

Queensland Research Centre
RMIT Research Centre
Southern Research Centre
Swinburne-Monash Research Centre
UNSW-UWS Research Centre
Western Australia Research Centre