



*Final Report*

# **Australian Indigenous house crowding**

authored by

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## ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CHIP	Commonwealth Housing Infrastructure Program
CNOS	Canadian National Occupancy Standard
DAIA	Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (Queensland)
DCP	Department of Child Protection (Western Australia)
DoH (WA)	Department of Housing (Western Australia)
F	Female
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
M	Male
MRAC	Murchinson Region Aboriginal Corporation
NPAAH	National Partnership Agreement on Affordable Housing
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
POS	Proxy Occupancy Standard
QCOSS	Queensland Council of Social Services
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SIHIP	Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program
SLA	Statistical Local Area

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This AHURI project aimed to develop a model of Australian Aboriginal house crowding, based on social science theories, and then refined through empirical studies conducted in regional urban and state capital metropolitan areas, generating useful findings for housing policy.

The case studies were conducted in Queensland and Western Australia in order to gather comparative data with which to analyse crowding in Indigenous households.<sup>1</sup> The model incorporates the lived experiences of Indigenous people including the factors that cause, perpetuate and prevent crowding, and relates these to crowding theory and policy implications.

This Research Project has two stages. The first stage was a literature analysis that was reported in an earlier Positioning Paper (Memmott et al. 2011). The second stage involved empirical research which took place in mid and late 2011, resulting in this Final Report for AHURI. In our Positioning Paper, we examined social science definitions and models of cross-cultural crowding, particularly those grounded in environmental psychology and social anthropology theory.

The stage 2 research used the literature-based model of Indigenous crowding developed within the Positioning Paper and refined it based on our research within non-remote urban settings. Our research addressed the prescribed questions for this study as outlined below.

1. What are the dimensions of crowding in Indigenous households?
2. How does this vary by tenure, dwelling type and geography?
3. What are the various drivers of crowding?
4. How do the drivers interact with housing variables?
5. How does crowding impact upon individuals and households?
6. At what point does crowding have negative consequences?
7. What strategies do Indigenous households employ to cope with crowding?
8. What are the policy and program implications of crowding for housing providers?
9. Are there design opportunities to build housing that can accommodate the high rate of mobility and visiting patterns of Indigenous people while maintaining high standards of living for permanent residents?

The case studies were selected to examine key concepts and theories applicable to constructing a general model of household crowding for Indigenous communities, while acknowledging that particular cultural and place factors are relevant for specific communities, whether they be remote, rural urban or metropolitan.

Two suburbs within metropolitan centres were chosen for this study: Inala in Brisbane and Swan in Perth; each has a substantial Indigenous resident population. In addition, the two regional centres of Carnarvon and Mount Isa were selected as case study sites, both of which have high Aboriginal populations and attract visitors or residents from a regional catchment of remote communities that are characterised as having strong customary traditions of residential behaviours. The four urban study sites were

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term Indigenous because our case study participants included a small number of Torres Strait Islander people, and hence the term Aboriginal is not appropriate when we generalise to discuss the broader groups of study participants. When we frequently discuss matters that apply to Aboriginal people, which do not apply to Torres Strait Islander people, we use the term 'Aboriginal'.

used during stage 2 to ensure a reasonable (although not necessarily equal) sample of householders. Our primary criteria for selecting interviewees was a recent (past 12 months) experience of hosting large households, either in terms of a core household or large numbers of visitors, or both.

The organisation of each of the four study site analyses that are contained in Chapters 3–6 is in accordance with the following content structure:

- Household profiles in sample.
- Household expansion—origin of visitors.
- Reasons for household expansion.
- Large household formation patterns.
- Sleeping arrangement principles.
- Perceived absence of stress by some interviewees.
- Perceptions of stress by other interviewees.
- Strategies used to cope when stressed.
- Neighbourhood stress problems.
- Physical needs and improvements to cope.
- Summary

Initially however, an introduction is provided in Chapter 2 to each of the four study sites in order to sensitise on what structural drivers of crowding might be present and how those may constitute or contribute to ‘antecedent factors’ in accordance with Robert Gifford’s model of crowding.

The theory used to develop the crowding model is based on social science literature that argues while stress can arise from large household numbers, density alone is not the cause of crowding. This aligns with international models of crowding that have developed significantly over the last four decades, in which crowding is no longer conceptualised by researchers as simply high-density, nor is it assumed that stress and annoyance will automatically arise in high-density situations. It is acknowledged that some people in some high-density situations do not experience stress in relation to high-density, but conversely that in some situations a high density of people is desirable.

We devise our concept of what constitutes crowding primarily from the literature review of crowding by environmental psychologist Robert Gifford (2007), drawing also on an earlier review of the Australian Indigenous crowding literature by Memmott (1991) and a recent audit of the Aboriginal housing literature by Long et al. (2007). The model of crowding that we develop (see Figure 1) takes into account Gifford’s key elements of crowding: loss of personal control, variable experiences of stress and specific cultural components of crowding. Gifford’s model of crowding identifies antecedent factors to crowding, responses to crowding and factors that mediate the experience of crowding.

We then identify behaviours, attitudes and concepts from our case studies that give life to this model, to develop an initial understanding of the kinds of situations in which Aboriginal people feel crowded, the coping mechanisms that are utilised, and the cultural factors influencing their threshold of when crowding occurs. We establish the basic cross-cultural factors that drive these models, enabling us to evaluate them:

- in relation to the crowding models currently in use in Australia

- with regard to their policy application to household crowding in Australian Aboriginal communities.

We find a number of antecedent factors that influence people's experience of crowding particularly government policies and societal factors such as a shortage of housing in Indigenous communities generally, the economical fragility of many Indigenous families and communities, and the prevalence of both primary and secondary homelessness among Indigenous people. Cultural drivers that influence Aboriginal households to become large households included Indigenous people's kin ties and desire for an immersive sociality, women as frequent household heads, and the cultural traits of demand sharing and mobility in Indigenous communities. Culturally specific responses to large households included particular patterns of expansion of households along kin and social lines, and varying perceptions of stress when households did become large. Finally we were able to identify factors that mediated stress relating to large household numbers including firm administration of household rules, sharing visitors among nearby kin, and arranging people in culturally appropriate groups for sleeping.

We discuss the policy implications that the case studies and analyses point to, and areas for further research. These findings inform a more refined definition of Aboriginal crowding for policy applications across all Australian jurisdictions, as well as having relevance for other international jurisdictions with substantial Indigenous populations (e.g. Canada & New Zealand). The research has implications for government policies on Indigenous health, housing procurement, housing management, homelessness, town planning and appropriate house design. We provide policy-makers with an increased knowledge base from which to understand, predict, measure, assess and manage Aboriginal household crowding.

The policy implications that we identify, and discuss in our recommendations, are that:

- Crowding cannot be identified through density measures alone and further quantitative and qualitative investigation of crowding to understand local causes, effects and manifestations should be conducted prior to housing measures that address crowding.
- Housing policies should recognise the importance of social and kin ties and the deep obligations to house kin that remain strong for many Indigenous people in urban areas (both regional cities & metropolitan areas). This may include the desire to be housed close to kin and one's social groups which, in turn, build into strong place attachments even through people reside in rental housing.
- Housing policies such as Western Australia's 'three strikes' policy increase both large numbers in households as people lose their tenure, and stress, as those who are obliged to take these people as visitors worry over their own tenure if they breach permitted numbers. This should be addressed to reduce such a burden on householders.
- Children and women require support through mechanisms that provide financial and housing stability where it is desired. Support for women in the face of domestic violence and financial distress would assist in this regard. Similarly support for those who have substance abuse, alcohol and violence problems can reduce stress and crowding.

Housing stock is usually designed for smaller nuclear families and is inadequate to house large, extended and complex family structures typical of Indigenous communities. Housing design should focus on the number of people housed, aligning with sociospatial patterns of sleeping arrangements, and consider the large numbers of people likely to inhabit one house. Provision of more bathrooms and larger kitchen

facilities, outdoor living and sleeping spaces and flexible internal spatial arrangement would produce a better cultural fit and reduce both stress and household wear and tear.

Mobility at scales from the regional to the suburban influenced the ways in which households operated on a daily, weekly and longer-term basis. A rhythm of movement locally over short periods was then scaled up to longer-term and long-distance mobility. Key drivers of this are kin sociality, demand sharing, permeable households and hub households, as defined earlier in this report.

A comparison of the variables between the four study sites, rather than highlighting some definitive differences between regional cities and metropolitan suburbs, tells us alternately that the combined variables of:

- Ratio of Aboriginal residents to non-Aboriginal residents.
- Ratio of public rental to non-public rental and private housing tenure.
- Supportive versus punitive approaches to housing management which can generate crowding stresses of different sorts.

For example, a very high proportion of Aboriginal residents in public rental, as in Pioneer in Mount Isa can result in neighbourhood crowding stress for Aboriginal residents caused by other Aboriginal residents, whereas at a different extreme, a low proportion of Aboriginal residents (albeit with high household numbers) living among predominantly white people in private rental and freehold tenure, combined with a punitive housing management policy ('three strikes') as in Swan, can result in a different type of crowding stress, arising from the moral prerogative to house kin under severe threat of instant eviction.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This AHURI project aims to build a model of Australian Aboriginal house crowding, then test and refine it empirically for urban and metropolitan areas, generating useful findings for housing policy. The Final Report builds upon a detailed literature analysis contained in the authors' earlier AHURI Positioning Paper (Memmott et al. 2011).

This report uses case studies conducted in urban areas of Queensland and Western Australia to analyse crowding in Indigenous households. We discuss the lived experiences, theory and policy implications derived from a deeper understanding of crowding and the factors that cause, perpetuate and prevent crowding.

We use the social science literature to derive a model of crowding that is based on the stress that large numbers cause, rather than a model that relies upon density alone. Internationally, models of crowding have developed and changed significantly over the last four decades. Crowding is no longer conceptualised by researchers as simply high-density, nor is it assumed that stress and annoyance will automatically arise in high-density situations. There is acknowledgement that some people in some high-density situations do not experience stress in relation to high-density, and that in some situations a high density of people is desirable (cf. Proshansky et al. 1970; Stokols 1972, 1976).

Based on our earlier Positioning Paper, we devise our concept of what constitutes crowding primarily from the literature review of crowding by environmental psychologist Robert Gifford (2007), drawing also on an earlier review of the Australian Indigenous crowding literature by Memmott (1991) and a recent audit of the Aboriginal housing literature by Long et al. (2007). The model of crowding that we develop (see Figure 1) takes into account Gifford's key elements of crowding: loss of personal control, variable experiences of stress and specific cultural components of crowding (Gifford 2007, pp.21, 145, 212).

We then test this model through the case studies, to develop an initial understanding of the kinds of situations in which Indigenous people feel crowded, the coping mechanisms that are used, and the cultural factors influencing their threshold of when crowding occurs. We seek to establish the basic cross-cultural factors that drive these models, enabling us to evaluate them:

- in relation to the crowding models currently in use in Australia
- with regard to their application to household crowding in Australian Aboriginal communities.

Finally, we discuss the policy implications that the case studies and analyses point to, and areas for further research.

We use the term 'Indigenous' in this report because our case study participants included a small number of Torres Strait Islander people, and hence the term 'Aboriginal' is not appropriate when we generalise to discuss the broader groups of study participants. When we discuss matters that apply to Aboriginal people, which do not apply to Torres Strait Islander people, we use the term 'Aboriginal'.

## 1.1 Debunking density

Density is a measure of the number of individuals per unit area, whereas crowding according to Gifford:

[It] refers to the person's experience of the number of other people around. Rather than a physical ratio, crowding is a personally defined,



subjective feeling that too many others are around. Crowding may correspond to high density, but often the connection is not as strong as one might think ... Crowding is a function of many personal, situational, and cultural factors. (Gifford 2007, p.192)

This definition emphasises the culturally-specific nature of crowding perception, also acknowledged by Gillis et al. (1986), Chan (1999) and others. The determination of what constitutes a 'high-density' situation for a particular group is thus a subjective perception that is dictated by the group's implicit norms about the matter and its recognition of the potential 'crowding' effects of such a state (Rapoport 1976:23). We align with the majority of environmental psychologists to conceptualise crowding as an interpretive, motivational state of which individuals are, for the most part, usually aware. As Chan argues:

Firstly, crowding is a personal, subjective reaction, not a physical variable; secondly, it is a motivational state that often results in goal-oriented behaviour with which to alleviate discomfort; thirdly it centres on the feeling of having or controlling too little space. (Chan 1999, pp.105–106)

It is important to note that cultural factors also influence the perception of the converse psychological state of 'isolation', where desired social contact fails to be achieved (Gillis et al. 1986, p.685). This is a key element of Indigenous culture that has been absent from models of crowding and household utilisation in the past, and is examined in more detail in the case studies, where we demonstrate the importance of understanding this concept in relation to visiting relatives and large households.

Despite the social science definition of 'crowding', it is density measures that are inherent in the calculation of crowding used by governments in Australia, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These measures also determine, according to tenancy agreements, the size of houses and maximum numbers of people that should be accommodated, as well as how those houses should be occupied to be considered not crowded.

## **1.2 Factors contributing to crowding**

Summarising from our Positioning Paper, the literature suggests some keys factors that contribute to crowding, beyond simply the density of people in dwellings. We examine these here and will return to them in the case study analyses and policy recommendations.

### **1.2.1 *Loss of personal control***

One key element of crowding is the loss of personal control over one's circumstances. This can be understood by the simple analogy of a party or a stadium event. The choice to attend such an event involves a seeking of the experience of interaction, group cohesion and heightened sensations. Those who do not enjoy such experiences may indeed find them unpleasant and feel crowded. The loss of personal control in relation to a household become problematic because there are usually few other places that a person may be able to inhabit. Personal control is used by social scientists examining crowding to encompass a range of meanings and notions, including the individual's ability to control the occurrence of certain social experiences, to maintain goals, to fulfil expectations, to obtain valued outputs from situations despite annoying surroundings, or to be satisfied that the predictability of social and environmental conditions is not threatened. Density of people becomes annoying or stressful when it threatens, removes or reduces personal control and consequently the outcome of desired types of behaviours (Baron & Rodin 1978; Insel & Lindgren 1978, p.21; Schmidt & Keating 1979; Schmidt 1983).

The environmental psychologist, Gifford, expands on the nature of personal control as follows:

Personal control is an important component of crowding. A key aspect of this is locus of control, the tendency of individuals to believe (or not) that they exercise considerable influence over their own lives. Individuals who believe this more (internals) generally have been found able to handle the stress of crowding better than those who believe it less (externals), although not every study supports this conclusion. (Gifford 2007, p.195)

The notion of personal control being limited in other aspects of people's lives is an important consideration to crowding in Indigenous households. While there may be culturally specific notions of what constitutes satisfactory levels of personal control over factors such as the number and composition of household residents, there may also occur other more stressful events involving loss of personal control, such as continual premature deaths in a family, social network or community, the financial loss of control associated with unemployment, the experience of being a victim of domestic or other violence, and so on, which all may of course add to the stress people feel, and may contribute to a sense of crowding.

### *1.2.2 Variable experiences of stress*

People living in the same environment may experience different levels of stress, and hence crowding, because of individual factors, expectations and their response to that particular environment. The perception that there is a high density of people (compared to that desired) alongside the architectural design that may inhibit desired behaviour, the presence of excessive noise or other undesired phenomena can make a place feel crowded for a particular person. The person's power to alter circumstances also effects these perceptions of crowding, as those who are 'in charge' may feel less stressed than those who may desire change but are unable to implement it. Loo and Ong (1984) argue that sensory overstimulation leads to environmental stress—for example, unwanted people staring or observing one another, proximate arguments or fights, proximate sickness, unsanitary pollution and smells, constant jostling and pushing, people being uncomfortably close, too many strangers or unfriendly people, high frequency of localised crime, and a lack of alternate settings into which to retreat (see also Six et al. 1983), and they argue that even an individual alone in an unsatisfactory environment may feel crowded (Loo & Ong 1984, p.12).

Zeedyk-Ryan & Smith (1983) add that the length of time of exposure to such situations shapes feelings of crowding with Evans et al. further arguing that the effects of crowding may take months to have an impact on residents (Evans et al. 2000, p.210). Importantly though, stress may also be caused by a low density of people, or isolation from those who one would like to be near. Both undesirably low and undesirably high density living have been shown to increase the risk of mental disorders, according to Gifford (2007, p.213).

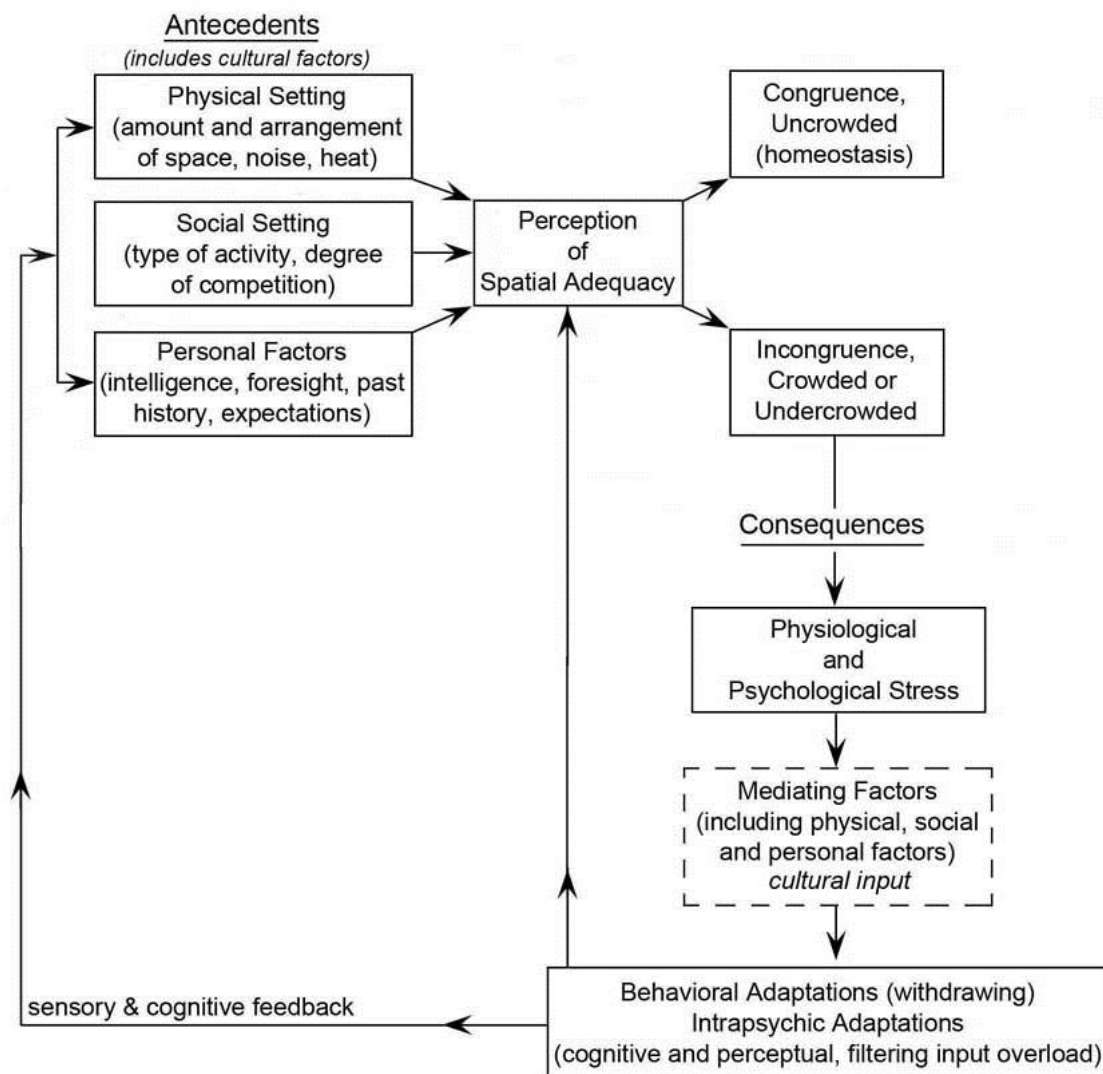
## **1.3 Gifford's integrative theory of crowding and its cultural components**

Gifford synthesises the various factors that contribute to crowding into a single integrative theory of crowding:

Certain personal, social, and physical antecedents lead to the experience of crowding. Among these are a variety of individual differences, resource shortages (behavior-setting theory), the number of other people nearby (density-intensity & social physics theories), who those others are, and

what they are doing. Sensory overload and a lack of personal control are psychological processes central to the experience of crowding. The consequences of crowding include physiological, behavioural, and cognitive effects, including health problems, learned helplessness, and reactance. (Gifford 2007, p.217)

**Figure 1: Integrative model of crowding**



Source: Adapted from Gifford 2007, pp.195, 214, Fig. 7.12

As outlined in more detail in our Positioning Paper (Memmott et al. 2011), we have adapted Gifford's diagrammatic theoretical model to crowding as above (Figure 1), to include the salient cultural factors in his discussion. We note that Gifford incorporates culture into his crowding model in two places, first as antecedent factors that contribute to the tendency of crowding to occur, e.g. the character of physical and social settings, personal and group history; and second as mediating factors that shape people's responses to stress.

Antecedent cultural factors could include childhood conditioning and socialisation that equip individuals to desire culturally specific levels of density and thus to deal with density in different ways, according to different norms, in perceived high-density situations. Thus Rapoport (1976, p.18) and others have argued that being with similar

people will decrease stress in potentially crowded circumstances. Kinship groups (e.g. extended families, multiple family units) and other culturally homogenous groups are most likely to be socially well-structured. (Memmott 1991, p.257)

Similarly, culturally informed mediating factors also affect how individuals react to situations that are perceived to be stressful and crowded, and those factors drive group sanctions over what is appropriate stress-avoidance behaviour. Gifford discusses the operation of cultural factors in relation to crowding:

The consequences of crowding and high density depend in part on cultural background. Culture acts as a moderating influence on high density, sometimes providing its members with a shield against the negative effects of high density and sometimes failing to equip them with effective means of coping with high density. (Gifford 2007, p.21)

Cultural factors that affect Indigenous crowding both as antecedent and moderating agents are analysed in the case studies herein and show that crowding is both anticipated and moderated by particular cultural factors in many Indigenous people's experiences. We shall present this as a holistic influence on the perception of crowding, requiring an analysis that searches beyond density alone and accounts for surrounding influences including culture.

#### **1.4 Why do simple density models persist?**

While crowding and density are only weakly correlated (Gifford 2007, p.220; Evans et al. 2000, p.207), density is still the preferred model of measuring and predicting crowding for many Australian agencies. These density rules are based on cultural norms that tend to assume a British model of culture and habitation of housing. These are embedded in the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) adopted by Australian agencies to measure levels of crowding in households, based on norms of sleeping and living in a British nuclear family culture. It is the CNOS that is used by government, in conjunction with flawed methods of counting household occupation that determine levels of crowding in Indigenous households (see Memmott et al. 2011).

Density models of crowding are used to assess which houses are crowded as well as to plan for funding on new housing (Memmott et al. 2012 forthcoming). Models based on density also influence architectural design of housing, with the provision of the three-bedroom house still the most prevalent model, even in the most recent construction of housing in remote Aboriginal communities (Davidson et al. 2011). Housing for Indigenous people in urban areas tends to be within mainstream service provision where again an assumed density and level of occupation of nuclear families of a certain size drives the provision of three-bedroom houses as the norm.

Government agencies persist with density calculations and models despite their lack of applicability to the diverse cultures within Australian communities. We presume that given the large bureaucracies at work and the continued counting of people in particular ways by the national Census, NATSISS and other instruments, density calculations have become embedded in such a way that it becomes difficult to move beyond the density orthodoxy. Currently there is no suitable replacement for density calculations when there is a desire to measure crowding or improvements in crowding. Nevertheless the persistence of the density orthodoxy hampers deeper and more useful understandings of crowding, household use, and related issues of homelessness and mobility. Acknowledgement of the limits of its usefulness would at least give conceptual room for seeking more insightful understandings of the ways in which Indigenous people actually occupy houses and their motivations for doing so.

## 1.5 Indigenous people's perceptions of crowding

Again, drawing from our Positioning Paper, the Australian literature clearly establishes that traditional Aboriginal crowding behaviours are culturally distinct, in line with the international literature which posits crowding as a complex concept requiring further investigation, particularly at the cross-cultural level of analysis. (Memmott et al. 2011, ch.3)

Marked cross-cultural differences are noted in the international literature in the varied social manifestations of crowding, but these are currently crudely modelled and require further refinement for a culturally specific understanding of crowding.

The consequences of ongoing cultural change on Indigenous norms of crowding and privacy in urban contexts are poorly understood, as is the impact of housing on such norms. Although we can show anecdotally that the provision of Western European style housing has wrought change in the way all Australian Indigenous families and groups now react to and deal with crowding and privacy, this has not yet been systematically demonstrated through published case study analysis. Our case study analysis addresses this lack of primary research. Obviously substantial further research is required to fill out the above model in relation to Aboriginal groups with varying histories of change, before any specific crowding metric can be developed for Indigenous communities. In the meantime it certainly cannot be assumed that high household densities regarded as 'crowded' by non-Aboriginal standards are necessarily perceived as being stressful by Aboriginal groups (Memmott 1991, p.262).

Several known factors, in Gifford's parlance 'antecedent factors', that have informed our case study design include cultural norms on the juxtaposition of inappropriate types of relatives in sleeping and living spaces (thereby breaking avoidance rules), issues of residential mobility, 'demand sharing' (see further on this below), power relationships and traditional authority (Memmott et al. 2011, p.40). Additionally the concept of appropriate levels of companionship and sleeping intimacy, as discussed by Musharbash (2008), are incorporated into our case study analysis.

With these known factors in mind, we examine the usefulness of existing models of crowding such as the most commonly cited measure, the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) (ABS 2008) and the less commonly used Proxy Occupancy Standard (POS) (AIHW 2005) that are typically used by Australian public housing providers and planners. While certain Indigenous households may indeed be crowded, as we shall demonstrate herein, we seek to determine whether the provision of housing and tenancy rules to the standards prescribed in the CNOS would alleviate such crowding, or whether other types of household use are preferred, and if so, what these might be.

### 1.5.1 *The structure of 'demand sharing'*

The concept of 'demand sharing' in anthropology was developed originally by Peterson (1993), partly based on the work carried out by Hiatt (1982) and Sahlins (1972). Peterson asks the question: 'Why do recipients often have to demand generosity?' (1993, p.860), noting that it is a widespread phenomenon in Australia. He points out that this is about 'relatedness and about how we construct and represent social relations in small-scale societies'.

The injunction to look after one another, including providing a visitor with accommodation in one's house, is not based on altruism as such, although one would not deny that this is involved. What is being expressed here is the right to ask, not the obligation to offer. The meanings of rights and obligations are therefore in direct opposition to the understandings of Anglo-Australian society. In Aboriginal society

kinfolk are often not invited. Instead, when kinfolk descend on a household asking for accommodation they can do so because of the logic of the meta-principle involving reciprocal rights and obligations. The answer to the request may not necessarily be 'yes', but the right to ask is perfectly legitimate.

Under what circumstances might householders say 'no' to such requests? As Peterson notes, it is very difficult to deny such a request if it comes from kinfolk in an appropriate relation to oneself. It is vitally important for a host kinsperson that every effort is made to avoid denying such a request. One can make it impossible to accede, but one does not say 'no'. For example, one way of denying a request for accommodation is to declare the house to be full. Clearly however, this is not just a matter of household density. Depending on the age, gender, and status of the individual, there may be no place to put them that would not contravene the principles surrounding decency in the regional Aboriginal society. As will be amplified later in this report, the principle guiding household arrangements of persons is that the age, gender and status of the occupants of a sleeping space must not be in conflict because to allow this to happen can lead to situations in which people are shamed. This is a very powerful trope in Aboriginal society. It is a means of maintaining social control and when invoked, the situation can become physically dangerous to the members of the household.

Occasionally, the status of the person requesting accommodation is so high that the request cannot be refused. In such circumstances, although the householder may already have up to 20 people in their household (e.g. on the occasion of a funeral), she (or he) will move people out of rooms and into public space in order to maintain the respect that the high status individual has the right to be given. Those who are moved out of the room may decide that the house is now too full and leave, but they have never been told to go. Their sleeping arrangements have simply been downgraded. (Birdsall 1990)

## **1.6 Research aims**

Our primary research aim is to build an Indigenous model of crowding, initially based on literature analysis, and then to test its veracity and application to Indigenous crowding in regional urban and metropolitan settings, and in so doing uncover salient dimensions and properties of Aboriginal crowding to see how different tenures impact on distinctly Aboriginal rule-governed behaviours and coping mechanisms. These findings seek to inform refined definitions of Aboriginal crowding for policy applications across all Australian jurisdictions as well as to have relevance for other international jurisdictions with substantial Indigenous populations (e.g. Canada & New Zealand). The research findings will also have implications for government policies on Indigenous health, housing procurement, housing management, homelessness, town planning and appropriate house design. We aim to provide policy-makers with ways to understand, predict, measure, assess and manage Aboriginal household crowding.

The case studies are selected with the objective of discovering key concepts and theories involved in constructing a model of household crowding applicable to Indigenous communities in general, while acknowledging the cultural and environmental specificities of the various settings where Indigenous people live, whether they be remote, rural urban or metropolitan.

Although there are many passing references and comments in the literature to Aboriginal household crowding (see references in Long et al. 2007, pp.15–16, 39–42), there has been no recent systematic attempt to critically examine these dispersed observations and findings in order to integrate them into a synthesised model of

crowding that also draws on established social science models of crowding used for different cultures (e.g. the Chinese).

One of the crucial deficiencies in the existing research base on Australian Aboriginal household crowding is that, although it was easy to source statistical analysis of 'overcrowding', and despite the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) acknowledgement that perceptions of crowding are subject to 'cultural norms', there were no significant empirical studies of Australian Indigenous perceptions of crowding. Such perceptions should be considered an essential sub-theme of crowding research. Until the necessary empirical perceptual studies are carried out, the distinction between 'crowding' and occupation density remains methodologically flawed. A secondary aim of this research is to introduce and to maintain the distinction between crowding and occupation density as a matter of consistency, logic, and the proper recognition of the function of culture in the development of a crowding model.

It should also be noted that we employ the term 'crowding' throughout this report in preference to 'overcrowding', despite the prevalence of the latter in the Australian policy literature; this is in line with international social science usage and avoids the inherent tautology of the concept 'overcrowding'.

Another point on the terminology used throughout this report concerns the use of the terms 'emic' and 'etic'. These terms generally distinguish the understanding of cultural representations from the point of view of a native of the culture (emic), from the understanding of cultural representations from the point of view of an outside observer of the culture (etic), particularly that of the Western social scientist (Barfield 1997, p.148). We shall use the terms 'etic' and 'emic' from time to time to make the fine distinction between particular crowding concepts. The 'etic' use of 'crowding' will be in accordance with the social scientific model of crowding as outlined in this chapter and, by definition, incorporates a state of being stressed. The 'emic' use of the term 'crowded' will be that provided by our interviewees, who it will be seen, will sometimes include a state of being stressed in the way they use the word, but in other cases they may not.

Throughout this document, we make reference to housing policies in order to describe the impacts that such policies are having on public housing tenants and we therefore draw the reader's attention to policies that householders chose to discuss while being interviewed. While most tenants had general comments about the constraints and difficulties of complying with housing policies (such as numbers of residents permitted in a house), the Swan (WA) case study clients singled out the 'three strikes policy' of managing disruptive behaviour as particularly onerous, although this was not mentioned as a problem by the Carnarvon (WA) interviewees. This may be due to the particularly clear and distinct promotion of the 'three strikes' policy to both tenants and the public, with people in the more racially mixed Swan area worried about neighbours being able to affect their tenancy through this policy. The effect of particular policies and how they are implemented on the ground are discussed for each case study site, and in the conclusion more generally.

The ultimate focus of the current AHURI study is that of Indigenous communities in urban settings, that is, the capital cities and the large towns that function as regional centres. However, in the context of our Positioning Paper (Memmott et al. 2011), we included existing studies of remote and very remote Aboriginal communities, together with those from urban centres, partly because of the paucity of previous studies on this topic, but also in order to demonstrate that the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of crowding are part of the deep structures of Indigenous cultures across both remote and non-remote settings (after Sutton 2003).

## 1.7 Research methods

This Research Project has had two stages. The first stage was a literature analysis, which was reported in our earlier Positioning Paper (Memmott et al. 2011). The second stage involved empirical research, which took place in mid and late 2011, and analysis of those case study findings that resulted in this Final Report for AHURI.

### 1.7.1 Stage 1: Literature analysis on Indigenous crowding

In our Positioning Paper (Memmott et al. 2011), we examined social science definitions and models of cross-cultural crowding, particularly those grounded in environmental psychology and social anthropology theory. A review was also made of recent, pervasive density-based standards of crowding used widely by government policy-makers, such as the Canadian National Occupancy Standard. In contrast we analysed the social sciences models, which emphasised the perceived loss of personal control as a prerequisite of crowding, and held that the cause of such loss may vary cross-culturally (such as perceived stressful density), as will behavioural norms and rules for minimising such stress. Models also differentiate between different scales of crowding (e.g. room crowding, house crowding and neighbourhood crowding).

The Australian social anthropology literature on crowding is strongest regarding remote Aboriginal settlement settings, and our preliminary model as developed in our Positioning Paper did have an inevitable bias in this regard, but one that was unavoidable due to the relative lack of research in urban settings (although see most recently Birdsall-Jones & Corunna et al. 2010). Empirical research in Stage 2, based in urban towns and cities, has aimed to redress this bias in our findings. The literature analysis also draws on the unpublished findings and reflections of the two senior researchers, Memmott and Birdsall-Jones, on Indigenous crowding, based on extensive lifelong field experiences in Aboriginal Australia, as well as on the personal experiences of our two Aboriginal researchers, Go-Sam and Corunna, who have grown up in Aboriginal households in North East Queensland and South Western Australia respectively.

### 1.7.2 Stage 2: Empirical data collection on urban Indigenous crowding

The stage 2 research used the literature-based model of Indigenous crowding developed within the Positioning Paper and tested it for non-remote urban settings (ABS 2001), first, to refine the application of the model for use in metropolitan and urban settings and second, to address the prescribed set of detailed research questions for this study as outlined below.

- What are the dimensions of crowding in Indigenous households?
- How does this vary by tenure, dwelling type and geography?
- What are the various drivers of crowding?
- How do the drivers interact with housing variables?
- How does crowding impact upon individuals and households?
- At what point does crowding have negative consequences?
- What strategies do Indigenous households employ to cope with crowding?
- What are the policy and program implications of crowding for housing providers?
- Are there design opportunities to build housing that can accommodate the high rate of mobility and visiting patterns of Indigenous people while maintaining high standards of living for permanent residents? (Memmott et al. 2011).



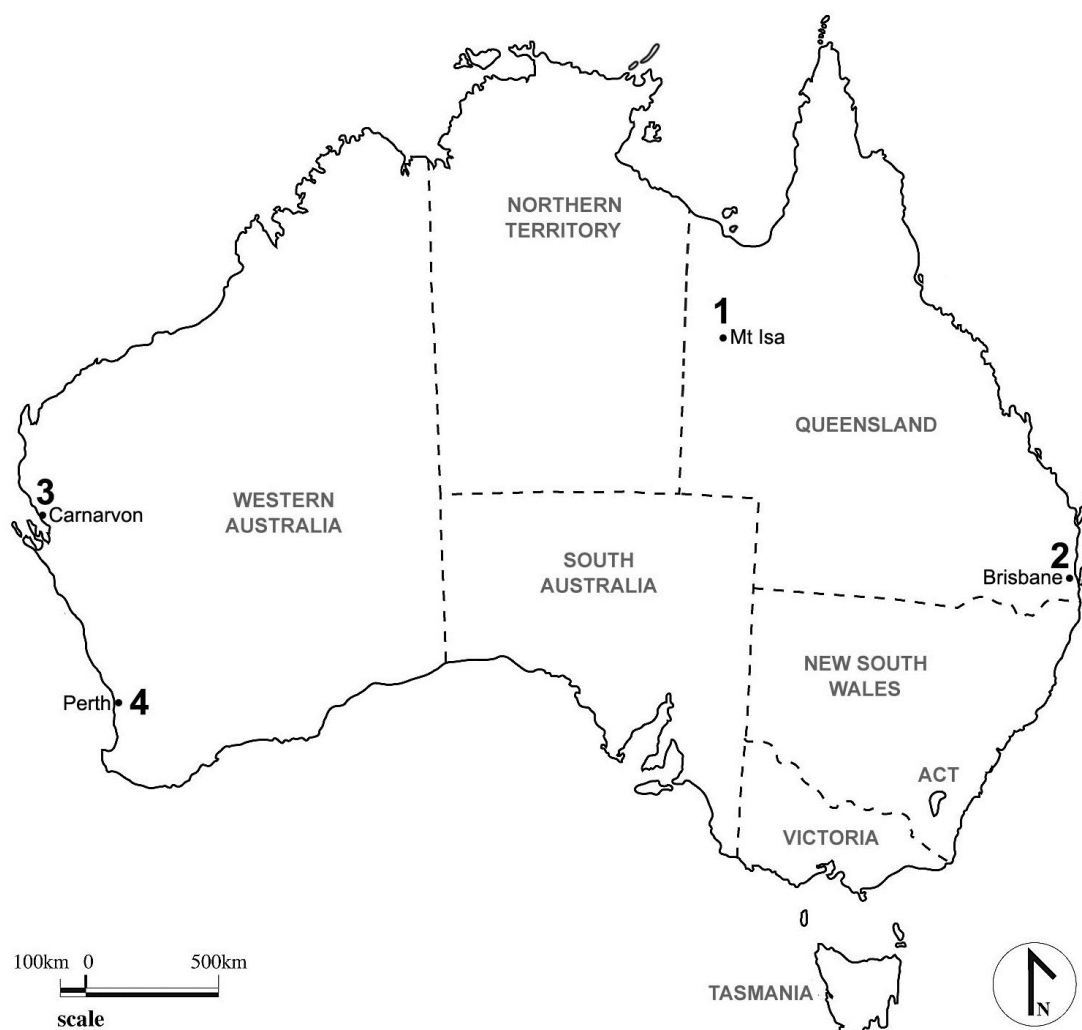
Two suburbs within metropolitan centres were chosen for this study: Inala in Brisbane and Swan in Perth; each has a substantial Indigenous residency. In addition, the two regional centres of Carnarvon and Mount Isa were selected as case study city sites, both of which have high Indigenous residency rates and attract visitors or residents from a regional catchment of remote communities that are characterised as having strong customary traditions of residential behaviours. The four urban study sites were used during stage 2 to ensure a reasonable (although not necessarily equal) sample of householders. We originally aimed to sample large households across public housing rental, private rental and home-owner categories.

The four study sites were narrowed down for selection from the team's working knowledge of all capital city metropolitan sites and regional city sites in Australia. A key reason for selecting the four sites was prior in-depth experience of at least one of the research team at each site with known contacts among Aboriginal 'gate-keeper' organisations. Other sites were considered but for one reason or another deemed not suitable at the time. For example, Broome was not feasible despite our early attempts, because of Kimberley Land Council surveys being simultaneously conducted there by CAEPR researchers from ANU.

Cultural factors contributing to crowding were explored, including mobility and migration patterns. A principal aim was to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings and constructs of what constitutes crowding. These findings will be built into a model of Indigenous crowding in Chapter 7. The main data collection technique to ensure cross-site comparative analysis was a structured interview in conjunction with a survey instrument (see Appendix). However it was conducted using a semi-structural approach so that interviewees could elaborate on the issues of large households.

Our primary criterion for selecting interviewees was their recent experience over the previous year of hosting large households. Access to such Indigenous households was enhanced not only by the prior experiences of the researchers working in the selected study sites, but by the assistance of Aboriginal fieldworkers who assisted in locating suitable interviewees, facilitating introductions and helping with communication problems. Mr Keith 'Kung' Marshall took this role in Mount Isa, Ms Patricia Conlon in Inala and Ms Vanessa Corunna in Western Australia. The survey thus involved a targeted sample of interviews (not a random sample).

**Figure 2: Map of Australia showing locations of four study sites (1) Mount Isa (2) Inala, Brisbane (3) Carnarvon (4) Swan, Perth**



### 1.7.3 Crowding data sample

We aimed to carry out a total of 70–80 householder interviews distributed across the four sites. A total of 70 interviews were actually carried out, with 34 in regional cities and 36 in metropolitan settings (see Table 1). However more interviews were achieved in Queensland (39) than in Western Australia (31).

Note that the individual interviewees are identified with a code number in this report, using prefix letters to indicate the study sites of Mount Isa, Inala, Carnarvon and Swan, hence M.I.16, IN8, C4, S13 by way of example.

In Inala and Swan, the dispersed nature of Indigenous residence within the suburb meant that a known local person was required as a research assistant to locate and negotiate with householders prior to their participation. While this was a very successful technique, it relied on the availability of this research assistant, which was not always achievable due to unforeseen personal and community events, such as significant deaths that required attendance to funerals. This also affected participants who were often not available for interview during times of community sorry business. Similar circumstances occurred for the Carnarvon situation where the field assistant unexpectedly left for Alice Springs during the fieldwork period.

Additionally, in Inala some prospective participants were willing to discuss crowding, but unwilling to have their homes used in the study, not wanting to be scrutinised by researchers or to have their homes 'judged' and they declined to participate, on good terms. While participants were generally satisfied with agreements of confidentiality about their identity, some people stressed throughout interviews that 'you can't tell [Department of] Housing about this', thereby indicating a continuing anxiety about how many people are housed and the intrusion of housing providers into these arrangements, that is felt by tenants.

**Table 1: The dwelling types occupied by the interviewees**

Dwelling Types	Mt Isa	Carnarvon	Inala	Swan
Detached house	20	13	18	16
Duplex	1	-	-	-
Flat	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	2 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Total number of interviews</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>

<sup>2</sup> One was in a townhouse and the other was living in a shed.

Where possible, some variation of house type was also sought in the study, for example detached dwelling, town house, flats. This was also not readily achieved with most interviewees being in detached dwellings due to the profile of the housing stock in our study sites.

**Table 2: Rental type and home ownership status of interviewees**

Rental Type	Mt Isa	Carnarvon	Inala	Swan
State Government	20	12	15	13
ATSI Housing Organisation	1	-	1	-
Other Social Housing Organisation	-	1	-	4
Private owner rental	-	-	1	-
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>
Home Owner	-	-	1	1
<b>Total number of interviews</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>

Difficulties were also experienced in obtaining the ideal sample of interviewee households in all study sites. Whereas there was no difficulty in locating households according to the criteria of large households, those whom our Aboriginal field assistants selected for us were largely in detached rental housing, especially state government rental housing as indicated by the tables above. Few interviewees were located in duplexes, flats or other dwelling types, nor many in non-ATSI social housing, private owner rental, or self-owned houses.

The maximum diversity was in Swan where there were a total of four living in other than state government rental. All of these were living in detached housing rented from Foundation Housing Ltd., which has a housing stock of over 1000, both in the metropolitan area and across the state (Foundation Housing 2008), albeit not exclusively ATSI social housing. Foundation Housing is generally regarded by tenants as better quality than Western Australian Department of Housing (DoH(WA)) housing, but it is also somewhat more expensive.

In Mount Isa, Aboriginal consultants and interviewees were not able to elicit any Indigenous people in private rental or self-owned housing who received regular visitors. One householder (M.I.5) had two brothers who each owned houses, but only one was said to allow a limited number of in-laws from Dajarra to stay. Neither were large households.

In Inala there was more success in finding private rental households who received visitors, but these were still in the tiny minority. This does reflect the demographics of the suburb and the nature of the concentration of Indigenous government rental residence in this area. There was only one home-owner interviewed in Inala, and this house was a large household that had a multi-generation family living in it (IN8). The householder was due to finish paying off the mortgage in 2012 and was contemplating purchasing another house for her children to occupy.

Our interviewees were generally found to be aware that they had a tenancy agreement, but did not know the specifics on whether there was a maximum household size clause in their agreement, or, if there was, how many people were prescribed who could stay in their house.

**Table 3: Tenants' knowledge of tenancy agreement and its household size prescription**

Extent of Knowledge	Mt Isa	Carnarvon	Inala	Swan
Have a tenancy agreement (Q4.1)	21	13	18	17
Do not have a tenancy agreement (Q4.1)	-	-	-	1
Do not know if they have a tenancy agreement (Q4.1)	-	6	-	4
Knows the number of householders prescribed (Q4.2)	5	3	11	6
Do not know of number of householders prescribed or unsure of numbers (Q4.2)	16	8	5	7
Not applicable (private renting or purchasing)	-	-	2	1

**Table 4: Tenants' knowledge of numbers of co-residents prescribed in their tenancy agreements**

Number prescribed	Mt Isa <sup>1</sup>	Carnarvon	Inala	Swan
2	1		3	
3			1	
4			1	2
5			2	3
6	2	1	3	
7	1			
8	1	1		
9			1	
10				
10+		1		1

#### *1.7.4 Trial data collection using projective techniques*

Two projective techniques were trialled in the data collection process to establish their usefulness for future studies of this kind.

##### **Use of the house drawing method**

This technique was tried in the Carnarvon and Swan interviews. The researcher requested that each interviewee draw a floor plan of their house. Apart from the interest that lies in the drawing themselves, this method helped discussion about the house in real terms. It was possible to name each room according to its use with focus on sleeping space and to obtain accurate information regarding who slept where. Often each bedroom was given a name such as 'my son George's room', or 'the girls' room'. Discussion then occurred whether or not the residents of the rooms changed as visitors came and went, and how this was important to understandings of the dynamic use of sleeping space. The occupants of some rooms in some households never changed while others changed frequently. Although there were limits to this method, it made it possible to ask direct questions concerning the sorting and re-integration of people into 'sleeping groups' for each sleeping space in the circumstances of the arrival of visitors and large household formation.

##### **Simulated visitor event game**

A methodological issue that required a solution was that, although a great deal of data was gathered in the course of the formal interview process, some of the answers to questions such as 'where will you put all these people' received an answer such as 'we'll fit them in somehow, don't worry'. Even when the answer was more specific it was difficult to ascertain whether a principle of social organisation was being stated or a rule derived from such a principle. To this end an experimental data gathering technique was carried out in Carnarvon, which permitted householders to show the researcher dynamically how people were allocated sleeping spaces. This was a simple process of providing an outline floor plan of the dwelling and providing the householder with game pieces, such as chess or checkers pieces, to represent individuals needing sleeping space. By this means, the researcher could forensically question the actual process of making these decisions.

#### *1.7.5 Structure of study site chapters*

The organisation of each of the four study site analyses that follow in Chapters 3–6, is in accordance with the following content structure:

- Household profiles in sample.
- Household expansion—origin of visitors.
- Reasons for household expansion.
- Large household formation patterns.
- Sleeping arrangement principles.
- Perceived absence of stress by some interviewees.
- Perceptions of stress by other interviewees.
- Strategies used to cope when stressed.
- Neighbourhood stress problems.
- Physical needs and improvements to cope.
- Summary.

Initially however, an introduction is provided in Chapter 2 to each of the four study sites in order to sensitise on what structural drivers of crowding might be present and how those may constitute or contribute to 'antecedent factors' in accordance with Gifford's model.

## 2 THE STUDY SITES

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of relevant aspects of history, demography, housing and culture in each of the four study sites of Mount Isa, Inala, Carnarvon and Swan respectively in order to elicit salient antecedent factors according to the earlier prescribed model of crowding.

### 2.1 Brief overview of Mount Isa

Rich deposits of silver-lead were discovered at Mount Isa in 1923 and within a year the mine was established and the town surveyed (Blainey 1970, p.157). Three years later the population was 3000. The mill and smelter were completed in 1931, but the mine struggled economically and did not boom until the late 1940s. By 1955, Mount Isa Mines (today called Xstrata) was the largest mining company in Australia. It is known from oral history that a small Aboriginal population became established in Mount Isa from its outset, including members of the local traditional owners, the Kalkadoon tribe. They provided services to the mining, exploration and pastoral industries.

The intense growth led to Mount Isa eclipsing Cloncurry as the regional centre for North West Queensland, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. Mount Isa became a holiday or recreational destination for many Aboriginal people in the region and an employment centre for some. In the early 1970s it provided a range of unique facilities for the surrounding region, including several bars and cafes, a 'late night spot', a supermarket, and the popular annual rodeo, which was the largest in Australia. Even then, most Aboriginal visitors from the region's communities had some sort of kinship tie to at least one or more Aboriginal person in Mount Isa with whom they could stay.

In the early 1970s the Mount Isa Town Camp on the southern edge of the city contained about 100 people living in humpies and tin sheds and came to be known as 'Yallambee'. This Camp was distinctive in that it contained designated places for the many visiting campers from the respective communities of the region. Thus there was a place for 'the Boulia mob', 'the Dajarra mob', 'the Camooweal mob', 'the Burketown/Doomadgee mob', 'the Mornington Island mob', etc. The Yallambee Camp thus functioned as a regional settlement with residents from numerous language and community groups organised in a socio-spatial structure<sup>2</sup>. By the mid-1970s there was a Lake Nash householder in Yallambee who for a period was one of the Camp leaders.

While the Camp acted as a gateway to Mount Isa for many Aboriginal visitors, rental housing had begun to be provided for Aborigines in Mount Isa from 1969 as part of a State/Commonwealth housing agreement, and was administered by the Queensland Department of Aboriginal Islander Affairs (DAIA) as an instrument of their assimilation policy. Houses were initially purchased to create a 'scatterisation' effect, aimed at juxtaposing whites and blacks and breaking down Aboriginal enclaves and hence Aboriginal identity. In later years this housing stock was to be transferred for the administration of the Queensland Department of Housing but remained identified as 'ATSI housing' exclusively for the use of Indigenous tenants, despite subsequent mainstreaming policies. Notwithstanding these assimilation efforts, the Yallambee Town Camp remained a popular low-cost residential enclave. Most of the town camp

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<sup>2</sup> The division of a settlement into spatial zones in this manner, each occupied by an aggregate of domiciliary groups possessing a common and distinct social and geographic identity is termed a 'socio-spatial structure' (Memmott 1983; 1990)

humpies were removed after Mount Isa Mines donated a number of second-hand fibro-clad bungalows in c.1973–74 (which were later upgraded to houses<sup>3</sup>).

Relaxation of the Queensland Aboriginal Act after 1970 brought more widespread freedom of movement of people within the North West Queensland region. Combined with the advent of welfare payments, pensions and unemployment benefits, Aboriginal people participated more centrally in the mainstream economy. Aboriginal families purchased second-hand cars for local travel and hunting. The various travel restrictions in North West Queensland broke down further during the 1980s, with increased cash acquisition and vehicle ownership among Aboriginal people, as well as improved roads and a relaxation and disappearance of the provisions of the Act when it was phased out. A pattern of circular mobility became more pronounced. Despite these changes, a regional pattern of Aboriginal lifestyle in North West Queensland has persisted (Memmott 1996, p.32; Long 2005).

### *2.1.1 Regional demography of North West Queensland*

Population estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Mount Isa became available from the 1976 Census (1544 persons). Each successive consensus up to 2006 has indicated varying Aboriginal population growth of between two and 800 individuals, with the latter maximum increase occurring between the 1981 and 1986 Census. In the 30-year period from 1976–2006, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has doubled from 1544–3267. This is despite substantial drop-off of the non-Indigenous population in response to shifts in global metal prices and associated mining employment (Table 5). In 2006 the Indigenous population was 16.6 per cent of the overall city population (or 1 in 6).

**Table 5: Population change in Mount Isa, 1976–2006**

	1976	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
<b>Non-Indigenous</b>	22,674	21,431	22,021	19,714	18,371	13,990
<b>Indigenous</b>	1,544	2,496	2,714	3,025	3,265	3,267
<b>Not stated</b>	2,278	-	-	-	-	2,403
<b>% Indigenous</b>	5.8%	10.4%	11.0%	13.3%	15.0%	16.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,496</b>	<b>23,927</b>	<b>24,735</b>	<b>22,739</b>	<b>21,636</b>	<b>19,660</b>

Sources: Memmott et al. 2006, p.14; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007h

Overall, the North West Queensland region has grown to have an estimated total population of approximately 34 000, with Mount Isa having by far the largest population of around 21 000 (QCOSS 2011, p.3). The next largest town, Cloncurry, had about 2500 people whereas 4 other settlements had in the range of 1000–1750, viz. the town of Normanton and Hughenden and the discrete Aboriginal settlements (ex. Missions) of Doomadgee and Gununa (Mornington Island).

Migration of Aboriginal people into Mount Isa from these smaller centres in the North West Queensland region and also the Central East Northern Territory has been gradual and incremental in the last 40 years. Reasons why Aboriginal people have moved to Mount Isa include: medical reasons, family needs (to be closer to family members), seeking secondary and tertiary education, seeking better services and facilities and to escape from other adverse circumstances in home communities

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the study, Yallambee had nine detached houses and one set of duplex (total of 11 residences)



(Memmott et al. 2006, pp.64–65). Over the last ten years, Queensland Department of Housing officers have observed a pattern of gradual in-migration from Alpururulam (formally Lake Nash pastoral settlement), Tennant Creek, Katherine, Doomadgee and Gununa (Mornington Island) to Mount Isa. Growth periods in Mount Isa's mining economy have also attracted an increasing number of Aboriginal people from east coast population centres, particularly from North and Central Queensland, albeit still a minority in Mount Isa.

Circular mobility within the North West region has always been high since the old Aboriginal Act was phased out, and includes regular, temporary or seasonal movement to Mount Isa. Reasons for such movements included travel to Mount Isa for the Rodeo and the Royal Show (some people stay a few days, some stay a bit longer), for intra-regional football games, to avoid trouble in their home community and just to 'see the bigger world'. People who came into Mount Isa initially stayed in the houses of family, camped in the Leichhardt River bed or used the residential facility of the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre, see later profile (Memmott et al. 2006, p.65). Fortunately an in-depth study of circular mobility within the North West region was carried out previously for AHURI and informs this study (Memmott et al. 2006). Also see Figure 5 in Chapter 3.

This background to Aboriginal in-migration and regional circular mobility provides insights to the origin of visiting kin in the contemporary large households of Mount Isa.

### *2.1.2 The Queensland Government housing<sup>4</sup> program in Mount Isa*

North West Queensland households are broken down across tenures in a substantially different way to the rest of Queensland, with fewer owners and purchasers and more renters, particularly those renting from the state government and community organisations (QCOS 2011, p.7). This is partly explained by the transient nature of the mining population.

At the time of writing this report, there were two types of government housing programs provided by the Mount Isa Housing Service Centre of the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works. The first was public rental housing (a stock of about 590 dwelling units), also known as 'RGS' (rental general stock); and the second was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) rental housing (a stock of about 395 units). The latter is (as was mentioned previously) a specific program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, many of whom, it has been found, prefer to stay within this program rather than move into the public housing sector. Nevertheless, the objective of the ATSI housing program has been to provide a standard of housing that is equal to that of the general community.

Due to the introduction of the One Social Housing policy the Mount Isa Housing Service Centre is unable to provide wait-list times as clients are housed according to their need. An increase in demand for private rentals due to the expansion of mining operations and an influx of mine workers has placed pressure on access to houses in both the Aboriginal and public rental sector. It cost \$450–550<sup>5</sup> per week rent for a three-bedroom house in the private sector whereas the Department's Housing Service Centre weekly rent charge is significantly lower. The exact figure of the rent charged varied between suburbs for a week's rent of a three-bedroom house. Aboriginal access to private sector housing was restricted by very high rents in response to

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<sup>4</sup> This profile was largely prepared from information provided by the Housing Manager, Mt Isa, Queensland Department of Housing in October 2004 and updated in successive years, most recently in April 2012 by the Acting Manager of the Housing Service Centre, by then in the Department of Housing and Public Works.

<sup>5</sup> See *North West Star*, newspaper 9 March 2012, pp.1,3

mining booms as well as by landlords with less tolerance of cross-cultural residential behaviours, such as a preference to sleep outside. Although the Housing Service Centre personnel have more tolerance of such domiciliary behaviour, they nevertheless receive complaints about such and take action accordingly.

In April 2012, there were 243 people on the waiting list for public housing in Mount Isa of whom 151 were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. However, there were only about 46 vacancies, consisting of 24 vacancies in the public housing sector and 22 vacancies in the ATSI housing sector. Thus, only a maximum of about 20 per cent of the applicants could be serviced. The process of fitting the applicants' household size needs to the bedroom numbers in the available housing stock may have reduced this potential service percentage down a little further.

### 2.1.3 Household size according to ABS Census

Table 6 indicates the contrast in recorded household structures between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in Mount Isa. Non-Indigenous households are mostly small in size with almost 60 per cent of them being one or two-person households and only 2.6 per cent of them having six or more persons. However Indigenous household sizes are more evenly distributed across all size categories, peaking with 18 per cent of households having six or more usual residents. Note that another ABS Table (2007, p.120) indicates that in 2006, Mount Isa had 14 Indigenous families recorded with 10 or more usual residents, whereas there were no non-Indigenous households in this category. These figures indicate that large households, in which one might expect to find crowding, are relatively common in Mount Isa.

**Table 6: Profile of Mount Isa households, 2006 Census**

Size of household	Households with Indigenous Person(s)	% Indigenous	Other	% Other	Total Households
1 person	142	14.8	1288	25.2	1430
2 people	208	21.7	1711	33.5	1919
3 people	158	16.5	811	15.8	969
4 people	157	16.4	795	15.6	952
5 people	121	12.6	371	7.3	492
6+ people	173	18.0	133	2.6	306
<b>Total households</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5109</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,068</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, Table I22

### 2.1.4 Homelessness in Mount Isa

In 2006, Indigenous people categorised as 'homeless' in North West Queensland numbered 128 persons. The non-Indigenous homeless people (some 512 persons) were largely in the secondary homelessness category and staying with friends and relatives and in boarding houses, but the Indigenous homeless people were largely in the 'improvised dwelling' category (i.e. primary homelessness), which included rough sleeping in the Leichhardt River bed in Mount Isa (see Table 7).

Elsewhere we have argued that the extent of secondary homelessness in Indigenous households is severely masked by the application of the ABS definition of householders by excluding those for whom the house is not their 'usual place of address' ('usual place of residence' is defined as the place where a person lives or

intends to live for s months or more) (Memmott et al. forthcoming 2012b). Therefore the figures in Table 7 for Indigenous people residing with friends and relatives, is in our view, a severe under-count. This will be verified in the interview data later.

**Table 7: Homeless people in North West Queensland Statistical Division compared to Queensland as a whole, 2006**

	Indigenous or non-Indigenous	Boarding house	SAAP	Friends and relatives	Improvised dwellings	Total homeless	Marginal residents in caravan parks	Total homeless and marginally housed	Rate per 10,000 (including caravan parks)
<b>North West</b>	Non-Indig	99	13	338	62	512	58	570	247
	Indig	47	13	17	51	128	9	137	175
<b>Qld</b>	Non-Indig	4,982	2,442	12,468	4,637	24,529	5,649	30,178	80
	Indig	456	686	478	528	2,148	516	2,664	197

Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2009, p.10

There are a number of services in Mount Isa established to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people living in public places (rough sleepers), people at risk of homelessness, and people without safe or secure shelter of their own. These services provide responses to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients, but mainly Indigenous people from Mount Isa and other remote discrete settlements and rural towns in the North West Queensland region and adjacent parts of the Northern Territory. These services include:

- The Arthur Peterson Centre, an overnight shelter used by people who spend their days socialising and drinking in public places.
- The Jimaylya (Topsy Harry) Centre, a residential facility for homeless people over the age of 18, with alcohol management and a program of transitional accommodation with final placement in public rental town housing.
- The Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House (KASH), which runs an alcohol rehabilitation program (generally 3 months in length depending on individual needs) and offers clients living skills, group therapy, individual counselling, on-site AA meetings, and work therapy.

There are a further range of supported accommodation options and domestic violence refuges in Mount Isa.

Initiatives targeting homelessness in Mount Isa have been and continue to be implemented through the Queensland Government's Opening Doors—Queensland Strategy for Reducing Homelessness 2011–14. These include a coordinated action plan<sup>6</sup>, brokerage, responses to public space issues, an increase/enhancement of crisis and transitional housing, and proactive tenancy management practices within

<sup>6</sup> Titled *Sheltering the Isa, Mt Isa Homelessness Action Plan*

the Housing Service Centre (Queensland DCS & QCOSS 2011) which, at the time of writing was in the Department of Housing and Public Works<sup>7</sup>.

### *2.1.5 Tenancy support services in Mount Isa*

In this section we summarise approaches to managing Indigenous tenancies adopted by the Mount Isa Housing Service Centre (formerly in the Department of Community Services & also in an earlier Department of Housing, North West Area Office). Interviews were conducted in early 2012 with staff from the Centre and supplement previous interviews by the authors (PM) with the staff of that office (Memmott et al. 2006, p.64; Flatau et al. 2009, pp.81–99).

The Department of Housing and Public Work's Housing Service Centre in Mount Isa services a geographical area that extends south-west to Birdsville, west to Camooweal, east to Hughenden and Blackall, north to Normanton, Burketown and Karumba, and within this area also includes the further centres of Cloncurry, Dajarra, Boulia, Bedourie, Doomadgee and Gununa (Mornington Island).

There are a number of teams in the Mount Isa Service Centre, each with its own manager and under the overall leadership of the Centre Manager. Two of those teams are relevant to Mount Isa, the Housing Access Team, which responds to any enquiry from potential or actual housing applicants in Mount Isa; and the Housing Services City Team, (or 'Client Services') which is the landlord over the public rental housing stock, both mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) housing, and which handles rent assessment and property management complaints, and monitors repairs and maintenance and upgrading budgets.

Additionally the Mount Isa Housing Service Centre also managed the referral of applicants on its 'Register of Need' to Community Housing providers. Under this program there were 66 properties within the region for which this service was provided which included 36 properties in Mount Isa.

The Mount Isa Housing Service Centre operates from a baseline of Departmental mainstream policy within the constructs of the Queensland Residential Tenancies Act. However, the staff recognises that there is a need for a culturally-sensitive adaptation of such a formal approach to effectively stabilise Aboriginal tenancies in the regional city of Mount Isa—a city that contains families from the many different Indigenous groups of North West Queensland and Central East Northern Territory. Aboriginal households in Mount Isa vary greatly in their retention of traditional domiciliary practices.

The Housing Service Centre approach in Mount Isa is designed to sustain tenancies, reflected in the rent arrears statistics which were well below the state average of four per cent (key performance indicator). During earlier research in August 2008, rent arrears were low for this region (under 1%) compared to other Queensland regions, according to the available statistics. The public housing population in Mount Isa was about 80 per cent Indigenous. This level of arrears was an outstanding achievement especially for the Pioneer area, a suburb of Mount Isa with a high density of Indigenous people in public housing (Flatau et al. 2009, p.87). In March 2012, at the time of completing this report, the arrears KPI for the Mount Isa region was higher at 2.28 per cent (with 2.8% for Pioneer), but still considered to be very satisfactory for public housing, and indeed competitive for comparative cities with ATSI populations (e.g. Townsville 5.53% & Mackay 5.98% arrears), see Figure 6.

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<sup>7</sup> As of April 2012

Patterns of circular mobility within the region impact regularly on household size, composition and harmony when people from the outer parts of the region visit the regional centre. The proactive and strategic tenant support services of the Mount Isa Housing Service Centre include tenancy entry case management, early rent arrears strategy, integrated case management, the targeted risk period strategy and partnerships with the police. These services are designed to support at-risk tenancies (both before the start of a tenancy and during the tenancy), to respond to early signs that a tenancy is at risk, and to take into consideration local events and family/group dynamics.

The 'early intervention strategy' involves an officer contacting and counselling tenants as soon as they fall one week behind in rent and encouraging extra payments to keep them off the arrears sheet. The 'targeted risk-period strategy' is used during the five times of the year when Aboriginal tenants were clearly vulnerable for a range of socio-economic and cultural reasons. Four of these times are when visitors are likely to impact on household size, for example, Easter (April), Mount Isa Show (June), Mount Isa Rodeo (August), and Christmas (December). During these events, there is maximum Aboriginal mobility in the region including from the large Gulf communities of Gununa and Doomadgee. Departmental staff know from past years that an excessive number of relatives will arrive to stay with certain tenants, which may violate their tenancy agreements. At these critical times, tenants are encouraged to come into the Office to check their rental credit and agreements. Tenants are warned to control their visitors and keep them quiet to avoid having visits from the police. In Mount Isa, the presence of many different family groups from different communities continues to contribute to the challenges of sustaining Indigenous tenancies (Flatau et al. 2009, p.89, 99).

Housing Service Centre staff frequently dealt with high levels of alcohol consumption and related disputes as part of their work. The 'partnership with the police' strategy involves the Housing Centre staff, especially the Centre Manager, working closely with the Mount Isa Police and is based on an understanding with them with respect to dealing with Aboriginal family violence and other anti-social behaviour that affects tenancy stability and housing stock. For example, if a tenant was reported for anti-social behaviour, the police phone the Centre Manager who would accompany the police to assist in resolving the problem, even if it was late at night. Housing Service Centre staff will wait while the police deal with the problem, then they talk to the tenant who often cannot easily step in to stop a relative's behaviour because of their kinship relation and/or obligations. Some tenants may thus appreciate the Centre Manager and the police evicting their visitors (Flatau et al. 2009, pp.89–90).

Despite entry case management of various incoming tenants, there are always some tenancy failures. Tenancies are often placed at risk when visiting families are staying, and in some cases neighbourhood disputes can start up. Nevertheless, exploration of the Queensland Government's Mount Isa Housing Service Centre approach to housing management reveals a proactive and, to some extent, a flexible approach to sustaining Indigenous tenancies—one that reduces rental arrears, costly evictions, and damage to property. In so doing, the service centre staff must balance their awareness of cultural sensitivities with their need to produce competitive tenancy statistical outcomes consistent with the Department of Community's expectations. How this plays out from an Aboriginal tenant's perspective with a large household will be explored later in this report.

## 2.2 Brief overview of Inala

The contemporary Inala is an outer south-western suburb of Brisbane, a city with has a majority non-Indigenous population with just 1.4 per cent of the population being Indigenous Australians, compared to a 7.3 per cent Indigenous population in Inala (ABS 2006c). Inala is a hub of Indigenous residence within a belt of suburbs that share a high level of Indigenous population density, running from the city of Ipswich 30km to the west of Brisbane, and south-east to Logan, a city 25 km south of Brisbane's CBD, but contiguous with its southern suburbs. Ipswich, Inala, Logan and suburbs in between (see Figure 3 below), have a set of similar features including a high Indigenous population, a high recent migrant population, and higher than average levels of financial disadvantage. They are characterised by negative associations among Brisbane's wider population, yet internally Inala is characterised by a strong sense of positive self-identification with place, community pride and 'battler' spirit (Peel 2003; Bond 2007; Greenop 2009).

The Inala area has been built on the traditional lands of the Yuggerah, Jagera and Ugarapul people, whose Native Title claim encompasses a large area of Brisbane's metropolitan area south of the Brisbane River.

The Inala district was used as grazing and farming land, known as Woogaroo in the colonial period. It was developed as a suburb in the post WWII era initially as a returned soldier's housing estate named Serviceton, later taken over by the state due to financial difficulties and the housing built as public housing stock for low income families (Kaeys 2006). The name Inala was coined in 1953 and is said to mean 'a peaceful place' in an unknown Aboriginal language (Kaeys 2006). The initial development of the modern suburb of Inala occurred in what is now the Biota Street area, with bush land remaining for several decades in parts of Inala which have now been developed into housing and commercial areas. Housing proceeded in stages, or estates, with particular enclaves being developed at each stage, including local shops, schools and parks so that each community area had local facilities within walking distance. During the 1980s Inala Plaza shopping centre was developed, expanding upon an existing set of local shops, to provide a large central shopping and civic facility for the growing suburb, including a library, banks, government services, supermarkets and smaller retailers.

Indigenous people were among the first people to settle into the Queensland Government housing in Inala in the mid-1950s, which also included post-war refugee families from Italy, Greece, Poland, Russia and elsewhere in Europe. According to Indigenous residents who were children during that time, there was great mixing of people of many nationalities, and a sense of acceptance between people of diverse cultures. Despite this mixing of diverse social groups, there was still a strong Indigenous community and identification during this early period. Many people had a shared history of difficult mission life during the earlier part of the 20th century from locations relatively near to Brisbane. The period of release from mission control coincided with the creation of Inala as a state government housing scheme which attracted many Indigenous families in the foundation years from Cherbourg Mission north of Brisbane, Myora Mission on Stradbroke Island and Purga Mission close to the nearby city of Ipswich. These places were common links in the history of Indigenous people moving to Inala at that time, so that despite disparate home country areas prior to the mission era, a shared knowledge of mission life and attachment to those mission places was a uniting factor (Hegarty 1999; Holt 2001; Huggins & Huggins 1994). Many people also lived in other areas of Brisbane before coming to Inala, especially the inner suburbs of New Farm, Paddington and West End, which were hubs of Indigenous residence before gentrification that began in the 1980s (Cadd

1990). The movement to Inala was driven chiefly by the provision of state housing, and many are still drawn to Inala on this basis.

Some people now recall the early era of establishment as one of connectedness and solidarity for the Indigenous community in Inala, although perhaps nostalgia plays a part in their perceptions. There is in perception that there were 'two or three Murri families on every street'. This is a contrast to the contemporary situation with greater overall population numbers and a more distributed pattern of Indigenous people within Inala, which some feel has resulted in a less connected Indigenous community.

### *2.2.1 Inala's Indigenous demography*

Inala's Indigenous population appears according to statistics to be relatively stable in a suburb with a slightly diminishing population. Notable, however, is the increasing number of Indigenous status 'not stated' results in the consecutive Census, which has risen from a 2.9 per cent response in 1991 to a 6.5 per cent response in 2006. Additionally, known undercounting of Indigenous populations could be masking a significantly higher population (Pink 2007).

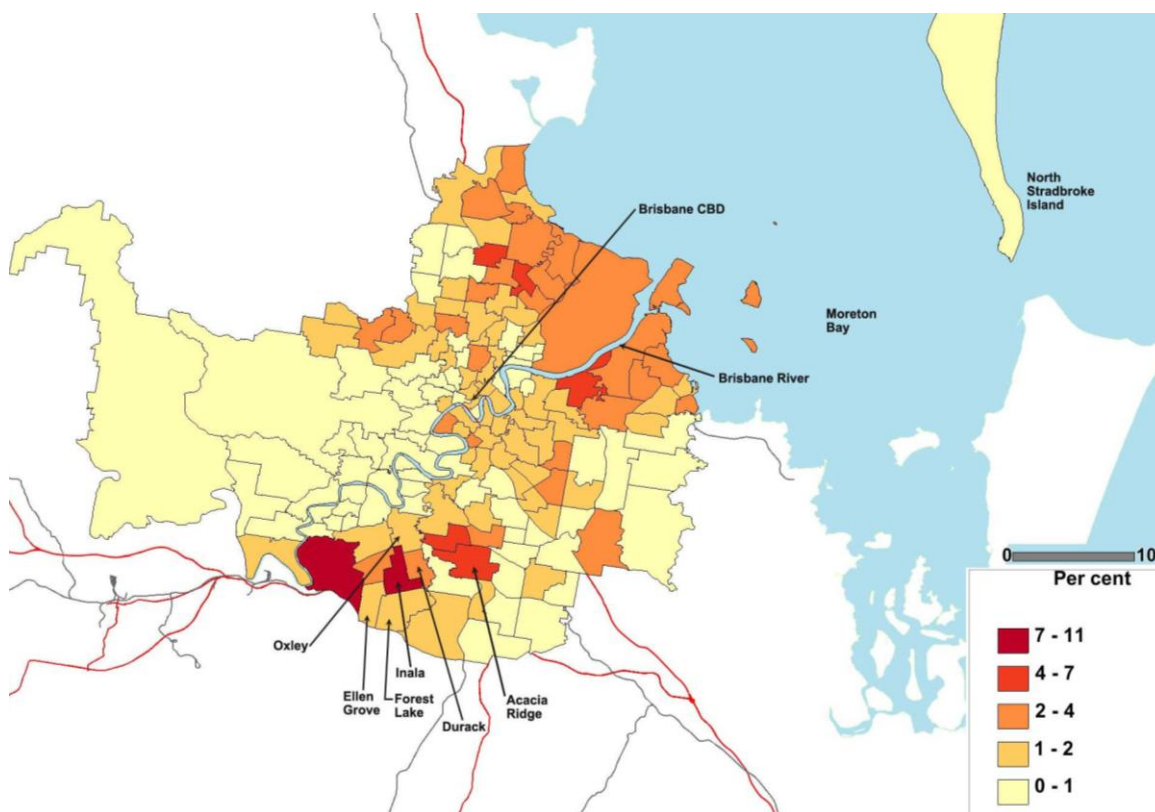
**Table 8: Inala population change, 1991–2006**

<b>Population by Indigenous status</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
Indigenous	875	993	898	960
Non-Indigenous	13533	11835	10976	11355
Not stated	424	431	509	853
% Indigenous	5.9%	7.5%	7.3%	7.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14832</b>	<b>13259</b>	<b>12383</b>	<b>13168</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001c, 2007f

The population statistics for Inala describe the area as having a significant Indigenous, migrant and non-White population, particularly compared to neighbouring suburbs. The Inala Indigenous population in recent decades is shown in Table 8. Census data for Indigenous populations in specific areas of Brisbane is not available prior to 1991, but the data that is available shows that the general area of Brisbane had an Indigenous population of 1 per cent of the total population, and Ipswich had a 2 per cent Indigenous population, at the 1986 Census. In the years from 1996 the Inala Indigenous population has been consistently higher than the wider Brisbane Indigenous population (Figure 3). It should be noted that there has been an historical tendency for Indigenous people to under-report in Census counts, partially attributed to previous persecution and control of Indigenous people's movements during which times it was disadvantageous to identify oneself or one's family as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Other causes include concerns over privacy, general reluctance to participate in information gathering for governments, mobility and literacy problems with Census forms (Pink 2007, p.1). This under-reporting means that we could expect that, to varying degrees, the Indigenous populations shown here are at best conservative, and at worst significantly lower than the real population numbers (Trewin 2001).

**Figure 3: Indigenous people in Brisbane (2006) shown as percentage of the total population in Statistical Local Areas\***



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007

\*Note: high proportion of Indigenous people in Inala

### 2.2.2 Housing tenure in Inala

A report for the Department of Housing and Local Government on the state of Inala's Public Housing, and strategies for its improvement, included statistics from the 1980s which are unavailable elsewhere (Todd et al. 1992). The report, based on demographic analysis and community consultations, describes the state of Public Housing tenants and Inala more generally in the 1980s and early 1990s, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 1016, or 16 per cent of the overall Brisbane Indigenous population (p.5). Inala also had an unemployment rate of 21 per cent in 1986 (p.7), with only 12 per cent of dwellings being purchased compared to 39 per cent in Brisbane more generally (p.9).

Biddle (2008) discusses the contemporary over-representation of Indigenous people in public housing in Australia and this is also very true for Inala, where 56 per cent of Indigenous households in the Inala live in state-provided public housing compared to 31 per cent of non-Indigenous households in Inala (ABS 2007a). This makes Indigenous people almost twice as likely to be in government housing, but also bears out the reputation of Inala as a public housing suburb with massive numbers in public housing compared to the Brisbane-wide average of 13.7 per cent of Indigenous people in public housing and 3.2 per cent of non-Indigenous households (Biddle 2008). The Indigenous population in Brisbane has high rates of people living in public housing compared to the non-Indigenous population, but these are still relatively low compared to the rest of Australia. The most common form of housing tenure for Indigenous people in Brisbane is private rental (41.9%).



**Table 9: Inala housing tenure**

	Privately Rented		Public and community rented		Owned or buying		Total*
<b>Indigenous households</b>	40	10.8%	207	55.9%	68	18.3%	370
<b>Non-Indigenous households</b>	395	9.3%	1306	31.1%	1922	45.7%	4205

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007b

\*Note: total includes landlord type and tenure type not stated where applicable, hence totals do not equate to 100 per cent

### 2.2.3 Inala's multi-cultural character

Interactions with and awareness of these multiple other ethnic and cultural groups is integral to the experience of living in Inala and this has been a characteristic of the suburb since its early years. The diverse population in Inala is reflected in the following table that compares the diversity of population in Inala and the neighbouring suburb of Forest Lake, which is not a 'public housing suburb'.

**Table 10: Ancestry of Inala and Forest Lake residents**

<b>Ancestry</b>	<b>Inala</b>	<b>Forest Lake</b>
Indigenous	7.2%	1.5%
Vietnamese by birth	14.3%	3.7%
Vietnamese parents	16.7%	5.6%
Australian born	56.8%	63.4%
British Isles parents	28.7%	50.1%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006c

Conflicts between Indigenous groups and other cultural and ethnic groups have been known to flare at times in Inala. In the 1980s the area was renowned for so-called gang violence and this has also become an issue in more recent years. A frequent comment in the field work for this project is that 'illegal immigrants' are given favourable housing treatment and that Indigenous crowding is caused by migrants (particularly the highly visible African migrants who have moved into Inala in recent years) taking houses that would otherwise go to Indigenous families.

Waiting times for housing in Inala are anecdotally several years unless a person's need is classified as an emergency by the state housing administrators. In the Inala area, such an emergency is constituted by being homeless with children, being a homeless victim of a natural disaster (such as the floods in Mackay in 2009), or other severe circumstance. Several people stated that they had been on a waiting list for a larger house for over five years, but had been unwilling to change their priorities for housing to be placed in another suburb, where waiting times are shorter, due to their strong preference for Inala.

## 2.3 Brief overview of Carnarvon

The town of Carnarvon is located on the coast, 904 km 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<sup>8</sup>, Carnarvon is classified as 'very remote'. It is a relatively old Australian town, surveyed and declared a town site in 1839, although it was many years later in the 1880s before it became a recognisable settlement. It 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 general area of Carnarvon was first settled in 1876 and at that time the only industry was in sheep. There is a sizable harbour at the confluence of the Gascoyne River and the sea and Carnarvon became a regular port of call for the coastal shipping that serviced the far north of the state. Industry in the town began to diversify and by 1920 the banana growing industry was developing along the banks of the Gascoyne River. Other farming industries subsequently developed and Carnarvon's dominance of the Western Australian fruit and vegetable industry commenced from this time. Probably the biggest single factor in the growth of the town was the opening of Highway 1 in 1986. Once the road from Carnarvon to Broome was sealed with bitumen, Broome became an important tourist destination and because it was on the road north, Carnarvon profited from the new tourist trade as well.

During roughly the 1890s to c1962, the Aboriginal policies of protection and genetic assimilation were operating in Western Australia, involving the practice of separating children from their parents and people in general from their country. The port at Carnarvon was one of the major destinations on the journey between the north and south of the state taken by such people undergoing separation and removal. During this time, the road system in the interior of the state was not yet developed and so travel by boat around the coast was the most efficient means of transportation. The state transported Aboriginal people from all areas by this means.

For most of the 20th century there was a reserve and a mission at Carnarvon where Aboriginal people from other parts of the state were placed when they arrived. When the state's special Aborigines legislation was repealed between the 1950s and the 1970s many Aboriginal people were therefore familiar with Carnarvon, if not through personal experience, then through the knowledge that they had from kinfolk living there. In addition, there was a ready source of Aboriginal employment on the surrounding pastoral stations.

By various means therefore, the Aboriginal community of Carnarvon came to be made up of various language groups and varying cultures. In the generations immediately following the demise of the assimilation policy in the 1950s, people found partners mostly outside their own particular group, but who were resident in Carnarvon at that time. Since then, however, as the old people have died and been buried at Carnarvon, people have come to regard Carnarvon as their home town and they increasingly partner among themselves, and with the out-of-town kinfolk of others in the community.

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<sup>8</sup> 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 (ABS 2001; 2003)

### *2.3.1 Aboriginal housing history*

Until 1981, Aboriginal people in Carnarvon were divided by culture into three groups, two of which had appellations by which they were known within the Aboriginal community. These two were called the 'Boor Street Mob', and the 'Reserve Mob'. The third group was referred to only as living 'in town'. Most of those who lived in town were in State Housing Commission homes, which by and large were in good repair. The Reserve Mob (as the name would suggest) lived on the gazetted Carnarvon Aboriginal Reserve (Birdsall 1990). The housing on the Reserve was provided by the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare before the State Housing Commission taking over responsibility for Aboriginal housing in 1972. These were what was then called 'transitional' housing. Native Welfare transitional housing came in two main types. There was 'primary transitional', made of unlined galvanised iron and uncovered concrete floors. They had no connection to water or electricity, no bathroom, and no toilet, though there was a tap in front of each house. Then there was 'standard transitional', built either from unlined galvanised iron or asbestos cement sheeting. These houses did have water, electricity, toilet and laundry facilities. Cooking was done on a wood stove in the lounge room, which doubled as the kitchen (Dagmar 1978, p.148). There was a third kind of transitional housing that was built by the State Housing Commission. This kind was conventional in design and in the facilities provided, but the interior walls were painted galvanised iron. The exterior walls were either asbestos cement sheeting or timber cladding. This was built specifically for Aboriginal housing (Dagmar 1978).

Homelessness in Carnarvon at this time was plainly visible and was represented by the Boor Street Mob. The Boor Street Mob lived outside the town on undeveloped land that was dominated by patchy, low scrub growing on sand flats. Essentially everyone who lived there was squatting with the tacit approval of the Shire of Carnarvon. There were no services provided nor was there any actual housing of any kind. People who lived there built their own dwellings and paid the Shire to truck water in or brought it in themselves in containers. There was considerable variety in these dwellings. Some people had caravans, and some lived in cars or an old bus, but mostly people constructed housing out of tents, tarpaulins, tin, corrugated iron and wood. Cooking was done on a camp fire (Birdsall 1990). Dagmar (1978, p.150) estimated the unmet need for housing at Boor Street on the basis of an average number of persons per house of 5.8, finding that at least 138 more houses were needed. This constitutes a homeless population of 800 people. A very few of these were single white men or white men who had Aboriginal wives.

The Reserve, which was situated on the banks of the Gascoyne River, had always been prone to infrequent but severe flooding in the rainy season, and on these occasions the residents were forced to abandon the Reserve for higher ground. In the late 1970s, the Reserve was again flooded and the decision was made to abandon it finally. The residents were removed to higher ground and housed in tents pending the development of a housing solution. At this point, they received an additional appellation; the 'Tent City Mob'. The housing solution developed for both the Tent City Mob and the Boor Street Mob was the establishment of a subdivision of dedicated Aboriginal housing at Boor Street which was named Mungullah.

Mungullah was vested with the Western Australian Housing Commission in 1981 on Crown Reserve land for the purpose of housing Aboriginal people left homeless after flooding. The population of the community was made up largely, though not exclusively, of the former Boor Street campers and the former residents of the (cancelled) Aboriginal reserve who were also the local traditional owners, the Ingarda people. The exact population of the community can never be stated with absolute

accuracy because of long-established visiting patterns between Mungullah and other communities to the north and south, but especially the associated community of Burrungurrah (which is approximately 500 km east of Carnarvon). The reserve is no longer used specifically for Aboriginal housing, but a high Indigenous population remains.

At the 2006 Census, 39 per cent of Indigenous households in Carnarvon were housed by the state compared to 9.4 per cent of non-Indigenous households (ABS 2007c). In total 69.5 per cent of Indigenous households in Carnarvon rented and only 32.5 per cent of non-Indigenous households rented.

### 2.3.2 Demography

According to population figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the population of Carnarvon has fluctuated over the last ten years, dropping in the 2006 Census by some 3000 residents. This drop may be due to changes in the ABS methods of calculation, but even taking this into account the general trend of the population in the SLA of Carnarvon appears to be decreasing according to successive Censuses. A drop also occurred to the Aboriginal population albeit not nearly to the same extent as the non-Aboriginal one, and thus the proportion of the population which is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander actually increased to 19.1 per cent in 2006. (ABS 2006a, 2006b, 2007)

**Table 11: Carnarvon population change, 1996–2006**

<b>Population by Indigenous status</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
Indigenous	1,229	1,144	1,086
Non-Indigenous	6,679	7,252	4,159
% Indigenous	14.5%	12.8%	19.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,479</b>	<b>8,942</b>	<b>5,682</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a, 2007a

Note: the Indigenous status 'not stated' population is not shown here but is reflected in total population

Regular circular mobility occurs from the discrete Aboriginal settlement of Burrungurrah westwards into Carnarvon. Fortunately an in-depth study of circular mobility within the Carnarvon region has been previously carried out for AHURI (Habibis et al. 2011), and informs this study.

### 2.3.3 Contemporary Aboriginal housing

At the time of writing this report, the Mungullah community had 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. Housing at Mungullah was managed by the Mungullah community council from the late 1990s to 2009, and is now under the management of the Western Australian Department of Housing (DoH (WA)).

All other public housing in Carnarvon is managed directly by the DoH (WA). Apart from the DoH (WA), there are a few rental houses managed by the Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation (MRAC), which is run out of Geraldton. None of our interviewees were living in MRAC housing.

Apart from the DoH (WA) and MRAC, the only organisation that provides housing-related services 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 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) provider. Other organisations of relevance to Aboriginal people in Carnarvon include the CDEP provider, Emu Services, The Carnarvon Aboriginal Medical Service and the Family Support Service which offers financial counselling, child protection and family counselling. The Family Support Service is also responsible for the Carnarvon Women's Refuge. Carnarvon has no dedicated service for alcohol and drug addiction or any specific services for men or adolescents.

No count has been made of Indigenous people living in situations of secondary homelessness (that is those otherwise homeless people who have found housing with friends and relations), but Carnarvon practitioners (housing welfare workers etc.) have in the past acknowledged that probably more than half the Indigenous households in Carnarvon were subject to crowding to some degree (Habibis, Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011). According to the last 2006 Census there were a total of 338 households with Indigenous persons (ABS 2006a, b).

Currently, mobility patterns both within the town and from other towns result from family homelessness, youth homelessness and the dysfunctional behaviour which arises out of substance abuse. All of these serve to produce situations of crowding. Substance abuse related mobility is a visible problem in certain areas of the town and, from time to time, at Mungullah (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008).

Also of significance in relation to housing, is the overall economic situation of Western Australia with the emergence of a 'two-speed' economy associated with the mining boom. This has noticeable effects on the housing situation around the state. In Carnarvon it has meant that more rental properties are taken up by the large mining companies, reducing the supply of available rental housing in the town (Trenwith 2012). This has made it difficult to impossible for employed Aboriginal people whose income is in excess of the DoH (WA) limit to obtain private rental homes. Previous research has shown that this barrier to obtaining private rental for employed Aboriginal people contributes to crowding (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Memmott et al. 2009).

## **2.4 Brief overview of Swan**

Swan is an outer suburb of 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.

Fortuitously, the earliest information available on Aboriginal housing in the Perth metropolitan area concerns the eastern part of the metropolitan area near the field site of Swan. This information is contained in two rare, unpublished reports—one submitted to the State Native Welfare Department and the second to the Office of Community Relations under Gordon Bryant, Aboriginal Affairs Minister during the Whitlam Government.

In July of 1908, following the closure of the Welshpool native settlement, a number of Aboriginal families came to live at a long-standing Indigenous camping ground in West Guildford. By the end of that month, a complaint had been made to the police that the 'natives' were 'far from the best and they are within hearing of the road and there are a lot of children going to and fro' (Lippmann 1977, p.1). The police moved

them to Success Hill, on the Swan River, but two years later as a result of more complaints from Guildford residents, they were moved to a new reserve in South Guildford (Biskup 1973, p.121). In 1941, complaints made by 'various road boards [the precursors to Shire/City councils] adjacent to the Guildford townships' resulted in all Aboriginal people in the Guildford area being removed to a campsite in Bassendean. On account of further complaints from local residents there, they were shifted to a number of camps in the Bassendean-Bayswater area. In 1954, they were removed from these camps, evidently with no particular arrangements having been made for them. A number went to one of the old sanitary depot camps (Lippmann 1977, p.2). Successive efforts were made by the Department of Native Welfare to establish a permanent camp, however:

A mere rumour that the Department is negotiating for the purchase of a suitable block inevitably results in a spate of publicity and organised protests, in the course of which natives and the Department are subjected to disgraceful, unwarranted criticism...The inescapable conclusion, therefore, is that natives were not wanted anywhere in the metropolitan area fifty years ago, and they are not wanted today. (Annual Report of the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare, 1959, quoted in Lippmann 1977, p.2)

Lippmann goes on to describe the care of homeless Aboriginal people during the period of her investigation:

Aboriginal Hostels are fairly inactive in Western Australia and the home for inebriate Aborigines which is run under church auspices is overcrowded and unable to offer rehabilitation programmes. A large tin shed nearby, known as Miller's Cave, containing a few old beds and no other facilities whatsoever, serves as night shelter for whatever Aboriginal alcoholics might seek protection there. Others camp in the open. (Lippmann 1977, p.7)

She received estimates of around 900 Aboriginal families on the State Housing Commission waiting list and roughly 100 homeless Aboriginal men living in East Perth. (p.8)

According to Robinson et al. (1977, p.15), 'conventional housing' for Aboriginal people in Perth 'did not become an issue until the 1960s'. They quote the Annual Report of the Department of Native Welfare which noted that in 1966, 90–100 Aboriginal families were living in private rental accommodation in Perth, some of which was 'unfit for human occupation, and located in areas which have been approved as future industrial sites' (Department of Native Welfare Annual Report 1966, p.35, quoted in Robinson et al. 1977, p.15). Aboriginal housing was the responsibility of the Department of Native Welfare in 1966, and they had provided one conventional house in that year. The following year the Department appointed a dedicated housing officer and by 1972 there were 205 Aboriginal homes (Robinson et al. 1977, p.15). In 1972, the State Housing Commission took over responsibility for Aboriginal housing. However, the provision of housing lagged well behind the population growth. By 1976, when Lippmann was conducting her research for the Office for Community Relations, the shortage of homes for Aboriginal people in Perth ran to 500 dwellings (Robinson et al. 1977, p.16). Lippmann's contemporaneous assessment regarding a shortage of 900 dwellings may have been an overestimate, therefore.

#### *2.4.1 Demography*

In the 2006 Census there were 1 445 079 people resident in Perth, which is more than half the population of Western Australia (ABS 2007a). Perth had a population of 21 323 Indigenous people, which was the largest single population of Indigenous people of Western Australia. However, at 1.5 per cent, Indigenous people form only a

small proportion of the total Perth population (ABS 2007a). Indigenous people in Perth are fairly well distributed throughout the greater metropolitan area, although not in the affluent riverside and coastal suburbs.

**Table 12: Swan SLA population change, 1996–2006**

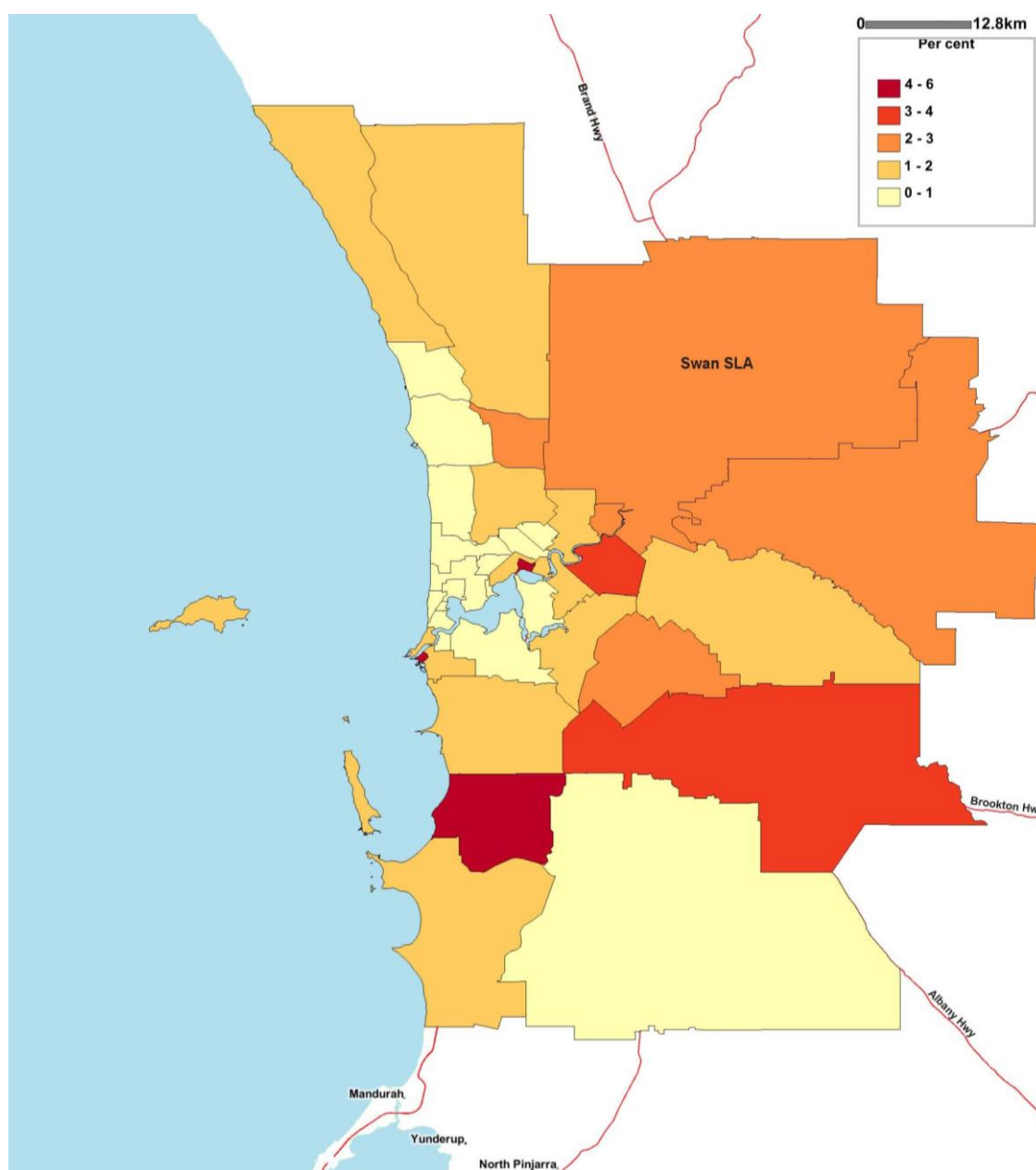
<b>Population by Indigenous status</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
Indigenous	1,934	2,315	2,585
Non-Indigenous	32,847	77,241	84,950
% Indigenous	2.3%	2.8%	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69,296</b>	<b>82,243</b>	<b>93,280</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007d

Note: The Indigenous status 'not stated' population is not shown here but is reflected in total population

Over the census years from 1996–2006, the Swan Statistical Local Area (SLA) has remained stable. By the 2006 Census, the population of the SLA had increased from 69 296 in 1996 to 93 280, with the Indigenous population remaining at a very similar percentage of the overall population in Swan (2.7%), keeping pace with general population increases in the SLA. Figure 4 shows the proportion of Indigenous population in Swan in relation to that of other SLAs in Perth, some of which have higher proportions. However Swan is a large area with its Indigenous population dispersed among a substantial non-Aboriginal population (84 950 persons). Swan does have a very large number of people not recording their Indigenous status on the Census, some 6.2 per cent of the total population, which could be masking a higher Indigenous population than Census data currently show.

**Figure 4: Indigenous people in Perth (2006) shown as a percentage of the total population in Statistical Local Areas, with study area of Swan SLA indicated**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007

#### *2.4.2 Contemporary housing profile*

The public housing provider for Perth and the rest of Western Australia is the Department of Housing (DoH (WA)). In Western Australia, Aboriginal community housing is administered through an Aboriginal Housing section within the DoH (WA). This is changing under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, which will negotiate Housing Management Agreements with remote communities housing to manage their housing assets for a period of 40 years. Under these partnership agreements, household 'overcrowding' is a key priority. Aboriginal 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 (WA) thus provides de facto housing for many Aboriginal 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 household crowding experience of Aboriginal 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 Aboriginal Affairs (FaHCSIA). It has now been replaced by 'A Place to Call Home' under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, administered through FaHCSIA (Australian Government, FaHCSIA 2009).

Currently, there are more non-Indigenous than Indigenous households renting from the state by numbers alone. However as a proportion of each group, 23.6 per cent of all Indigenous rentals are with the state, whereas only 5 per cent of all non-Indigenous rentals are with the state. The majority of the non-Indigenous rentals are in non-state rental. Thus, of all non-Indigenous houses in Swan, 21 per cent are rented (ABS 2007e).

Of all Indigenous houses in Swan, 41 per cent are being purchased. Some 1.6 per cent of all houses in the Swan SLA are owned or are being purchased by Indigenous people. Ninety-eight per cent of all houses that are owned or being purchased in Swan are owned or being purchased by non-Indigenous people (ABS 2007e).

**Table 13: Rental housing, home ownership and homes being purchased in Swan**

	<b>Indigenous households</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous households</b>
Owned or being purchased	371	23,156
<b>Rented houses</b>		
Real estate agent	93	2,420
State housing authority	222	1,156
Housing co-op	24	44
Other landlord type	15	238
Not stated, rented from absentee person, other anomalies	88	2,354
<b>Total rented</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>6,212</b>
<b>Total households</b>	<b>887*</b>	<b>30216</b>

\*Total households also includes categories not in this table, hence totals are greater than categories listed in this table

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007e

**Table 14: Swan Indigenous household percentages**

<b>Percentage of total Indigenous rented all types</b>	58.6%
<b>Percentage of total non-Indigenous rented</b>	9%
<b>Percentage Indigenous of all households</b>	2.9%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007e, 2007g

### 2.4.3 The 'three strikes' policy

In May of 2011, the Western Australian Government enacted what is referred to as the 'three strikes' policy by introducing policy amendments to the existing Disruptive Behaviour Management policy. The amendments removed what the Minister said was 'unnecessary and problematic discretion' (Buswell 2011) in the implementation of the existing policy. He did this by introducing three levels of disturbances. The policy rules as outlined for tenants are quoted below:

The Department of Housing has defined three levels of disruptive behaviour and will respond in a fair and reasonable manner to all complaints. Once the complaint is received the Department will investigate the disruptive behaviour and when the Department is satisfied the incident occurred the Department will take the appropriate action against the tenant.

#### **Dangerous behaviour**

Dangerous behaviour is characterised by activities that pose a demonstrable risk to the safety or security of residents or property; or have resulted in injury to a person in the immediate vicinity and subsequent Police charges or conviction.

**Response:** Immediate proceedings will be taken under Section 73 of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987, or other relevant section where this cannot be applied.

#### **Serious disruptive behaviour**

Serious disruptive behaviour is defined as activities that intentionally or recklessly cause disturbance to persons in the immediate vicinity, or which could reasonably be expected to cause concern for the safety or security of a person or their property.

**Response:** A strike will be issued following one incident the Department is satisfied occurred. Legal action will proceed if one subsequent incident (of similar severity) occurs within a period of 12 months.

#### **Minor disruptive behaviour**

Minor disruptive behaviour is defined as activities that cause a nuisance, or unreasonably interfere with the peace, privacy or comfort, of persons in the immediate vicinity.

**Response:** A strike will be issued for each incident the Department is satisfied occurred. Legal action will proceed if three strikes are issued within a period of 12 months. (Housing WA 2012)

Important aspects of this policy are that three breaches of a minor nature, within a 12-month period will lead to eviction. The brochure outlining this policy for tenants states that Minor Disruptive Behaviour (constituting one of three strikes) can include 'Nuisance from children, associated with loud noise, but short of misdemeanours such as property damage. Loud parties resulting in Police attendance ... Domestic disputes which cause disturbance to neighbours' (Government of Western Australia n.d.) among other minor events.

Within the DoH (WA), this made necessary the creation of a new division of housing officers whose sole duty is to investigate, verify allegations of misbehaviour and to put in process the appropriate measures as dictated by the policy. One effect of this on certain Aboriginal public housing tenants (as revealed in our interview findings) has been to introduce elements of fear and confusion into the management of their

houses. This policy is relevant in differing ways to both Swan and Carnarvon. Examples of such will be considered in our Western Australian research data, set out in later chapters.

It should be understood that this policy does not originate with anything to do with the Western Australian Aboriginal community. The Minister, Mr Buswell, requested the redevelopment of the existing policy after the explosion of a methamphetamine lab in a DoH (WA) unit in the Perth suburb of Carlisle in May 2011. He was quoted at the time the policy was announced in June 2011 as saying:

I expect there will be an increase in the number of evictions. I expect I will be back here in the not-too-distant future defending some of those evictions against claims that we are unfairly evicting people. There are support services ... They will have a role to play. (Emerson 2011)

### **3 MOUNT ISA LARGE HOUSEHOLD ANALYSIS FINDINGS**

This chapter sets out the findings from our interview survey of the 21 householders in Mount Isa who were reported to have experienced large household formation.

As noted in the previous chapter, Mount Isa has displayed a pattern for over 45 years as a regional visitation and immigration centre for an Aboriginal cultural region. At the time of our survey, its gradually increasing Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) population was in the order of 3250 (identifying) persons, some 16.5 per cent of the total city population of around 20 000 which included some in-migration from the outer towns and settlements of the region. The strong internal pattern of circular mobility was driven by kinship, recreation and service provision. Housing characteristics were shaped by:

1. The growing mining economy of the Queensland North West Mineral Province which was occurring at differential rates in response to fluxes in mineral export demand and prices.
2. The under-design of the town's sewerage processing infrastructure which in recent years had severely constrained ongoing urban expansion.

The net outcome at the time of the survey was a two-speed economy with an overall shortage of housing supply and a significant difference between public and private rental costs. Aboriginal households were frequently large and the state government housing officers exercised some flexibility in administering tenancy rules knowing that eviction was likely to displace people to another of their properties. This strategic response was complemented by a city Homelessness Strategy with a range of managed facilities for temporary, emergency and transitional accommodation (both government and NGO).

As indicated in Chapter 1, the analysis in this chapter has the following content structure:

- Household profiles in sample.
- Household expansion—origin of visitors.
- Reasons for household expansion.
- Large household formation patterns.
- Sleeping arrangement principles.
- Perceived absence of stress by some interviewees.
- Perceptions of stress by other interviewees.
- Strategies used to cope when stressed.
- Neighbourhood stress problems.
- Physical needs and improvements to cope.

#### **3.1 Household profiles in the Mount Isa sample**

Table 15 sets out the 21 household profiles that were sampled in Mount Isa differentiating by gender and separating children and babies, as well as dividing the core household from those deemed as 'visitors' at the time of interview.

**Table 15: Profile of sampled Mount Isa households—actual people present**

	Core household								
	Householders (adults)			Babies	Child male	Child female	Adult male	Adult female	Sub Total
	No.	M/F	Age						
1	1	F	40s			2			3
2	1	F	50s					2	3
3	1	F	50s				1		2
4	2		40s						2
5	1	F	50s						1
6	1	F	40s				1 (?)		2
7	2		30s		4	5			11
8	2		30s		2	2			6
9	2		50s			3			5
10	2		40s		3	3			8
11	1	F	Elder						1
12	2		20s		4	3			9
13	2		30s		5	3			10
14	1	F	Elder						1
15	2		30s		4	1		1	8
16	2		40s			2			4
17	2		30s		5		1	1	9
18	1	F	Elder						1
19	2		20s			4	2		8
20	1	F	20s			3	1		5
21	1	F	20s	1	1	3	1	1	8

Note: '2 householders' implies female/male spouses in all cases

**Table 16: Profile of sampled Mount Isa households—visitors present**

	Extended family/visitors at time of interview							Total
	Partnered adults (male/female)	Babies	Child male	Child female	Adult male	Adult female	Sub Total	
1	4	1			1	1	7	10
2				1			1	3
3	4		3	1		4	11	14
4	4		3	2	1	1	11	13
5	2				4		6	7
6	2		2		3		7	9
7				1			1	12
8							0	6
9	2	1					3	8
10	2		1		2	3	8	16
11							0	1
12					2		2	11
13	2		2	1			5	15
14	2		5	1	1		9	10
15							0	8
16	2	1	1	2	2	1	8	13
17				1			1	10
18					4		4	5
19							0	8
20	8	2	2	1	1		6	19
21			1	1	1	1	4	12

Note: Assume adults aged 18 or over

Our brief to our Aboriginal consultants was to take us to households that had a reputation of being large and/or known to experience large visitation numbers. This latter criterion did not necessarily mean they were large households at the time of interview but for most this proved to be the case, with only two householders having less than five people at the time of interview. Household sizes ranged from one to nineteen (see Table 16), with an average of 10 persons (total 210 persons). Using a conventional density measure this represents an average of three persons per bedroom (69 bedrooms total).

**Table 17: Sizes of Mount Isa households at time of interview, July 2010**

<b>Size of households</b>	<b>Number of households</b>
1 person	1
2 persons	0
3 persons	1
4 persons	0
5 persons	1
6 persons	0
7 persons	1
8 persons	3
9 persons	1
10 persons	3
11 persons	1
12 persons	2
13 persons	2
14 persons	1
15 persons	1
16 persons	1
17 persons	0
18 persons	0
19 persons	1

Two sets of data on sleeping arrangements in rooms were collected for Mount Isa, one set being where people said they slept during their interviews, and the second set based on observations of bedding (and sometimes sleeping persons) and information collected (and mapped on floor plans) during a walk-through of the house with a householder. It was generally found from the walk-through that more people were sleeping in the houses than were identified during the interview. The table below is thus largely based on the observational data, with some cross-checking from interview data. Note: those figures do not necessarily reflect the size of household when it is perceived to be crowded.

**Table 18: Sleeping arrangements described by Mount Isa interviewees, July 2011**

Interview number	Size of house by bedroom numbers	Number of persons sleeping in house rooms and spaces														Total
		B/R 1	B/R 2	B/R 3	B/R 4	B/R 5	Lounge/Dinning	Kitchen	Veranda 1	Veranda 2	Bathroom	Garage/Carport	Garden Shed	Yard Camp/Tent	Caravan	
1	3 B/R	2	2	3	-	-	3									10
2	2 B/R Duplex	1	0	-	-	-	2									3
3	3 B/R	4	4	2	-	-	3		1				*			14
4	3 B/R	2	2	3	-	-	2							4		13
5	2 B/R	1	3	-	-	-	3							*		7
6	3 B/R	4	2	1	-	-						1	1			9
7	3 B/R	2	5	5	-	-										12
8	3 B/R	2	2	2	-	-										6
9	3 B/R	2	2	3	-	-	1									8
10	4 B/R	3	3	3	2		1	1						3		16
11	2 B/R	0	0	-	-	-	1									1
12	5 B/R	2	2	2	4	1										11
13	3 B/R	3	4	2	-	6										15
14	3 B/R	3	2	2	-	-	2	1					*			10
15	3 B/R	2	2	2	-	-	2									8
16	5 B/R	1	2	2	2	2	3			*		1				13
17	4 B/R	2	2	2	3	-	1									10
18	3 B/R	1	2	1	-	-	1								*	5
19	4 B/R	2	2	2	1	-	1									8
20	4 B/R	2	3	5	4	-	4					1				19
21	4 B/R	3	2	1	3	-	3								*	12

\* = Said to be used for visitors when they come

The Mount Isa sample thus contained houses with the following bedroom numbers: three two-bedroom, eleven three-bedroom, five four-bedroom and two five-bedroom. We were informed by tenants that the limited numbers of five-bedroom houses in the state rental stock were largely located in the suburb of Happy Valley which corresponds with where our two interviewees were located who lived in five-bedroom houses.



A clear finding from this table is that people were commonly using the lounge/dining room for sleeping as well as a range of external spaces on the periphery of the house and in the yard, in addition to all of the bedrooms.

**Figure 5: Map of the 'beats' of the North West Queensland/Northern Territory border region (by Long 2005, p.359)**

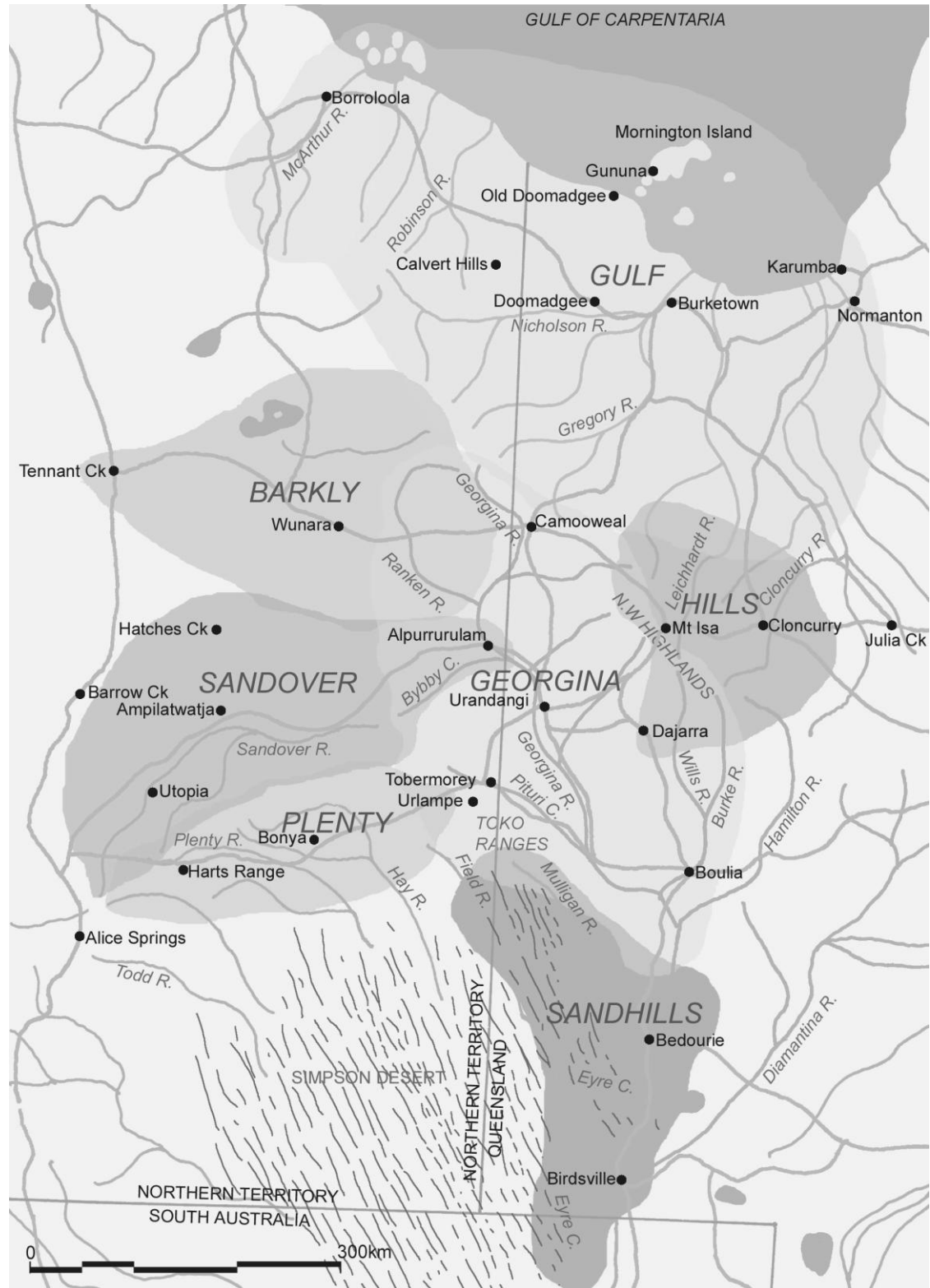
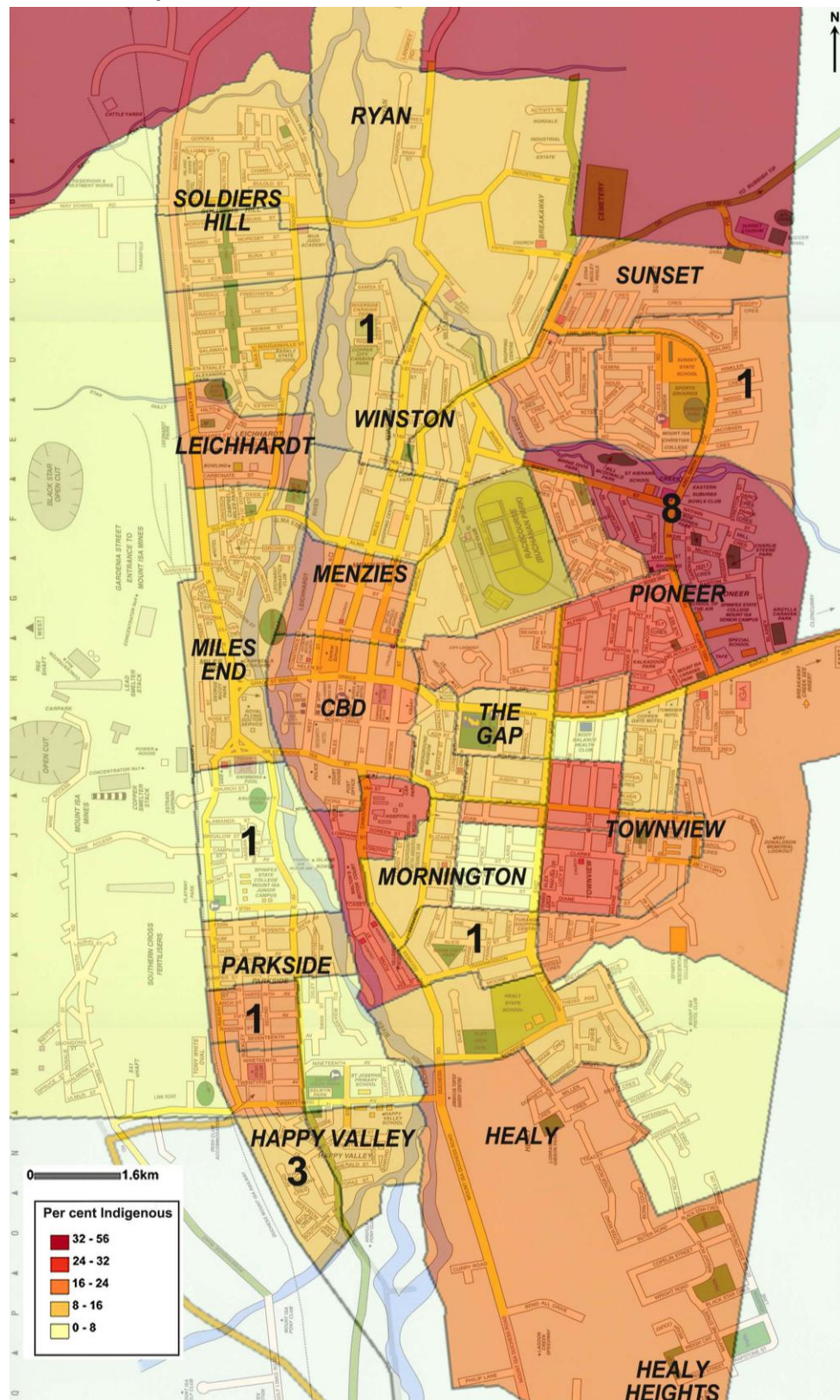


Figure 6: Mount Isa's named suburbs and Census Collection Districts, coloured according to per cent of Indigenous population. Numerals refer to numbers of interviews in particular districts\*



\*Note high density of Indigenous people in Pioneer

### 3.1.1 Household expansion—origins of visitors

The first category of visitors is likely to come from the home communities of the householder. Table 19 indicates the home community of the interviewees in the Mount Isa sample. Only two interviewees identified as being from Mount Isa itself. There were seven from Dajarra and one from Boulia, both small towns to the south of Mount Isa, four from Alpururulum, a discrete community to the west and located a little over the Queensland-Northern Territory border, and three from the discrete communities of Doomadgee and Gununa in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Thus 17 of the 21 randomly located householders were from within the North West Queensland region. This finding is in keeping with the well reported phenomenon of Mount Isa being the regional centre of an Aboriginal cultural region with people having a range of places where they can live in a 'beat' throughout the region. This wider North West Queensland region is shown in Figure 5 (taken from Long 2005: figure 8.13). Note that it straddles into the Northern Territory thereby implementing two state jurisdictions.

**Table 19: Identified home community of interviewees**

Home community of interviewee(s)	Number of interviewees	Comments
Mt Isa, Qld	2	Includes white woman & TSI spouse, Mt Isa woman with spouse from Doomadgee
Dajarra, Qld	7	Includes 5 single women, one single man, one couple
Boulia, Qld	1	Stable couple
Alpururulum (Lake Nash), N.T.	4	Three couples and a female pensioner long resident in Isa (40 yrs) but originally from Sandover.
Doomadgee, Qld	1	Male householder with wife in hospital.
Gununa (Mornington Island), Qld	2	Householders are single women
Woorabinda/Rockhampton, Qld	1	One woman with exogamy to NWQ region
Innisfail	3	3 women with exogamy to NWQ region
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	

A further four interviewees were from outside the North West Queensland region being from the east coast: one from Rockhampton (to the south-east) and three from Innisfail (to the north-east).

#### **Sociogeographic exogamy**

A second category of visitors is likely to come from the home community(s) of the householder's spouse. There were 11 out of 21 interviewees who had a spouse. Of these, 10 had a spouse from a different home community to their own. The combinations were as follows (interviewee's home community first, then that of spouse):

M.I.7: Mount Isa/Torres Strait Islander.

M.I.8: Mount Isa/Alice Springs but this Mount Isa woman was descended from an Alpururulum family

M.I.9: Alpururulum/Andarrenginye (Sandover River communities, N.T.)

M.I.10: Doomadgee/Bidunggu (Gregory Crossing)

M.I.12: Woorabinda/Dajarra

M.I.15: Mount Isa/Doomadgee

M.I.17: Dajarra/Camooweal

M.I.19: Innisfail-Melbourne/Mount Isa

M.I.20: Innisfail/Cloncurry

M.I.21: Innisfail/Boulia.

Of these ten sets of householder spouses, four were intra-regional exogamy, while six were extra-regional. Of the six extra-regional, three were women from the east coast with families from Innisfail but dispersed down as far south as Mackay. The fourth woman was from Woorabinda, near Rockhampton. The fifth was from within the region and had her spouse from Alice Springs. The sixth was again from within the region and she had a Torres Strait Islander spouse but he was possibly a diasporic Islander whose family had been in the North West region for some generations (originally brought as railway gangers).

These exogamous linkages were important because they dictated from where visiting kinspersons were likely to come, defining a 'visitor catchment' so to speak. These visitors were all relatives and extended family who had spread out to different residential locations from the original home communities of the householder and of his/her spouse. The visitor catchment area was likely to be much more extensive for the extra-regional exogamous couples. Thus, in the case of M.I.19, the householder couple gave home bases as Innisfail, Melbourne and Mount Isa but listed their visitors coming from a range of other places in addition to these, viz. from Normanton, Darwin, Innisfail, Melbourne, Cairns, Yarrabah, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Mackay, Brisbane.

All of the interviewees and their spouses were Aboriginal, except for the case of M.I.7 where the interviewee was a white woman who had children to two former Aboriginal spouses and was with her third spouse, a Torres Strait Islander. She said she 'grew up in Mount Isa—in a white family—but there were a lot of Aboriginal kids at high school and I got mixed in'. Our Aboriginal consultant confirmed she grew up in a big family with about six brothers and sisters. Also that she lived at Alpururulum and Ilampe (Northern Territory) with an Aboriginal spouse and was used to bush living. People bring kangaroos to her house and cook in her yard.

Given the history of removals of North West Queensland people to the penal settlement of Palm Island during the 20th century, it was not surprising to find some Palm Island visitor connections. Thus, in the case of M.I.20:

Jack's family visits from the coast, from Palm Island. Two or three people come, Aunties. Stay about two weeks, come on one payday. Two or three here, two or three stay somewhere else. Come by bus when visiting. Palm Island crew come for Boxing Day or for meetings for native title. Trying to get Jack into Kalkadoon Native Title [claim group], but he won't do it—too much fighting. (M.I.20)

## Reasons for household expansion

A question was asked about why people had come to stay or visit over the last year and the responses were compiled into Table 20. Note that some informants provided generic statements about when or why visitors come, but these were not included in this table unless they could be linked to a specific event. Generally this question was poorly reported, with not all events reported, as particular events merged into generic events. So the responses are not an objective measure of all visits but indicate the type and intensity of visitation drivers.

**Table 20: Household expansion with visitors—catalysing events recorded from the previous year (may or may not be perceived as crowding)**

Reason for visiting	Number of visitors
Visiting relatives in general, including just travelling through and visiting for Christmas.	18
Visiting relatives for recreation event (Mt Isa Rodeo, Show, AFL game).	15
Visiting relatives for funeral (including those awaiting imminent death of kinsperson).	10
People visiting to drink and staying overnight	5
Visiting relatives obtaining health services	4
Visiting relatives coming out of prison	3
Visiting relatives after Cyclone Yasi	3
Visiting relatives' children (child minding/ child playing sleepover)	3
Visiting relatives for family celebrations (eg. birthday)	2
Relatives visiting for shopping in Mt Isa	2
Relatives visiting for weekend who are employed elsewhere	1
Staying with relative due to unavailability of rental housing	1
Visiting relatives engaged in court hearing	0

## Kinship as a driver of mobility, combined with other events

One of the most frequent reasons for why people came to stay was simply to visit their relatives. This is in keeping with an earlier AHURI study of Aboriginal mobility in this region in which kinship was found to be the key driver of circular mobility (Memmott et al. 2006). Several interviewees thus reported family visitors at Christmas time (e.g. M.I.4, 12, 21). A variant of this was people who were travelling through Mount Isa en route to somewhere else and who chose to stay with a relative both to visit them and out of convenience.

Accommodation of extended family for significant recreational events in Mount Isa also obtained one of the highest scores in Table 20. The most commonly reported event was the annual rodeo in August, while other events were the Show and particular AFL games, especially the finals.

The following three interviewees describe their visitor events at rodeo time:

Probably get about 20–30 [visitors] at rodeo time, with their children. Get three carloads for rodeo. Got a big tent, put up at back. They come from Bonya.

Bonya people bring food – kangaroo, emu. They come for short visit, stay for months, get stuck. Bring own food, swag and eight-man tent. It's good when you've got people who share. But in other families some lap it up, abuse their host. (M.I.5)

[And] come for rodeo. Back yard gets full—they bring swags. Bring kangaroo and bush tucker. Eat anyone's tucker. Chuck in [for rent] some time... Saw 40 in backyard. Some people sleep inside with babies... (M.I.6)

Will come for rodeo time.... Both families, [husband's] and [wife's] come to stay. From Boulia, about ten people come, but also stay with other family. Also come from Cloncurry too, about six or eight people. All family visiting. They'll bring tents and chuck in for food. They pay it as board but [I] keep it small because they'll payback. Old people and kids be inside. Girls have own room. Jeffrey's room—visitors can use [it]. (M.I.6)

There is a common theme here of people camping in the yard, even cooking bush game in ground ovens. Some visitors share their resources and are not an economic burden on their host, while for others the opposite is the case.

The third most frequently given reason for visitation was to attend funerals in Mount Isa and by extension, participate in mourning and grievance behaviour (e.g. M.I.1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 15 & 21). The timing of our interview fortnight followed soon after a particularly large funeral, which fortuitously generated insightful data.

### **Ray Punch's funeral case study**

Ray Punch was the son of parents from the Georgina River (Waluwarra tribal group), and the Central East Northern Territory (Wakaya). He died prematurely aged in his mid-40s in June 2011. His funeral was coordinated through his sister who was an interviewee (M.I.1) living in a three-bedroom house. Her household increased from eight to 24 during the funeral of this socially important middle-aged initiated adult male, with the overnight visitors. Some stayed for two or three nights, some for a week, and a few for a couple of weeks, coming in advance to organise the funeral. She hosted 16 visitors (8 adults & 8 children), mostly from Wunara Outstation in the Northern Territory, located on the deceased's traditional land. She also hosted about 100 people on the evening of the wake. From our other interviews (which were selected randomly and not designed to track this particular event), we also identified funeral visitors who stayed in three other households, and undoubtedly there were more hosting householders whom we did not interview.

The sister of the deceased gave the following account of her funeral visitors. She (M.I.1) reported: 'it was ok but it was crowded,' indicating there was not excessive stress due to the overall experience, although there were some inconvenient incidents. Her two girls moved up to her elder daughter's house to make room for the visitors. She recalls a 'big line up for shower and the water got cold with gas hot water system'. Also, a 'line up for toilet—kept going back and someone always in there'. Lots of people were visiting at the same time for the wake.

Had wake here; hired table and chairs. Few drinks, but all pretty quiet. All packed at front and back—100 people or more. One woman got full of rum. She was just visiting—went stupid—the only one! She started [drinking] in early evening and got worse. Took her in a car swearing. Kept her in car. Drove her to the drive-in theatre ground. After she left, all was pretty quiet.

The next day, the floor was reported to be covered in grime from spilt drinks. The householder said she 'took off' and let six other people clean up the house and take the rubbish to dump.

Other hosts of visitors coming for this funeral reported briefly as follows:

Only when a funeral, we get overnight visitors for a few days. Biggest mob for Ray's funeral—four weeks ago. They're all Dajarra and Boulia people.' [Observers agreed that there were 20 people in this house.] (M.I.6)

After Ray's funeral—had two couples with their children as well as 'Sharkie' who sleeps under the gazebo; eight visitors altogether. We get [maximum] two or three carloads of visitors for any big funeral, and there are between one and three funerals a year. Have been suicides in Dajarra and Mount Isa lately [giving rise to frequent funerals]. (M.I.7)

Ray's funeral—had Jacob's wife Essie and their family staying here. They bring money and food. [Estimate six people] (M.I.9)

It should be noted that there is an economy parameter to the nature of funerals whereby the extent of available capital of the extended family and friends dictates where a particular funeral can occur. More preferably it will occur in the deceased's home community with the cost covered of transporting the body back from Mount Isa. Alternatively, if such transport funds are not available, the funeral must occur in the regional centre of Mount Isa where the body is located after its post mortem. The latter option clearly impacts on temporary household expansion in Mount Isa, especially in the case of a culturally eminent or socially distinctive deceased individual. Note that this was not an issue for Doomadgee and Mornington Island (Gununa) communities as the lucrative Century Mine in the Gulf of Carpentaria had provided a funeral fund to cover the costs of transporting any bodies by plane back to these places from Mount Isa.

### **Health issues as a driver of visitation to Mount Isa**

Another common reason for people from the wider region to stay with their relatives in Mount Isa was the need to obtain health services, usually at the Mount Isa Hospital (M.I.2, 9, 14). Such individuals may stay two or three weeks. For example, M.I.2 said she accommodated members of at least five extended families from Mornington Island for this reason, and probably more. Householder M.I.19 reported: 'Hospital visits, for friends; stayed here because hostel has strict hours to be inside, so stayed here three months; was pregnant, stayed until she had the baby, then stayed for an extra two weeks.'

A related event that can result in even longer visitation impacts is the prelude to the slow death of a kinsperson. Thus, in the case of householder M.I.9, a close relative from Alpururulum was admitted to the Mount Isa Hospital with severe cancer. She lingered there for some months before her expected death occurred. During this period many people from Alpururulum came to visit her in Mount Isa, knowing that it was likely their last contact with her. Householder M.I.9 accommodated from 15–20 visitors at a time during this prolonged event as well as during the actual funeral at the end.

### **Prison release persons**

Another category of visitors was comprised of those relatives (usually male but not exclusively so) who had been recently released from Stuart Creek Prison (near Townsville). For example, the householder of M.I.3 said that her '[Elder sister had] just come out of jail—let him stay with me because nowhere to stay—wanted a flat'. As was the case for those coming to obtain treatment at the hospital, those with serious convictions may be accommodated both en route to prison and on return. Thus householder M.I.6. was accommodating 'a man just out of jail; also stayed before court and jail'.



This was particularly the case for Doomadgee and Mornington Island households since prison releasees from these communities had to catch a bus to Mount Isa then connect with a plane to their remote community. The male householder of M.I.10, himself from Doomadgee, indicated 'One boy on parole stopping here now, Jimmy Jones from Mornington Island', and added: 'Men on parole supposed to stop here...but they cut through to the Northern Territory to get away from police'.

Another related category was that of persons on court orders requiring them to temporarily stay away from their home community due to having caused some conflict or carried out homicide or manslaughter there. Thus a Doomadgee host (M.I.10) reported: 'Some nephew and niece here: John Garrett stays here—not allowed on Mornington Island till November. Felicity Garrett stops here too, but she [residing] at Pamela Street now.' (These two siblings later appeared and introduced themselves.)

### **Extraordinary case of a disaster response—Cyclone Yasi in February 2011**

One event that triggered the expansion of numerous Aboriginal households in Mount Isa was that of Cyclone Yasi. Cyclone Yasi came west from Fiji, crossing the Queensland coast around midnight of 2 February, destroying Mission Beach and Tully, then tracking westwards causing widespread damage and flooding as a rain depression. Its momentum was so strong it was expected to cause damage to Mount Isa, then cross the Northern Territory border and possibly impact on Alpururulum (near Lake Nash). Due to the isolated nature of Alpururulum, a decision was made in the Barkly Shire to evacuate all of the residents to the south-west, first to the small settlement of Ampilatwatja whose infrastructure was quickly taxed, then to Alice Springs and accommodate them in the Showground. However many of the Alpururulum people felt socially isolated in Alice Springs and moved of their own accord north to Tennant Creek and then east to Mount Isa where they knew they could stay with close relatives until the roads dried out. Those Mount Isa householders who were in the custom of hosting Alpururulum visitors under normal conditions were inundated by the many families who arrived. Thus the interview team encountered three households who had experienced visitors in this way:-

Got stuck for Christmas, when Cyclone Yasi came—People got moved because flood at Lake Nash [Alpururulum]. Some come here and stopped here—came to Mount Isa on bus. Couldn't get back for months. They hired plane to get back. We had Barbara Egert, her daughter Noela, Bethel (the mother) and her sister-in-law, Mary, and her daughter. (M.I.4)

[During] big flood time [Cyclone Yasi]—big mob here, came on bus from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek—they didn't know many people there [so left and came here]. (M.I.9)

At Cyclone Yasi time, all the Lake Nash people were not here in flood—because Lake Nash mob got [rental] houses here [in Mount Isa] now. [So they stay with own relatives.] Only Shirley, Agie and Jill—three from Lake Nash stopped here. (M.I.14)

### **Further reasons for visitation of householder interviewees**

Relatives were also accommodated by interviewees when they came from the outer region to Mount Isa for shopping. For example M.I.17 reported a brother from Doomadgee visiting Mount Isa regularly to buy car parts.

Shortage of accommodation at affordable rental is another issue, which can lead to a host accommodating kin. One householder characterised the rental cost situation as follows:



We all stay together—so expensive to get a private house. Black people are flat out getting a house—very prejudicial around here. Mount Isa one of most prejudicial places for accommodation. That's why a lot of families live together. More houses needed in this town. No accommodation makes everyone depressed. Everyone shares everything, bunk down together, it's Aboriginal way. (M.I.5)

As well as people having their initial motivation to visit Mount Isa for a particular matter, their stay could be unexpectedly extended for various reasons, most often to wait for funds from an expected welfare cheque. Another reason for delay in returning home was due to unexpected loss or disruption of transport means. For example, M.I.5 was hosting a man from Bonya while his car was being repaired. Others from Mornington Island or Doomadgee may fail to get to the airport on time due to indulging in a drinking spree ('got choked down').

### **Visitor scale**

It proved difficult to elicit any sense of the exact number of visitors from interviewees. It was easier to elicit the scale of visitation according to the number of carloads of visitors who had come, e.g. three or four carloads of visitors staying at one time for rodeo, show or funerals was elicited from some householders (M.I.4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15). This was translated as between 12–30 visitors maximum by a few interviewees (M.I.5, 21).

An example was given by a householder (M.I.15) with kinship connections to Doomadgee of two or three car-loads of visitors. She said, 'funeral time, big mob come [from Doomadgee] for one or two nights then go back; two or three car-loads; a few times a year [this occurs]'.

One observer gave a sense of the density of people sleeping in the house during Ray Punch's funeral: 'When a lot of visitors here, just like little cattle pads. We got mattresses', thus giving the picture of wall to wall mattresses, some separated by a gap of about 20 cm to make a walkway. This informant pointed out that it can be an advantage having people stay as they help out financially (KM, 11/07/11).

Similarly M.I.7 reported that 'had three car loads at a time—I bunk who I can. [Assume 12–15 visitors.] Sometimes they camp in yard under the gazebo' [we observed two double mattresses and a table under the gazebo]. Get up to two or three carloads of visitors for the show, the rodeo and any big funeral'. She said they attended one to three funerals per year; thus such large visitation events happened three to five times a year. (M.I.7)

### **Large household formation patterns**

Within the Mount Isa data, four distinct patterns of large household formation were clearly visible, based on the nature of the visitation styles.

#### ***Pattern 1: Diurnal visitors from Mount Isa who stay overnight***

This pattern involves a mix of both overnight staying adult visitors as well as daytime adult visitors (M.I. 5, 6, 7). This pattern involves daytime visitors who then decide to stay overnight by mutual agreement. The visitors come from other households in Mount Isa, either by private car, taxi, or on foot. Such visitors include people who come in the day to drink and who decide or who are invited to stay over; perhaps some pass out and stay over (e.g. M.I.21) in the host's house.

In M.I.5, the female householder's son had come to visit from another Mount Isa suburb the night before but required additional companionship. 'Couple of people

slept last night, to sleep with my son—he has a mental problem. Jack and Gloria asked to stay here with Jason last night.’ (M.I.5).

Overnight drinking visitors were reported in M.I.16: ‘A lot of young men come for a drink and ‘crash’ out back. They don’t make any trouble. They’re all Dajarra and Boulia people. Big mob inside now—all [daytime] visitors—came to have a drink. Lots of young people. We have to hunt them away half the time.’ The researchers observed the house inside to be totally packed with people coming and going. Similarly M.I.10 stated: ‘soon as sun go down all come in just like cattle coming for water...Maybe get 60 night visitors,’ and M.I.9 reported, ‘some people come at night; camp on lawn or in lounge’. This is an example of what we later define in this report as a ‘permeable household’.

M.I.16 reported hosting a set of nieces and their infants on weekends: ‘Five nieces from Sue See Avenue come on the weekend [when] their father [the male interviewee’s brother] kicks them out and they come and stay here—Jeff and Lorraine’s girls. The nieces have kids—one has three kids.’ Also in M.I.3, the household had a female adult visiting (kin) from another suburb who often stayed over rather than walk back at night.

### *Pattern 2: Diurnal visitors from Mount Isa who do not stay overnight*

The pattern involves daytime visitors only, with nobody staying overnight due to the rules of the householder (M.I.12, 13, 21). This pattern may be in accordance with either:

- a drinking-allowed attitude
- a drinking-not-allowed rule
- a restrained-drinking-only rule (e.g. M.I.21).

For example, when interviewers visited M.I.13 (a household of 4 adults & 11 children) at about 5.30pm, some 13 adult family visiting kinspersons and neighbours had dropped in, and were socialising and drinking beer on the front veranda and in the carport.

The household of M.I.18 reported: ‘Come drinking in day, stay for day. Friends come for visit. Visitors on payday to drink in day, come home in taxi. Niece (Georgina) and her 9 or 10 kids, they all come over; they keep mum happy to see the kids. Trevor’s daughter comes over: Miranda and her two daughters; Edwina and her two kids (boys). They just come and sit with me for the day.’ Their visit clearly did not create any stress. ‘No problems from neighbours, they friends... It’s really quiet here at night, no problems.’

### *Pattern 3: Visiting children from elsewhere in Mount Isa*

This pattern involves hosting mainly visiting children who either stay for the company of the host’s children or are left by relatives to be cared for by the householder. Thus household M.I.13 had four adults and 11 children at the time of interview and the householder said: ‘lot of kids all the time, cousins—come with parents for day visit and don’t want to go home, so sleep over. Brothers and sisters’ kids, nephew and niece kids. Kids whinge to come over. Or visit with parents and when time to leave, the kids bail up, so stay. The most we had once was 23 kids. In school holidays it’s like that. Sometimes they are left by relatives; or they are [local] school friends.’

For example, the householder of M.I.11 was a grandmother who was left with the children of several daughters to care for, either for day visits or overnight visits. ‘Liza leaves her kids here: two boys, two girls [4]. And Shayleen leaves hers: three boys,

one girl [4]; and Freddie: four boys, one girl [5]. All these kids get left here. [3–13]. Kids draw everything on walls, make mess.' The householder said she spent the whole of the previous evening cleaning the walls.

In the case of M.I.7 the household was composed of a couple and their nine children. The female householder said: 'The kids have their cousins and friends visiting all the time—in the daytime, maybe six visiting kids—some are a local gang.' There were 15 children present on the veranda at the time of interview, politely listening and well behaved.

The female householder of M.I.8 who had her own four children, reported visitation of her nieces and nephews:

Sister comes with her four kids, aged two to twelve (2, 4, 8, 12). Other sister lives in town—her kids come over to visit—four kids. So can end up with twelve kids. All girls sleep in one room and all boys in another room. Works out okay till third day—too many and too much mess—girls clean up, but not boys—start fighting one another.

#### *Pattern 4: Visitors from the wider North West Queensland region and beyond*

This common pattern involves hosting relatives for at least several days and often for weeks, who come from various communities mainly from the wider North West Queensland region. They either arrive by car, bus or plane. Such regional relatives hosted while visiting Mount Isa from the wider region, but may have to wait across paydays to get back (eg. M.I.14, 21). For example, M.I.14 reported: 'Visitors come and go, flake out around yard; come from Dajarra, Boulia, Camooweal, Lake Nash. Put 'em in yard, they bring swags. When funerals, when Johnson or Cronin families come, big mob come. This yard is so packed the day after a funeral; three or four carloads.'

A number of interviewees added in to the interview details of their reciprocal visiting rights to the families involved in Pattern 4, although this was not a specific interview question. Thus the householder of M.I.17 stated:

[Our relatives] don't come here for Rodeo or Christmas. We go to them at Christmas, stay with family then. We stay with uncle in a two-bed flat at Doomadgee at Christmas. And cousin [mother's brother's son] in Doomadgee, go and visit them, nothing much to do here.

#### *3.1.2 Sociospatial principles of sleeping location*

Five broad principles were evident in the interview data that guided how people were arranged into sleeping clusters and allocated sleeping spaces, based on broad kinship principles. Each will be described in turn.

##### **Principle of division by gender and generation**

Single visitors, whether children or adults were integrated with other single people in the household and divided into different spaces by gender. In some cases this was more complex whereby single people of the same gender were separated further by generation and slept together, e.g. older single male adults versus male adolescents. (reported at M.I.3, 7, 8, 21)

Girls sleeping together in one bedroom was reported in M.I.4, 16 and 17. In M.I.17, this was said to be under 'normal' conditions. One room for girls and a separate one for boys (children or teenager) was reported in M.I.7, 8, 9, 12 and 13. For example, M.I.8, who regularly had visiting children mixed in with her own children, had boys and girls in separate bedrooms.

Single men sleeping in one bedroom was also reported. The M.I.11 household had a room for her son when visiting. M.I.16 had a single man in a bedroom and in M.I.12, the 'two bunjis' (brothers-in-law) of the female householder had been allocated their own room (a distancing principle here). A single man was reported in the lounge of M.I.13; also in M.I.14, a man was in the lounge and on dialysis (an equipment issue).

### **Prioritisation of visitors for private sleeping rooms**

A key principle of prioritisation was that visiting elderly people, mothers with babies and children received priority to stay inside the house; while others had to stay outside in the yard or on verandas or in carports or garden sheds when the numbers were too high (e.g. single men, couples in tents). An example of older visitors being respected in this way was in M.I.19, where 'great aunties and uncles get a [bed] room or [stay] in the lounge room'.

### **Young nuclear family or couple in bedroom given preference**

A sub-principle of the above prioritisation principle was that visiting young couples with a baby or infant(s) were given their own room. For example, the householder's son and his wife were allocated their own room in M.I.16, and in M.I.17, two couples were in separate bedrooms. In M.I.2, a couple with a baby or infants were in one bedroom, while a visitor nuclear family had their own bedroom in M.I.9. And a single mother and son had their own bedroom in M.I.14, and also in M.I.16.

### **Early vacation of children to provide a bedroom for visitors**

A recurring rule was that the boys of the household, who normally occupied their own room, were moved out to the lounge so that adult visitors could take the boys' room (e.g. M.I.7, 21). Sometimes this role may be extended to young girls. For example, M.I.16 had three grandchildren in the lounge (a household of 12 in a 5-bedroom house). And in M.I.17, if visitors came, all the children moved into the lounge.

### **Two competing principles concerning sleeping location of householder(s)**

Two diametrically opposed principles emerged concerning the sleeping place of the head householders. Several such persons (all single householders) said they vacated their bedrooms for visitors and slept on the lounge room couch (e.g. M.I. 1, 2, 3, 11), whereas other householders said they retained the master bedroom exclusively for self (and partner if relevant), irrespective of visitor needs or demands (e.g. M.I.5, 7). An example was in M.I.2, where a single female householder and her two younger sisters slept in the lounge, in front of the television and used the bedrooms for visitors. In M.I.11, an elderly single female householder also slept in the lounge, watching television at night. And in M.I.1, a female householder and her 12-year-old daughter gave up their bedroom for visitors and slept in the lounge. One case was encountered of an elderly female householder (M.I.14) who reported she slept in the kitchen in winter to make room for others.

An example of a single householder alternating between bedroom and lounge room included the householder of M.I.3, who said, 'where they sleep, [they] organise themselves. Girls sleep in my room. I let all the girls stay in my room and I just blanket on couch. Boys sleep in own room'. The researcher's Aboriginal field consultant, K.M. (11/07/11) stated that the, 'person of the house is usually in the lounge camp,' but he said he was not sure why and added 'not by choice; kids put their stuff in bedrooms when they arrive,' i.e. visitors claim the bedrooms. He then reflected that 'older people always yarn up late in front of TV' and that this was the case when he was a child.

Additional hypothesised reasons as to why householders with large extended families resident, may prefer to sleep in the lounge room are to watch over household food

stocks in the kitchen and to deal with any incoming visitors during the night (be they wanted or unwanted visitors).<sup>9</sup>

Examples of a householder couple remaining in their own bedroom, thereby maintaining their privacy even when visitors arrived, were reported in M.I. 4, 7 and 12 and probably also occurred in M.2, 13 and 16. It was also reported by a single woman householder in M.I.5.

### **A sleeping arrangements case study**

Let us consider the case of M.I.17 to see some of these principles operationalised. The householder reported that 'normally there's one room for girls, and one room for boys'. The four bedrooms were thus occupied as follows: 'one for Jane and Rickie (the householder couple); one for all girls; one for all boys; and one for the other son John and his partner (no kids)'. She added, 'the nephew sleeps in the yard on a swag, especially if he's been out; he's not a nuisance we don't have problems with him'. When visitors came, the rooms were said to be re-organised as follows: 'the [visiting] mother and father are given a bedroom. The children move to the lounge where they stay with the visiting children, on mattresses. The sister gets a room with the niece who stays here'.

#### ***3.1.3 Use of external spaces for sleeping and socialising***

Some visitors arrived with tents or self-nominated to sleep on a veranda in an external steel shed or carport due to their longstanding visitation expectations and practices with their host. However, if there were too many people opting to sleep inside the house, the householder may have to designate certain people to sleep outside in such spaces, most commonly single men.

#### **Use of veranda**

Sleeping on verandas is commonplace in the outer communities of the region, but appeared to be less so in Mount Isa, partly because it may trigger complaints from neighbours and give rise to some embarrassment from strangers staring. Nevertheless two examples were recorded. A man from Mornington Island who had arrived late at night was sleeping on the veranda in M.I.3 when the interviewers arrived around 9am; and an elderly female householder (M.I.14) said she slept on the back veranda in summer to avoid being under the air conditioning (due to her arthritis).

#### **Use of driveway/ carport**

Single men were found to be sleeping in driveways or carports, often inside suspended plastic tarps in two houses, at M.I.6 and M.I.16. The householder of the latter house said, 'we live with extended family; carport is for playing cards [and] back veranda and patio has mattresses'.

#### **Use of backyard garden shed**

Various tenants conceded it was against tenancy rules to stay in their standard housing department pre-fab steel garden shed. However, some interviewees clearly used same for visitors. Thus M.I.3 said, 'want bigger shed at back for visitors—only tin one—older boys can flag out in a shed. We get half tribe and can't knock them back'. M.I.1 accommodated a 21-year-old visitor from Boulia in their shed; an elderly visitor couple were accommodated in a shed at M.I.4, and a male adult was reported sleeping in a shed at M.I.6.

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<sup>9</sup> Compare to case of Walter Scobie at Mt Nancy Camp in 1986 who slept in his kitchen to watch over his refrigerator (recorded by Memmott 1989, p.123)

### **Use of outside yard tent**

A good proportion of interviewees (e.g. M.I.4, 5, 9, 21) reported visitors (mainly from south, south-west & west) using tents, but once again this violated housing department tenancy regulations. Thus, M.I.4 reported an adult daughter and spouse to use a tent when visiting. M.I.19 reported younger adult visitors staying in a tent. M.I.10 had a tent with two cousin sisters and a male spouse; formerly camping in the river bed.

The case of M.I.10 was instructive: 'Joseph Kelly, he's Ganggalida, was staying in river when I pulled him out—now in tent in backyard; with Annie O'Malley. Here couple of days in tent. Joyce [Annie's parallel cousin] sleeps in the tent too. I don't want them old people to go anywhere. They got story to tell about country'. The motive of the householder to encourage his relatives to leave the riverbed and stay in his yard so as to minimise the risk of harm, seemed honourable. However towards the end of the interview, a Housing Officer and a Police Officer arrived and instructed the householder to dismantle the tent: 'You got a tent out the back. What's going on?' ....[indicating a breach of housing lease]. 'Boss has had enough. No more. Are you still on parole?' However, when one of the research team re-visited the house three days later the tent had not been moved.

Similarly the householder of M.I.14 was quite defiant about the tenancy regulation on this matter: '[I] Get fined if let people sleep in shed. [But] I don't mind getting fined for old people [i.e. Bill and Rose who visited from Bonya occasionally]. They won't sleep inside [house], that's their way, sleep outside, [they] show respect. We like to sit outside. That's our law. They show that respect'. The householder is here explaining that the old couple choose to stay in the tin shed out of respect for the household in order to provide them with relative privacy by distancing themselves during sleeping time.

### **Sleeping in yard in swags**

If spaces inside houses were full, some visitors practised bush camping style by sleeping on swags on the open ground of the yard (e.g. M.I.4, 9, 17). In the case of M.I.17, a single man was sleeping in a swag in a yard in which the fence was screened.

### **Use of hearths and outdoor socialising/drinking places**

Some tenants' yards had been adapted and equipped for outdoor living, similar to the norm in other bush communities (e.g. Long 2005, pp.176–179 on Dajarra). Household M.I.14 thus had a kangaroo roasting pit in the backyard; the householder commented: 'When we had Junior, he had a gun license; used to shoot roos and bring them back, used to help out in a situation like that,' referring to the large visitor influxes. Similarly M.I.18 had a game roasting hearth in the backyard and gidyea wood for hot coal fires. Visitors were seated under a large shade tree when drinking, with an outdoor bed under the tree for day-time sleeping. M.I.7 was also reported to employ ground oven cooking when Northern Territory visitors came with a kangaroo killed en route. Another householder (M.I.3.) with a hearth seemed aware of the legal requirements of lighting an outdoor fire 'but got to ask neighbours and fire brigade for fire'.

#### ***3.1.4 Perceived absence of stress by about half of interviewees***

At least six interviewees asserted categorically that there was no stress experienced in their large households (M.I.2, 3, 9, 10, 17, 18) and another three indicated there

was generally no stress except under occasional extremes (M.I.12, 13, 14).<sup>10</sup> Thus M.I.17 reported: '[they] come in for Rodeo, Show and funeral—same family mob each time; Mum and Dad chuck in, they all do...not stressful'. The young couple in M.I.20 indicated they experienced no stress; describing their cooperative household and recreational activities:

Not stressful, don't get problems. People spread out. Someone's always got a car. Some people go out bush. Boys' girlfriends help clean up, plus boys too. Go out to the lake. Everybody chucks in, Joanne does the shopping. Everybody helps, when they come, everybody pitches in.... But everybody shares, tea bags, sugar, a smoke. Everybody shares. When visitors do drink they go away to Irish club or the Overlander [Hotel]. We love a drink but no big parties.

A householder from M.I.3 was asked 'Do they get too piled up?' by the interview team. She replied:

Always okay—some can stay with Wendy [who lived two houses down from M.I.3.] No crowding here—not really. Everyone happy stopping here. [I] get upset when boys don't listen—they get drunk. I hunt them away—stubborn when drunk. I catch them when they're sober—but they listen to me [then]. (M.I.3)

Householder M.I.5, originally from Dajarra was particularly insightful in describing the kinship ethic involved of allowing demand sharing of the house and its facilities by kin.

Get a lot of daytime visitors, male and female, families. Visitors from Dajarra, Bonya, Urandangi. Never got stressed out by visitors. Being an Aboriginal person it's a normal state of life. Never want to turn family away, one day you might need them. Person being drunk and having a fight—it's normal—see it everyday life. Don't worry me. They do fighting outside. We're good-hearted people—we like to share. You see other people. So private and protected of their own space. If women with little kids, let them sleep inside—too cold outside for kids. Mothers and children visiting stay in lounge. (M.I.5)

Similarly, a Mornington Island householder (M.I.2) alluded to her kinship obligations:

They come and go, I can't say anything [meaning can't refuse]. Stay for one or two weeks then go home [to Mornington Island]. Come for check-up when little bit sick.

This householder made no response to the question on whether she was crowded or what crowding meant but she was clearly stressed by fighting—see later.

When the householder couple of M.I.16 were asked if they experienced any stress, Rosemary said she kept good control, while Michael said 'they know me!', meaning the visitors respect his word and know that he will not tolerate any disrespect of his wishes. Similarly, M.I.12 reported that 'visitors behave themselves, [have] good control,' and M.I.14 stated 'visitors behave, no trouble; they listen, sit around campfire, chuck in food'.

Being alone was perceived as a more stressful state than having visitors as indicated by the elderly householder of M.I.11: 'Get lonely sometimes, like visitors to come. Have a cuppa. Visitors mainly in afternoon time. No trouble in this house. No crowding here.'

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<sup>10</sup> Note that our study reports on self-perceived stress by interviewees. We did not conduct any physiological research to see if perceived stress correlated with symptoms of psychological stress

### *3.1.5 Issue of housing staff management of tenancies*

The occurrence of householders being stressed by the imposition of tenancy management rules was minimal even though housing officers regularly visited to warn them of such. Thus M.I.7 stated: 'Housing [department] mob only hassled me once.... when a neighbour complained about too many kids making noise, but brushed it off'. And M.I.3 said: 'Housing get upset when a lot of people; they tell me 'can't keep people here'—I say "not staying long".' There were some exceptions however (see later).

### *3.1.6 Perceptions of stress by other interviewees*

Some interviewees agreed they were crowded but did not offer any details of specific stress happening (i.e. a mild response), other than the need for a bigger house (M.I.5, 7, 14). This was the case of M.I.7 who did not concede any stress because people followed her rules, but then admitted she was crowded. However, we took this to mean crowding in the narrow sense of density rather than stress. She said:

Rule is 'clean up after themselves'. They bring food or shop when here. No fighting problems. Only Sharkey drinks—but he's no trouble. Some visitors have a drink. I drink. As long as they're quiet. Murri people don't care about how many people all living under one roof. Let three carloads stay—didn't worry anyone. Nobody got upset. They slept anywhere.

M.I.14 in a three-bedroom house conceded: 'Yeah, we're crowded. Need a four-bedroom house, but can't get a transfer. It is stressing me out. Promised four-bedroom house in December, but when it came up, not given to us. I gotta have a spare room where others travelling through can stop—Alice Springs, Darwin travellers.'

Some eight or so householders did identify specific stressful situations that had arisen in the context of their large households when visitors stayed. These are described in seven categories.

#### **Visitors making noise when householder trying to sleep for next day's work**

A cause of stress reported in one household (M.I.4) was visitors staying up late at night and making noise while the male householder who was employed in the day was trying to sleep. His wife when interviewed agreed that 'it gets crowded [and] sometimes gets too hard. Some come back late at night to cook inside. Trying to sleep—Jason trying to sleep, [he has to] go to work on weekend. Sometimes people drunk. When lock gate, jump over fence. That's why got cheeky dog. Single men walk around in night—sleep in day.' It is worth noting that Tangentyere Council architects were once involved in designing a style of house in Alice Springs that could be divided into two separate parts at night with an acoustic wall and hallway between, so that sleepers could sleep and partiers party without disturbing one another.

#### **Unwanted drunks imposing**

Whereas a number of interviewees tolerated heavy drinking in their extended households, possibly even participating themselves, several reported being stressed by this behaviour. Thus, M.I.4 said:

We don't keep drunks—tell them to go up the hill [Kangaroo Hill]. Just keep families with kids. Some ask to sleep in backyard. They sleep with swags. Sometimes on veranda. Three or four carloads might come [e.g. at rodeo]. Tell them keep tidy—clean rubbish. Come with own money—chuck in.... Too much [visitors] at rodeo from Ampilatwij and Utopia—all nuisance. [They] hang round Alice Springs after Harts Range race—. Then stringing this way [for rodeo].



They'll be at Johnie's family house...at Soapy Bore—stay Exeter Street, all go Kangaroo Hill [for drinking].

Similarly M.I.21 experienced stress:

At last Christmas, they did have visitors in other house. Gave that other house up because of problem with the three big girls' father—he'd let drunks in, loads of people. Had house for two or three years. Couldn't keep the drunks out. Police would come nearly every day of the week plus weekends. Drunks used to stay, camp there for the night if they were too drunk... About 30 people in house, sitting in house drinking. Caused my marriage breakdown. Husband would not tell drunk family to leave. I'd get sworn at if I said anything. We split. Had to move to 'Curry with my dad to get away from him. (M.I.21)

Another householder (M.I.10), who was clearly a heavy drinker himself, reported:

Night visitors [they're] ignorant, won't listen, when asked to leave. Start arguing, try to get 'em out before they start up. Some young girls, want to argue, can't take notice of older person. Families [from particular places] give you the shits, they won't listen. [He contrasts] the boys from Lake Nash real good, listen to you. (M.I.10.)

The worst aspect of heavy alcohol consumption is when uncontrolled drunken fighting erupts; this was overtly mentioned by only one interviewee who simply said: 'Sometime they upset me—drunken fighting that's all' (M.I.6) implying that this was the only time she got stressed. This was a heavy drinking household with numerous male visitors observed.

### **Stress from children fighting**

Stress from visiting children fighting was also reported by several householders (M.I.8, 19). For example: 'Jennifer's kids drive me wild, too wild, too messy; make a mess of the house. Jennifer's too soft; she doesn't know how to stick up for herself' (M.I.19). There is a notion here of the need for a householder to be firm with children, whether their own children or those of other adults. In this case it is a young female householder (in her 20s) who is said not to be firm enough.

### **Avoidance behaviour as a potential stress**

One example was given by a female householder (M.I.4) of the tensions arising from trying to maintain customary avoidance behaviours between her mother and her husband. 'Because mum come here and stay, Jeffrey not allowed to talk to her. In old days can't go near my brother or uncles— These days [they can] go anywhere— Brother and sister can speak now.' The householder is here commenting on the loss of avoidance custom in the younger generation, but then she commented further on her husband, saying that although there has been a relaxation of spatial avoidance of proximity between mother-in-law and son, nevertheless he is not allowed to talk to her when she stays. However, this could not be taken to be an extreme stress as the householder seemed to know how to cope with the necessary sociospatial restrictions.

### **Stress from lack of critical repairs and maintenance (R & M)**

Stress was reported by many due to the lack of R & M in houses especially issues of home security (locks & latches) and plumbing operation. This is discussed further in a later section on the requests for R & M.

### **Stress from people looking into the yard**

Shame arising from people staring in from the street at one's household and/or their visitors, particularly when outside in the yard, was widely reported. A common response to this was the erection of a screen of some sort on the fence to block visual access. For example, in the house of M.I.6, a blue tarp was strung along the front fence. When asked its purpose, the householder replied, 'people stare in, black and white'. The householder of M.I.21 reported that such screens were to 'stop the other family looking in and seeing the kids'.

### **Stress from pressure to conform to tenancy regulations**

Although people often said that they were not stressed by their visitors they sometimes reported being warned by housing department staff who were trying to manage their tenancy according to the regulations and to get them to move out the high numbers of visitors, including those breaking rules such as the use of tents in backyards and the use of hearths without a permit. Few householders seemed stressed by this pressure, perhaps due to the culturally sensitive management approach and the option offered to visitors of accommodation at the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre. When stress did occur, it was usually from a combination of neighbours' complaints and housing office warnings.

M.I.9, in one example of coming under strong pressure from housing officers, gave the following account when asked: 'Is your house crowded or ok?'

OK. Rodeo time, bit crowded then, three or four carloads. Visitors behave all right, don't have to growl.<sup>11</sup> Don't get upset by visitors. One back neighbour complained. Pushing me [signs hands together]—he make me worry. Had a bit of argument with Housing—they came down here. Drunken noise. People come visiting for rodeo, sometimes make noise. Housing give me notice to leave—have to argue with them [re the neighbour's complaint].

#### ***3.1.7 Strategies used to cope when stressed***

The following strategies were outlined that allowed householders to minimise or prevent stress occurring.

#### **Strategy: Sending visitors on to another hosting kinsperson**

A strategy that was clearly practiced by Alyawarr, Mornington Island and Dajarra householders was to move excess visitor numbers on to other households who were from the same home tribal group or community. This was not a matter of fobbing them off to someone else but a clear agreed-upon strategy between a number of inter-related households to equitably share out the hometown (or home country) visitors so as to spread the load (so to speak). Thus we found four identified Alyawarra houses in Mount. Isa, one of whom was said to 'have a rough time' from 'young fellers breaking door and take tucker'. Similarly a series of Dajarra households were identified who took visitors from the south-west, viz. from Dajarra, Urandangi and Bonya (Northern Territory) and a similar practice whereby one could send visitors to the next kinsperson's house. Thus M.I.5 said: 'Everyone comes for a funeral—everyone shares family—put people in different houses. I will send some to others if full'.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Growling' is a term, frequently used in Indigenous Australia, to mean verbally chastising someone with just cause, usually to correct an inappropriate behaviour.

### **Strategy: Household rules firmly administered**

The young female householder of M.I.19 (with a partner and 6 children) conceded she had been stressed by visitors but had learnt to discipline her visitors according to her house rules.

Yes, my house is pretty much a half-way house! They come over for tucker, pretend to visit but I know what they want, free food. Used to get stressed with all the visitors but now I'm used to it. Used to get stressed but didn't say anything, keep the peace. I tell them straight away, they learn [the rules].... Don't allow alcohol around the kids—that's a big no-no. So no problems with big parties or things. All visitors know the rules and stick to them. (M.I.19)

Householder M.I.10 spoke of a male visitor out of prison and on parole. She said I 'ask 'em to clean up, [and] they help, chuck in money, feed [share food]. I keep everyone under control.' Another rule is evidenced here that was mentioned by many interviewees that of contributing resources to the household, the 'chuck-in' principle.

### **Strategy: Protocol not to let one's spouse manage one's own visiting relations**

Due to the experience of deep shame in prescribing strong behavioural rules to one's spouse's relatives (e.g. to moderate drinking & noise), some couples had a protocol to avoid this. Thus the female householder of M.I.4: 'If [visitors] hang around too long and stay—I get angry and chase them. Both of us talk to them [Ego and her husband] —But Fred ashamed to talk to my family. So I tell Fred to talk to his family, and I talk to my family.'

### **Strategy: 'Hunting' drunks away, including with dogs**

To cope with unwanted visitors, householders had to learn to be selective in dealing with obstinate drunk people, learning the technique of 'hunting them away'. Thus M.I.4 said: '[I] had drunks pull up after food, in middle of night, [but] hunt them away'.

Keeping aggressive dogs was another strategy to discourage late night drunken visitors. The female householder of M.I.15 discussed her efforts to chase away drunks: 'If they are drunk, I hunt them out, even if they are family; they understand now'. She also locks the gate and has four savage dogs, but she said drunks have come back at times with weapons to subdue the dogs.

### **Strategy: Mother-in-law avoidance issue**

Only one householder (M.I.4) of Alyawarr identity with visitors from the Sandover River communities reported the need to observe avoidance behaviour between her mother and her husband.

### **Strategy: Spousal split up**

This may seem an extreme method to cope with the stress of crowding, but when it is accompanied by constant daily heavy drinking by the male householder and his male visitors, and a subsequent range of family violence events, it may be the only option available. Thus the female householder of M.I.21 had split up with her spouse, moved to a shelter, wait-listed for a new house, and then obtained a more acceptable spouse.

### **Strategy: Conscript the help of outside authorities**

The householder of M.I.15 reported calling in the police for unruly visitors: 'big mobs were drinking here, [so] I called police in to break it up. People are different when they get drunk; I don't mind when they are sober but not drunk'. Similarly M.I.10 reported:

If too many [visitors], we ring police to remove them, but when police asked to come, they don't [always] come straight away.

One householder (M.I.15) conscripted help from another agent:

The river bed mob [the Riverbed Action Group of River Outreach Support Services] helped us out, got the people out; [and] housing helped us out. River bed organisation helped us chase drunks out too. It was good to have someone else tell them to go.

**Strategy: Use of visual screens on front fence.**

This strategy involved adjusting the external physical environment with opaque screens to generate a degree of privacy. In this manner covering materials of fabric or cane were fixed on the side and front fences of M.I.6 and 8 for privacy, but were also observed on many other houses as well (Figures 7–10). One tenant (M.I.16) who erected screens on his fence reported that he was then made to adapt them to a standard specification by the Department of Housing: 'Gotta take all the screens off the [outside of] fence and put them on the inside and cut them down to fence level. Neighbours [white] from up the street complain when there are too many people in front yard. That's why we put up the screens.'

**Enduring stress if no effective coping mechanism**

The difficulties caused by large numbers of visitors may cause a build-up of stress for a householder who does not have effective coping strategies but who holds high the value of hosting visiting kin. Thus the female householder of M.I.15 revealed:

I do get worried and stressed with too many people. Can't get the house clean, make you wild. I just have to wait till people go away. You can't growl at them because they are family. They might think you are embarrassing them or their kids. You can't send them away. Don't want to upset. You get worried but you gotta put up with it... I've gotta provide mattress and blanket for them. I have to provide food and rent for them. They want to eat off us. (M.I.15)

**Figure 7: Aboriginal tenant's makeshift fence screens, Mount Isa—also note veranda screen**



**Figure 8: Aboriginal tenant's fence screen, Mount Isa**



**Figure 9: Tenant's fence and veranda privacy screens, Mount Isa**



**Figure 10: Commercial privacy fence, Mount Isa**



## **3.2 Neighbourhood stress problems**

### **3.2.1 Case of a high-density Aboriginal suburb**

When the researchers commenced the search for large householders in Mount Isa, they were constantly referred by Aboriginal consultants to a place called 'the Bronx' which was an informal name for an urban area with a high proportion of Aboriginal residents centred in the suburb of Pioneer, as well as including a central supermarket



and surrounding blocks in this suburb. Twelve out of the twenty-one interviews by the authors were carried out in this area.

Once conducting interviews in this suburb, the predominance of Aboriginal people and the high incidence of inter-household mobility (people constantly coming & going) became very obvious, as was the high visibility of public intoxication. A small park was noticeably an epicentre of public drinking as was a spinifex grassed hill at the back of the suburb known as 'Kangaroo Hill'. For example, the householder of M.I.4 reported 'get Epenarra people come here; some go hill drink—Kangaroo Hill—Alyawarre people drinking, stop and drink at park—White people can't'.

**Table 21: Indigenous-identifying people from selected 2006 Census data**

	<b>Mt Isa</b>	<b>% Mt Isa</b>	<b>Pioneer</b>	<b>% Pioneer</b>	<b>Aust</b>	<b>% Aust</b>
<b>Total Persons</b>	19,663	100%	2,611	100%	19,855,288	100%
<b>Indigenous Person (ATSI)</b>	3,051	15.5%	860	39.9%	455,031	2.3%
<b>Indigenous status not stated</b>	2,405	12.2%	N/P	N/P	N/P	N/P

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007h, 2008c

A check was done of the 2006 Census data on the suburb of Pioneer. Table 21 indicates the high proportion of Indigenous people living in the Mount Isa Collector District of Pioneer, almost 40 per cent, as compared to 15.5 per cent for Mount Isa as a whole (2.3% for all of Australia, also see Figure 6). This confirms the intense levels of Aboriginal social interaction in this part of Mount Isa.

An analysis of the interview results indicated that while most interviewees claimed not to experience stress from their approved visitors, many experienced stress from the random infringements of drunken behaviour on the streets of Pioneer. In Chapter 7 we shall model this further as a state of 'neighbourhood crowding'. But the supportive data can be set out below. The householder of M.I.5 thus described her concern over the unwanted nocturnal intrusion of drunks:

Lock gate up at night so people can't get in. Some jump over fence when lock gate—They can't listen. Everyone comes past looking for a place to sleep because it's cold. In summer time they don't come—they sleep in park. [Park is over road]. Can't lock front door. [A faulty glass sliding-door track]. Have dogs out at night to keep people away, and chain on gate. (M.I.5)

One of her visitors referred to an unwanted intruder on the premises on the previous night. 'Someone come and shone a [torch] light on my face last night [through the glass sliding door]'.

The household of M.I.6 outlined the stress arising from intoxicated people fighting in the street.

Lot of people come in front of house—fight in street in front of our house—[they] come here all time—Housing mob blame us. Lot of Dajarra people around here [in the neighbourhood]. [The interviewee growls at a young man passing.] I hunt them away if they play up here. (M.I.6)

A number of interviewees who lived in different suburbs to Pioneer made specific reference to the 'Bronx.' For example M.I.16 said: 'A lot of people come and stay here

with us to stay out of trouble because we away from town.... Not really [any trouble] because we are too far out of Bronx for 'em'. He added that 'big [five-bedroom] houses should be spread out over the [Mount. Isa] areas, not all in the one area [or suburb] [and] offering for people to buy houses over in the Bronx. The householder of M.I.18 who lived on the edge of Mount Isa reported that 'Lake Nash visitors, just leave their car here. They park their cars here, then go over the Bronx, because they [their cars] aren't registered'.

The householder of M.I.14 had a proactive response to people coming in off the street at random. She said: 'If motorcar in yard, passer-by drunks want a lift—People humbug you for a lift to go home. [But] best to get them home, keep safe, run them home [i.e. they comply]'. Note this household had two cars.

### *3.2.2 A reverberating inter-family feud*

Another incident was recorded that qualified as a form of neighbourhood stress for many families, the case of a reverberating feud between two extended families from different tribal groups and areas in the North West region. This involved a family from Mornington Island (predominantly 2 sisters, Jackie & Norma & their kin) versus three inter-related families from Mount Isa/Camooweal [families X,Y,Z]. It arguably extended to a neighbourhood crowding syndrome.

A central figure in the fight was the younger sister of Jackie, householder M.I.2; she said: 'In 2008, Norma had house here, big fight over nothing!'. Jackie noted that the feud had erupted at times in her own house: 'They used to fight here before—told them to move out of yard. No real fighting here no more'. But then she added: 'Last month, [another] big fight [happened], all family had to be in it'. Jackie said: 'They need to fight with Norma—she just came out of Stewart Creek (prison), there nine months'. Norma was able to find a house in a different suburb in an attempt to isolate herself from her antagonists fighting her. 'The fight is with [X, Y, Z families]; [norma] still fighting with [Y] families. They're fighting at my sister's house,;they're throwing rocks—Vera [Y] throwing rocks'. An interview was then carried out with Norma (M.I.3). She said: 'Don't like ex in-laws, [Z] family, don't like them coming—they know not to come or I'll call police'. 'My little gang, my little family—first husband was Billy [Z]'s son. I have Billy [Z]'s eldest grandchildren—[but I] get on with Billy'. (M.I.2)

Mount Isa Housing Office staff have since then identified a second feud of similar intensity and confirmed that these feuds have a destabilising impact on all local tenancies. Many residents make applications to move away.

## **3.3 Requests for physical improvements to cope**

### **Ablution facilities**

Large extended households need at least two toilets and two showers, each in a separate room, so that more than one person can be carrying out ablution activities simultaneously. For example, M.I.16 said she 'fought for improvements' including getting the bathroom and toilet separated. 'This is a disability house, bath and toilet are in together, would be better if it was separated.'

The householder of M.I.4, noted that 'everyone has to wait to use the facilities' when she had visitors; also M.I.1 said everyone had to 'line up for toilet; [I] kept going back, [but] someone always there!' In M.I.7, a household of two adults and ten children... 'puts pressure on the toilet and shower— Routine on weekday is 6.30am rise and shine, to 7.40 when all leave for work and school,' i.e. an hour for twelve people to take turns at using one bathroom and one toilet.

### **Need for repairs and maintenance**

There was a general need for minor repairs and maintenance, expressed by most householders. The tenant in the co-op rented house (M.I.5) appeared to have the worst R & M problems, saying: 'It makes you depressed—house is that small—owners won't do any repairs, [but] gotta stay; nowhere else to go to. Rather have a bigger house... should put veranda on house, fix up shower, door'. M.I.16 also stated the need for wide 'verandas like those [on certain homes] at Palm Island'.

### **Need for more storage**

A wider distribution of cupboards in the house to provide more storage for visitors was requested by the householder of M.I.3.

### **More accommodation in Mount Isa**

More hostel type accommodation was prescribed by one interviewee (M.I.4), but it was unclear as to whether this would help, as visitors were likely to persist in staying with relatives. M.I. 4 said: 'Some people come in for medical reason from Lake Nash and nowhere to stay—sometimes to Pamela St Hostel'. However, the hostel was said to be relatively expensive.

Several interviewees recommended more five-bedroom rental houses to be built by the government, pointing out that there were only a small number of them in the suburb of Happy Valley.

## **3.4 Summary of findings in Mount Isa**

For the 21 interviews in Mount Isa, their household sizes at the time of interview ranged from 1–19 with an average of 10 persons (total 210 persons), representing an average of 3 persons per bedroom using a conventional density measure. These household sizes increased when large numbers of visitors arrived. The scale of visitation was given according to the number of carloads of visitors, e.g. often 3 or 4 carloads of visitors staying at one time, translating to between 12–30 visitors maximum, with such large visitation events happening at least 2 or 3 times and possibly up to 5 times a year.

### **Background to visitation**

Visitation is in accordance with a regional sociogeographic mobility pattern, in keeping with the well reported phenomenon of Mount Isa being the regional centre of an Aboriginal cultural region with people having a range of places where they can live in a 'beat' throughout the region.

One of the most frequent reasons why people came to stay was simply to visit their relatives. This is in keeping with an earlier AHURI study of Aboriginal mobility in this region (Memmott et al. 2006), in which kinship was found to be the key driver of circular mobility. Accommodation of extended family for significant recreational events in Mount Isa (viz. the Rodeo, the Show & AFL games) was given as one of the highest scoring reasons for visitors coming to Mount Isa. The third most frequently given reason for visitation was to attend funerals and participate in mourning and grievance behaviour. Other common reasons for people from the wider region to stay with their relatives in Mount Isa, was the need to obtain health services, and to carry out shopping. Another category of visitors was comprised of those relatives who had been recently released from Stuart Creek Prison. Once visitors were staying in Mount Isa, their visitation could be unexpectedly extended for various reasons.

### **Large household formation patterns**

Large household formation patterns were analysed into three categories:



- Diurnal visitors from within Mount Isa who only stay overnight.
- Diurnal visitors who do not stay overnight.
- Visiting children from elsewhere in Mount Isa, who either stay for the company of the host's children or are left by relatives to be cared for by the householder. Visiting relatives from the wider North West Queensland region and beyond, requiring hosting for at least several days and often weeks.

### **Sociospatial principles in organising visitors**

When household size expanded with visitors, people were found to commonly use the lounge/dining room for sleeping as well as a range of external spaces on the periphery of the house and in the yard, in addition to all of the bedrooms. The survey sought to understand the sociospatial principles involved in clustering people into these various spaces.

First, the principle of division by gender and generation prescribed that single visitors, whether children or adults, were integrated with other single people in the household and divided into different spaces by gender and age. Second, a key principle of prioritisation was that visiting elderly people, mothers with babies and children received priority to stay inside the house; while others had to stay outside in the yard or on verandas or in carports and garden sheds when the numbers were too high. A sub-principle of the above prioritisation principle was that visiting young couples with a baby or infant(s) were given their own room. A further recurring rule was that the boys of the household, who normally occupied their own room, were moved out to the lounge so that adult visitors could take the boys' room.

And finally two diametrically opposed principles emerged concerning the sleeping place of the head householders. Several such persons (all single householders) said they vacated their bedrooms for visitors and slept on the lounge room couch, whereas other householders said they retained the master bedroom exclusively for self (and partner if relevant), irrespective of visitor needs or demands.

In using external spaces for sleeping and socialising some visitors arrived with tents or self-nominated to sleep on a veranda in an external tin shed or carport due to their longstanding visitation expectations and practices with their host. However, if there were too many people opting to sleep inside the house, the householder may have to designate certain people to sleep outside in such spaces, most commonly single men. Some tenants' yards had been adapted and equipped with hearths for such outdoor socialising and living, similar to the norm in other bush communities. There was a common theme of people camping in their host's yard, even cooking bush game in ground ovens.

### **Perceptions of stress from visitors**

Interestingly six interviewees asserted categorically that there was no stress experienced in their large households and another three indicated there was generally no stress except under occasional extremes. However, stressful situations were reported by at least eight interviewees and included visitors making noise when householders were trying to sleep for the next day's work; unwanted drunks imposing; stress from children fighting; stress from pressure to conform to tenancy regulations; stress from people looking into the yard; and stress from lack of critical repairs and maintenance.

A number of strategies were outlined that allowed householders to minimise or prevent stress occurring:

- Sending visitors on to another hosting kinsperson.

- Firm administration of house rules by householder.
- Protocol not to let one's spouse manage one's own visiting relations.
- Hunting drunks away.
- Use of visual screens on front fences and verandas.
- Calling police or other authorities when things get out of control.

Note that firm administration of house rules by householders included control of the alcohol consumption behaviour of both regular householders and visitors, encouraging visitors to contribute resources and turning away unwanted drunk people.

### **Neighbourhood stress problems**

Two forms of stress emanating from the other people in the wider neighbourhood were recorded. While most interviewees claimed not to experience stress from their approved visitors, many experienced stress from the random infringements of drunken behaviour on the streets of the suburb of Pioneer. A second neighbourhood stress problem was the case of an inter-family reverberating feud. This affected a range of residents and extended to a neighbourhood crowding syndrome.

The requests for physical improvements to cope with crowding included additional ablution facilities so that several people could bathe and toilet simultaneously; the need for regular repairs and maintenance in general, and more accommodation in Mount Isa, including hostels and five-bedroom houses.

## **4 INALA LARGE HOUSEHOLD ANALYSIS FINDINGS**

As outlined in Chapter 2, Inala is an outer suburb of Brisbane with a relatively high proportion of Indigenous residents (7.3%) compared to Brisbane overall (1.4%) the total Indigenous population was stable around 950 persons. Aboriginal residents had a strong positive sense of identification with their suburb (despite negative perceptions from the wider Brisbane population) which contributed to a pattern of residential stability. Inala was built in the early 1950s as an estate for lower income families and persists in having higher-than-average levels of financial disadvantage. Aboriginal families were among the first to be housed there ('two or three Murris on every street'), along with European migrant families, and it had become increasingly multicultural with Vietnamese and Africans. Aboriginal residents originally came from South East Queensland missions (Cherbourg, Purga, Myora), which had themselves been government 'removal centres' for groups from all around the state. This was reflected in the contemporary state-wide visitor patterns in Inala Aboriginal households. In the order of 56 per cent of Indigenous Inala households lived in government rental housing compared to 30 per cent of non-Indigenous households. Indigenous residents competed on the waiting list for up to several years with other high-need migrant groups such as African refugees, but often preferred to wait longer periods to stay in Inala rather than take a short-term rental option in another suburb where there was better supply.

This chapter sets out the findings from our interview survey of the 18 householders in Inala who were reported to have experienced large household formation.

The content structure of the analysis in this chapter is identical to that in the previous chapter, starting with a profile of the sampled households and their visitors, moving to the nature of large household formation patterns and accompanying sleeping arrangements and then addressing the nature of any perceived stresses around such patterns and how households respond or cope with such.

### **4.1 Household profiles in Inala sample**

Tables 22 and 23 set out the 18 household profiles that were sampled in Inala differentiating by gender and separating children and babies, as well as dividing the core household from those deemed as 'visitors' at the time of interview.

**Table 22: Profile of sampled Inala households—actual people present**

	Core household							
	Householders (Adult)		Babies (2 years & under)	Child male	Child female	Adult Male	Adult Female	Sub Total
	No.	Gender						
<b>1</b>	1	F		2		1		4
<b>2</b>	2	1M + 1 F			1	2	1	6
<b>3</b>	1	F	1 (f)	1	1		2	6
<b>4</b>	1	F		3		2	4	10
<b>5</b>	1	F				5		6
<b>6</b>	1	F			2	1	2	6
<b>7</b>	1	F	1	2	4	1		9
<b>8</b>	2	1M + 1 F	1		2	2	1	8
<b>9</b>	1	F			1	2	2	6
<b>10</b>	1	F	1	3		1		6
<b>11</b>	2	2F, M&D			1	1	1	5
<b>12</b>	1	F				6		7
<b>13</b>	3	F+M+2D	2			2		7
<b>14</b>	1	F	1	1	2	2		7
<b>15*</b>	*							
<b>16</b>	1	F		2	2	1		6
<b>17</b>	1	F	1	2		1	1	6
<b>18</b>	2	1M + 1F			3			5
<b>Total</b>	23		8	16	19	30	14	110

\*Interview No.15 is a revisit of No.4 when very crowded at Christmas time, but more family were due to arrive shortly

**Table 23: Profile of sampled Inala households—visitors present**

	Partnered adults (male/female)	Babies	Child male	Child female	Adult male	Adult female	Sub total	Total
1							0	3
2							0	6
3					1		1	7
4							0	10
5							0	6
6			2	3	1		6	12
7							0	9
8						1	1	9
9		1	1	3	1	0	6	12
10					1	2	3	9
11							0	5
12				1		1	2	9
13							0	7
14	2 (M&F)		1				3	10
15	4 (2x M&F)	1	1	2			8	17
16							0	6
17						1	1	7
18	2 (1M & 1F)						2	7
<b>Total</b>	8	2	5	9	4	5	33	143

Note: Assume adults aged 18 or over

Our brief to our Aboriginal consultants was to take us to households that had a reputation of being large and/or known to experience large visitation numbers. This latter criterion did not necessarily mean they were large households at the time of interview but most were, with only two householders having less than five people at the time of interview.

**Table 24: Sizes of Inala households at time of interview**

<b>Size of households</b>	<b>Number of households</b>
1 person	0
2 persons	0
3 persons	0
4 persons	1
5 persons	1
6 persons	3
7 persons	4
8 persons	0
9 persons	4
10 persons	2
11 persons	0
12 persons	2
13 persons	0
14 persons	0
15 persons	0
16 persons	0
17 persons	1
18 persons	0
19 persons	0

Two sets of data on sleeping arrangements in rooms were collected for Inala, following the methods used in Mount Isa, one set being where people said they slept during their interviews, and the second set based on observations of bedding (and sometimes sleeping persons) and information collected (and mapped on floor plans) during a walk-through of the house with a householder. It was generally found from the walk-through that more people were sleeping in the houses than identified during the interview. The tables above are thus largely based on the observational data, with some cross-checking from interview data. Note those figures do not necessarily reflect the size of the household when it is perceived to be crowded.

**Table 25: Inala households' distribution of persons in sleeping places—August 2011, December 2011 and January 2012**

	Number of persons sleeping in house rooms and spaces															
Interview number	Size of house by bedroom numbers	B/R 1	B/R 2	B/R 3	B/R 4	B/R 5	Lounge/Dinning	Kitchen	Veranda 1	Veranda 2	Bathroom	Garage/Carport	Garden Shed	Yard Camp/Tent	Caravan	Total
1	3	1	2	*												3
2	3	1	2	1			2					*				6
3	3	2	1	2			2*	*		*						6
4	5	3	2	3	1	1	*									10
5	4	1	1	1	1		2*					*		*		6
6	3	3	2	2			5*									12
7	3	2	4	3			*					*				9
8	3	2	2	1			1					3*				9
9	4	2	1	1	2		5					1				12
10	3	2	2	2			3									9
11	3	2	2	*			1									5
12	2	2	1				6*									9
13	3	1	3	3												7
14	3	4	1	3			2*									10
15	5	3	1	3	2	2	6*									17
16	3	3	2*	1*			*									6
17	2	1*	2*				3		1#							7
18	3	2	1	1	1									*	2	7

\* = Said to be used for visitors when they come

# This room was an enclosed veranda/sunroom and was weatherproof, but use as a bedroom blocked light from the lounge room

#### *4.1.1 Household expansion—origins of visitors*

The first category of visitors are likely to come from the historic home communities of the householder. While many people consider themselves to be 'Inala people', ties to home countries outside Inala and to former missions and reserves where family ties became established in the 20th century are still strong. Table 26 indicates the home community of the interviewees in the Inala sample. Most interviewees identified as being from Inala, but also with the 'set' of places, reflecting their parents' or grandparents' traditional or historic places, and other places to which their families have an affiliation. Hence, the total number of home communities numbers far greater than the 17 interviewees, as each have a 'set' of home countries.

The most commonly reported place affiliated to outside Inala for those interviewed was Cherbourg, a former mission and important historic and home country place for

many Inala people. Other places in the broader South East Queensland region such as Woorabinda, Gayndah and Eidsvold (close to Cherbourg), were cited as home places from which visitors may arrive. Kullilli country as a broad home country affiliation was also cited frequently, but this also reflects the method of interviewing an extended family group consisting of a family's three adult siblings, and an adult daughter/niece for this sibling group. This does allow us to see how the difference between family members of a close extended group plays out with visitors and how stress responses can be different at different times in the life course.

While people in Inala identify with home country communities outside Inala, most people also identify with Inala as a significant place to which they affiliate. Nevertheless, even people who are 'from' Inala have family and social connections in the wider region, state and nation, where visitors can originate. One woman was able to name places from Cairns to Melbourne and both coastal and inland New South Wales as places where her visitors might originate (IN,5). The social affiliations built up in historical locations such as Cherbourg and Woorabinda (both missions of the 20th century) give many Inala people a large geographic visitor base, as people have moved from these settlements all over the eastern parts of Australia.

**Table 26: Identified home community of interviewees**

<b>Community</b>	<b>No.</b>
Moree	1
Maryborough	1
Biloela	1
Kulili country, Southwest Queensland	4
Bundaberg	1
Boigu Island, Torres Straits	1
Laura, Queensland	2
Woorabinda	3
Mitchell	2
Rockhampton	2
Stradbroke Island	2
Gayndah	2
Cherboug	6
Palm Island	1
Eidsvold	1
Thursday Island	1
St George	1

Where people have identified with more than one home country place they have been listed separately and thus the number of home country places is greater than the number of interviewees.



Figure 11: Map of home communities



#### 4.1.2 Sociogeographic exogamy

There were eight out of seventeen interviewees who had a spouse. Of these, six had a spouse from a different home community to their own, or the spouse was not Indigenous. The combinations were as follows (interviewee's home community first, then that of spouse):

IN. 7: Kullili country and Cherbourg/Charleville and Gunedah, New South Wales

IN. 9: Kullilli country and Cherbourg/another community not divulged by spouse

IN. 10: Kullilli country and Cherbourg/Inala and Mackay

IN.13: Palm Island and Woorabinda/another community not divulged by spouse

IN.14: Laura/white spouse

IN.18: St George/white spouse

Many interviewees were not forthcoming about their spouse's home country connections, reflecting a high level of separation and re-partnering among the interviewees.

## **4.2 Reasons for visiting causing household expansion**

A question was asked about why people had come to stay or visit over the last year and the responses have been compiled into Table 27. Like the Mount Isa respondents, many people gave generic statements about why visitors come and these were not included in the table unless they were linked to a specific event. People found this question very difficult to answer, indicating that a 'reason' to visit may not be required for many people; that visiting is an end in itself, so widely understood in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that the question at times seems absurd to the research participants. The table is thus an indicator of the drivers of visiting, rather than a specific set of instances of visitation.

**Table 27: Reasons for household visitation**

Reason for visiting	Number of households in which this occurred
Visiting relatives in general, including just travelling through and circular mobility	12
Visiting relatives and friends for funeral	13
Visiting relatives for Christmas and/or New Years Eve and/or school holidays	9
Visiting relatives' children e.g. for child minding, child playing together, or sleepovers.	2
Fostering relatives' children on a short to medium term basis.	4
Visiting relatives for family celebrations e.g. birthday, important wedding anniversary	5
People visiting to drink and staying overnight.	6
Waiting for a house from state housing authorities, both long term visitors and people staying short term, travelling between families regularly as they wait for housing (circular mobility).	4
Visiting to avoid a marital or family dispute, e.g. because a spouse (usually a woman) will not allow a drunk person to stay at the house, to avoid a violent partner, to avoid arguments with family	4
Teenage children or grandchildren coming to a relative's house, sometimes with friends.	2
Visiting to collect mail/ use house facilities when otherwise homeless or a public place dweller.	1
Children visiting who are usually resident with their other parent or family.	3
Visitors who were recently released from prison, or the police watch house and are planning their next moves.	2
An 'open house' policy where people know they can come and stay for any reason, usually in the long established home of a senior woman.	2

Note: Some informants provided generic statements about when or why visitors come, but these were not included in the above table unless they could be linked to a specific event. Generally this question was poorly reported, with not all events reported, as particular events merged into generic events. Hence, this is not an objective measure of all visits but rather indicative only of the type and intensity of visitation drivers.

#### *4.2.1 Permeable houses*

One of the most commonly-cited causes of visitation was the desire to spend time with family. This can be both planned and spontaneous, but the idea of offering a generous location of sociality to one's family was key to many people's identification as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and was seen as an essential aspect of

Indigenous culture. Visiting was seen as synonymous with helping family and friends, and that visitors would receive hospitality in whatever form they required when visiting. One Inala woman explained that this occurs both on the daily level with local visitors: 'We have lots of visitors coming by, both family and close friends. People just pop in for a yarn, come in to see what's happening' and with people who have travelled greater distances and stay for longer periods of time: people just show up when they come and stay, they don't let you know first'. She also pointed out that this was a core value: 'we help each other out' (IN.4). This helping through providing a generous home is an important principle that many people lived by.

Some people let their houses be used by people who are public place dwellers (Memmott et al. 2003) who need a permanent address to collect mail or have food and bathroom facilities. Others take in those who are recently released from the nearby prisons or watch house, as they plan their next move into the community (IN.1).

Others had a truly open house policy stating: 'If I can help anybody, I will' (IN.5), 'My home is their home' (IN.3), 'I'd never turn anyone away' (IN.6) and 'anyone is welcome here, anytime' (IN.1). This last statement was from a householder who, several years ago when I visited her one morning, had a man sleeping on her sofa in the lounge room, his face hidden in his sleeping position. I asked her who that was and she said she didn't know, but that he obviously needed somewhere to sleep. She would find out the story when he woke up, she said. One of the authors (K.G.) has termed this kind of approach to running a house, permeability (Greenop 2009). For many householders this is a given and when asked about this kind of informal permeability, one woman looked perplexed and asked me: 'Well, don't you just go to your Mum's whenever you feel like it?' This reciprocal generosity of household space for visiting, not just to stay, but to have company is an unselfconscious value that is ingrained in people from an early age. This household permeability is extended to non-Indigenous people (and was extended to me during earlier research in Inala) as part of growing closeness and is seen as part of one's basic needs.

The principle of demand sharing (Peterson 1993) is clearly at work here and reciprocity is well understood by all who offer generosity. Nevertheless, those who have a greater capacity for visitors, are expected and understand themselves that they take on more visitors or offer more hospitality than those with less capacity.

#### *4.2.2 Funerals and grieving*

Funerals caused a great deal of mobility and visiting for Inala Indigenous households. Most people stated that they had large numbers of people coming to visit them when funerals occurred, unless their house was newly established and not well known among the family, or they were based away from their usual family groups and thus funerals were not held for their family in Brisbane, in which case they were part of the visiting group travelling to funerals in their home country. Funerals, like other kinds of visiting, also induce both overnight staying, and daytime visiting, to pay one's respects to the bereaved family.

These daytime visitors can require food, seating, and space to undertake the proper forms of paying respect, and a household is considered open to the community at this time. Some households found these daily visitors were numerous and the mourning period in which this occurred lasted for weeks.

For two weeks people were here for the grieving time, coming to sit around and see people. Even those who didn't stay here, but they stayed all day (IN.5).

In terms of overnight visitors, she said: 'the largest group was 20–30 people extra staying, just for one or two nights. They also spread out to sleep at [my daughter's], but they all gathered here for a feed and to see people' (IN.5). The visiting of the family usually begins from the time that people hear the news of the death until the funeral, or when visitors return to their homes following the funeral. Nevertheless, sometimes people do stay on, as noted below.

When a death is truly unexpected or a young person has died, the mobilisation of people in response can be huge.

When [my son] died, 200 people came from Mackay and booked out the motel at Oxley and bunked in anywhere they could. I couldn't count them, I woke up and there were [sleeping] bodies everywhere. And some of them just stayed. (IN.12)

This 'staying' in this case lasted more than a year, with this woman stating that her son's friends felt comfort in his perceiving his presence at the house, and were concerned to offer her company in her time of mourning. Their status as his close friends meant that they were entitled to stay on, for as long as they liked.

While the permeability of households is a cultural given, it can still lead to stress for householders if the house cannot physically cope with the number of visitors, or accommodate their needs for privacy, particularly given the added emotional stress that occurs at times of bereavement. One woman, discussing her partner's cousin-brother's funeral time, commented that: 'It can get draining on the family with so many visitors' (IN.14).

#### *4.2.3 Additional family obligations*

Additional obligations to house people occur at happy times, such as parties for birthdays, special wedding anniversary events and other social occasions. This can sometimes lead to problems with visitors drinking and becoming rowdy or violent, but many householders were very successful at managing these situations.

Caring for family on a more long-term basis can also lead to household expansion. Fostering children from the extended family on a medium-term basis was seen in four cases. These children may be considered as sons and daughters rather than nieces and nephews due to kinship ties, and as such are entitled to stay and be cared for by relatives. One woman was fostering five of her nieces and nephews whose parents had been evicted from their house and were unstable. Despite the children being relatively difficult to settle into her already large household, she said: 'I decided to take them on because they are family' (IN.9). Additionally, teenagers are relatively autonomous and may choose to spend weeks or months staying with relatives because they are close to their cousin-siblings, their grandparents or aunt-mothers and uncle-fathers. The tensions between parents and teenagers are sometimes diffused by teenagers moving long distances to towns outside Brisbane, but also across the suburbs to other houses within the family where tensions are lesser, or where more autonomy is granted.

Similarly, those seeking refuge from marital disputes sometimes stay with family or friends until tensions die down, or a disgraced spouse is forgiven.

The longest-term obligation to family occurred in cases where people were staying with relatives, waiting for state housing to become available. This was in some cases years' worth of waiting, such that a household had become permanent in an arrangement that was only originally temporary. In some cases when this causes too much stress, people move from one family household to another in a pattern of circular mobility trying to spread the load as well as meet kin obligations to visit family.

#### 4.2.4 *Housing shortage in Inala*

While many people found themselves with long-term visitors in Inala, this reflected a micro-scale housing shortage in both government and private housing in the area. Many people commented that they were on the waiting list for housing, or had their long-term visitors waiting for housing and that the lists were extraordinarily long, with waiting times of years to obtain a state house. This is at odds with recent press coverage of empty state housing in Queensland (*Courier Mail* 2012), and reflects the desire of many people to obtain housing in the Inala area, and not elsewhere in Brisbane where vacancies exist. The importance of staying close to family, Indigenous-specific services and participating in a fulfilling Indigenous sociality was cited as important to people in obtaining a house in the area. Some had taken housing in other areas such as Goodna, a nearby suburb, but had found the social isolation too difficult to cope with, and had taken pains to return to Inala, despite the situation feeling crowded and stressful (IN.10). It would seem that for some people the need to be within a particular area and close to social networks is more important than stress caused by crowding.

#### 4.2.5 *Stress and large numbers*

Elders, householders and young people are often able to control rowdy guests. However, there is a pattern where young householders (usually young women in their early 20s) find dealing with visitors who are staying more stressful than established householders who have either earned respect or who are perhaps somewhat feared. Three contrasting households exemplify this. The first is a young woman who lives with her nuclear family in her uncle's house, but for which she is responsible. She has recently moved back to Inala and comments: 'Inala is good, it's close to family, but a bit too close'. When visitors don't help out and the house becomes untidy this woman becomes stressed, 'I go off my head...I'm always growling, I have to say it a couple of times to get them to listen' (IN.10).

A more long-term householder, who was also more experienced in how to run a house and was in her 40s commented that she does find the lack of routines when visitors come stressful, the kitchen and household tidiness becomes difficult to maintain. She says 'I soldier on...I wait until they are gone to re-establish my routine. I go to my room to cope, it's my sanctuary' (IN.8). When drinkers get rowdy, 'I tell them to shut up!' (IN.8) and this is sufficient.

The third householder does not ever have a problem with visitors who are staying. She is in her 60s and has lived in that house for decades, and is very strongly connected to a large family and social network in Inala. She has an immaculate house with pristine furniture, many artworks hanging on the walls and precious objects on display. Yet she does have many visitors and no trouble maintaining order. 'I don't need to growl at people. Only my own children', she laughed (IN.11). She did admit to feeling stressed during the funeral of her grandson when she had ten visitors staying in the house in addition to the usual five residents, but stated that she 'just coped'. Additionally, the presence of children did not bother her, despite the tidiness of her house. As we sat talking, her daughter arrived with several toddlers in tow, whom she encouraged to look at her photos and special objects, she was not worried that they would break things, she said, they just have to be shown how to do it and they would be fine. For this woman, inclusivity, and sharing of her house and possessions with her extended family is clearly a priority, as is leading by example in terms of tidiness and order.

Stress from crowding may change over the lifecycle of a person, and according to their developing or diminishing coping skills. Personal factors such as parenting small

children, a recent bereavement, or family violence naturally seem to add to stress from large numbers in a house, as do physical factors in the house such as problems with house infrastructure (e.g. inadequate numbers of toilets & bathrooms for all residents & visitors), maintenance problems (e.g. broken kitchen stoves or bathroom fittings) or faulty design (e.g. bathrooms that persistently grow rampant mildew because of poor ventilation that cannot be fixed)

#### *4.2.6 Visitor scale*

It was very difficult to ascertain accurate numbers of visitors from householders. There may be a cultural norm of not being seen to be counting the number of people staying, as it might imply being too sensitive about who stays and therefore being ungenerous. While some people could state the number of 'carloads' of people, (with a carload approximating 5 people), others chose the terms 'chock full' to indicate that their house might be at complete capacity.

While some households were more established and were more often 'chock-a-block', others had sporadic visits of fewer people. Many people did not seem to count numbers but stated that 'if they need to sleep, they'll rest wherever' (IN.3) or 'they all squash in' (IN.4) indicating that the capacity of the house was more directly determined by people's willingness to engage in sharing behaviour, rather than the physical limits of the house itself.

#### *4.2.7 Large household formation patterns*

##### *Pattern No.1: Daytime adults and children visiting*

This pattern was commonly found in Inala and involved people coming to visit during the day for social reasons and perhaps shared meals. Many people would come by to other's houses to catch up on local and family news, see their families and perhaps receive money, cigarettes, alcohol or food from their hosts if they did not have any or enough of these. People arriving and asking what others were cooking for dinner or if they were going to the shops, was common. Those undertaking shopping probably had money that others may be able to borrow.

##### *Pattern No.2: Regional relatives hosted*

While visiting Inala from the wider region, relatives may have to wait across paydays to get back to their more permanent residence. These relatives are entitled to stay under kin obligations.

These visitors may also arrive spontaneously as in the above category, despite the large distances they may have travelled. If the householder is not home when they arrive, then the visitors can move on to another house within their social or kin network and make arrangements at a later point to visit or stay over once they have located the householder.

##### *Pattern No.3: Children visitors who stay overnight, including teenagers*

Many older children and teenagers are relatively autonomous in their choice of household in which to sleep within their extended family network. It was seen as positive to stay with one's grandparents, cousin-siblings or aunties, and indeed people cited that parent-child tensions are relieved through these practices of staying with those other than parents. Grandmothers cited that their teenage daughters would come to stay if they were arguing with their mothers, and that they would counsel and accommodate them during this time.

Even young children were often encouraged or keen to stay and continue playing with their extended family, especially cousin-siblings or to stay with their extended

grandparent generation of family. These younger children were often babysat overnight by their grandmothers when their parents, often still in their 20s, would go out on a Friday or Saturday night with their friends.

#### *Pattern No.4: Mix of day visitors and overnight stayers*

Sometimes people come to visit and begin drinking, then become too intoxicated to return home and will 'crash out' at the hosts' house for the night. Others, particularly young single mothers or those whose partners are drinking elsewhere, encourage their friends or sibling-cousins to come over and stay the night to keep them company.

### **4.3 Sleeping arrangements principles**

Several principles were noted in how sleeping arrangements were organised in households where space is a premium.

#### **Principle of division by gender and generation**

Bedrooms were shared by those who shared the same generation and gender. Sister or male sibling-cousins would frequently share a bedroom or other space for sleeping. The idea that 'all the girls are in this room' and 'all the boys are in that room' works for many households, especially when children are not yet teenagers. More complex arrangements are made when teenagers are present, with teenage boys in particular often sleeping in a lounge room, particularly if there is only one. Larger numbers of male teenagers may need a separate bedroom to contain their noise late at night.

#### **Prioritisation of privacy for visiting couples or families**

Visitors are often given their own private place to sleep, although this depends on the age, status and needs of the visitor. Long-distance visitors who come less frequently are accommodated differently to local, regular or spontaneous visitors who sometimes 'sleep wherever'. Aged people were given high priority in line with their frailty or health needs for quiet, or warmth inside. Teenage friends on the other hand are expected to find themselves somewhere suitable and not expect special treatment. They may have to share a space with younger children of the same gender.

#### **Young nuclear family or couple in bedroom given preference**

Visiting families or couples are often given their own bedroom in which to sleep, especially if there is a young baby who may need to be attended to in the night or small toddlers who can fit in with their parents, making a bedroom in a place for an entire nuclear family. Older couples of a grandparent generation are often shown respect by being given a bedroom to themselves.

#### **Early vacation of children to provide a bedroom for visitors**

Children are moved to make way for those with a higher need for privacy. This can occur on a semi-permanent basis with children sleeping in the lounge of their parent's bedroom on a regular basis as in IN.14.

#### **Householder keeps their own bedroom (particularly a conjugal couple)**

In a complex addition to this set of principles, it was common in Inala for a couple to insist that they kept their own bedroom when visitors came. Some permitted children to sleep in with them during peak visitor numbers, but others maintained it as a private space, especially as a place to escape when stress levels were high. While this may seem to contrast with ideas of sharing, such a coping strategy can allow the householder to maintain their acceptable stress levels and thus allow the high numbers to continue, whereas a further loss of privacy may lead to the whole household becoming non-viable.



### **Sleeping patterns**

- Single householder use of lounge/living room.
- Single householder alternates between bedroom and lounge room.
- Young nuclear family or couple in bedroom.
- Use of veranda.
- Use of driveway/carport.
- Use of backyard garden shed.
- Use of outside yard tent.
- Householder couple remain in own bedroom.
- Visitors in lounge.
- Girls in one bedroom.
- Men in one bedroom.
- One room for girls, one for boys (children or teenagers).
- Single men outside.
- Sleep in kitchen.
- Young children in lounge.
- Older people visitors respected.

## **4.4 Perceived absence of stress by some interviewees**

Many householders in Inala did not feel stressed despite large numbers of people in their house. Ten out of the seventeen (IN.1–6, 8, 11, 16 & 18) householders interviewed did not consider that their house was crowded, but many instead said that they 'coped' with large numbers and used strategies to make sure that the house was able to accommodate large numbers. For many, this reflected not only a value of demand sharing, but identification with an Aboriginal way of life that involves frequent intense sociality, and the reinforcement of relationships through sharing of housing and time spent together.

When discussing whether large numbers were stressful, many stated problems with the house as contributing to stress, rather than the effect of many people being in the house, reflecting a desire for people to be together and accommodated in a suitable fashion, rather than a desire for people to be accommodated elsewhere.

Case study/Vignette IN.4/15 (visit & re-visit during maximal crowding)

One householder was visited twice, once in August when the house had 10 people staying, and once in the week prior to Christmas when large numbers of visitors were arriving from North Queensland and 17 people were staying, with three more expected immediately prior to Christmas (see Figure 12 for diagram of house at normal & maximum levels of occupation). This householder, a woman in her late 40s who has children and grandchildren staying in her house, as well as siblings and nieces and nephews on a rotating basis, had a five-bedroom house that she waited for many years to be allocated. In August the householder had not perceived stress or crowding, but stated that they had felt crowded at other times. 'We help each other out' she stated, but then added with a wry grin: 'They always seem to stay with me!' She noted that her coping skills for large numbers in fact added to the numbers who

would stay in her house. 'I tell them off straight. People don't party here. That's what they've got pubs and clubs for, not in your own home'. The orderliness and availability of food, television and clean accommodation make this house very popular with family who are visiting Brisbane. In this case the coping strategies operate to cement the house and householder as a desirable house for visiting in.

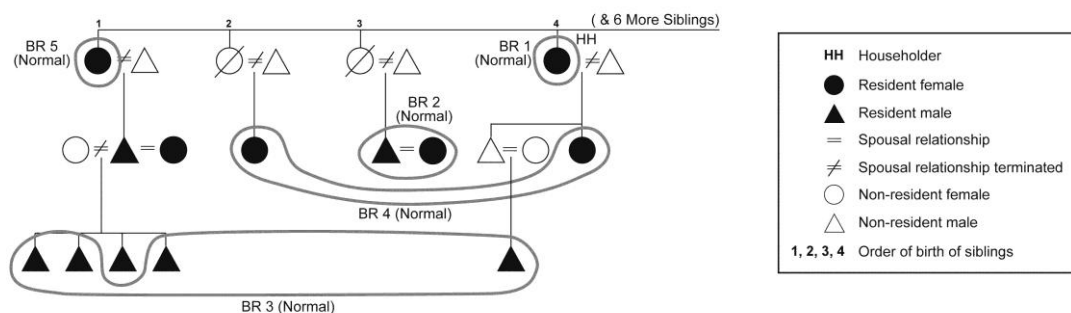
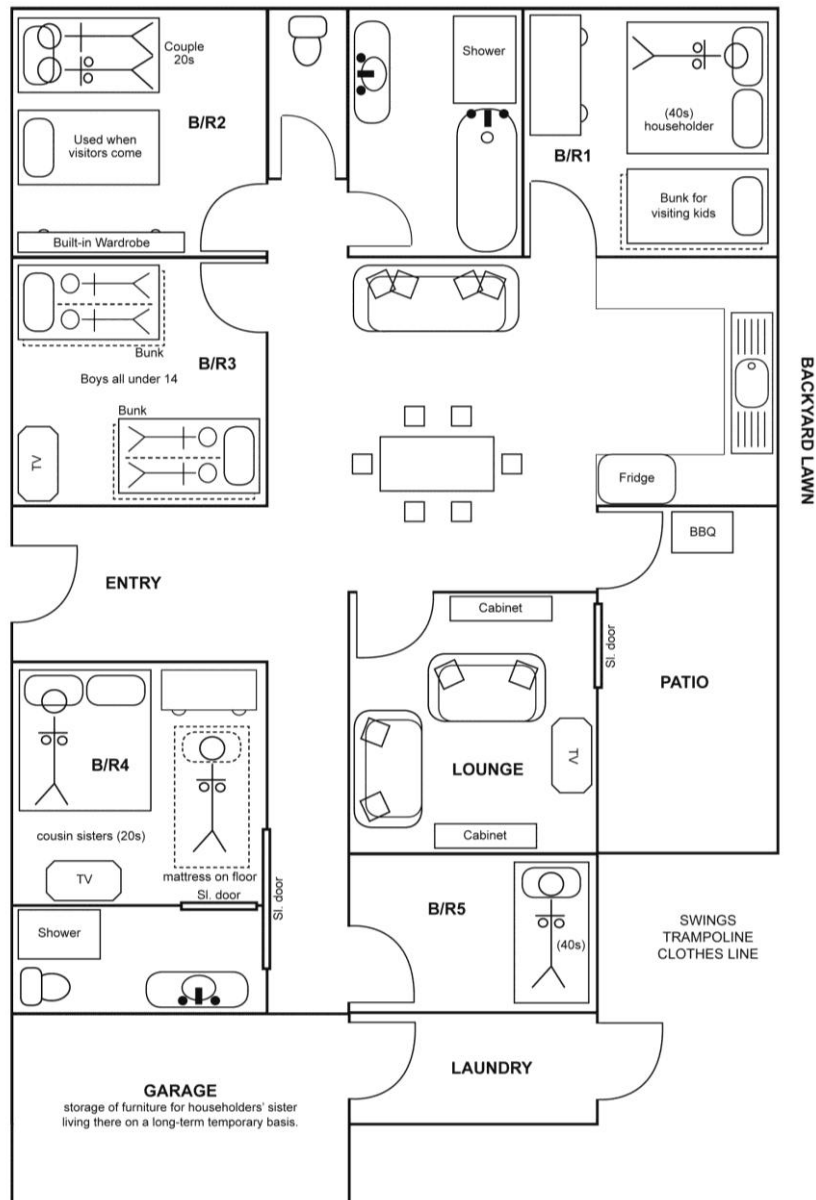
This was borne out at Christmas when an additional seven people were staying and more were due any day. The large number were accommodated and considered part of the celebration of Christmas and facilitated children and young people to see their families, valued as an important aspect of identity and culture. 'My mother's like a big teacher for everyone, so they all come over' stated the householder's adult daughter, indicating that not only long-distance visitors, but locals would come at these times to see the North Queensland family and hear stories and share knowledge. Cooking up a big stew to feed many people and planning days out to South Bank Parklands or local swimming pools was also part of the fun of having many children around at this time of the year.

While this time of year was perceived as crowded, with many people sleeping in the lounge room, stress was also downplayed, with coping mechanisms emphasised: 'some will go to a cousin's house for a few days and come back' if the house cannot cope with the numbers. Knowledge that this was a very temporary state of affairs, based on the Christmas holiday period, also helped the householder and other residents cope with the crowding. Kids fighting and playing repetitive video games were cited as some of the few factors that caused stress, because other behaviour that often caused problems, such as drinking and adults fighting simply did not occur at the house, in accordance with the householder's rules.

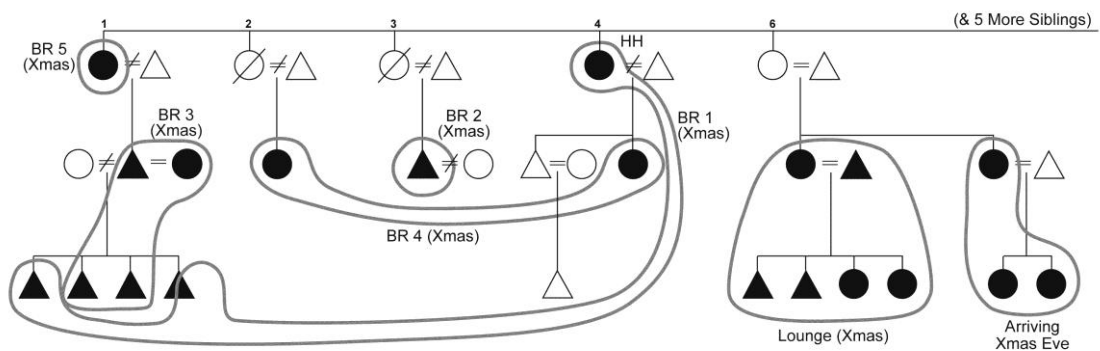
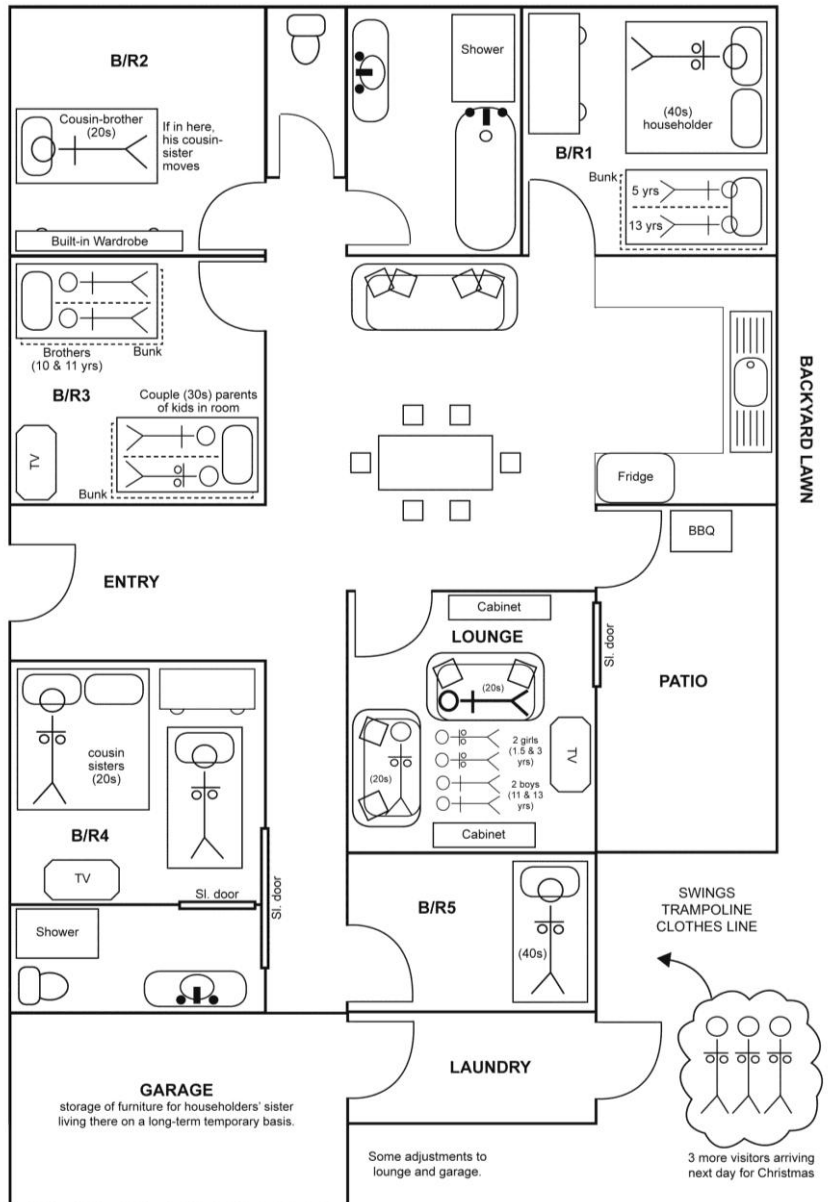
Importantly, this householder is regularly the recipient of reciprocated hospitality in Cairns when she travels with her children and grandchildren to see family there and attend the biennial Laura festival. She travels with a large group, of up to 15 people including children who are accommodated among the family houses in Cairns.

What seems to be important to this householder is the maintenance of family ties, the provision of a place in which the family can gather, celebrate and share company, and the reinforcing of an Aboriginal way of life, where family comes first. The pay-off is the kudos associated with being at the centre of such gatherings, and the satisfaction of doing the right thing, growing up children the right way, and ensuring that they will care for one another in old age.

**Figure 12: Example of sleeping arrangements in Inala, of a core (or base) household—total of 10**



**Figure 13: Example of sleeping arrangements in Carnarvon, adapted to accommodate visiting kinspersons the week before Christmas—total of 20**



## 4.5 Causes of perceived stress by other interviewees

While many people did not perceive stress with large numbers, some others did, mainly caused by the behaviour of their visitors, or the house being unsuitable for such numbers despite a desire to accommodate them.

Some people felt extreme stress including one woman householder IN.9, who has in the past year accommodated up to 14 people in her three-bedroom plus downstairs rumpus room house on a semi-permanent basis. This had caused extreme stress because of the work to maintain the house in a reasonable organised fashion. The householder had been a foster carer for five of her nieces and nephews whose parents were unable to provide them with stable accommodation after being evicted for continual fighting at their Queensland Housing residence. These children were taken in 'because they are family' but had proved difficult to have in the house: 'It stayed stressful the whole time they were here, for four months', she stated, 'it was like re-training them, I had to growl at them the whole time, it was stressful'. These five children, aged 2–9 years, slept in the lounge room as all other bedrooms were already full.

Eventually child safety raised a number of 'matters of concern' with the householder including for smacking the oldest child who was caught stealing, and not having adequate window bars to prevent small children from climbing out. The house, that is owned by a Brisbane Aboriginal community housing organisation, is in urgent need of repair and has only one bathroom operational (a downstairs bathroom is in need of repair so severely it cannot be used) and other problems such as large holes in the plasterboard walls, and a bathroom tap that cannot be turned off and severe mould that recurs in the bathroom. 'It's like living in a squat' stated the householder, who had paid for kitchen repairs herself after a lack of response from the housing authority over months. The stress of numbers seems to be increased by inadequate facilities in houses, despite people's desire to accommodate family and provide a haven for those in need. In the case of IN.9 this tension between the limitations of the poorly maintained house and the obligations that the householder wants to be able to fulfil would appear to be the main cause of stress. Similarly, IN.17 had seven people in her house, but the very cramped spaces meant that children could not play without bothering adults and storage of clothing, toys and medicines became real issues creating stress for the aging householder.

For others who had relatively well maintained houses, stress was still evident as their lack of authority meant that behaviour was out of the bounds that the householder felt was acceptable. Uncontrolled use of water and electricity, resulting in high bills for the householder caused stress. A young woman in her 20s at IN.10 stated that not being crowded would be defined as only having 'my little family' here meaning her partner and children. She was fostering two of her Uncle's children aged 10 and 11 and this was causing stress due to their rowdy behaviour and her relative lack of authority, as they are the same generation as her. She decided to foster the two cousins because she felt obliged to help and the house was being lent to her but was in another Uncle's name, so was considered a family place, rather than her own. She had previously been in Ipswich but had moved back to Inala ten months before the interview after problems with her neighbours and a lack of family support in the area. 'When we were in Ipswich, we got no visitors, but now we get them all the time!' she commented, adding 'Inala is good, family is close, but a bit too close'. Her youth and her lack of experience in controlling behaviour in her house (including her partner's friends who ate & slept at the house frequently) caused her stress.

Factors that commonly caused stress were:

- Untidiness of visitors.
- Disruption to normal routines of cooking and cleaning.
- Stress caused by costs associated with visitors (e.g. electricity bills, food bills).
- Physical limitation of house capacity (e.g. 'stepping on people to walk to the kitchen' (IN.14), queuing for bathroom use).
- Drunken fighting.
- Kids fighting because of limited space to play.

#### **4.6 Strategies used to cope when stressed**

Five diverse strategies were identified in the Inala interviews that are used by householders to respond when large numbers of people are creating stressful situations in their houses.

- Use of tents in the garden.
- Calling police (to evict fighting or drunk visitors).
- Retreating to bedrooms or another house if visitor numbers are becoming stressfully large and/or behaving badly.
- Patterns of circular mobility (similar to Birdsall's beats & runs in Western Australia (1991)) where people move to family in another town when a household, or individuals within a household, become stressed.
- Becoming proficient at 'growling' (disciplining people using anger) so that visitors behave. This is well developed in older women who are household heads and thus they feel less stressed, younger women are frequently still developing this and find it stressful trying to assert authority at a young age and with limited backup. As their children age they are more able to 'back them up' and this aspect of a maturing family may help assert authority.

#### **4.7 Neighbourhood stress problems**

Most people in Inala did not state that they encountered problems with their neighbours. They said that people who had problems with their neighbours tended to move until they found a location where they got along with their neighbours, and many said that they tried to work with their neighbours, communicating with them about visitors and parties in order to keep relations harmonious. Some people stated that they had 'no problems with neighbours—they are all Asians with crowded houses too!' (IN.9). This highlights the solidarity many Inala people feel with their culturally different neighbours who are nevertheless of similar economic status. While cultural practices do vary on some levels, many of the non-Western cultures such as Vietnamese, Pacific Islanders and African people who live in Inala perhaps share values of household permeability and an ethic of sharing.

A few people did have neighbour problems such as one woman whose racist neighbours verbally abused her children and other family on a regular basis (IN.14), and another family who had been evicted on the basis of neighbours' complaints about persistent domestic disputes over many years, to which the police were called every day (IN.7).

Most stated problems with neighbours, either current or in the past, related to noise from children playing and fighting, or from rowdy or violent drinkers. One other woman stated that her upwardly mobile neighbours had complained about the noise from her

house, a very crowded situation with seven people living in a two-bedroom house. She said that they had signed a petition to have her removed but 'I fight for my rights to stay' (IN.17). She had, however, toned down the music playing and gatherings, but complaints to the housing authority were still being made, if no longer to the police.

A few householders did state that they would sometimes call the police themselves because they were disturbed by their neighbour's noise. One woman relocated from Ipswich back to Inala, following ongoing problems with her drug addicted neighbours, about whom she regularly phoned the police (IN.10).

Strategies used in response to neighbourhood stresses can thus be summarised as follows:

- Become friendly and work on relationships with neighbours, of all cultural groups. Communicate with neighbours if there is a party planned and be seen to be trying to keep children and visitors under control.
- Move house until you find you are in a neighbourhood without problems and with compatible neighbours.
- Talk back to racists (e.g. IN.14).
- Phone the Police (e.g. at the former residence of IN.10).
- (by Queensland Housing): Sell houses that have had problem tenants and neighbourhood complaints (e.g. IN.7 house has been put on the market by Queensland Housing after a family with domestic violence problems had been evicted).

## **4.8 Requests for physical improvements to cope**

Having additional people in bedrooms designed for only one or two children means that the storage of clothing, games, and other items becomes very difficult as rooms cannot accommodate the numbers sleeping within them and all their storage needs. Many families have cupboards, large plastic storage boxes and washing baskets full of clothes inconveniently located in the living areas of the house because there is nowhere else to put these items. Storage of items such as bicycles, scooters and other items that can promote active lifestyles or transport is often not possible because garages are often not provided in most state rental houses, or if they are, people are using them as bedrooms.

### **Ablution facilities**

Most houses in Inala have just one bathroom despite very high numbers of both residents and visitors. Exceptions are 'disability houses' (as they are known by locals) and the very rare five-bedroom houses that both have two bedrooms, although 'disability houses' have a second bathroom that is usually en suite so privacy can be compromised if others use this.

### **General need for repairs and maintenance**

Problems with mould on walls and ceilings are very common and can be linked to health issues (allergies & asthma). Holes in walls, rotten stairs, windows that do not slide and wardrobes that do not close add to people's stress levels and feelings that their housing is inadequate, irrespective of the numbers of people who are in the house at the time.

### **Old kitchens**

Aging kitchen facilities are seen as difficult to clean and may put people off cooking for themselves and turn to takeaways, exacerbating health issues. Kitchens are generally

very small to cope with large numbers of people being catered for, and lack adequate bench preparation areas or storage for food and kitchen equipment. This is a serious public health issue given the emphasis on food preparation skills and concerns over obesity and food lifestyle related illnesses such as diabetes.

### **Lack of outdoor living**

Outdoor seating areas that can provide additional socialising spaces can relieve pressure on the internal spaces, and reduce stress, but they are not common in many state houses in Inala. Such facilities are also used as additional sleeping spaces, especially by young men in summer or during parties, Christmas celebrations or for children to play out of the way of the adults.

**Figure 14: Mould on ceiling in Inala resident's state government house, caused by inadequate ventilation and poor construction**



## **4.9 Summary of findings in Inala**

For the 18 interviews (with 17 interviewees) in Inala their household sizes ranged from four to seventeen people, with an average of 8.6 residents (total 154 persons) representing an average of 2.7 persons per bedroom using a conventional density measure.

### **4.9.1 Background to visitation**

Visitation occurred in two main patterns: local visitors coming for daytime or short-term overnight visiting that nevertheless may occur in a serial manner; and long-distance visitors who come for longer stays, often over pay-day periods to allow for receipt of funds to return home. These long-distance visitors were chiefly from the traditional and historical places of the family receiving the visitors, but here ranged from South East Queensland places such as Cherbourg and Eidsvold to South-West Queensland locations like St George, and North Queensland places like Cairns and



Laura. This reflected the diverse Indigenous populations in Inala, which have been influenced by the missionisation and movement restrictions in the 20th century.

Like the Mount Isa study's findings, one of the most frequent causes of visitation was simply to see kin and maintain family connections. Attending funerals was also another major cause of visiting, and this seemed to cause more stress as emotions were heightened and the obligation to attend is stronger, resulting in more visitors and the need to accommodate them. Nevertheless the need to attend funerals is acknowledged as an absolute obligation and people tended to cope with the stress despite households become problematic during these times. Expectations of behaviour were often lowered, with people being more forgiving of drinking and emotionally unpredictable behaviour.

Additional reasons for visiting included special family celebrations such as Christmas, special birthdays or wedding anniversaries, and other family events.

#### *4.9.2 Large household formation patterns*

Large households were categorised into four patterns that constituted their formation:

1. Diurnal visitors from Inala and neighbouring suburbs.
2. Diurnal visitors from Inala and neighbouring suburbs who also stay overnight.
3. Visiting children from elsewhere in Inala or neighbouring suburbs, who stay for the company of the host's children or to be cared for by the householder.
4. Visitors from more distant Queensland and interstate places which involves staying for several days and sometimes weeks or on a semi-permanent basis.

Visitors in patterns 1 and 2 can come in a serial fashion (i.e. every day), leading to very full houses, despite the visitors having their own homes in the nearby areas. This indicates a desire for sociality and company that is very strong with Inala Indigenous people.

#### *4.9.3 Perceptions of stress caused by visitors*

Stress and numbers in the house did not seem to be directly correlated. The behaviour of visitors, the condition and state of repair of the house, and the authority and agency that the householder could exercise in maintaining their control over the house, were all factors that contributed to the perception of stress or lack of stress.

Common causes of stress were drinking and fighting (which were frequently cited as being related), children not having enough to do or places to play, and the poor state of repair or level of facilities in a house. Many people would seem to desire large numbers if they could have the facilities to cope with such, for example additional bathrooms, outdoor living areas to relieve the pressure on the internal living spaces, and a bigger kitchen in which it is easier to prepare meals for large numbers of people.

A number of strategies were outlined by householders to minimise or prevent stress from occurring during times of large numbers living in a house:

- sending visitors to another kinsperson, even if temporarily
- firm administration of house rules by the householder
- retreating to one's own private space or another house
- organising family outings to remove large numbers from the house during the day
- hunting drunk people away

→ calling police or other authorities when things get out of control.

#### *4.9.4 Neighbourhood stress problems*

Unlike Mount Isa, Inala people did not seem to have problems with neighbourhood crowding, except in two cases where neighbours frequently complained and had tried to have the householder evicted, one unsuccessfully and one that resulted in an eviction. The density of Indigenous families in Inala is less than in the main study area of Pioneer in Mount Isa, where most neighbourhood stress occurred. Many people cited the agreeability of their neighbours and the phenomenon of people moving house until they found a street that suited them and had neighbours with whom they could get along. Many people also stated that they took care to manage neighbour relations; communicating with neighbours about parties or visitors and asking for understanding during these events. Some people explained that they rotated family events through the different family houses, to avoid stressing the same neighbours too frequently. The general acceptance of large households in the wider Inala community was cited as a factor that helped many neighbours understand their circumstances.

## **5 CARNARVON LARGE HOUSEHOLD ANALYSIS FINDINGS**

This chapter sets out the findings from our interview survey of the 13 householders in Carnarvon who were reported to have experienced large household formation.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Indigenous population of Carnarvon had dropped slowly over recent Censuses, commensurate with an overall drop in the town population and was about 1100 in 2006, forming 19 per cent of the town population. As a port on the western seaboard, Carnarvon was historically a drop-off point for Aboriginal removals as well as a regional centre throughout the 20th century with a legacy of town camps and reserves, culminating in a discrete urban Aboriginal settlement established in 1981 called Mungullah, which at the time of our survey, had 43 dwellings. Mungullah had state Housing Commission-managed housing from 1981 to the late 1990s, following this until 2009 the Mungullah Community Council managed housing, and from this point the DoH (WA) has managed properties under a Housing Management Agreement. Unlike Mount Isa, there were minimal facilities in Carnarvon for emergency accommodation or homelessness except for a Women's Refuge. But like Mount Isa, there was regular circular mobility within the Gascoyne region as well as a 'two-speed' mining economy dividing and inflating the rental costs of the private from the public housing sector. And also as in Mount Isa, working Aboriginal families who exceeded the eligible ceiling income for government rental housing were often unable to afford rental in the higher bracket private sector, compounding secondary homelessness.

The content structure of the analysis in this chapter is identical to that in the previous chapter, starting with a profile of the sampled households and their visitors, moving to the nature of large household formation patterns and accompanying sleeping arrangements and then addressing the nature of any perceived stresses around such patterns and how households respond or cope with such.

### **5.1 Household profiles in the Carnarvon sample**

Table 28 represents the people who were present in the 13 participant households at the time of the interviews. Women are householders in all of the households, either as sole householders in seven cases or as a female spouse with a male partner as a co-householder in six cases. However, in these latter cases it is the woman whose name is on the lease, not that of her male partner. Men tend not to be sole householders in the Carnarvon Aboriginal community and this is reflected in the study group as well as observed in previous research (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Birdsall 1990). This pattern has also been observed in our other case study sites.

In size, the core households ranged widely between three and 16 residents. In regard to age, the total population of these households was dominated by children. Between the ages of two and 18 there were 52 children as opposed to 55 individuals of all other age groups combined.

**Table 28: Profile of sampled Carnarvon households—actual people present in core household (ages in brackets)**

	Householders*	Babies (2 years & under)	Child male	Child female	Male adult	Female adult	Sub total
<b>C1*</b>							<b>0</b>
<b>C2</b>	1 F (50+)			1(13)		1(50+)	<b>3</b>
<b>C3</b>	1 M & 1 F (40s)	2 M (2-3 mos, 2yrs)	5 (14, 11, 13, 5, 6)	1 (17)			<b>10</b>
<b>C4</b>	1 M & 1 F (60s)		1	2	1	1	<b>7</b>
<b>C5</b>	1 F (40s)		2 (11, 13)	4 (14, 2 x 15, 16)			<b>7</b>
<b>C6</b>	1 F (34)	2 (under a year and 2)	1 (5)	3 (7, 15 17)	1 (mid 30s)		<b>8</b>
<b>C7</b>	1 F (mid 60s)			1 (9/10)	2 (30s)		<b>4</b>
<b>C8</b>	1 F (40s)		1(5.5)	2	1 (30s)	1	<b>6</b>
<b>C9</b>	1 M & 1 F (mid60s)						<b>2</b>
<b>C10</b>	1M 1F	1M (2)	4 (10,14, 5, 4)	1 (6)			<b>8</b>
<b>C11</b>	1 M & 1 F (40s)			11 (12-14)		1 (27)	<b>14</b>
<b>C12</b>	1 M & 1 F (30s)	1M (2)	4 (10,14, 5, 4)	1 (6)			<b>8</b>
<b>C13</b>	1 M & 1 F	1M	1M				<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>81</b>

\*Usually the leaseholder, but sometimes as in 1 a relation who is minding the house while the householder is away. In the case of 1, she has brought some of her own household with her and they are now mixed with those of the original household who stayed behind.

N.B. Visitors are in the following table

Table 29 shows the household visitors during the study period. Only eight of the thirteen households actually had visitors at the time of the survey. Of these eight, six had one or two visitors only. Of the two households that had larger numbers of visitors, one house (C.1) was being minded while the actual core household was away visiting other kinfolk. One household in this study group, household C.4, had ten visitors in addition to a core household population of 16, giving a total household of 26.

Four of the households in this group were members of the same large kin group. This was fortuitous and it enabled the researcher to consider the inter-relationships and differences in behaviour and of perception that there might exist in such a network of related households. One distinct difference was that it cut down on the frequency and the numbers of overnight visitors. To visit each other they had only to go across the road. The numbers of residents in these households appeared to be more stable than among most other households.

**Table 29: Total household numbers at time of interview including extended family/visitors, August–September 2012**

	Partnered adults (male/female)	Babies	Child male	Child female	Male adult	Female adult	Sub Total	Total Core and Visitors
<b>C1*</b>			1 (3)	1 (mid-teens)	2 (67, 25)	2F aged 50+	6	<b>6</b>
<b>C2</b>							0	<b>3</b>
<b>C3</b>						2 (40s, 50s)	2	<b>12</b>
<b>C4<sup>1</sup></b>	4		2	4			10	<b>17</b>
<b>C5</b>	NIL						0	<b>7</b>
<b>C6</b>	NIL						0	<b>8</b>
<b>C7</b>	NIL						0	<b>4</b>
<b>C8</b>						1 (30s)	1	<b>7</b>
<b>C9</b>						2(50s, 30s)	2	<b>4</b>
<b>C10</b>	2						2	<b>10</b>
<b>C11<sup>2</sup></b>	See note						0	<b>14</b>
<b>C12</b>	2						2	<b>10</b>
<b>C13</b>	NIL						0	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>106</b>

Notes: Assume adults aged 18 or over

# This participant and her family were among the visitors to this house

+ The householders are foster parents. Numbers vary accordingly, but none of the children are termed visitors by the foster parents

Table 30 indicates that among the study group, six households were made up of more than 12 persons, with the remaining eight containing from four to eight persons. According to the density measures used by state and federal housing departments, the rate of 'crowded' households in the state of Western Australia was 16.8 per cent in 2008 (AIHW 2009). The representation of large households in the Carnarvon study sample therefore was considerably higher than the state average published on crowding.

**Table 30: Sizes of Carnarvon households at time of interviews, August–September 2012**

<b>Size of households</b>	<b>No of households</b>
1 person	
2 persons	
3 persons	
4 persons	3
5 persons	
6 persons	2
7 persons	1
8 persons	2
9 persons	
10 persons	
11 persons	
12 persons	1
13 persons	1
14 persons	2
15 persons	
16 persons	
17 persons	
18 persons	1
26 persons	1
Total	13

A word is in order here about the recruitment of people to the study. Potential participants were informed that the study was about crowding in Aboriginal households, but that it was not required that their own household should be experiencing crowding during the study period. Rather, it was required that they had experienced household crowding in the previous year and could discuss the ways and means they had developed for managing household crowding. Because the researcher did not specifically search out crowded households, the proportion of density-related crowding among participant householders was perhaps more significant than it might otherwise be despite the statistically small number of households in the study group.

**Figure 15: Plan of Carnarvon, Western Australia, showing location of the discrete urban Aboriginal settlement, Mungullah. Numerals indicate number of interviews carried out in those parts of the town**







**Table 31: Carnarvon households' distribution of persons in sleeping places–August 2011, December 2011 and January 2012**

Interview No.	Number of persons sleeping in house rooms and spaces																Total
	Size of house by bedroom numbers	B/R 1	B/R 2 <sup>1</sup>	B/R 3	B/R 4	B/R 5	Lounge/Dinning	Kitchen	Veranda 1 <sup>1</sup>	Veranda 2	Bathroom	Garage/Carport	Garden Shed	Yard Camp/Tent <sup>1</sup>	Shed	Granny Flat	
<b>C1</b>	4	2	1	1 *	1		1 *			# *							<b>6</b>
<b>C2</b>	3	1 *	1	1										*			<b>3</b>
<b>C3</b>	4	3	2	6 *						# *					= *	*	<b>11</b>
<b>C4</b>	3	3 *	4 *	4 *			7 *			# *				*			<b>18</b>
<b>C5</b>	4	2	1	1	1	*				*		*					<b>5</b>
<b>C6</b>	3	1 *	2	3 *			*			# *							<b>6</b>
<b>C7</b>	4	2	1	1	1		*							*			<b>5</b>
<b>C8</b>	3	3 *	3 *	1			*		*	# *							<b>7</b>
<b>C9<sup>2</sup></b>	3	1	1 *	1 *													<b>3</b>
<b>C10</b>	3	2 *	4	4			*										<b>10</b>
<b>C11</b>	4	1	5	5	2		2										<b>14</b>
<b>C12</b>	3	2 *	4	4			*										<b>10</b>
<b>C13</b>	2	2	2														<b>4</b>

1 Used only in summer or generally when the weather is warm and fine.

2 The householders are an elderly couple and the man is very ill. They will not have many visitors unless and until he is well.

\* Said to be used for visitors when they come.

# This room was an enclosed veranda, secure and sheltered from rain and sun but not used in winter because it was too cold.

= A shed that is used for visitors' accommodation is always said to be a 'good' shed; concrete floor, lockable door, power, cleaned out and furnished for sleeping space.

However, although nearly everyone agreed that visitors could sleep out of doors, away from the verandas, there were only three experience-based reports of visitors actually sleeping outside the covered areas of the house. All three were associated with the customary visiting that goes on for a funeral (this will be discussed further in a later section).

## 5.2 Household expansion—origins of visitors

Table 32 sets out the community identified by each Carnarvon interviewee as their 'home community', together with that of their partner (where relevant). The aim of this table was to give an indication of where visiting relatives may come from.

**Table 32: Identified home community of interviewees versus partners**

	Origins of Interviewees Versus Partners	
	Householder	Partner
<b>C1</b>	Carnarvon	Nil
<b>C2</b>	Carnarvon	Nil
<b>C3</b>	Carnarvon	Meekatharra
<b>C4</b>	Carnarvon	Carnarvon
<b>C5</b>	Carnarvon	Nil
<b>C6</b>	Carnarvon	Carnarvon
<b>C7</b>	Carnarvon	Nil
<b>C8</b>	Carnarvon	Nil
<b>C9</b>	Mt. James/Carnarvon	Nil
<b>C10</b>	Perth	North western Wheatbelt region
<b>C11</b>	Perth	Perth
<b>C12</b>	Esperance	Central Wheatbelt region
<b>C13</b>	Carnarvon	Carnarvon

Table 32 reflects the fact that by and large, Carnarvon Aboriginal people tend to find partners from within their own community. This practice was not always the case, as explained in the brief overview of Carnarvon earlier. In the early and mid-20th century, there was extensive exogamy between the members of different language groups who had found their way to Carnarvon under the directives of the Aboriginal Protector.

## 5.3 Reasons for household expansion

### 5.3.1 Mobility range and visitors

It is relevant to consider what we know of the contemporary mobility range among Carnarvon Aboriginal people. Other research (Habibis et al. 2011) shows that the mobility range for Carnarvon includes but is not limited to, Geraldton, Meekatharra, Burringurrah, Roebourne, Tom Price, Port Hedland, Karratha and Marble Bar (where the communities of Pipunya & Gooda Binya are located). Some of this travel is related to men travelling in connection with Aboriginal Law Business. The greater proportion of travel, however, is undertaken by women travelling on family business including checking up on their daughters and their grandchildren (Habibis et al. 2011). The following section provides some indication of the variety of reasons people have for travelling, and the corresponding need for housing both short-term and long-term.

Table 33 provides a summary of the reasons that people gave for visiting or why they were being visited. It should be noted that the total for this table is in excess of the

actual study group. This is because there may be more than one reason for people to be visiting their relations.

**Table 33: Reason for visiting and the number of households for which this was reported**

Reason for visiting	No of households in which this was reported
Householder away, kin minding the house	1
Returning to home community after time away	1
Visiting (maintain kin relations, shopping, birthdays etc.)	3
Attending funeral	3
Providing care to kin; after hospitalisation or during school holidays or aged care	3
Temporary homeless; family violence, seeking local employment, loss of housing through other causes	3

All of the reasons in this table have been regularly demonstrated in previous Aboriginal mobility research (Memmott et al. 2006; Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Habibis et al. 2011). Some explanation is still warranted here however.

### 5.3.2 *Providing care to kin*

School holidays are included under the category 'providing care to kinfolk'. Children who are upper primary school age and older, not unusually may be taken to other towns to spend their school holidays. Sometimes this is simply to provide the child with a change of place for the holiday. Sometimes, however, this practice is undertaken to temporarily relieve crowding in the child's home household. Interviewee C.2 provides this kind of care for one of her grand-daughters. Thus:

C.2: But at the moment she's boarding up in Broome. She's with her mum up in Broome. But she'll come back for holidays. But that's how my house is. It's very old, you know? And my daughter, in Broome, she's got a one-bedroom unit, for her, her other half, and her and her three kids. In a one-bedroom home. And it's shocking. They're building all new homes around. She's been on the list since; well, her oldest one now, the one I look after, since she was a baby, and that's gone 13 years next year.

CBJ: Oh, and so that's why she comes down to you so often.

C.2: Yeah. And in March she turns 13, you know? And my daughter's still waiting for a house. Homeswest said by February, she'll have a house. But what February? When's February? She's still waiting?

There are other ways in which providing housing to kinfolk might be described as providing care for those kinfolk. Interviewee C.12 and her partner came from the Wheatbelt to Carnarvon because he had, they thought, been offered a better job than the one he had in the Wheatbelt town where they had lived for 25 years.

### *5.3.3 Temporary homelessness as a cause of taking in kinfolk*

C.12 provides an example of the provision of emergency housing for kinfolk when things fail to proceed according to plan.

Before that, we were on a farm .... We came up here on a verbal promise of a truck driving job for him and we got up here, but there was no job. It'd gone to somebody else. I was lucky to get the job here [clerical position in an NGO].  
(C.12)

Until her partner obtained work they could not afford to move into private rental and because she worked, their income was over the eligibility limit set by the DoH (WA).

The circumstance falls into the category of temporary homelessness which includes 'loss of housing through other causes'. The reasons in this category may also include the loss of housing amenity because the gas and electricity bills have gone unpaid and so people may go to stay with kinfolk until they have saved enough to pay the bills.

### *5.3.4 Returning after time away*

'Returning to home community after time away' includes release from prison or drug rehabilitation as well as the individual's decision to return to their own home country after some years spent away. Interviewee C.6's son was on probation and had to stay in the town in which he was released from prison. She kept a room ready for him.

Well, [the person who slept in that room] mainly it used to be my other son, but he's gone at the moment. He'll most probably be back. And he's got three kids. He mainly goes to prison and when he comes out he stays here. He wants to stay out now because he's got his two children. And he needs to get out, too. His kids stay in there with him. I keep that room for him. When he comes he stays in there all the time. He's trying to get a house, but, he can't get one.  
(C.6)

Other research has shown that 'returning home after time away' is common to young men who have been travelling for some years and who have decided to put an end to their travels (Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Habibis et al. 2011).

## **5.4 Instances of arranging sleeping space for funeral time**

C.2 was visiting her sister, C.3 in connection with C.3's recent move into another DoH (WA) property and a funeral that was imminent and being held in the Wheatbelt town of Mullewa. The base household numbered eleven. C.2 and another sister were with C.3 visiting and they were expecting several more of their siblings to arrive from the north that evening. The funeral itself would be in Mullewa, but the family was foregathering at C.1's house to travel in convoy down to Mullewa for the funeral. There were two family homes in Mullewa, both public housing rental. In this exchange they were discussing where best to sleep in relation to the two houses. C.2's house and her sister's house in Mullewa were both small two-bedroom houses, but they were on sizeable blocks of land.

C.2: So when I get back down to Mullewa, she'll be there with me [C.3 and her family]. Because we got to go for a funeral down there.

C.3: And [their sister] will have, oh, a back yard full.

C.2: Well, I said to my sister, bring a tent, because she's got [a sizeable back yard]. My sister's house. You could put another house in that back yard.

In a separate instance, interviewee C.5 has a five-bedroom house and could accommodate a number of people within the house on the occasion of a funeral. However, it is not always the case that people necessarily want to sleep inside the house.

Cause I did have a lot of family for a funeral. But they used to camp out the back. On beds out the back. They don't care cause they come from Meekatharra. They won't sleep inside the house. That's how they are....They like the outdoors. (C.5)

Interviewee C.7 cites the weather as the deciding factor in whether or not people will prefer the outdoors to the house.

Oh, at funeral time, we was all pretty hot then, real warm. Generally they all slept around, or all slept on the lawn here. (C.7)

Thus, various reasons are given for sleeping out of doors, such as the house being too small to accommodate everyone, or the preference some people have for sleeping outside, but the deciding factors are the weather followed by the capacity of the house to hold the number of people that arrive for funeral time. There was no other occasion proposed which would provide a reason for sleeping out of doors.

## **5.5 Other large household formation patterns**

Most of the reasons for large household formation patterns are covered above. These include visiting to maintain kin relations, providing care to kin whose homes are undergoing stress because the home is not large enough to accommodate the family with propriety, providing emergency housing to kin, and gathering for funeral time. There are some other reasons that are not covered above, when one considers the types of large household patterns.

### **5.5.1 *Visiting within the town***

In Carnarvon, visiting occurred in two broad patterns; casual daytime visiting and visitors who came to live for varying lengths of time with the householder. Within the former diurnal pattern, mothers and daughters who respectively lived in town visited each other daily and young men appeared around lunchtime for a meal on a somewhat irregular but expected basis. Teenagers roamed the houses of their kinfolk haphazardly in the out-of-school hours. The teenagers sometimes stayed the night if they became involved in either a television program or some activity that they did not wish their parents to know about.

### **5.5.2 *Daytime visiting***

Daytime visiting is important in regard to large household formation patterns. Because Carnarvon is so remote, this kind of visiting is limited to visiting kinfolk within town. Generally speaking, there will be one particular house in a kin group that is visited every day whereas those in other houses go out to visit. In most kin groups in town, the person who is visited is generally the elderly mother of the current generation of adults. Her children will generally visit her every day. There is often one other household among the adult siblings whose home forms what we might refer to as a 'hub' for visitors at particular times of day. The high point here is lunch time. Most of the people who came at lunch time were young men and most of them brought their own lunch. They came only to eat lunch in company rather than alone.

### **5.5.3 *Drinking for celebration***

There were some occasions among the study group that occurred during the study period that seemed to call for celebratory drinking. One of these was the birth of a

new child (or grandchild) and the other was a birthday. On these occasions, kinfolk gathered to mark the occasion and some would stay to drink through the day and into the night and possibly into the next day. The researcher offered to visit these households to add her congratulations and was told on both occasions:

Oh, well, no, you hadn't ought to go over there just now. They're all a bit sparked up you see, from yesterday. It was [someone's] birthday [or birth of a child], see.

There was no suggestion that the researcher would come to any harm. Everything was judged to be 'pretty peaceful over there', however people simply did not wish to be seen by outsiders in this state of extreme relaxation, and of course the researcher respected this.

#### *5.5.4 Circular mobility*

Some households appeared to have a constant turnover of large numbers of visitors. An example is C.4. The householders in this house were an elderly couple who had a large family. Their sons' and daughters' families were not as large as that of their elderly parents, but taken together, this was a very large extended family. The sons and daughters of the householders live in a small town within the Carnarvon hinterland, which had no general grocery store, and although the roadhouse sold some basic grocery items, prices were high and no one cared to shop there. They, therefore, came to Carnarvon more or less on a fortnightly basis. At the time of the interview, two of the householder's adult children were visiting with their own children to do the fortnightly shop.

### **5.6 Sleeping arrangement principles**

In order to discover the relationship of people to sleeping space, all interviewees were asked to draw a floor plan of their house and then to populate the house with its present household membership. This proved very useful in ascertaining some patterns in sleeping arrangements.

The householder and her partner, if they were together, always had the largest bedroom. It was not unusual for them to take young grandchildren in with them either in the same bed, if they were very young, or in a single bed of the child's own if the child was older. What was meant by 'older'? This varied somewhat, but by and large 'older' meant that the child was at least six years old. There were some older children who continued to sleep in their grandparents' room into the upper years of primary school, but this was unusual if the grandparents were living together, and much more common if the grandmother was the sole householder. In such circumstances the child would ordinarily be a girl. Here it was not uncommon for the grand-daughter to have an allocated room in the house that she used occasionally, but with a preference for sleeping in her grandmother's room.

Young men in their 20s and 30s with no partner or children, who were still living with their parents, would have a room of their own. They were not asked to sleep with anyone else except in the extreme circumstances of funeral times. Then they would have the visiting young boys and men sleeping in their room with them.

Young women with no partner and no children and who were in their 20s and 30s, still living with their parents would not necessarily be given a room of their own. They would ordinarily sleep in a bedroom with other, younger girls. Although both of the younger women and older girls as well as the younger men and older boys had a recognised need for privacy, it was more likely that the boys and men's need would be recognised in these circumstances. The researcher did enquire about this, as a matter

of apparent inequality, and was told very earnestly that the young men needed their privacy. The impression was that it was a matter of protecting the young men from feeling shamed, but shamed in what way or on what account was not forthcoming. The closest the researcher came to an answer was simply the assertion that they needed their privacy. This leads one to the impression that the young men are considered to have a greater need to come and go without having to inform their mothers and sisters where they are going and why. This appears to be a matter of independence. The independence of young women was also recognised and if there was a way that they could be given a room of their own, this would be done. However, they were definitely second in line in this regard in a situation of limited sleeping space.

### *5.6.1 A case study in the distribution of sleeping space*

The first diagram in Figure 18 illustrates the results of one interview using the house plan as the basis for questioning intended to reveal the principles and rules the householder was following in the allocation of sleeping space, and also, at what point she would consider the house as full as it could hold. That is, the point at which she would take no more visitors. The second diagram in Figure 19 illustrates this same household at that point, at which the householder declared, 'No. It's too full now. There's no place to put anybody else'. The premise on which the case study rests is an imaginary funeral; that of a fictional brother of the householder's mother's.<sup>12</sup>

If we look at the diagrams together, we note a number of features. First, we note that the only bedroom in which the occupants do not change is the second bedroom where the householder's oldest daughter sleeps with her new baby. This is an indication of a rule in the arrangement of sleeping space. It rests on the fact that the baby is very young; so young that it requires special care and protection. The householder will not require the young mother to take others into her room until the child is considered old enough to require no longer such special care and protection. Therefore, the occupants of this room do not change even when the house is this full.

Second, we note that both the householder's older two sons have been given rooms of their own for themselves, their partners and children (bedrooms 3 & 4 in Figure 19). In order to do this, the householder's younger daughter, aged 15, and the younger son's two older children are sent to sleep in the lounge room. To provide a bedroom for her younger son and his family, the householder and her partner take the two grand-daughters into their own room. The rule involved here is that couples must be given their own rooms. The principles involved in the application of this rule involve conjugal status, propinquity of the kin relationship, the age of the couple and the ages of their children.

Couples should be given rooms of their own if at all possible and this reflects the principle of privacy involving the display of a sexual relationship. 'No one wants to see their private business,' is one expression of this principle. However, the mere fact of conjugal status will not necessarily guarantee privatised sleeping space. The propinquity of the kin relationship and in some cases the propinquity of the social relationship will determine who among the couples will be allocated privatised sleeping space. Therefore, the householder's own children should be given priority in order of age. It is according to age because seniority matters in the distribution of privilege; 'oldest looks after youngest and youngest obeys oldest'. Therefore, those of

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, both of the householder's maternal uncles had passed on some years ago. In order to maintain respect for her uncles, a fictional mother's brother was the object of the funeral. The reason for making up an uncle was to provide a relation who was important enough to account for the maximum attendance of the extended family.

the couples who are the householder's own children will take precedence over those who are more distantly related to her; hence the two couples on the back veranda.

With regard to children and the allocation of sleeping space, seniority does not apply. Children who are considered to be young enough to require special care and protection will sleep with their parents in their bedrooms. The older children and the adolescents will go into the lounge room. This is the same rule that applies to the householder's older daughter and her baby. The younger the child is, the more he or she needs the focused care and protection of their parents.

The householder was asked where she would put her third son if he came home for this imaginary funeral. She said that he could just go in with all the other kids in the lounge room. The householder was then asked if she could put anyone on the back veranda and she replied that it depended on who they were. After some discussion, she settled on two young couples and a young man, who were more distantly related cousins, to sleep on the back veranda and a couple more adolescents in the lounge room. With these additions, she declared that there would be nowhere to put any more people.

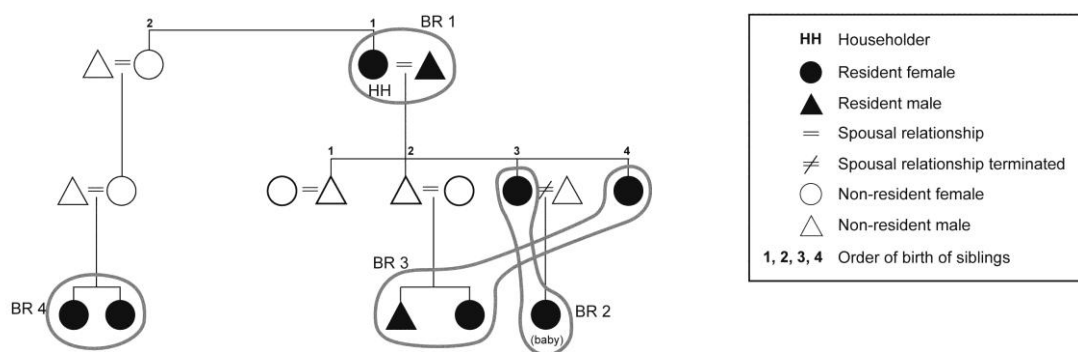
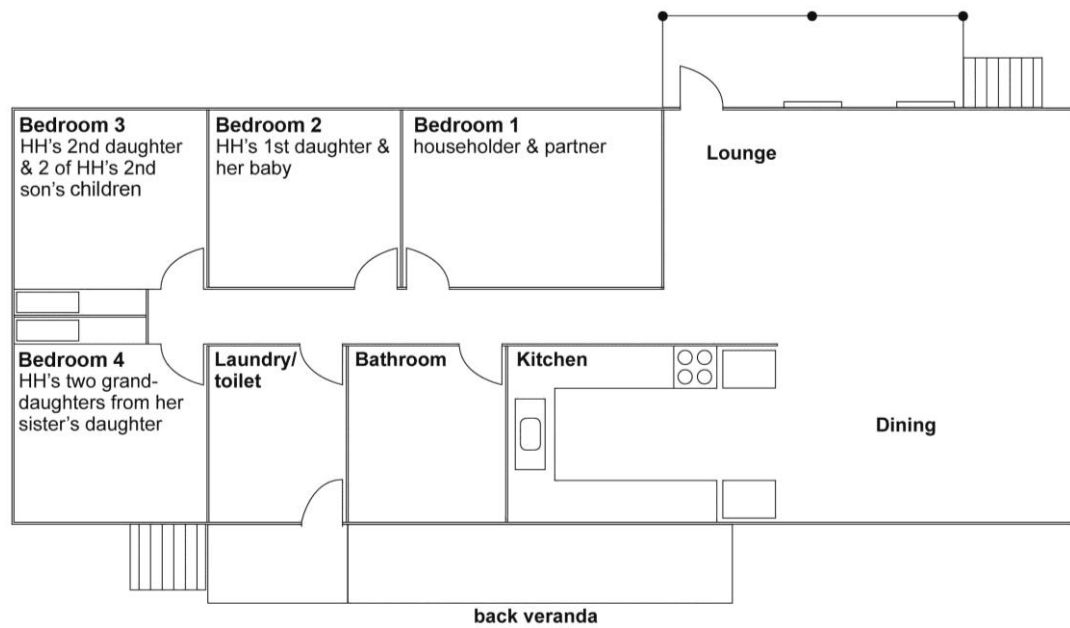
**Figure 17: Mungullah housing village, Carnarvon, Western Australia**



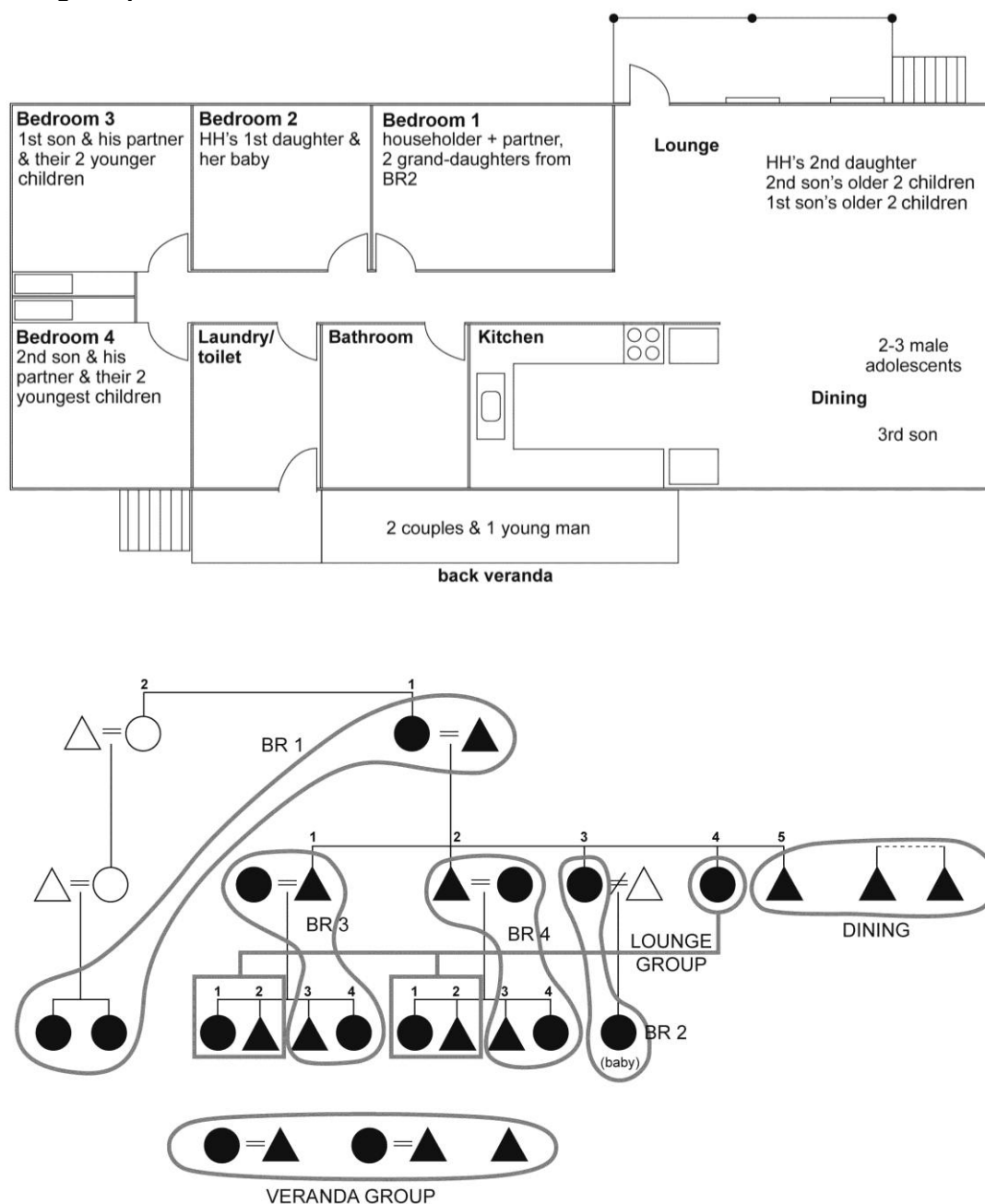
The genealogical diagrams below (Figures 18 & 19) illustrate the kin relationships among all of the people who formed the expanded household. The kin who were assigned sleeping space on the back veranda and the adolescents who were put to sleep in the lounge room are shown in Figure 19. The basis on which these particular people were chosen was that they were relatively distant cousins, but the relationship with these kin from other parts of the extended family had been more or less maintained over the generations. The householder considered it possible though not likely that they would attend the funeral. She chose them as examples of kinfolk to whom she would not ordinarily refuse sleeping space on any basis, but who were distant enough in social and in kin terms for it to be appropriate to offer them the back veranda on which to sleep.



**Figure 18: Example of sleeping arrangements in Carnarvon, of a core (or base) household—total of nine**



**Figure 19: Example of sleeping arrangements in Carnarvon, adapted to accommodate visiting kinspersons—total of 27**



## 5.7 Perceived absence of stress by some interviewees

The terms 'crowding' and 'stress' were not used in interviews although they did form part of the information provided to interviewees about the study. The effort was to try not to put words into their mouths, so to speak, and also to avoid inducing in them a response to the terms themselves rather than the conditions under which the interviewees lived. Not unexpectedly, no interviewees used either the word 'crowding' or the word 'stress'. It was necessary to the research to discover how the interviewees themselves spoke of difficult living conditions.

Within the Carnarvon group of interviewees there were six extended family groups represented. Not all were well represented in the town. Those interviewees whose kin groups were well-represented kin groups in town were:

- Kin group 1 – C.1
- Kin group 2 – C.4
- Kin group 3 – C.5
- Kin group 4 – C.6, C.7, C.8, C.13.

C.2 and C.3 were sisters who certainly came from a large kin group, but most of the group's members lived to the north and south of Carnarvon. C.9 was related to a number of kin groups in Carnarvon, but she and her daughter seemed, at the time, to be almost social isolates. The reason for this was their attachment to a particularly noisy drinking life style and this made them unwelcome visitors. C.10 and her partner were from the Wheatbelt region north of Perth and were living in Carnarvon because they had work there. C.12's partner was C.10's cousin-brother and they too were in Carnarvon for work. The rest of their very large kin groups lived to the south in the Wheatbelt. C.11 had been a foster mother for many years and although there were many people she had fostered living in Carnarvon, her kin group was from the Perth metropolitan region.

The effect of having a large kin group living in the town is to encourage daily visiting patterns to the households of senior members of the kin groups. This is a household of the kind we have termed 'hub' households. People visit kin-related hub households to get news of the family, catch up with other members of the kin group and to pay respect to the senior kin group member whose house it is. Crowding in hub households forms a daily ebb and flow, whereas other kin-related households are visited less often and for more specific reasons. These reasons included the exchange of child minding, to arrange to go shopping, and so forth. Householders who were members of large kin groups in town tended not to express much stress about the way they lived. Reasons for this included the fact that the dominant visiting pattern was in the daytime. People were always busy with one another; visiting, running errands, shopping and so forth, but night-time household numbers seemed not to be an issue.

Being the only representative in town of a large kin group has the opposite effect. Such households receive little daily visiting and instead tend to have large numbers of kinfolk visiting periodically for days or weeks. This tended to be the situation of the householders with whom C.4 and her family were staying. In these circumstances, the householders insisted on everyone leaving the house for the afternoon, every day, so that they could rest and 'have their peace and quiet' (Interviewee C.4, September 2011). The householders with whom C.9 and her daughter were staying followed the same practice. However, these householders were not excluding their visitors on account of numbers, but because they were themselves ill and C.9 and her daughter were drinkers and they would not share their house with C.9 when she and her daughter were drunk.

A category in between those of being stressed and not stressed, were households who indicated that they were generally in control (hence apparently unstressed) but at times, circumstances could temporarily arise to create a problem which was nevertheless solvable through a particular strategy.

For example, C.4 was a house with a consistently high turnover of visitors. One of the daughters-in-law of the householder couple was interviewed. On being asked if the house was perhaps a bit difficult to live in on account of the numbers, she replied that it was all 'pretty peaceful', and that their stay in Carnarvon would be brief in any case. There were two indications that the household was felt to be crowded, at least by some of its residents. The interviewee modified her statement that the house was

'pretty peaceful', because of the children. She explained that they would sometimes get into arguments but, she said, 'Kids are kids; you just got to expect those sorts of things'.

The second indication that the householders might be feeling the pressure of a lack of privacy, the rise in the level of noise and so forth, was when an interview was sought of C.4's parents-in-law, the householders. 'Oh no!' she exclaimed, 'you can't talk to them now. They're having their rest. They're asleep. That's why we're all over here [in a neighbouring house]. They made everybody go somewhere else for the afternoon so they could get their bit of peace and quiet for their sleep'.

From these two indications one might surmise that, although the household was managing on the understanding that the situation was short-term, there were still sources of stress in play that, albeit temporary, made daily life tiring and at times, difficult for at least some of the household.

**Table 34: Occasional perceived stress of Carnarvon interviewees arising from expanded households**

	Situation	Hub household?	Primary activity during period of stress	Reason for stress	Further comments on nature of stress
C1	Current	No	Minding house in absence of householder	C1 is minding her niece's household with whom she has been on good terms. However, there was a tragic accident involving the niece's granddaughter which was the fault of C1's son. C1 mourns this. She wants a house to live near her niece and to take on the care of her aged mother.	C1 is most anxious that this serious incident not result in a breach between the two parts of the family. She needs a 4 bedroom home but these are rare.
C2	Past	Yes	Child minding	When C2 was a younger woman, she lived in Mungullah. She took in young teenagers who were out wandering the street because drinking parties made their homes unbearable. On this becoming known, women would regularly leave babies and young children with her to be minded until an unspecified time of return.	Stressful for householder and for visitors.
C3	Current	No	Primarily rearing children	Newly moved from outlying station. House is relatively new, in a mostly non-Aboriginal neighbourhood. Householder uncertain they'll be able to carry out their hunting activities or that their children's behaviour will conform to expectations of new neighbours.	Stressed. All of their children and grandchildren live with them. The house has concrete/lino floors and painted concrete walls resulting in high noise levels. It is so new she finds it intimidating.
C4's mother in law	Current	Yes	Coming from outlying town to do food shopping	C4 is visiting her parents-in-law and is not herself bothered by the situation. However it is clear that her parent-in-law are: "You can't talk to them now. They're having their rest. They're asleep. That's why we're all over here (in a neighbouring house). They made everybody go someplace for the afternoon so they could get their bit of peace and quiet for their sleep."	Stressful for householders, but not for visitors.
C6	Current	Yes	Daytime visitors and regularly	CBJ...We want to tell them (WA Housing Department) sometimes people's houses are crowded because they have to be.	Sometimes stressful.
			houses the homeless	C6 partner: That's right, cause you can't say no. C6: No. You can't say no. We just let them in. C6 partner: you can't let them sleep outside	
C10	Not current	Yes (her parents')	Housing their 5 adult children with their own children	C10: They've got a 4 bedroom house. My mother had my younger brother when he was just turned 18 with his girlfriend, my sister had come [from a distant town] with her 2 kids, they had my brother with these 3 grannies and it was me and my 6 kids in the lounge, and then it was my other sister with her 2 kids and then they cleaned the shed out, and they slept in the shed. And that was like that for a while.	Yes. As C10 puts it, they tried to be peaceful but still people were "treading on each other's toes."
C11	Current	Yes		C11 has fostered girls for years and has always had a household in excess of ten. It is not just the numbers that cause her stress, but the design of the house. She needs more and larger living areas, at least one more bedroom and all of them to be larger to permit the girls to keep their belongings in an organised way.	Stressful for householders.
Total households in stress = 7		Total hub households = 5			

## **5.8 Further strategies used to cope when stressed.**

One strategy used to cope when stressed is the practice of sending all visitors out to spend the afternoon away from the house, which is discussed above. However, there are other ways of coping with stress within one's own household.

### **5.8.1 *Re-organising sleeping arrangements***

Many Carnarvon households have a practice of sleeping together in the lounge room and no-one thinks the worse of them for this. C.10, however, found that when she had her youngest child this past year, she could no longer tolerate this practice. The lounge room was beginning to feel small and arguments among the children prevented the household from falling asleep in a timely manner. C.10, who was employed, therefore purchased additional beds and bedroom furniture and required that everyone commence sleeping in their own rooms. For her, the house then lost its stressful, disorderly feeling and in her estimation, her children were better for it.

### **5.8.2 *Growling at visitors***

In other situations, the stress of daily life in the household had nothing to do with numbers in any conformation. Rather it involved the behaviour of the visitors. If the visitors are drinking in excess of what the householder feels to be reasonable and make no contribution to food or other running costs yet readily consume them, they may by various means be asked to leave. There was one householder who dealt with this by requiring the teenage daughters of the visitors to clean her house under her direction and telling them strictly that if they were not home by a particular hour, the doors to the house would be locked and no-one would let them in. This practice of growling is an effective method of controlling unwanted behaviour for those with sufficient authority; householders in this situation inject their own content into the practice of growling. It is a practice that is not open to most younger women, but by her middle 30s, a woman should be fairly proficient at it. She needs to be because it is the primary means of getting recalcitrant visitors to behave and sometimes, in finally telling them to go.

### **5.8.3 *Relieving crowding stress in kin-related households***

There was one verified instance of this and that is C.2 taking one of her grand-daughters from Broome to her home for the summer holidays. While this was the only verified instance, other people did talk about it as a method of relieving stress through inadequate housing in kin-related households in other towns.

Many households in Mungullah and Carnarvon generally undergo expansion during the school holidays. People speak of the need to 'give the kids a little break'. Mungullah and Carnarvon people may take their children to other towns within their mobility range, such as Karratha, Roebourne, Port Hedland and Broome. Other kin-related families may stay at their houses while the majority of the resident household is away. Thus, it becomes possible to give one's children a change of place for a holiday without undergoing excessive expansion.

## **5.9 Earlier phases of neighbourhood induced stress**

On this particular field trip to Carnarvon, the Aboriginal community appeared to be experiencing a period of relative calm. The village of Mungullah was tidy and quiet through the night, and other known trouble spots around the town were similarly relatively quiet. The years 2007–10 were not so peaceful. Mungullah was not a happy place, but there was a good reason behind this. During those years, the sewerage plant at Mungullah was not working (Habibis et al. 2011). Even in the dry season there

was occasional overflow and in the wet season, raw sewerage was running in the street and standing in pools in the children's play park. The pump and the pipes of the sewerage plant were finally replaced and repaired and the response of the community was immediate. Neighbourhood-induced stress incidents became much more rare events. This is a case of an antecedent factor contributing to a sense of neighbourhood crowding.

Other areas of Carnarvon, between Morgantown and Brockman, formerly major trouble spots, were not mentioned in the current research survey. When they were problem areas, in 2008 and 2009, householders dejectedly said that the only thing they could do about the violence and the speeding cars was to call the police and to keep the children within the house (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008).

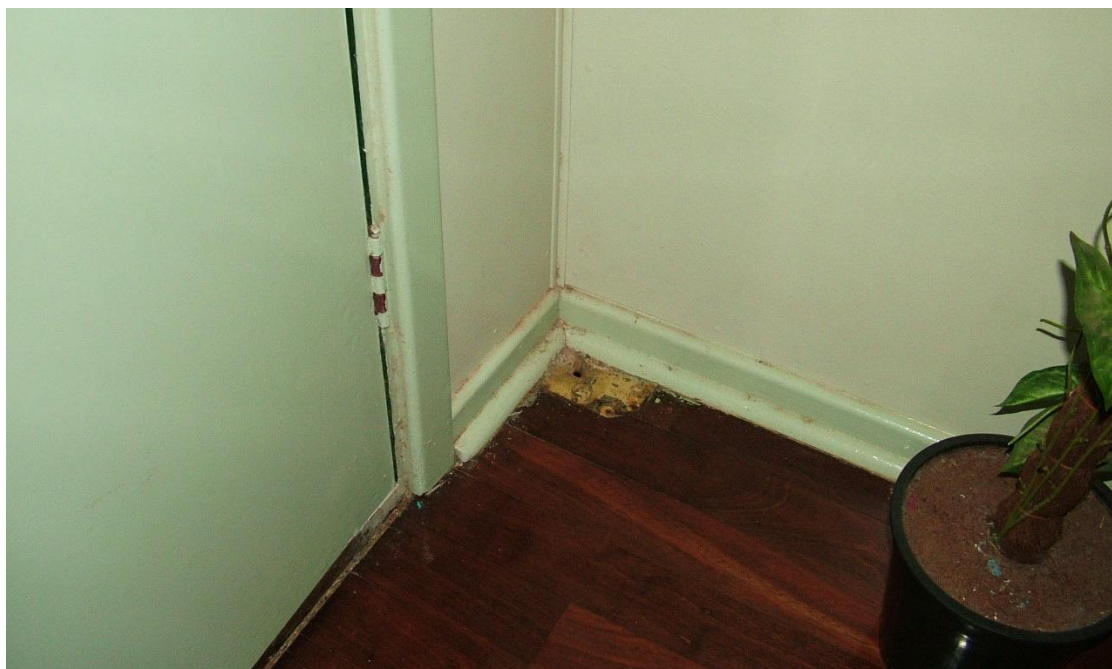
## **5.10 Physical needs and improvements to cope**

A number of desired physical improvements were identified by interviewees as being necessary to relieve their stress.

### **Dangers of inadequate repair and maintenance**

The stress of living in a house also has to do with the house amenity and whether or not it seems to the household to be a safe place to live. For example, the photo below shows a small hole in the corner of the lounge room which, in other settings, might not be a problem. Carnarvon, however, is within the habitat range of the King Brown Snake, also called the Pilbara Python and it is a venomous snake. In this house, the household members discovered that the small hole was providing ingress when they moved the lounge chair one day and found a sizeable King Brown. It is not an aggressive snake and so it made its way back down the hole and disappeared under the house. A pot plant has been kept over the hole.

**Figure 20: Access hole for King Brown snakes**



Source: Vanessa Corunna

The result of this was that fewer activities took place in the lounge room. For example, the television was on the dining room table instead of on the entertainment unit that was purchased to hold it. After several years of pointing the problem out to various

DoH (WA) officers, the hole was finally blocked and inspected for snakes. The household has returned to using the lounge room. Up until this point, however, the house could not provide adequate space for the household activities required of it. The householder's major concern was that the children lacked space to do their homework but this was a hub household. Most of the family in Carnarvon came to visit there every day. This caused both space and safety problems to all concerned.

### **Need for storage facilities**

While not as dramatic as the problems caused by the King Brown snake, there is often a relative lack of storage space for a large household in public housing. No-one to whom we spoke had adequate storage space. Those of their belongings that could not be stored in the cupboard spaces provided were stored in large plastic garden bags arranged in rows along corridors and against the walls of rooms. The newer houses had built-in wardrobes in the bedrooms and pantries in the kitchen, but the majority of homes were the old style. The least expensive wardrobes and cupboards cost over \$200. Aboriginal people on government benefit incomes simply cannot afford these things.

### **General wear and tear**

In addition, kitchens and bathrooms tended to be old and dilapidated; there were holes in the walls of some homes. Window and door frames were warped with age and weather and did not close properly. All of these problems can make a house inadequate to the purpose for which it was built so that it cannot properly provide the basic expectations of space residents should be able to have in their home. It is with some difficulty that some houses provide room enough for the listed tenants. This causes stress because people simply find the house inadequate to their needs.

On a positive note, the Carnarvon office of the DoH (WA) had begun a program of renovation of homes at Mungullah and in the town itself. Verandas were being lengthened or widened, interiors were being painted and door and window frames were being repaired. This will be a substantial step forward for Carnarvon Aboriginal public housing tenants whose homes seem to have remained in a stagnant state of disrepair for many years previously.

## **5.11 Summary**

In Carnarvon, visiting occurred in two broad patterns; casual daytime visiting and visitors who came to live for varying lengths of time with the householder. Mothers and daughters who respectively lived in town visited each other daily. Young men appeared around lunchtime for a meal on a somewhat irregular but expected basis. Teenagers roamed the houses of their kinfolk haphazardly in the out-of-school hours. The teenagers sometimes stayed the night if they became involved in either a television program or some activity that they did not wish their parents to know about. Visitors who came to live in the households of their kin for a period of time did so for the following reasons:

- To maintain kin links as with mothers coming to stay with their daughters and grandchildren for lengthy periods of time which might be as much as three months or more.
- To attend funerals.
- They had lost their own homes and were now homeless, reduced to travelling between households of their kinfolk, seeking not to place too much stress on any one household in particular.



- Their own home had lost amenity either through a failure of repairs and maintenance, or the householder's own failure to pay the electricity and gas bills, and in consequence having the power and gas to their own home disconnected.
- They were in the dangerous position of fleeing from a situation of domestic abuse.

A set of sleeping arrangement principles were elicited from the Carnarvon interviewees for when households expanded, based on variables of age, gender, spousal status and notions of privacy and independence. These last two together pertained particularly to people in their late teens.

Interestingly, very few interviewees used the word 'crowded' in relation to their homes or the homes of others except in reference to very specific circumstances. No-one claimed it as the state in which they constantly lived. Still, the way in which some people spoke about their current circumstances indicated that they felt stressed in ways that conformed to our model of crowding. Major sources of stress occur in combined households made up of short-term visitors. These most commonly are conflicts among certain age groups of the children. In the case of people who are living in these circumstances in the long-term, there is a certain feeling of shame that parents cannot provide their children with a home of their own to grow up in. Although people dislike feeling dependent, or 'in the way', they are fully aware of the generosity of their kinfolk in providing them with a home when nothing else is to be had.

Household stress and numbers therefore were not clearly correlated. This is in line with our model of crowding. Crowding may arise from a lack of fit between simple household numbers and how people use their housing, and how they feel about their living conditions on a day-to-day basis.

It seemed that for people to live contentedly in large households, they needed to be assured of a relatively large deal of household and yard space. There seemed to be a better correlation between the physical condition of the house and feelings of stress. It is possible that this field work discovered Carnarvon in a state of relative calm because the DoH (WA) was undertaking the housing renovation and improvement program, thereby providing people with the additional space required to improve access to privacy which is so necessary to the alleviation of stress in households.

## **6 SWAN LARGE HOUSEHOLD ANALYSIS FINDINGS**

This chapter sets out the findings from our interview survey of the 18 householders in Swan who were reported to have experienced large household formation.

As a peripheral area of Perth, Swan had Aboriginal town camps throughout the early and mid-20th century which were frequently moved due to complaints by the expanding white landowners. Rental housing provision for Perth Aboriginal families did not become seriously provided for until the 1970s when the Western Australian Housing Commission took over responsibility from the Department of Native Affairs. At the time of the survey, there were a wide range of emergency housing and homelessness services in Perth. A feature of housing management in both Swan and Carnarvon (in contrast to Queensland) was the 'three strikes policy' whereby tenancy incidents of 'dangerous behaviour', 'serious behaviour', and 'minor behaviour' were managed respectively by immediate eviction, eviction after two incidents, and eviction after three incidents.

The content structure of the analysis in this chapter is identical to that in the previous chapters, starting with a profile of the sampled households and their visitors, moving to the nature of large household formation patterns and accompanying sleeping arrangements and then addressing the nature of any perceived stresses around such patterns and how households respond or cope with such.

### **6.1 Household profiles in Swan sample**

Table 35 represents the people who were present in the participant households at the time of the interviews. Half of the households were run by couples and half by women on their own. At 50, the largest single group in these households were boys between the ages of 3–18 years. Between the ages of 2–18 there were 73 children which amount to 46 per cent of the study group.

**Table 35: Profile of Swan households that were sampled (ages in brackets)—people in core household**

	Core household						
	Householders	Babies (2 years & under)	Child male	Child female	Adult male	Adult female	Sub Total <sup>a</sup>
<b>S1</b>	2 <sup>b</sup> (Both late 60s)		1 (9)		1 (early 20s)	2 (early 20s, 40a)	6
<b>S2</b>	2 (Both late 60s)		1 (early teens)		1		4
<b>S3</b>	1F (early 40s)	2 girls (2 years, 3 months)	3 (16, 11, 10)	2 (2, 6)	1 (early 20s)	1 (19)	10
<b>S4</b>	2 (woman 32, man 33)	1	3	2			8
<b>S5</b>	1 (woman, aged late 50s)		6	6			13
<b>S6</b>	1 (man, late 40s)		2	1			4
<b>S7</b>	1 (woman, aged late 30s)	2	4	3	1	0	11
<b>S8</b>	2	1	3		1	1	8
<b>S9</b>	1 (woman, late 20s)		2	2			5
<b>S10</b>	2 (Both late 60s)		1		1	2	6
<b>S11</b>	1 (woman, late 40s)	1		2			4
<b>S12</b>	2 (both late 40s)			1	2		5
<b>S13</b>	2 (both aged mid-20s)	1	2	1	1	1	8
<b>S14</b>	2	1	2				5
<b>S15<sup>c</sup></b>	2~ (woman mid-50s, man unknown)		1			1	4
<b>S16</b>	2	1		1	1		5
<b>S17</b>	1 (woman, mid-40s)		1		2		4
<b>S18</b>	2 (both late 20s)	1	2	1			6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>116</b>

a The subtotal includes the householder(s).

b Two householders always is a conjugal pair or a couple. Where there is one householder, therefore, the gender is specified.

c This woman was living in a shed at the back of the house.

~ Indicates that because they were living in the shed, they were not in fact householders.

N.B. Visitors are in the following table

The size range of the Swan households varied between four and 17 individuals claimed as forming the core household. Some houses had a relatively large number of children. Household S.7, for example, held 14 babies and children and six adults including the householder. The reason for this is that the householder had a family of her kinfolk living with her who had been evicted from their home under the 'three

strikes policy'. This formed a pattern among Swan households. The larger households held refugees from the 'three strikes policy' in addition to the base household. Another pattern was aunts and grandmothers taking in grandchildren and nephews and nieces who had either run away from their parents' home or who were being badly treated by their parents in the opinion of their aunt or grandmother.

**Table 36: Extended family/visitors staying at the time of the interview together with total numbers in household (core householders & visitors)**

	Partnered adults (male/female)	Babies	Child male	Child female	Male adult	Female adult	Sub-Total	Total household core & visitors
<b>S1</b>							0	<b>6</b>
<b>S2</b>							0	<b>4</b>
<b>S3</b>							0	<b>10</b>
<b>S4</b>							0	<b>8</b>
<b>S5</b>							0	<b>13</b>
<b>S6</b>							0	<b>4</b>
<b>S7</b>	2	1	4	1		2	10	<b>21</b>
<b>S8</b>	4	1	4	3			12	<b>20</b>
<b>S9</b>							0	<b>5</b>
<b>S10</b>							0	<b>6</b>
<b>S11</b>			1	1	1	1	4	<b>8</b>
<b>S12</b>							0	<b>5</b>
<b>S13</b>				1	1	1	3	<b>11</b>
<b>S14</b>	1	1	4		1	1	8	<b>13</b>
<b>S15<sup>d</sup></b>							0	<b>4</b>
<b>S16</b>	2		3		3	1	9	<b>14</b>
<b>S17</b>							0	<b>4</b>
<b>S18</b>	4				2		6	<b>12</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>168</b>

<sup>d</sup> These four people were visitors occupying the shed in back of the house

Table 36 shows that more than half of the Swan households had no visitors during the study period. The eight households that did have visitors had between three and 24 kinfolk visiting during the study period. This is a reflection of the effect of the 'three strikes' policy. One householder currently was fighting an eviction notice under this policy. Five interviewees said that they would take no visitors because their homes currently held too many people. There were three who were currently living with kinfolk because they had been evicted from state housing under the 'three strikes policy'. There was one interviewee who had received one strike and said she would be very unwilling to take any visitors until that strike was removed from her record.

**Table 37: Sizes of Swan households at time of interview, August–September 2011 and January 2012**

<b>Size of households</b>	<b>Number of households</b>
1 person	0
2 persons	0
3 persons	0
4 persons	5
5 persons	1
6 persons	2
7 persons	0
8 persons	3
9 persons	0
10 persons	1
11 persons	0
12 persons	0
13 persons	2
14 persons	1
15 persons	1
16 persons	0
17 persons	1
18 persons	0
19 persons	0
20 persons	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 37 indicates that in Swan slightly less than half of the households were made up of 13–20 persons. The remainder of these households held from 4–10 persons.

#### *6.1.1 Provision of sleeping space*

Table 38 indicates the pattern of use of sleeping spaces in the sample of 18 households. Nine were using living or dining rooms for sleeping at the time of the interviews, with another six indicating that these spaces were used when visitors came.

**Table 38: Swan households' distribution of persons in sleeping places, August 2011, December 2011 and January 2012**

	Number of persons sleeping in house rooms and spaces																
Interview number	Size of house by bedroom numbers	B/R 1	B/R 2	B/R 3	B/R 4	B/R 5	Lounge/Dinning		Kitchen	Veranda 1	Veranda 2	Bathroom	Garage/Carport	Garden Shed	Yard Camp/Tent	Caravan	Total
S1	4	2	2	1	1		*				*						6
S2	4	2	1	~			*						*	*	*		4
S3	3	5	1	4									*				10
S4	3	1	1	3			3										8
S5	3	4	2	1			6										13
S6	4	1	1	1	1		*						*		*		4
S7	4	2	4	3	1		3	2	5								21
S8	4	2	2	3	8		5										20
S9	3	3	2	*			*										5
S10	3	2	2	1			1										6
S11	3	1	1	2	1		1	2									8
S12	3	2	1	1			1						*	*			5
S13	3	1	5	1			1										11
S14	3	5	4	2			2										13
S15	Shed													4			4
S16	3	2	5	5										2			14
S17	4	1	1	1	1		*										4
S18	4	1	1	1	1		*										12

\* = Said to be used for visitors when they come.

~ = This is the person's assigned bedroom, but the individual sleeps in the lounge room in front of the TV as often as not.

# This room was an enclosed veranda/sunroom and was weatherproof but use as a bedroom blocked light from the lounge room.

Split cell under lounge/dining room—sleepers divided between the two function areas, although lounge/dining may architecturally form one large room.

It is noteworthy that no-one offered a caravan to cope with the problem of sleeping space. This is consistent with previous research in other locations (e.g. Broome) showing that Aboriginal people (at least in WA) apparently do not include this form of shelter as an option. In contrast, four interviewees found the idea of housing visitors in a shed acceptable provided it was a good quality small construction with a concrete pad floor, was secure and lockable, had power connected and was clean and furnished with bedroom furniture. Despite this, only two actual instances of living in a shed (1 couple & 1 group of men) are represented in our study group. There were

men who regularly slept in the carport or on the back veranda when they visited, but they were not present during our study period. Apparently they used these outdoor areas in both winter and summer. Partly this was said to be the preference of some men, particularly from the north, to sleep outside the house, and others accepted it having no better alternative.

Even when people who are relations are off the streets and that. I've got, in the carport, usually I have a mattress out there, and I tell them just to help themselves, just sleep out there. Cause it'll be better than living where they have been. (S.3)

I had my brother, who came down from Roebourne, sleeping outside, in the carport.... [My brother] sleeps in the carport because he likes the fresh air and getting out in the open. (S.12)

Some practices cannot be tabularised in this manner, such as whether or not the householders give up their bedroom to visitors. This depends to some extent on who the visitors are. Some younger people give up their bedroom only for their parents, for example. Others extend this practice to include those of their brothers and sisters who come with their partners and children. Older householders do not engage in this practice because their status precludes it, meaning, that it would shame all concerned if the older householders were to give up their bedrooms for anyone. Still, other householders never give up their sleeping space for anyone. All visitors are expected to sleep in the lounge room. It does not seem as though this is a matter of the deep structure of Aboriginal relationships and is more a matter of individual kin-group practice. Further research would be needed to find a definitive answer to this question.

## **6.2 Household expansion—origin of visitors**

### *6.2.1 Where is home?*

The following Table 39 contains the identity of the home communities of the Swan interviewees and their partners.

**Table 39: Identified home community of Swan interviewees and their spouses or partners**

Community		No.	Comments
Interviewee	Partner		
York Region	York/ Guildford	3	Husband's father's country is York region, his mother's traditional country is the Swan Valley in the Guildford local government area (LGA). He claims both.
York Region	Badu Is.	2	Badu Island is in the Torres Strait
Midland LGA		1	
Midland LGA		1	
New Norcia & Mogumber		2	New Norcia and Mogumber are 56.7 kms apart. Interviewee attended both missions in her school days.
Perth Metro Area	New Zealand	2	Interviewee and partner no longer together
Swan LGA		1	
Midland		1	
Esperance		1	
Central Wheatbelt	Central Wheatbelt	2	
Central/Western Wheatbelt	Central Wheatbelt	2	
Guildford		4	
Midland		1	
Midland		1	
York region		1	
Perth		1	
Perth metro area		1	

Of 18 interviewees in the Swan SLA, four had a current conjugal relationship. Of these, two were with someone from outside their own country. Seven interviewees were from the Swan SLA or the nearby Midland area. Six interviewees or their spouses were from the Wheatbelt region north of Perth. Interviewees generally expected that their visitors would be coming to stay from around the Wheatbelt region, sometimes for a funeral. More often though they would expect visitors to be requesting shelter on account of loss of their own housing or housing amenity.

For most of the interviewees, Swan SLA and Midland SLA were seen as a continuous Aboriginal region of origin. People preferred to partner with others from Swan-Midland. As well, they resisted the idea of living outside of this region mostly because this is where their families are, but also it is the region with which they identify on an everyday basis. This is the case even with those few interviewees who have ties to country outside Swan-Midland, such as the Wheatbelt or the Great Southern.



Few people claimed associations outside of this relatively restricted region of the state. The government settlements to which their forebears had been sent were Moore River Native Settlement, and New Norcia Mission in the Wheatbelt. Few had ancestral ties with the more southerly government settlements of Carrollup and Wandering. Their view of their country was solidly located in the upper valley of Swan River and north into the Wheatbelt.

**Figure 21: South-West of Western Australia showing places identified by Swan interviewees as ‘home’ community of self or spouse (with red dots) and indicating the likely catchment of household visitors**



## 6.3 Reasons for household expansion

This section discusses the forces that drive household expansion and the means by which people manage household expansion. In all Aboriginal societies, mobility is a common driver of household expansion and this is the subject of the following subsection. However, in Swan there is a force external to the Aboriginal socio-cultural world that is driving the expansion of households, and this is the DoH (WA)'s 'three strikes' policy. This policy is a significant source of stress for the Aboriginal people of Swan, as will be shown when we come to that part of the discussion.

### 6.3.1 Mobility

In the Swan interviews, it was quite clear that the way that people talked about mobility related to homelessness was quite different to the way people talk about mobility related to visiting for cultural reasons, including to maintain kinship ties. S.5, for example, was homeless over a period of at least five years before acquiring her current public housing home.

I was living with [her daughter] and her kids. So from there to here, but then before that, when I had my other place, all the girls were with me with all the kids, so it was just constantly crowded. So for the last five or six years, I been constantly moving around, until I got my own place and then they all come and

stayed with me. And then when I never had my own house, they'd come and stay with me and all my grannies. (S.5)

Interviewee S.4 has a good relationship with her family and enjoys having them around her, however:

...that doesn't mean you need to live together in order to have your kinship, to have your strong family relations. They can come and visit, they can stay for a while, but I don't want to have them living with me, and I don't want to live with them. I think that even when they lived in the camps, everyone had their own little camps, had their spaces. They respected that. (S.4)

S.4's statement that 'everyone had their own little camps...they respected that' segues into the matter of house design.

### 6.3.2 *Concept of the 'accordion house'*

'Accordion house' is a term that was used by social workers in Perth during the 1980s (Birdsall 1990). In that context, it was used exclusively with regard to Aboriginal households and it meant that the people you found at a particular house one day would not necessarily be the same people you found the next time you visited (this term is also used in the wider international housing literature (cf. Hansen 1998)). The household numbers expanded and retracted according to processes that the social workers claimed not to understand. It is this phenomenon that this report, in part, directly addresses. There are reasons why households may expand or contract on a more or less rapid pattern of transition. Funerals, for example, change everything. Funeral time, a period of time very loosely specified, brings more or less predictable but imprecisely known, numbers of kinfolk to the town where the funeral is to take place. This was discussed previously in the chapters on our Mount Isa, Carnarvon and Inala findings and we merely note it here as one certain cause of movement of people and increase in numbers in Aboriginal households. But there are other forces afoot and in Swan they appear to revolve around the care and protection of children.

A grandmother will, apparently, suddenly leave and go to her daughter's home, taking most of her household of dependents with her, leaving only one couple or person to mind the house during her time away. Her reason for going falls into the category of cultural mobility (Birdsall-Jones & Shaw 2008) and often what impels her to go visiting is that she may have heard news that her daughter needs some kind of help or support for any of a number of reasons from the illness of one of the children to the deterioration of her daughter's relationship with her in-laws. Thus, while it may appear sudden and impetuous to others, she will very probably have been planning such a journey for weeks, waiting for the opportunity of someone else travelling north to take her and her numerous household in their car, or for someone among her kinfolk to arrive seeking housing, whom she can with some confidence leave to mind her home. Similarly, her daughter will have been expecting her for some time, but she will not be notified of the exact date of arrival because it is a matter of the confluence of several events—the transport, the house minders and her pension—and perhaps other factors that arise outside of her own planning. In any case, she will arrive at her daughter's house and be greeted with no surprise; only an affectionate greeting such as, 'well you finally made it' (Birdsall 1990; Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Interview S.1 & S.2, September 2011).

Other forces behind the accordion house include the way in which the local kin group in general perceives and judges the quality of care that a child is receiving on an ongoing basis. If the situation is judged to be lacking in some essential quality, such as ensuring that the child attends school regularly, or is in danger because the parents permit too much unregulated drinking and drug taking among visitors who

may or may not be kin, it may fall to the duty of the grandmother or one of her sisters to remove the child to her own household (Birdsall 1990; Birdsall-Jones 2003). The task of formalising this with agents of social welfare follows on from this much later, or perhaps not at all. One reason that it may not be formalised at all has to do with the child's parents' access to their public rental house and their welfare-based income. Without the child or children, the parents would not qualify for their public rental house, and their income would be greatly reduced by losing the Principle Caregiver's allowance and any annual child payments intended to support the child's needs in regard to schooling, and other basic needs. A woman cannot so pauperise her own son or daughter this way, and so she takes the child without any government support or imprimatur for her custody of the child.

These are hard decisions to make and difficult actions to take. Women rarely go back on these decisions fearing that even though a temporary improvement in the situation may occur, it is only that; temporary; and she would have to go through the whole process again. This would be very hard on the mother or grandmother and harmful to the development of the child, and so it is rare that a child taken into the custody of a grandmother or aunt is returned to the care of the parents (Birdsall 1990; Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008).

We see this in our Swan study group very clearly. The high numbers of children in some households is a direct result of the operation of this culturally-based system of child welfare. The process of maintaining an orderly and stable household for the children becomes the sole objective of the householder and this is one reason why the grandmothers and the aunts never leave their dependent children behind when they travel to other towns to check up on the families of their sons and daughters. When most of the family lives in the same general region, this task becomes much easier to fulfil. The knowledge that they have family on whom they can rely to such a great extent is also one reason why Swan Aboriginal householders strongly resist being housed outside the Swan-Midland region. Their safety net is here, and that is a major factor in the resistance to being housed away from this region.

This culturally-based child welfare/protection system is not to be confused with the ordinary movement of adolescents around the homes of their kin network. Such mobility is not always an expression of poor parenting threatening the welfare of the child. Rather, this is an expression of normal Aboriginal adolescence. During these years, 'the kids' move back and forth between their parents' and the homes of various of their relations with relative freedom. This was noted across all of our study sites.

## **6.4 Large household formation patterns**

### **6.4.1 *Sleeping arrangement principles***

As noted in Chapter 1, we requested that each interviewee draw a floor plan of their house. Using this projective technique, we were able to name each room according to its use with a focus on sleeping space and to obtain accurate information regarding who slept where. Often each bedroom was given a name. A room might be named 'my son George's room' for example. It was very important to provide George (a fictitious exemplar) with a room he could always call his own because providing a man with no established family of his own with a home is integral to ensuring his health and his safety. Both of these would be in danger should he adopt the drinking circular mobility pattern that it seems so many men are bound to pursue through lack of any other housing alternative. Although there were limits to this method, it made it possible for us to ask direct questions concerning the combining of householder and newly-arriving visitors into 'sleeping groups' for particular rooms and spaces around the house.

The process of moving the base membership of the household into new sleeping groups is required when particular categories of visitors arrive. For example, a couple with their children must be given a room on their own. The teenage girl and young children who normally slept in that room are given the lounge in which to sleep. Older teenage boys and girls who are single with no children, up to the age of around 20 may not get privatised sleeping space. However, they will be given sleeping space from which it is possible to come and go without having to disturb the rest of the household. It is said consistently by our interviewees that young people of this age need their privacy.

This may have to happen even in the absence of visitors. S.12 explains:

I got two elder sons, and I've got a teenage girl who'll be 14 next year. And I said to them, my 14-year-old, cause at the moment I got three bedrooms. I shifted from a two-bedroom to a three-bedroom. And I said, oh wait there. I said; my two sons got rooms on their own; I said, "where's my 14-year-old or my 13-year-old daughter's going to sleep?" She ends up in the lounge. And that's what I've been telling my Homeswest officers, I said to them I need a four-bedroom. I can't expect my teenage girl, growing up, sleeping around in a lounge. She's got to have her own room, personal things. And I said "oh, how long that's going to be?" Oh; there goes the years again, you know? (S.12)

This corresponds with earlier discussions regarding the way in which the age of the children structures the nature of household crowding. While the children are small, there may not be a problem of crowding because when they are very young, children can be combined in cross-gender groups. As they grow older, this becomes impossible.

This is a priority house, three-bedroom. I haven't got a lounge room in my house because I use it as my bedroom. My oldest son and daughter won't share because they think they're too old. My baby [girl], two, sleeps in with us. (S.4)

Young men require their privacy sometimes for very simple, obvious reasons rather than any matter of deep import.

Ordinarily, he lays in the room on his own. Like summertime, he would 'cause he likes lying back in just his shorts. (S.3)

It may be fine for a little boy to wander around in summer wearing only his underwear, but it is certainly not okay for an older teenage boy or young man. The feeling is simply that they should be free to do this kind of thing within the privacy provided by a room of one's own. If a young man cannot have privacy of this kind it can cause stress for him and also for his mother because she does not want to see him deprived of what she should under normal circumstances be able to provide for him. Interviewee S.3 adds:

You don't like seeing them out in the lounge cause the little kids get up early. (S.3)

This may sound like a small issue, but the deeper meaning of what S.3 is saying is that she does not like her 16-year-old son shamed by having to appear this way in the company of his younger brothers and particularly his sisters.

Some of this concerns the formation of large households, but all of it concerns the development of household stress that develops when a house cannot function in such a way as to provide for the housing needs of all of its occupants. A household need not be large in numbers in order for it to become crowded, in other words. We also

need to acknowledge that the feeling of stress may not be the same for everyone in the household. The householder may see an organised household in which everyone has their own space, whereas a member of that household may see a situation that is constantly active, noisy and the space that the household member sees as the space supposedly reserved to their private use constantly invaded by others wanting to talk, ask questions, borrow things, etc.

## **6.5 Perceptions of stress**

### *6.5.1 Attitude toward crowding*

In the Swan study group, there were 14 out of 18 householders who held negative attitudes toward high-density and thus what could be termed as 'crowding'. It was evident that such perceptions are generally related to the current context and circumstances of high-density. Five interviewees who were recorded as being neutral regarding 'crowding' (in the emic sense) did have an attitude concerning it. They saw a good side and a bad side to 'crowding' (in the emic sense). It is good, for example, because if Aboriginal people did not take their kinfolk in, they would be homeless, in dire circumstances, living rough under bridges or in cars. That is, those who are homeless and find shelter in the homes of their kinfolk may not have a positive attitude toward the circumstances in which they are living, but they are positive about the cultural imperative to provide shelter to one's kinfolk because without it, there would be children in danger.

Interviewee S.5 was asked if she saw any good things about being overcrowded.

Not really. Oh, sometimes. At least I know where my grandchildren are, you know, that they're safe, and not being victimised by domestic violence and everything. But, it's come to the stage where the kids are getting older, and they're getting bigger; they need their own rooms, their own privacy. (S.5)

Children do tend to be a central feature of large Aboriginal households, and some people are quite frank about this. Thus, S.8 commented:

It's bad, really. Because, one time it might've been good, but now, the generations are changing in that, the kids are having babies worse than us! Having them now, they're dropping them out like rabbits. And you see it's overcrowded, because when the kids had babies then they can't get a home because, you know? And Mum and Pa wants them out. (S.8)

A common feature of providing shelter to homeless relatives is that it can lead to conflict among the children.

It's good, but sometimes, family argue a lot, you know? And a lot of kids. And the kids start fighting and arguing. You don't want to get into big fights over kids with your brother and sister. (S.14)

There are other reasons for feeling both positive and negative about large household formation and these arise out of people's responses to the ongoing conditions of Aboriginal poverty; hunger for example; and these reasons cause people to see the Aboriginal imperative to house their homeless relations as being good in and of itself, but bad on account of the crowding (in an etic sense) that it often leads to. This interviewee agreed with others about the potential for conflict that follows from putting children of different households together, but goes on to cite the problem of food.

The bad parts is there's always kids there that argue amongst themselves, and they cause arguments between parents. You pay the people whose house it is to live in it, you've got to buy your own food, other people who don't buy food,

eat it. Cause that's always happened to us. Everywhere we lived we've bought our own food, but if we were to leave, when we come back there'd be none. Kids argue makes the parents argue. (S.4)

Constant demand sharing in a large extended household with limited resources from food can thus create stress that is, arguably, a form of crowding (in an etic sense).

### 6.5.2 *The 'three strikes policy' in Swan*

In Western Australia there is a particular policy situation which caused substantial concern to our Swan interviewees with regard to the imperative to house the homeless. As described in Chapter 2, the Western Australian Government enacted in 2011 what is referred to as the 'three strikes' policy. In the Swan study group, people who had acquired one 'strike' were fearful of losing their homes. The strikes were acquired through neighbours' complaints, principally about noisy children, and interviewees expressed some confusion about how to avoid acquiring strikes through such instances. Three interviewees were currently homeless having been evicted according to the 'three strikes policy'. One interviewee had been evicted on account of the Dangerous Behaviour provision, which requires automatic eviction after only one contravention of the policy. The eviction was enforced following a home invasion in which two of the adult residents were injured seeking to prevent the ingress of Aboriginal invaders to the children's bedroom. The interviewee was, with reason, confused as to how this particular type of contravention of the policy might have been avoided. DoH (WA) policy does not condone this interpretation of the Dangerous Behaviour provision, but nevertheless from the tenant's point of view this was an unavoidable situation for which a high price was paid.

However, others of the Swan interviewees spoke about the way in which Aboriginal culture is in effect contravened by the 'three strikes policy' with particular regard to the obligation of kinfolk to provide shelter to their homeless relations. Essentially, people understand the effect of the policy as being evicted for providing for their families.

And they condemn me from having the kids in the house. Cause when another family got three strikes, they went to Homeswest [the Western Australian housing department]. And I told them well you can come and live with me, and live in the kitchen. Cause they was homeless. (S.7)

Could one adhere to the dictates of respect for family that constitutes one of the strongest themes in Aboriginal culture, without invoking the 'three strikes policy' thereby putting one's own housing in danger? This policy represents an added layer of psychological stress over and above what might already be a set of stressful circumstances in a large household where some may be contravening Aboriginal living values.

Although the Western Australian Government was warned by the Western Australian Council of Social Service that this policy amendment would result in an increase in homelessness, the Minister's response was simply that there were support services and they would have a role to play (Emerson 2011).

### 6.5.3 *Stress and large household numbers*

The issue of stress and large household numbers is closely related to the concept of the accordion house, as described earlier. In Swan, numbers tended to vary most when there were no children involved. S.16 and her partner had a regular system of moving between households, the interviewee's mother-in-law's house in Swan and another kin-related household in Geraldton. She was well aware of the problem of wearing out her welcome and sought to pre-empt that moment by voluntarily leaving to stay with another kin-related household. Others engage in the same practice. S.15,

for example, had been doing it for more than ten years. It should be noted that those of our interviewees who travel the circuit between the homes of their relations all had their names on DoH (WA) waiting lists with no expectation of being offered a house, ever. That is not necessarily the case, in fact, but it is what they believed and it does colour the individual's world view and view of self to believe that they will never have their own home.

In those of the households we studied in which visitors were taken in, there was a particular attitude on the part of the householders. They stated forthrightly that they would not leave a relation of theirs on the street, no matter the consequences.

So we approached Karniny, and, see if they had any available housing. So one came through, because we felt like we didn't want to put pressure on our daughter. And she'd get kicked out and overcrowded, for overcrowding and things. But I think that was her way of saying, her door's always been open, but it's a time now for overcrowding, you can easily get evicted. For that, strikes and things. And that's what she's experiencing today. See half of the people she got there, was part of the homelessness on the street. We're part of the Lockridge community. I mean, they're still there staying! (S.15)

And I said. Look. I've got to be out. Because I got homeless kids that stay with me there too. Their mothers and fathers just chucks them out, don't want nothing to do with them. And I've told Homeswest this and look I'm not getting no money for them, but I'm just helping them out. And they don't like it, DCP don't like it one bit. And I bargained with them, any way you can help me, but nothing. (S.7)

In the above two cases, one can also discuss the added stress being imposed by the Housing administration personnel (three strikes). However, in the following quote, we see 'crowding' amicably described in a positive way, as 'a matter of culture'.

Crowding is a matter of culture. I'm the eldest of 12, always had lots of family around me. White people might think this is crowding, for us it's just family. We're always crowded here. We're just brimming all the time. The kids put mattresses on the floor, pull out the couch, and that's part of the kinship system. (S.1)

These householders were placing the imperatives of Aboriginal culture over the threat of losing their homes through the various DoH (WA) policies intended to control household population numbers; leasing agreements, extra rental charges for additional household members and, of course, the 'three strikes policy'.

Interestingly, there was very little offered by the Swan interviewees regarding strategies used to cope when stressed. This may be the influence of the 'three strikes policy', which is focused on the threat of neighbours reporting householders to the DoH (WA). The only tactic offered was from a group of nine householders who were largely concerned with housing their grandchildren, nieces and nephews who were considered to be in danger from their parents, or who had become homeless through parental neglect. These householders simply declared that they would take no more visitors because their homes were too full already. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## **6.6 Physical needs and improvements to cope**

What a number of the Swan interviewees are referring to is what Memmott elsewhere terms 'domiciliary behaviour' (2007). Memmott speaks of the 'cultural fit' between

physical structures and the living patterns that surround them, and goes on to list some of them:

...household groupings, typical diurnal/nocturnal behaviour patterns for different seasonal periods, sociospatial structures, domiciliary space maintenance, approach and departure behaviours, external orientation and sensory communication between domiciles, sleeping behaviour and sleeping group composition, cooking behaviour and the use of hearths, the storage of artefacts and resources, and the response to the death of a householder. There a number of reasons why an understanding of these domiciliary behaviours is important. First and foremost, they can shed light on the nature and meaning of the ethno-architecture around which the behaviour occurs. Second, architects must understand the nature of these behaviours in order to design appropriate residential accommodation for Aboriginal people whose day-to-day household lifestyle draws on these customary traditions. (Memmott 2007, p.286)

While Memmott is discussing domiciliary behaviour and cultural fit in a relatively traditional setting he does so with the clear understanding that all of this is relevant to 'post-classical' Aboriginal society as well (term after Sutton 1998).

Interestingly, this was an issue about which our Swan study group had quite firm opinions. For example, the following is a summary list of points from S.17's response to the question: 'How can they make housing better for Aboriginal people?'

1. The waiting list is the biggest problem.
2. They should build more houses.
3. Bigger kitchens, to look after these families that are in the houses.
4. A bigger bathroom and two toilets.
5. Bigger rooms all around.
6. It needs to be big outside so people can just camp out the back, when they come for funerals especially but some oldies birthdays as well.
7. And you need a street that's not racist.
8. We need a big carport, and an outside fire, like a proper barbeque.

S.17 speaks directly to many of the needs outlined by Memmott above; domiciliary space maintenance, approach and departure behaviours, external orientation and sensory communication between domiciles, sleeping behaviour and sleeping group composition, cooking behaviour and the use of hearths. Sensory communication between domiciles is an important issue for Aboriginal people who live in neighbourhoods of White Australians who are unsympathetic to their mere presence. Certain of our interviewees revealed experiences that showed quite clearly that it was not only Aboriginal behaviour that the neighbours objected to. It was, in fact, the Aboriginal household itself.

S.7 for example, understood this to be the insoluble issue behind her imminent eviction:

When we enquired, they just said they don't want an Aboriginal family next to them, that's what it is. The neighbours, when we first moved in, they didn't want two Aboriginal families. (S.7)



Her house was too close to her hostile neighbours to permit a sense of separation between the households. This is not an uncommon complaint among our Swan study group.

Sleeping behaviour and sleeping group composition is exacerbated as a problem by the design of public housing. There are very few such houses that are four or five bedrooms with more than one living area. Given the separation of siblings according to gender as they grow older, this is a problem in a two or three-bedroom house. This is illustrated in the following interview extract with S.5.

VC: So it's okay while they're little, but when they get bigger they need to have their own rooms?

S.5: Yes. Their own rooms.

VC: So what sort of housing should they provide just to help big families or to help with crowding? Like how should they design Aboriginal houses?

S.5: Oh okay. Bigger rooms mainly. The whole thing itself, the inside, much more bigger. Not a three-bedroom. It all depends, how many children they have. That's what they got to look at I suppose. And if the mothers, or the parents are going to take their mothers, or their aunties or whatever, the elders with them too, to live. To look after them, see, as well as the grandchildren.

This issue of taking in the elders as they grow too old to live alone is a difficult issue for many Aboriginal families. In Memmott's listing of domiciliary requirements, this speaks to household groupings, sociospatial structures, and approach and departure behaviours. Interviewee S.8 had a suggestion from South Australia that appeared to us both novel and practical.

Well, over in Port Lincoln, what we've noticed, [regarding her son and his girlfriend]. Well his girlfriend, when he was living over there, she had a three-bedroom flat that was in the front and she had [her partner, S.8's son], and she had her three kids with her and they were grown up, teenagers. They ended up, well this is what they were doing in Port Lincoln; they did it to quite a few people; they put granny flats in the back for children, or if there's another set of family there and it's overcrowded? They'd put it on the back for them. (S.8)

Depending on a variety of other concerns, such as the ethnic/White/Aboriginal composition of the surrounding neighbourhood, this idea of the add-on flat from S.8 could be an effective answer to certain important issues, including the storage of artefacts and resources. The following four Aboriginal domiciliary behavioural needs would be addressed with such a strategy.

Approach and departure behaviours; Older children of the family would find it possible to have their independence, emphasised as being so important by many of our interviewees. Elders could exercise similar independence, coming and going between the households.

Sensory communication between households in this situation would be an advantage. It would not go amiss for households to be able to take note of comings and goings of others without intruding upon them.

A complaint among interviewees who have considerable experience of being homeless and therefore living with relations; there is constant conflict over people eating food they have not bought and which was expected to constitute the other family's provisions over the next day or two. If there was an alternative abode (a significant step up from a shed no matter how 'good'), it would go some way towards resolving this source of conflict.

Elderly Aboriginal people are often referred to as the 'treasure' of the family, or 'our gold'. The elderly themselves have collected through the years a collection of objects which are important in telling the history of the family and how it came to be in the shape and in the location it now is. Many elders enjoy having these objects out on display and they use them to tell the young children the story of their own people and places. They include photographs, children's artwork, sporting awards, certificates commemorating an achievement, as well as the artwork of the older children and young adults and a great many more objects. This is more important than it sounds. A family's history is closely tied to its identity. Aboriginal people who have a strong sense of their own culture and identity tend to be better equipped to face the vicissitudes of life in a society significant portions of which are frankly hostile to them (see Dockery 2010). Such displays would be controlled in a small flat.

Interviewee S.6 regarded the problem of large rubbish removal as relevant to housing design. Perhaps it may be seen as peripheral but we agree that it is difficult to maintain quality of life if inadequate provision is made for this problem. The nature of the problem is, in the researcher's experience, a valid Aboriginal problem. In response to reassignment to a different house and evictions in particular, people have difficulty in removing all of their furniture, white goods and so forth. Often, they simply leave it behind and the DoH (WA) charges them for the removal so that the property will be left empty for the next tenant. What this may mean in practice is that kinfolk receive the goods that people have nowhere else to put.

Cause like my sister come and stay with me for a couple of weeks, she got kicked out of her Homeswest house. She brought all her furniture, all her, everything; washing machine, clothes, baskets, drawers, everything when she come here. And she left it on the side of my house, and when she did get a Homeswest house, she didn't take it all with her. She left what she didn't want to take. And my brother did the same when he got out of gaol he had nowhere to go. He come here and he had all his bags, and left all his bags of clothes. You know he was building chests of drawers and beds so he could get into his own place, but he was once again locked up again, he didn't stay out long; so I was stuck with his stuff on the side. And Homeswest come up my front yard one day and said push it all out the back. So I pushed it all out the back and it all got weather damaged. Couldn't keep it under the carport so now, I ended up with a backyard full of rubbish, and my sister didn't want to help me, she moved down to Gosnells, and yeah, and then my brother was back in gaol and really I had no one. I mean I got a lot of family, but they're too occupied in their own life. I think sometimes they find me vulnerable because I'm on me own with five kids. [Laughs]. (S.6)

Perhaps we might close this discussion with the observations of a woman who has been homeless for the best part of 20 years, and has been living with various of her kinfolk over that entire period of her life. With regard to crowding, she says:

Overcrowding is no good. You argue over things like the bills and cleaning up and all that stuff. But you come to accept things when you have no choice. (S.25)

Her final statement succinctly and accurately defines the relationship between housing design and crowding.

Aboriginal families need big property and lots of space to accommodate homeless families. We will go to our family when we have no other place to stay. (S.25)

## 6.7 Summary

In Swan, the influence of the 'three strikes policy' cannot be ignored. While we conceded that sample sizes are small, we believe that the level of stress expressed by those tenants who did mention it was such that this policy plays a significant role in determining both patterns of housing density and housing-related stress for the households we interviewed. We feel that these circumstances would very likely be replicated across other households, but more research is needed into the implications of this policy, particularly in relation to more pro-active and client-centred policies, which are being trialed in other areas of the state.<sup>13</sup> Some tenants are defiant in the face of the DoH (WA)'s authority and declare that they will not resile from their cultural imperative to look after their kinfolk and refuse to leave anyone homeless who asks for shelter. There are others who have declared that on account of fear of the policy in principle or because they have acquired strikes according to the policy they will not take any visitors.

By and large, people in Swan saw little that was good about crowding. They were not referring to household density here so much as the stress caused by conditions in which:

- Their access to privacy or their children's access to privacy could not be attained.
- They could not privatise their food supply even though they had purchased it themselves.
- Children fought and argued and pulled the parents into the quarrel, thereby causing a loss of social order among the household, and rendering them vulnerable to a neighbour's complaint.

Circular mobility as a solution to homelessness was practised by some in order to avoid causing friction in their host household. The problem to be taken note of here is the length of time some of our interviewees had been practising circular mobility as a hedge to homelessness. One woman had been practising circular mobility for this reason for around 20 years and others had been engaged in it for some years.

A significant amount of this stress is attributed by our interviewees to poor housing design in relation to Aboriginal culture. Consistently mentioned in this regard were:

- The rooms are too small, bedrooms especially.
- There are not enough four and five-bedroom houses.
- There is no strategy for dealing with household expansion except evictions.
- The land attached to houses is too small to prevent adequate sensory separation from non-Aboriginal neighbours.

As we have discussed in Section 6.4, our interviewees do have principles which guide social order in households, especially with respect to the correct combination of people in sleeping spaces. The purpose of these principles and the rules and patterns that derive from them is to ensure that life in the household is 'peaceful and quiet'; that is, stress free and conflict free. Given adequate household space in which to practice these cultural principles, Aboriginal people can achieve the lifestyle that most of them so ardently desire, and which contributes to better health and education outcomes.

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<sup>13</sup> Attention is drawn to the new 'tenancy matrix' approach being trialed in the Kimberly which takes an approach based on transparent and open communication with housing clients, client responsibility towards housing, neighbours and community and a responsive approach to housing problems by DoH (WA). This program too will require further research to evaluate its benefits.

## **7 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS ACROSS CASE STUDY SITES**

### **7.1 Research questions**

The set of detailed research questions posed at the commencement of this project were as follows:

1. What are the dimensions of crowding in Indigenous households?
2. How does this vary by geography? [modified form of this question]
3. What are the various drivers of crowding?
4. How do the drivers interact with housing variables?
5. How does crowding impact upon individuals and households?
6. At what point does density have negative consequences and become crowding?
7. What strategies do Indigenous households employ to cope with crowding?
8. What are the policy and program implications of crowding for housing providers?

With respect to Question 2, our methodology section in Chapter 1 discusses why we were unable to obtain any meaningful representative sample across different tenure types or dwelling types. Most of our interviewees were in rental housing stock. Question 2 will therefore be constrained to simply ask, 'How did the dimensions of crowding in Indigenous households vary by geography', meaning specifically by metropolitan versus regional city settings.

Each of these research questions will be addressed in this chapter, except Question 8 which will be discussed later in Chapter 8.

### **7.2 Definitional note**

In this chapter, we must continue to be careful to distinguish between the 'etic' use of the concept 'crowding' and the 'emic' use of the word 'crowding'; etic referring to the use of a concept from an external or scientific point of view, and emic referring to a group's own perception of a concept. The 'etic' use of crowding is in accordance with the social-science stress-based model of crowding as outlined in Chapter 1. The 'emic' use of the term 'crowding' has been provided by our interviewees, who sometimes include a state of being stressed in the way they use the word, but in other cases do not. Hence, at least one interviewee said 'being crowded is good' and a number said they were crowded but not unduly stressed. In these cases they are referring to high-density alone, rather than a stressful situation as we are defining crowding.

### **7.3 Antecedent factors underlying and driving large household formation**

In the preceding profiles of study sites, a number of structural drivers of household formation and household expansion have been identified which addresses Research Question No. 3 'What are the various drivers of crowding?' These are factors that we developed in our Positioning Paper model of crowding, and summarised in Chapter 1, and are defined as 'antecedent factors', that is the precursors to crowding. We have identified them as those that are beyond the everyday control of the householder and that form a socio-environmental setting or type of field within which people experience housing. Some of these factors may operate at the level of government and society

rather than at the level of the householder, as we will further discuss in this chapter. But as outlined in our theory-based model of crowding (adapted from Gifford 2007), some of these antecedent factors have a culturally specific dimension, and refer to deeply enculturated behaviours and values. We examine the findings on these antecedent factors here. First we shall consider the externally imposed structural factors such as housing market economy, government policies and service access issues. Then we shall analyse the cultural drivers that are enculturated within Indigenous societies.

## **7.4 Externally imposed structural drivers as potential antecedent factors of crowding**

### **7.4.1 *Demographics and overall shortage of housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people***

Any discussion of crowding needs to be seen in the context of the chronic shortage of Aboriginal housing throughout Australia that has been well documented by others (see Long et al. 2007, pp.17, 71–73). Since the Commonwealth Government undertook responsibility for Indigenous housing after the 1967 Referendum, successive national audits of Indigenous housing have always indicated a substantial backlog in relation to need. In all case study area participants commented on the lengthy waiting lists for public housing and the shortage of affordable housing in private rental markets. This was shown to be the case to varying degrees across all of our case studies, and particularly in the regional cities of Mount Isa and Carnarvon where there were ‘two-speed’ economies driven by mining.

In this regard, the effects of the two-speed economy varied across Carnarvon (and probably Mount Isa). As has already been mentioned in this report and in other reports, the incidence of secondary homelessness is reckoned to be high. One element of secondary homelessness that reflects the two-speed economy quite clearly is the situation of Aboriginal men and women who are employed. Their income makes them ineligible for state public housing and most are unable to break into the private rental market, partly due to the very high rentals in these areas, but possibly also because of elements of discrimination in some cases. In the case of Carnarvon, this was, to a certain extent, because one of the three estate agencies in town was wholly devoted to accessing rental housing for large mining companies. This is a topic for separate research, however, according to data obtained in other studies it is clear that Aboriginal families find it most difficult to gain private rental housing. (Long et al. 2007, p.70; Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010)

Among the public housing tenants in Carnarvon, the situation was markedly different. In relation to the limitations of their poverty and welfare income and housing, people in DoH (WA) properties seemed largely satisfied with the housing economics of the town. It seems highly likely that the DoH (WA)’s new strategy of home renovation and improvements had a great deal to do with this, since repairs and renovations which people had been requesting for many years were finally being dealt with. (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008)

For the 21 interviews in Mount Isa, their household sizes at the time of interview ranged from 1–19, with an average of 10 persons (total 210 persons), representing an average of 3 persons per bedroom using a conventional density measure.

For the 18 interviews (with 17 interviewees) in Inala, their household sizes ranged from 4–17 people, with an average of 8.6 residents (total 154 persons) representing an average of 2.7 persons per bedroom using a conventional density measure.

In Carnarvon, the household sizes for the 13 interviews ranged from 3–18 persons, with a total of 106 people, an average of 8.2 residents per household and 2.5 residents per bedroom using a conventional density measure. And in Swan after 18 interviews, the household sizes ranged from 4–20 persons, with a total of 168 persons, an average of 9.3 residents per household and 2.8 persons per bedroom using a conventional density measure, noting that a shed was counted as a one-bedroom space (Table 40).

**Table 40: Average household sizes and persons per bedroom in each study site**

	<b>Total number of households</b>	<b>Average household size</b>	<b>Persons per bedroom (density measure)</b>	<b>Average number of bedrooms per house in the study</b>
<b>Mt Isa</b>	21	10	3	3.3
<b>Inala</b>	17	8.6	2.7	3.1
<b>Carnarvon</b>	13	8.2	2.5	3.3
<b>Swan</b>	18	9.3	2.8	3.2

Clearly from Table 40, the highest density in the four study sites occurred in Mount Isa (10 persons), followed by Swan (9.3 persons), followed by Inala (8.6 persons), and lastly Carnarvon (8.2 persons). Note that these were the household sizes at the time of interview, and not necessarily at their peak of size due to visitor arrivals over the previous year as recalled and discussed by the interviewees.

In all study sites, these household sizes increased when large numbers of visitors arrived. The scale of visitation was often given according to the number of carloads of visitors, for example 3–4 carloads of visitors staying at one time, translating to between 12–30 visitors maximum, with such large visitation events happening at least 2–3 times and possibly up to 5 times a year. This could be termed ‘episodic large household formation’.

#### *7.4.2 House size and infrastructure—inadequacy of conventional rental houses for large households*

Most houses across the case study sites were three-bedroom houses (39 out of a total sample of 69) that had one main living area, one bathroom and bedrooms clearly designed for a maximum of two children or two adults per bedroom. There were notably more four-bedroom houses in the Western Australian site samples, bringing down the overall average bedroom density for the study sites, in spite of some very large households in the study.

Typically each main bedroom had been designed to accommodate a double bed but not an additional cot or single bed. The storage provided in bedrooms varied greatly with some having built-in wardrobes, and others without. Hence, in some cases, a main bedroom with additional beds left very little room for clothing storage, a television or a desk, which were often desired to be used in bedrooms. Secondary bedrooms were very cramped, often furnished with a double bed or two single beds and there was often very little room for clothing storage, schoolwork, games and other children’s needs. The assumption inherent in these designs is that a conjugal couple will use a main bedroom and their own modest number of children will use smaller bedrooms, perhaps sharing, but only during the years when the children are young. Such an assumption did not fit with the family patterns and needs of households in our interviews.

Current housing designs are used in ways that are unlikely to have been anticipated by the original designers, for example young children may share the same room with

their parents or grandparents, and householder members sometimes sleep in kitchens or dining rooms. Not unusually a couple and all their children must share one bedroom. Other solutions such as kinfolk of a variety of ages and genders having to distribute themselves around the lounge and dining room were not unusual. These are unlikely to be arrangements intended by the original designers of the house, but they are the sleeping solutions devised by the households within the physical parameters of their current house designs.

The concept of crowding according to the CNOS is defined through notions of appropriate sleeping spaces, with no reference to living room spaces. But the provision of only one living area can catalyse crowding which is not related to bedrooms, with activities in a diverse multi-generation household clashing frequently in this space; for example, children sleeping and adults watching TV, or children doing homework and adults talking or drinking (there is usually not room in children's bedrooms for a desk etc. because of large numbers of people sleeping in bedrooms), and so on.

Such provision of household spaces, designed to align with assumed Western behavioural norms, can cause stress and thus a sense of crowding because of inadequate spatial and design fit with the cultural values of the household occupants. Additionally, it makes certain activities such as attending to schoolwork, or workers getting a good night's sleep, very difficult to achieve because of inadequate infrastructure support within the house.

#### *7.4.3 Homelessness*

One of our four study sites had a declared homelessness problem specific to Indigenous people,<sup>14</sup> that of Mount Isa where a homeless strategy was being implemented by a collaboration of government and non-government agencies. Irrespective of the relatively low primary homelessness in our four study sites, all of them were shown to have significant secondary homelessness in the form of stress-defined crowding (in the etic sense) which masked the extent of true homelessness.

A number of the households we visited had temporary and semi-permanent visitors who would otherwise be homeless. These were often kinfolk who may have been evicted from a previous house, and now moving between places but not yet established within a stable situation; or alternatively seeking refuge from a family problem or even a natural disaster.

#### *7.4.4 Current policy effects*

The Queensland and Western Australia policies on maximum householder incomes dictate that once above certain income limits, an individual or household may not continue to occupy state government housing. Queensland Aboriginal householders who earn more than specified incomes (which occurs most often later in life) cannot afford a mortgage (their income often supports a large extended family, and they are too old to be eligible for a 25 or 30-year mortgage and affordable rental accommodation in a preferred area can be difficult to obtain), but they are no longer eligible for state housing. In these circumstances, crowding would likely occur if they were evicted from state housing on this basis and moved in with a relative. Alternatively, stress would also occur as they work out ways to subvert the system, such as finding other family members to take on the lease etc. Anecdotally, we

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<sup>14</sup> This has been commonly regarded as a primary homelessness problem in Mt Isa but recent research by Memmott and Nash (2012, forthcoming) indicates this perception arises from diurnal public-place dwelling rather than nocturnal rough sleeping. Most of the homeless people are accommodated at night in two emergency shelters, taken there by the police if necessary.

understand that this is rarely enforced in Queensland and evictions on this basis are uncommon, nevertheless, the perception that such a restriction may come into place, or the real threat of eviction (even if rarely followed through) can be very concerning for householders. In Western Australia, in contrast, the policy is strictly enforced.

In Swan (Western Australia), the 'three strikes policy' added to crowding when people were evicted, who then had to find emergency accommodation, possibly in the rental houses of other kin. But this, in turn, also made people stressed about receiving visitors in such circumstances, which may have then led to a 'strike' against their own tenancy should a neighbour lodge a sustainable complaint against them.

It is to be noted that Carnarvon people did not mention in their interviews, any impact of the 'three strikes policy'. We would predict that the first impact that Carnarvon people experience in this regard will be a newfound unwillingness of their southern kinfolk to offer them housing for the customary long visit over the summer holiday. Swan is not part of the Carnarvon mobility range and so no data was available in this regard. The Carnarvon mobility range in Perth tends more towards the coastal suburbs than the riverine suburbs. It would be useful to be able to perform research in the Carnarvon attached Perth suburbs to find out if the 'three strikes policy' has had any impact in this regard.

In Inala and Mount Isa, housing policy did worry tenants at times, with a number of people complaining that they were concerned about being evicted if they had too many people, or if their visitors were noisy. This added to their perceptions of being crowded under a stress-based crowding model. The implementation of policy in Mount Isa using a culturally sensitive 'Housing Service Centre' approach has led to lower levels of arrears and more people staying in their tenancies. However, in both Inala and Mount Isa, researchers were present on a few occasions when Department of Housing staff arrived to ask tenants to comply with housing policy requirements or face eviction; nevertheless the tenants did not identify a particular policy (such as the Western Australian 'three strikes policy') about which they were specifically unhappy.

#### 7.4.5 Access to services and recreational opportunities as a driver

Much Aboriginal circular mobility is generated by people in rural towns and remote communities travelling to the regional centre to obtain particular services, e.g. health, legal, dental or shopping. A clear finding of this study was that this could lead to expanding households and potentially crowding, especially in Mount Isa.

Comparing the social life of Inala people with those interviewed in Mount Isa, Inala people were harder to find at home and busier than our Mount Isa interviewees. This suggests they had more options for activities in Inala, greater access to transport and thus possibly also greater capacity to cope with changing housing circumstances and influxes of people. People in Inala spoke more frequently about the kinds of activities they would undertake within the community, such as going shopping, to the doctors or football matches. This relatively rich social and cultural life in part attracts Indigenous people to staying in Inala, and exacerbates crowding as those who await a house while staying with family or friends choose to opt only for housing within Inala. Housing in this suburb has a longer waiting list than many other suburbs that do not have such a rich Aboriginal social and cultural life or as many services providing structural support. Many people thus choose to wait in a house with high numbers of occupants, rather than be housed elsewhere in another Brisbane suburb with more limited social and service opportunities.



## 7.5 Cultural drivers of large household formation as potential antecedent factors

This section addresses the research question of what cultural factors drive the formation of large households in the Indigenous communities we studied. We found a number of salient factors across the four study sites and discuss them below.

### 7.5.1 *Kin ties, visitation and desires for an immersive sociality*

Strong kin ties still operate in both the regional centres of Carnarvon and Mount Isa and the metropolitan areas, such as Swan and Inala. These kin ties have implications for visiting on a regular basis. In particular, kinship ties have a strong influence on the processes that form, shape and reinforce people's identity and sociality.

There is an important role for kin as carers of children providing an outlet for both parents and children who need a break. This manifests in both local daily visiting to see people for meals and to 'catch up', as well as longer distance visiting requiring planning and saving for bus or plane fares. Even people with more distant kin (in Inala up to 2000 km away and beyond to the Torres Strait Islands) are committed to maintaining kin ties and this impacts on housing in terms of regular exchanges of kin between distant home places and city locations, with large numbers of people sharing houses during these visits.

This can be seen in a number of behaviours and at different scales:

Very few people ever sleep in their house alone. Company is desired and expected, and people do not want to be alone on the whole. This applied at all study sites.

It is rare for babies and young children to sleep alone. We have found direct evidence of this in our study. It would appear to be the norm across Aboriginal society that babies and young children share the beds of their mothers or any of a variety of kinfolk considered appropriate. These specific relationships are typically grandmother, grandmother's sister, mother's sister and cousin-sister. The terms of access to an infant regarding the mother's sister and cousin-sister are limited by the girl's age and the judgment of the mother and the other women of the family regarding the girl's capacity to handle a young baby safely (Birdsall 1990; Birdsall-Jones 2003; Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Musharbash 2008).

People rarely eat alone, preferring instead to gather to eat meals together. In Swan, during daytime visiting at hub households, people would stay for meals. In Carnarvon, we recall the hub household where a group of young men would gather for their lunch break from work. In the Swan study group there was one hub household where people gathered progressively throughout the day and into the early evening. Anyone who was there when a meal was being prepared shared the meal with the base household.

Funerals are a way of maintaining kin and social ties. They remain vitally important ritual events in Australian Aboriginal societies and were a major cause of household expansion at all sites.

People engage in social drinking and celebrating significant events together, but some people also drink as part of a sub-culture shared by kin and social groups, and households expand as a result. People are unlikely to drink alone if they can avoid it. There are some households in which behaviour in these drinking parties is well controlled and in these cases, the drinking never prevents the children having all their needs seen to. Sometimes, as in Carnarvon, the children will be sent over to the grandmother's house for the occasion. However, there are other households where no such control is exercised. These are the circumstances in which Aboriginal children of

a wide variety of ages may be observed walking the street in groups through the night. This has occurred in Mount Isa, Carnarvon and in other places. (Although it was not included in this study, Roebourne has had a similar problem recorded. (McKenzie et al. 2009)

Movement occurs between kin among the various houses of the towns or regions to maintain ties and sometimes to move towards being closer to 'country'. We discuss this further below under 'mobility'. It is a strong and important cultural driver of visitation, and sometimes crowding. For example, one of the most frequent reasons why people came to stay in Mount Isa was simply to visit their relatives. This is in keeping with an earlier AHURI study of Aboriginal mobility in this region (Memmott et al. 2006), in which kinship was found to be the key driver of circular mobility.

The cultural institution of demand sharing is very strong in these urban areas, despite cultural change and living within Anglo-normative housing. The cultural rules are adhered to at the expense of the house fabric if necessary, not vice versa. With regard to managing demand sharing in housing, we can state (especially from the Western Australian case studies) that there are rules of how to fit large numbers into a house that are strictly adhered to, even though this may appear chaotic to one unfamiliar with such rules. This will be discussed later.

In our study most householders were women, or women with male partners (Tables 15, 22, 28 & 35), and this is typical of general demographics in Indigenous Australia. There were a few men as sole householders in Mount Isa, but these were largely what could be called drinkers' houses where the safety of children and women may be compromised. The recurring role of Aboriginal women providing stable household heads for large households with intergenerational families was noted in metropolitan settings as early as the 1960s and 70s (Gale 1964, 1972; Smith & Biddle 1975), and this seems to be a continuing pattern across Australia (Hammill 2001).

Mutual care of extended family was practiced across all our research sites and indeed across all of Aboriginal Australia. It is clearly based in the deep structure of Aboriginal culture. It leads to certain findings of this research such as the 'permeable' houses of Inala. Interestingly, mutual care of the extended family can also alleviate crowding by effectively 'spreading the load' of visitors in houses, providing a number of housing alternatives. The strength of this cultural institution is indicated in a variety of ways, one of the most significant of which is that sharing is an integral value of Aboriginal identity.

In Queensland, 'put-downs' such as 'coconut' and 'uptown nigger' show the derision reserved for people who do not observe the Aboriginal cultural institution of sharing and reciprocity. In all jurisdictions, it is evident that policies, such as the Western Australian 'three strikes policy' but also the restriction on numbers of residents, responsibility for the behaviour of visitors falling on the householder, Western norms of quietness, internalised living and so on, conflict with the cultural institutions of demand sharing, large family gathering and externalised living, causing stress at a variety of levels including those of householder self-identity and relationships across the kin group.

### *7.5.2 Demand sharing and mobility*

Demand sharing and mobility are closely linked cultural practices. People are mobile in order to fulfil obligations and desires to see kin, and to access the hospitality they afford through a demand sharing relationship. These practices are facilitated by established rules and we discuss a number of ways in which these are made manifest in the communities we surveyed.

Demand sharing remains an important aspect of obligation to kin that was found to be strong in both the regional and urban case study areas. Demand sharing operates as a mechanism through which sharing of resources and money is managed within usually a kin network or close social group, although involving non-kin was found to be uncommon at the study sites. This extends to housing and as discussed in each of the case studies, people are happy to both call on kin for housing help, and to provide the same if circumstances require (reciprocity).

The back-and-forth movement of individuals between houses, suburbs and towns can cause temporary or longer-term household expansion. As noted in our literature review, this has been well documented in remote areas by Memmott et al. (2004) and across a region that includes the Western Australian field sites that have been studied (Birdsall 1990; Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Habibis et al. 2011), and that we also found it in our present metropolitan and regional centre sites. This was particularly the case in Mount Isa where there was a clear circular mobility pattern operating throughout the North West Queensland and Central East Northern Territory region.

Visitation in Mount Isa is in accordance with a regional socio-geographic pattern, in keeping with the well-reported phenomenon of Mount Isa being the regional centre of an Aboriginal cultural region, with people having a range of places where they can reside in a 'beat' throughout the region. The pattern was also evident in our other study sites, but the regions of visitor origin appeared to be less discrete due to more complex historical factors of imposed residential movements by government administrations throughout the 20th century.

It was noted in the previous section that kinship was the principal driver of mobility in the North West Queensland region. In addition, accommodation of extended family for significant recreational events in Mount Isa (viz. the Rodeo, the Royal Show & AFL games) was given as one of the most frequently cited reasons for visitors coming to Mount Isa. The third most frequently given reason for visitation was to attend funerals and participate in mourning and grievance behavior. Other common reasons for people from the wider region to stay with their relatives in Mount Isa were the need to obtain health services, and to carry out shopping. Another category of visitors was comprised of those relatives who had been recently released from Stuart Creek Prison. Once visitors were staying in Mount Isa, their visitation could be unexpectedly extended for various reasons.

Mobility at scales from intra-regional to intra-suburban influenced the ways in which households operated on a daily, weekly and longer-term basis. A rhythm of local residential movements over short periods was paralleled by longer-term and longer-distance mobility. Key drivers of this were kin sociality, demand sharing, and the presence of both permeable households and hub households, as defined earlier in this report.

Staying with family is a way in which people cope with and/or avoid tertiary homelessness. In Inala, this is often described as 'looking for a place'. It was reasonably common, and could last weeks or months. This process could occur at a local scale: for example a sister staying for months while looking for another house in the area; but could also include long-distance mobility. Some Inala households were on a mobility circuit linking a home-country based kin group (e.g. St George) with towns in between (i.e. in between the home country & Inala), where other kin may reside.

One family in Inala described a pattern of circular mobility that ranged across the southern parts of Queensland from St George to Inala, and Rockhampton, as various

family members visited one another, but also awaited more permanent opportunities for accommodation. This pattern of circular mobility does not end once employment is taken up, as people frequently take up, change or quit employment in order to take a break, move towns or concentrate on earning money for a time, but in a manner that may not become permanent. Beckett (1965) and Birdsall (1988), among others discuss mobility of this type. What is important to note is that those metropolitan Aboriginal communities that we sampled, continue to maintain these kin-driven mobility traditions. This can, in fact, be demonstrated in all of our field sites and it has been discussed in a number of studies in these and other Aboriginal regions over the years (Birdsall-Jones 2003; Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010; Memmott et al. 2006).

This kind of mobility also occurred in the Western Australian field sites, as reported in the earlier chapters (Sections 5.3 & 6.3). Swan mobility ranged regularly into the Wheatbelt Region and extended up to Geraldton as with the couple that travelled regularly from Swan to Geraldton, who, as previously discussed were staying with kinfolk because they had no home of their own. They shifted between kin related households in order to avoid causing stress to these households. This couple was not alone among our Swan study group. People in this position said that they were on the waiting list for public housing, but seeing as they had been on the waiting list for varying periods of up to ten years, they had no real expectation of ever being housed properly.

Much more temporary, local mobility occurs when men who are drunk, or temporarily unwelcome in their homes for various reasons, relocate to other family or friends in order to avoid conflict or in response to a temporary eviction by the householder. With regional differences, this was a common factor in all case study sites, and again emphasises the permeability of households. Inala men did not usually find it difficult to find a householder willing to take them in. In such circumstances, they called on their kin and other obliged social networks to provide them with temporary accommodation.

Whether or not they can do this with such seeming alacrity depends on the size and nature of their extended family of kinfolk. If there are not many kin-associated households in the town, they may find it necessary to sleep rough for some period of time. If their extended kin group is one of those that is well represented in the town, they will find it easier to move from household to household. Eventually, however, they are likely to wear out their welcome in all except those that are drinking households. It is not unusual for men and women who abuse alcohol and/or drugs to drive from town to town around the mobility range of their kin group. Certainly this is the case in both Swan and Carnarvon (Birdsall-Jones & Shaw 2008).

Inala residents did seem to have more local mobility for socialising within the suburb and greater choices of places to visit and activities to undertake, than Mount Isa people. They were at home less often, relieving the claustrophobia that may come from there being many people in the house, often going out to visit family and friends, shopping, local clubs and pubs. This mobility combined with a desire for company and intimacy meant that people would frequently stay over with family even when they lived within the same suburb. In Inala, social connections can be maintained through overnight or mealtime visiting, even when the householder may be busy or working during the day.

Much daytime visiting seemed to be based on the desire for intimacy and company with kin. The specific nature of these visits varied on the age, gender and life-stage of the occupants, but often included socialising, eating main meals together, providing or receiving child minding, drinking alcohol together and caring for those who were housebound (e.g. the elderly or disabled). The desire to have company and not to be

alone also aligns with known patterns of remote community Indigenous socialisation, for example, as discussed in Yuendumu by Musharbash (2008, pp.95–111).

People in all our field study sites generally abided by the principle that family could not be turned away if they needed or wanted somewhere to stay. This was seen as a core obligation in having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity, and has been well discussed in literature on demand sharing (e.g. Peterson 1993; Macdonald 2000). This was just as strong a value within the metropolitan communities as it was within the regional centres. People were mindful of the fact that when they were granting hospitality to their kin and friends, they were building up a store of goodwill and rights to reciprocal visitation if needed in the future.

In Inala, people tended to share housing even with those who were not kin because they felt obliged to help others, as part of their Indigenous identity. Ties to others, even those who were not kin, were valued more highly than money or convenience. In Inala, several women household heads thus stated that they would ‘help anyone’ and were proud to offer a bed, food or company to people who had nowhere else to go. An open door policy in known houses in Inala seemed to become known among particular social groups and informal support mechanisms such as this permeability of a house were taken up by those in need. Some offered support to particular groups such as those recently released from the police watch house, or those who drank alcohol in Inala’s parks. This form of social capital was afforded by having access to housing and the means to provide food. Having a house with many people living there already meant that extra visitors were easily able to share food, get access to cigarettes and alcohol and fit easily into an already large and changeable group. Being able to offer such a support was a point of particular pride for these householders, who saw it as an expression of their Indigenous identity and evidence that they were leading a proper life.

In Swan and Carnarvon, however, extending this practice to non-kin was less common from our findings. Ordinarily providing housing to the homeless via demand sharing in these places occurs mainly among kinfolk.

Like Inala, Mount Isa was also characterised by deep social structures involved in hosting and sharing. Perhaps this was a feature of standing patterns of regional mobility, inter-group exogamy and the capacity to emphasise classificatory relationships through various mechanisms (skin, totem, ceremonial partners, principles of respect, work mates) exhibited over many generations. Without in-depth genealogical and historical research across all of our study sites, it is difficult to explain the varying degrees of openness to hosting visitors who are not strong agnatic or affinal kin.

### *7.5.3 Place attachments*

Interviewees also chose to stay in houses with large numbers because of strong ties to place, both specific houses and their association with kin, but also neighbourhoods or towns. This was particularly conspicuous in our metropolitan study sites. Inala people could gain houses in other suburbs but did not do so because of their desire to be near social and kin groups, but also to be within a ‘Murri place’ with specific services such as schools, kindergartens, health service, etc. This attachment is closely linked to kin ties, but other factors are also important, and manifest in housing choices.

Similarly we saw in Swan that people who were attached to that part of Perth, tended to partner from that area and wanted to keep living in that place for social and cultural reasons. This did not mean that they did not have country ties elsewhere. Some of these attachments tended to extend into the Wheatbelt region north and east of Perth.

Most people in our Swan study group had dual ties to countries according to parental or grandparental affiliations. The region of the upper Swan River was a highly valued country tie, probably because it had become so very controversial in the course of native title rights proceedings in the Federal Court over recent years (Harvey 2011).

Conversely, in Mount Isa and Carnarvon, many people had strong attachments to home country away from the town, and their mobility between these places reflected this attachment.

No correlation between tenure type was possible given that so few home owners were interviewed, but place attachment was present for people who lived in state government rental housing, indicating that home ownership was not required for people to develop or maintain an attachment to place that gave them a compelling desire to stay in that location. The desire to keep living in a particular place for whatever reason was a prevalent attitude; it was preferred rather than moving to another suburb or town, even though it may have had more housing, better jobs, etc. People across all sites seemed to want to stay in particular kin and social circles based in particular places. It is a hard decision for an Aboriginal person to go to a town where they have no kin.

## **7.6 Cultural patterns of household expansion**

Following from our analysis of factors that drive the expansion of households, we can describe the specific, culturally-driven patterns that emerged from our case study sites.

When the various drivers of household expansion came to bear on our study sites, a number of clear patterns were evident. Large household formation was categorised into a number of types below, with the associated field study site noted:

- daytime visitors from the local town or suburb who only stay overnight (M.I, IN, C, SW)
- daytime visitors who do not stay overnight (M.I, IN, C)
- visiting children from the local area, who either stay for the company of the host's children or are left by relatives to be cared for by the householder (M.I, IN, C, SW)
- visiting relatives from the wider region and beyond, which involves hosting for at least several days and often for weeks (M.I, IN, C, SW).

Note: a special subset of this last category is kin from the local area, being housed because they have lost their house owing to the impact of a variety of external factors (including eviction for non-compliance with housing policies) and will be staying for periods of time from days to months (SW, IN).

## **7.7 Perceptions of stress and crowding by interviewees**

While we define crowding as a state of stress induced by large numbers of residents, we recognise in the model that this is perceived in a variety of ways and is ameliorated by varying expectation and coping mechanisms.

### **7.7.1 Findings on stress in general**

Note that one limitation of our study is that our analytic findings on crowding are based on self-perceived and self-reported perceptions of stress by interviewers. It was outside the scope of our research to correlate such perceptions with intrusive tests to identify the presence of actual bodily stresses (e.g. blood pressure levels) during crowding episodes. A second limitation of our study that needs to be pointed out, is that the findings are largely from the viewpoints of the householders rather than the

visitors. As one of our reviewers pointed out, the householder's stress may occur simultaneously with the visitor's pleasure, e.g. in the case of visitors having an unruly party. It would be useful to carry out a complementary piece of research to address and compare both visitors' and guests' perceptions in large households, but this was not within the scope of this study.

Let us address Question 6: 'At what point does density have negative consequences' and become crowding?' There was no quantitative answer that we could find to this question in terms of numbers of people in the house as a trigger to stress. Summary findings of the perception of stress and crowding in case study sites are set out in Table 41.

**Table 41: Perception of stress and crowding in case study sites**

	Mt Isa	Carnarvon	Inala	Swan
Total number of interviewees	21	13	17	18
Householders who had high visitor numbers in the past year	20	10	8	15
Householders who have experienced stress from visitors in the past year	9	4	7	12
Householders who did not experience stress from visitors in the past year	12 <sup>a</sup>	13	10	4
Householders who said they felt 'crowded' in the past year (overlapping category)	4 <sup>b</sup>	0	7 <sup>c</sup>	12

a Of these, three said not usually, only under exceptional circumstances.

b Relatively mild responses; two said crowded but not stressed (overlaps with the previous two categories)

c Of these, three said they were very much crowded and stressed by this; two others were crowded but understood this to be temporary; and the other two felt crowded, but not dangerously so.

Of the 21 Mount Isa interviewees (of whom 20 had experienced high visitor numbers in the past year), 9 reported experiencing stress from visitors in the past year while 12 indicated they did not experience stress from visitors in the past year. These were mutually exclusive categories. However, of those four who actually said they were crowded (bottom row in Table 41), only one fell into the 'stressed' category and three fell into the 'not stressed' category. These latter three indicated they were able to adequately manage their large households to avoid stress, so we interpreted this to mean that they were using the term 'crowding' in the sense of high density rather than stress, but they were of the view they needed larger houses.

Stressful situations were reported in Mount Isa by nine interviewees and included visitors making noise when the householder was trying to sleep for the next day's work; unwanted drunks imposing; stress from children fighting; stress from pressure to conform to tenancy regulations; stress from people looking into the yard; and stress from lack of critical repairs and maintenance.

In Inala, many people with large numbers stated that they were not crowded, however, a few did use this term and three declared this with vehement agreement, reflecting high levels of stress and dissatisfaction with their current household arrangements. One householder fell into the category of being crowded, despite a relatively low number of people in her house, reflecting the stress-based nature of

crowding. The solution that many proffered was not that people should leave the house, but they should have more room to house these people in the current social arrangement.

Similar reactions were noted in Carnarvon, where the behaviour of people within the house rather than numbers of people per se were the important factor relating to stress of householders. Of the four instances of household stress, only one of these had a clear connection with numbers of visitors. This was C.4's in-law's house and their solution was to temporarily send everyone out of the house for the afternoon. The other three instances, however, had nothing to do with visitor numbers. C.3 was stressed by the location of the house, situated within a predominantly White neighbourhood and thus more accurately a focus of neighbourhood crowding than house crowding. She and her family were more tradition and country oriented than the usual town dwellers, and she anticipated problems with the neighbours because she doubted that they would take a lenient view of her household's lifestyle. C.9 and her daughter were the only visitors in a three-bedroom house in which both the leaseholder and her husband were very ill. They were reputed not to want any visitors at all, but could not find it within themselves to say no to C.9 and her daughter. As a compromise, they insisted that like C.4, C.9 and her daughter must vacate the house every afternoon. C.11, the foster mother, did not see her problem as the numbers of children she fostered. Rather, she blamed the inadequacy of the design of the house to meet the ordinary everyday patterns of life in her household.

In Swan, there were many more instances of household stress than there were in Carnarvon. Out of 18 interviewees, 11 said that they were experiencing stress related to their housing. Four of these were directly related to the 'three strikes policy'. One woman was in the process of fighting an eviction order, the second had acquired one strike, and one young woman was housing her in-laws who had been evicted under the 'three strikes policy'. The fourth interviewee and her household had been evicted immediately following a home invasion, which they were powerless to prevent.

The remainder were experiencing housing-related stress for a variety of reasons, but only one of these cited high household resident numbers as the cause of the stress. The rest were things such as inadequate large rubbish collection, the size of the bedrooms, and other design issues.

Women were the primary householders in most houses we studied, and there was a particular stress issue attached to this. Sometimes there were male spouses who were also part of the household as co-heads, but often these persons were not recorded on the tenancy agreement so that status as a 'single parent' could be maintained. Living with this deceit is sometimes stressful and makes householders vulnerable to demands that others may place on them if they know that their tenancy could be breached for having a spouse at their house. This can restrict a householder's ability to control house resident behaviour, particularly if the householder is young.

Thus, according to our interviewees, household expansion per se was not directly leading to stress (refer to Table 41). This aligns with our model of crowding where the model speaks to factors other than housing density as being important in contributing to stress and therefore crowding in the etic sense.

### *7.7.2 Stress and large households*

Some Inala people stated that they did not feel stressed by large numbers of people in their house, and would not consider their circumstances crowded. These were often houses that were more tolerant of a more 'chaotic' way of living and who were used to such a situation. In these cases the values of sharing, intimacy and company were



more highly regarded than tidiness, order or routines. Those who valued tidiness, order and routines (self-stated), found large numbers in the house to be more stressful, but nevertheless they also felt they should fulfil their obligations to house people and 'just cope'. They coped by retreating to their bedroom or visiting other people's houses that had fewer people, or by 'growling' at people to obey their stated household rules.

Across our study sites, we generally found that young women seemed to find it more difficult to maintain their houses as they would like (but also generally their houses were less chaotic), and felt more stressed than older women household heads. These younger women considered themselves crowded, despite sometimes having fewer people in their houses than those who were not stressed and did not consider themselves crowded. Relatively few households with men as heads were interviewed so a general sense of their coping mechanisms is difficult to assess from our findings.

Vulnerability to household expansion through loss of housing amenity is another perceived way of losing control. Loss of housing amenity is a frequent problem for Indigenous people who are open to household expansion, especially those on low incomes and with strong patterns of sociality (propensity to host visiting kin and countrymen). Vulnerability to household expansion also increases the likelihood of out-of-control bills and difficulty in maintaining food in the house because of large visitor numbers. These lifestyle factors also combine to yield a negative assessment in application for a private rental house. Loss of housing amenity, resulting in an unliveable house, can cause other households to expand as the original house is abandoned. This was a factor in the Carnarvon study group, but the DoH (WA) was, fortuitously, for the first time in many years, responding to the housing amenity needs of public housing tenants. Abandonment of the house on account of loss of housing amenity was therefore no longer occurring in Carnarvon. In the Queensland case study sites we did not encounter anyone who had suffered loss of housing amenity, but it was a worrying issue for some Inala and Mount Isa people. We did not find any people who were staying with one another for this specific reason (but see Positioning Paper for remote community examples (Memmott et al. 2011)).

Severe loss of housing amenity (toilets, showers, power, cooking facilities, climate control) is thus an extreme form of stress that can result from constant large household presence and impact in a house too small or not sufficiently durable to withstand such physical wear and tear.

Two forms of stress emanating from the other people in the wider neighbourhood were recorded. While most interviewees claimed not to experience stress from their approved visitors, many experienced stress from the random infringements of drunken behaviour on the streets of the suburb of Pioneer in Mount Isa. A second neighbourhood stress problem was the case of an inter-family and inter-tribal reverberating feud. This affected a range of residents and extended to a neighbourhood crowding syndrome.

In summary, factors causing stress for our interviewee sample that contributed to and partly generated a sense of crowding included:

- unwanted behaviour of visitors and householders (e.g. drinking, fighting, children fighting)
- loss of level of control by householder
- lack of skills and support from others in the household
- economic vulnerability of the household

- status of the householder (e.g. without adult children for back-up, lacking ability to 'growl', without a respected spouse)
- poor state of repair of the house
- lack of outdoor amenities of the house, e.g. outdoor areas, large backyard, veranda spaces, sheds
- neighbourhood crowding and feuding issues
- female tenant maintaining the deceit of being single when covertly having a spouse living in the house (technically a single mother, in the eyes of the local housing department office)
- loss of housing service amenities (power, gas, water, cooking/ablution hardware)
- threats from housing managers to tenancy, e.g. in Swan, the 'three strikes policy'.

### *7.7.3 Loss of personal control as an antecedent factor that diminishes ability to cope with high numbers*

Loss of personal control does create feelings of crowding, as evidenced in all of our case study sites. Factors that contribute to feeling crowded include a householder's inability to prevent drinkers and partying visitors from entering or trashing a house or, eating all of the household's food, etc.

Loss of control over who stays is exacerbated by a lack of alternative accommodation and financial inability to pay for alternatives. This is particularly prevalent in Mount Isa and Carnarvon, where the quantity of affordable local housing stock is severely limited and currently under excessive demand. As has been shown in other studies (McKenzie et al. 2009), this situation must be reaching a crisis point in many Australian mining towns undergoing economic growth.

The loss of control over who can see into the premises also caused stress for some people, e.g. in Mount Isa people desired not to be watched in a panopticon type experiment, and many people had responded by erecting makeshift fences and screens to block people's view into their yards. In Swan and Carnarvon, Aboriginal people regularly hung window coverings. These were rarely actual curtains, and mostly people hung blankets, bedspreads, or sheets across the windows. They did this for the same reason as the Mount Isa people. They simply did not want people to be able to gaze upon them from the street or from neighbouring houses. It was considered both improper and a matter of privacy.

Loss of desired privacy, in fact, is among the most devastating manifestations of loss of control. The nature of this privacy is not personal isolation, but the capacity of the situation to permit people to be with only those whom they wish to be with from moment to moment. Certain social attributes improve the individual's capacity to command privacy of this nature. From our findings, the social attributes that helped an individual to be assigned a room allocated to them and therefore under their own control included the individual's status in terms of age and social worth, and whether or not they were young parents with very young children.

As we have seen in our case studies, householders assessed and valued these social attributes of their visiting kinfolk in various ways in order to arrive at the optimum distribution of people within living and sleeping spaces according to the householder's own understanding of the principles and rules of Aboriginal culture appertaining to these situations.

Factors of neighbourhood crowding came into play here too, as people lost control over the noise levels, violence and being near to feuding families etc. This was rarely

encountered in Inala, but was a strong factor in Mount Isa people's lives, depending on their suburb, some of which had an atmosphere of vigilance and security.

Additional loss of control that becomes cumulative can add to levels of personal stress, making people more susceptible to feeling crowded. The toll of constant deaths, particularly of people who are young or who die prematurely or preventably, unemployment, constant change and social chaos all contribute to higher than average levels of stress among the Indigenous population compared to the general population, according to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social survey (NATSISS 2008).

## **7.8 Mediating factors that prevent or alleviate stress**

Across the case study sites we encountered a range of responses to large household numbers, from a complete lack of stress, to high levels of stress and therefore crowding, according to our etic definition. The coping mechanisms for crowding address Research Question No. 7 (What strategies do Indigenous households employ to cope with crowding?) and can be discussed as mediating or antecedent factors, in our model of crowding. People's individual skills and attitudes, as well as cultural factors acted as mediating factors to reduce potential stress from high numbers. We did also note that some cultural factors acted to potentially increase stress and we discussed these in Sections 1.2. and 1.3.

A number of strategies were outlined that allowed case study householders to minimise or prevent stress occurring:

1. Sharing visitors by sending any excess visitors on to another hosting kinsperson (M.I, IN).
2. Informing visitors regretfully that the house is 'full up' without actually denying them outright (C, SW).
3. Firm administration of house rules by householder (M.I, IN).
4. Protocol not to let one's spouse manage one's own visiting relations (M.I).
5. Hunting drunks away (M.I, IN).
6. Use of visual screens on front fences and verandas (M.I).
7. Calling police or other authorities when things get out of control (M.I, IN).
8. Careful management of relationships with neighbours to avoid conflict over noise and living conditions (M.I, IN, SW).
9. Sending visitors out of the house for a period of time every day in order to give the householders some 'peace and quiet' (C).
10. Exchanging houses across the mobility range to provide schoolchildren with a holiday (C).
11. And most importantly: Employing sociospatial principles and rules in organising the sleeping spaces of large households (including those with visitors) (M.I, IN, C, SW).

We discuss these mediating mechanisms in detail here.

### **7.8.1 Firm administration of house rules**

The firm administration of house rules by householders (item 3) included control of the alcohol behaviour of both regular householders and visitors, encouraging visitors to contribute resources, and turning away unwanted drunk people.

When household size expanded with visitors, people were found to commonly use the lounge/dining room for sleeping as well as a range of external spaces on the periphery of the house and in the yard, in addition to all of the bedrooms. In using external spaces for sleeping and socialising, some visitors arrived with tents or self-nominated to sleep on a veranda in an external tin shed or carport due to their longstanding visitation expectations and practices with their host. However, if there were too many people opting to sleep inside the house, the householder may have to designate certain people to sleep outside in such spaces, most commonly single men. Some tenants' yards had been adapted and equipped with hearths for such outdoor socialising and living, similar to the norm in other bush communities and rural towns. There was a custom of people camping in their host's yard, even cooking bush game in ground ovens.

Personal expectations also played a role in the experience of stress. In addition to a person's cultural values were their personal values of how a home should be kept and what constituted acceptable behaviour. Many Indigenous people held strong Christian beliefs or had particular family values of cleanliness and orderliness that were not culturally uniform. This may affect the tolerance of large numbers of people flowing into a household, or it may determine the householder's response to such visitors, for example those who have rules about visitors not drinking in their homes, or swearing near their children.

The ability to assert these household rules effectively was a skill that seemed to develop over the life course in all study sites, and more so for people who had stable housing, over decades. The development of such agency and authority over visitors is often learned through years of hard work and struggling to assert rules within a highly connected group, while not causing family or social rifts that would jeopardise relationships.

A finding of our study then, was that older women predominated as the heads of those large households with stable tenancies and firm household rules. This presence of such matriarchs, combined with their strongly held value of accommodating needy kin, mitigates against the idea of promoting smaller-sized (e.g. 1-bedroom), more manageable houses for such elderly women, even though this option may be desirable for at least some elderly people.

### *7.8.2 Management of people within households*

Ability to cope with high-density households could be described as a component of social capital. Being able to manage large household numbers effectively can include having other places to house visitors when they arrive, such as family and friends in the same neighbourhood, having the means to afford their food and transport needs, and having the capacity to organise the household to cope with larger numbers. This sharing of visitors between households (item 1) in a local area was noted in our case study sites on Mount Isa and Inala.

This mediating factor involves demand sharing, being able to ask kin to house one's visitors, but it also involves the personal skill of the householder, to negotiate such movement, remain on good terms with many others to ensure such requests are granted. The person requesting such assistance must know which other households are viable locations for such overflow through a deep and accurate knowledge of each local household's residents, and what stresses are being felt by those householders and occupants, to make this work as an effective technique for alleviating stress caused by high numbers.

Housing amenities and infrastructure impact because in order for the house to be used in this way it must be well maintained, up to standards and therefore able to

cope with a temporary extra load. Additional loads on a house, however, do take their toll over time, both in terms of the house infrastructure, which wears out more quickly, thereby limiting the householders' ability to cope with increased numbers.

Similarly, in Swan and Carnarvon, householders sometimes informed potential visitors that there was no room at a particular house (item 2) and that they were unable to stay at the present time, possibly knowing or recommending alternative options for those potential visitors. These methods respond to and acknowledge people's need for accommodation while not denying them outright, and demonstrate that the householder may already be fulfilling prior obligations to house kin.

Community infrastructure also affects these experiences, such as women's refuges and homeless hostels that can take visitors who may have particular needs if they can no longer be housed by family or friends. These facilities were available in Mount Isa, and the process of housing department officers assisting householders to move difficult visitors into these alternate forms of accommodation seemed to be operating very effectively (Memmott & Nash 2012, forthcoming).

Other factors noted in the management of people within households including protocols about managing one's own kin rather than placing a spouse in this role (item 4). This prevented difficulties between a spouse and their in-laws and the closer relationship based on family of origin was used to smooth out difficulties that may arise. Nevertheless this could cause problems if a spouse was unable to be firm with their kin and other members of the household could feel stressed but unable to act.

More specialised management of visitors and regular residents was used in some cases, such as sending visitors away each day to relieve the stress of the householders (item 5), and sending children to kin during school holidays for a break (item 10). There may be other household-specific coping mechanisms in place that individuals derive on a needs basis.

### *7.8.3 Management of neighbourhood crowding*

People derived specific techniques to prevent neighbourhood crowding including the careful management of neighbour relationships (item 8), letting neighbours know about parties, visitors and warning them of potential disruption, as well as being friendly and cultivating good relationships of an everyday basis. Visual barriers to prevent both residents and neighbours from feeling overlooked were commonly used in Mount Isa (item 6).

Management of specific problems within neighbourhoods such as drunks intruding into yards, or becoming unruly in houses and needing to be 'hunted away' (item 5) were used by both Inala and Mount Isa people at times, in part to manage neighbourhood crowding, and in part for householders own comfort. Many householders were specific that they did not tolerate excessive drinking around their children or their visitors' children. At times householders had a policy of calling police to step in and manage such issues (item 8), aware that support is sometimes needed to alleviate difficult situations and to ensure the safety and reduce the stress of household residents.

### *7.8.4 Sociospatial principles in organising visitors, living at the limit of the rules*

An important mediating factor is the application of culturally specific sociospatial principles for arranging people within a house (item 11). Large numbers of people at high densities can be managed in Indigenous homes because there are rules pertaining to permitted and prescribed group formations in the arrangement of sleeping space. These are the rules that apply in ordinary everyday situations, but in a situation of crowding, people are living at the very limits of those rules. The rules

appertaining to group formation in households are intended to maintain proper relationships and accepted standards of behaviour and ultimately peaceful, stress-free, living. In applying these rules to the situation where numbers of residents in the house are increasing, householders must make decisions that apply the rules in innovative ways but always with the same objectives. These objectives are to uphold Aboriginal morality in order to maintain good social order, respect and avoid shame for residents.

It may appear that sheer numbers are the primary problem in the situation of crowding and it certainly is a motivating issue and constraining dimension. However, the primary problem is how to manipulate the age, gender and conjugal relationships among people. The principle which must be satisfied is that the age and sexuality of the occupants of a bedroom must not be in conflict. In a house of limited size with a large household, application of this principle will not produce arrangements that are optimal, or even equitable. Giving the single men a room all to themselves in which they will drink and carry on into the late night hours may seem an extravagant use of bedroom space. But it keeps them all in one place rather than roaming around the house, and it keeps their noise behind a closed door. Relatively speaking, the women and girls will be safer going to the toilet in the night if the toilet is located closer to the women's room, without having to pass the room for the young men. Housing density is important with regard to the adequacy of the dwelling's health hardware in relation to the numbers of people relying on it. People can tolerate cold showers and limitations on toilet facilities for some months. However, what they cannot tolerate is inappropriate combinations in sleeping space.

Thus, extreme situations of high household numbers cannot always be maintained, but the reason they cannot be maintained is not solely due to the numbers. The extreme situation of crowding is reached when the house cannot be made to accommodate the inhabitants according to the rules governing acceptable combinations of people according to age, gender and conjugal status. These are the rules that keep people safe, partly by permitting them to show proper respect for the status of kinfolk relative to one another, and avoiding combinations of people who will be shamed by the arrangements foisted upon them. If the social barriers that should operate between or among people cannot be maintained, social order breaks down and violence may break out. Inhabitants will begin to desert the house, beginning with the most vulnerable individuals; women and their children.

An example is a drinking household in Carnarvon. They were happy to take in a family of their homeless kinfolk, but because it was a drinking household, they did not maintain the security of the house. It was an 'open', or permeable house, that is, one which people seemed to be able to enter and wander the house freely. The family of homeless kinfolk included adolescent girls and they found this situation intolerable. They felt their safety was threatened because it was mainly adolescent boys and men who were wandering the house freely, with no announcement and no restriction on which rooms might be off limits. This situation had the effect of breaking the visiting family up. The girls left their parents and went to stay with other kinfolk in the town. Their mother was quite upset by this, but as she pointed out, this was not her house. She could not make the rules. Thus it is not the high numbers of residents per se, but the stress induced by the breakdown of the rules governing everyday life in the household. This is a situation that clearly cannot be maintained. Note that the concept of a 'permeable house' can therefore involve two sub-categories: one in which despite high degrees of access, behavioural rules are maintained, and one in which such rules are not vigorously maintained as in the above case.

### 7.8.5 *Discerning rules from principles in managing sleeping space*

Collectively, we found a number of different allocations of sleeping space in the homes of our interviewees, and indications of stress when allocations were inappropriate (Chapters 3–6). The problem was to develop a means whereby we could transform these allocations from simple lists to a systematic understanding of how our Aboriginal interviewees decided upon these particular arrangements at particular times, in particular circumstances.

As noted in Chapter 1, to this end a projective data gathering technique was carried out in Carnarvon, which permitted householders to show the researcher dynamically how people were allocated sleeping spaces. This was a simple process of providing an outline floor plan of the dwelling and providing the householder with game pieces, such as chess or checkers pieces, to represent individuals needing sleeping space. By this means, the researcher could forensically question the actual process of making these decisions.

The basic principle of allocating sleeping space in an Aboriginal household is that the age, gender and status of the inhabitants of the space must not be in conflict. However, this is a very broad statement and might reasonably be said of a number of societies. Our task was to discover the particular Aboriginal understandings of this principle. The technique proved very successful.

In the Aboriginal setting, in circumstances of crowding in which a conventional three to four-bedroom house must be made to accommodate 20 or more people, there must be ways of putting people together in shared sleeping space in ways that do not wholly overset Aboriginal notions of propriety. In order for social behaviour to remain consistent with the overarching principle guiding propriety, the following rules were discerned in the course of the data gathering technique.

- Boys and girls who are judged to be past being little kids may not share the same bed, but—if they are prepubescent and young adolescent they may share a room.
- No one excepting quite young children may share a room with a conjugal couple who were regarded as being completely adult.
- Correspondingly, a father and his daughter may not share a bedroom once his daughter is judged to be ‘getting big’, or acquiring the socially recognised sexual features of femininity.
- Not every room in the house will necessarily be used to accommodate the excessive numbers of kinfolk seeking a place to stay.
- A young mother and her children, or a young couple who are members of the usual household, and who regularly contribute to the running costs of the house will not necessarily be made to take in visitors.
- In contrast, an elderly couple will very likely take some of the younger grandchildren in to sleep with them.

There are differences among cultural groups regarding the sharing of sleeping space among opposite gender adolescents and adults. For example, among Nyungar people in Swan it was found:

- Sibling status negates the need to separate adult and older adolescent individuals.
- A partnered woman may be able to share sleeping space with her brother or male cousins, but she can never share sleeping space with her husband’s brothers or male cousins.

- A man who is with his partner may share sleeping space with his partner's sisters and female cousins.

However, among inland groups from the Carnarvon hinterland, opposite gender adolescent and adult kinfolk may never share sleeping space. It is always the case that visiting couples ought to be given privatised sleeping space, but this is not always possible.

There is a disassociation between the role of a parent and the role of conjugal partner. This disassociation plays a part in the restrictions on what social categories of kin may share sleeping space. Among Nyungar people, in the case of the young married couple, the wife's sisters and cousin-sisters may share the room if they are similar in age or younger than the wife.

Where possible, the householder (or lead tenant, head tenant, boss for place) will give a couple a room of their own and, in these circumstances, younger persons must give way to older. Therefore, if the householder has two of her children and their spouses living with her and only one room is available, the older of her children and his/her partner will get the room on their own. The best offer that the younger couple and their children may get is to make up their bed in the lounge room every night. Provided this is a situation in which no-one else is required to sleep in the lounge room on a regular basis, the younger couple may well accept this situation. However, if the house becomes severely crowded, then the older adolescent boys and girls will be sleeping in the lounge-dining room.

There are three emotional concepts that are paramount in analysing situations of household crowding and they are respect, shame and jealousy. A couple needs others to respect the relationship between them. An important element in garnering this respect is to avoid situations that might call their partnership into question. The ways in which they behave holds meaning for others observing their partnership.

The response to the violation of respect is shame, and one response to shame is jealousy. This is a very complicated phenomenon, as outlined in our Positioning Paper, and it has to do with the nature of social control and personal agency in Aboriginal society, and if people fail to show proper respect for one another, the situation may cascade into serious conflict (Memmott et al. 2011, pp.38–39). Children can, unwittingly, be the instigators of these situations. In situations of crowding, children can come into conflict with one another, because they make each other angry, sometimes because they take each other's belongings and sometimes because they cannot resist teasing each other. Parents will be drawn into these conflicts, seeking to maintain order and fairness among the children and this may draw other adults of the crowded house into disagreement with each other as to what exactly has happened and what should have happened. This is probably the most common source of conflict in a crowded house.

By comparison, without using this projective technique that was piloted in Carnarvon, the findings from Queensland in our study are not so refined and nuanced. Nevertheless, the principles elicited in other centres, generally conform to the structural principles outlined above. For example, to reiterate the rules as they were recorded in Mount Isa: First the rule of division by gender and generation prescribed that single visitors, whether children or adults were integrated with other single people in the household and divided into different spaces by gender. Second, a key rule of prioritisation was that visiting elderly people, mothers with babies and children received priority to stay inside the house; while others may be relegated to stay outside in the yard, on verandas, in carports or garden sheds when the numbers were too high. A sub-rule of the above prioritisation rule was that visiting young couples



with a baby or infant(s) were given their own room. A further recurring rule was that the boys of the household, who normally occupied their own room, were moved out to the lounge so that adult visitors could take the boys' room. Third, two diametrically opposed rules emerged concerning the sleeping place of the head householders. Several such persons (all single householders) said they vacated their bedrooms for visitors and slept on the lounge room couch, whereas other householders said they retained the master bedroom exclusively for self (and partner if relevant), irrespective of visitor needs or demands.

The structure of the rule-driven nature of Aboriginal household management does not exist as a world apart from the rest of Aboriginal belief systems. Rather the various facets, or aspects of Aboriginal life are inter-dependent and the evidence for this may be seen in the ways in which principles for one feature of Aboriginal life derive from another. We may refer to such a source principle as a meta-principle. The most powerful motivating principle of Aboriginal life is the injunction that rights and obligations are reciprocal and concurrent. This is often put as 'Aboriginal people look after one another'. While this may seem a simple and common sense statement, the fact that it lies at the heart of motivation for social behaviour is what makes it a meta-principle, that is, an over-arching principle from which many other things derive. For example, it is often stated that oldest looks after youngest and youngest obeys oldest. This principle is one articulation of the meta-principle regarding reciprocal rights and obligations. In the anthropological literature this has been expressed as 'demand sharing'. However, there is also embedded here the value of respect for older people.

The rules that derive from principles are far easier for people to state initially. For example, boys and girls who are close kin, who are judged to be past being little kids, may not share the same bed, but if they are prepubescent and young adolescent they may share a room. To have them share a bed would be inappropriate, calling forth a sexual theme that should not exist between these kinfolk. Another rule is that a man who arrives with his partner and children must be given a room on their own, but a man who arrives with his children but without his partner can quite appropriately be given sleeping space in the lounge room. He can even share this sleeping space with his adolescent sister, although they would likely sleep on opposite sides of the room.

#### *7.8.6 Final comment on Aboriginal kinship and household rules*

Although we clearly generated significant findings on kin-based rules as they apply to the dynamics of large households at our study sites, there is no simple way to generate a set of universal rules on this behaviour for all of Indigenous Australia. Unravelling traditional kinship systems across the continent as a topic engaged many early and mid-20th century anthropologists who demonstrated immense diversity and complexity across different regions. Furthermore all Indigenous groups in Australia have since undergone different processes of cultural change, both qualitatively and quantitatively (through varying time depths), and these processes have transformed the traditional kinship systems in different ways. (This whole topic is one obviously worthy of more empirical research.)

### **7.9 A model of Indigenous crowding for Aboriginal Australia**

One of the earlier questions that was asked was: 'Do we need to revise or refine the Gifford Model of crowding for Aboriginal Australia?' The case study findings, combined with existing understandings derived from the literature make it possible to proffer a preliminary model of Indigenous crowding in Australia. We endorse Gifford's model of crowding as stress-based, and can offer further specific factors that come into play as what he terms 'antecedent' and 'mediating' factors that affect the levels of stress actually felt by residents. As we have discussed, these include structural and

cultural factors as antecedent, driving crowding; and cultural, personal and social mechanisms for mediating, coping with large numbers to reduce stress and therefore crowding. These antecedent and mediating factors are transactional in nature. At times they act to increase crowding; at times they act to alleviate it.

It is important to note that structural factors beyond that of the house, the individual and their culture are influential. The availability or scarcity of housing, the economic wealth and social capital of the surrounding community and the management strategy of housing providers or landlords also have a large influence on the generation and perceptions of crowding and the capacity to cope with high-density situations.

Some eleven mediating factors as employed by Aboriginal householders in our survey were elicited earlier. The most critical of these appeared to be:

- firm administration of house rules by the householder
- sharing visitors among kin
- sociospatial principles and rules in organising the sleeping spaces of large households, as discussed above.

## **7.10 Differences between the four case studies, metropolitan versus regional cities**

Question 2 of our research questions asked: 'How do the dimensions of crowding in Indigenous households vary by geography?'

We have attempted to tease out differences between metropolitan sites and regional centre sites, to better understand the factors that cause crowding. Among the most obvious differences between the Western Australian field sites were the relative proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in the two locations. In Carnarvon, the Aboriginal population has been at least 19 per cent for many years (Chapter 2). In Swan, the Aboriginal population of Swan was 2.7 per cent of the total population at the 2006 Census, and again, has been at this level for some years. This disparity between proportions of the population can make an important difference between the attitudes of non-Indigenous households toward their Indigenous neighbours. In general, it appeared that there was more understanding of Aboriginal households in Carnarvon and thus fewer complaints to the local office of the DoH (WA).

Similarly in Queensland, the regional centre of Mount Isa had a much higher Indigenous population of 16.6 per cent (and rising steadily over the past 10 years or more) compared to 7.3 per cent and fairly stable in Inala. Contrary however to the Western Australian situation, in Mount Isa there seemed to be greater issues of neighbourhood crowding and intervention from the DoH compared to Inala, where people seemed generally happier with their neighbours and the housing arrangements. The strength of the Indigenous community in Inala, having a higher percentage of population compared to the Swan situation, may make people feel more secure in their housing and may also provide more households among which kin can be spread, reducing crowding pressure on householders. Inala's high level of public housing overall may also reduce stress induced by neighbours: in Inala 32.3 per cent of households are in public housing (ABS 2007b) compared to 4.4 per cent in Swan (ABS 2007d).

Within the regional centres of Carnarvon and Mount Isa, people's kin and social groups were more proximate; they were more able to walk to their commonly visited households. One possible negative consequence of such density at the neighbourhood scale is neighbourhood crowding, which was discussed by the Mount

Isa interviewees in Pioneer, both in terms of the current and recent situation and also experiences in the past. Carnarvon interviewees did not discuss such neighbourhood crowding issues as being currently problematic, but had experienced such situations in the past.

In the metropolitan cities there seemed to be more intra-community mobility among Indigenous households. This may be caused by the more distributed nature of living within a much more intercultural neighbourhood than in the regional centres, where Indigenous populations were similar in numbers, but more densely concentrated in particular suburbs. In Inala and Swan, people needed to travel more within their community to see their kin and social groups. Nevertheless, an accurate and detailed knowledge of who was staying within each household and of the extended kin network was still known in these areas, helping people to spread kin among other's houses, and allowing for the customary demand sharing, visiting and immersive sociality.

This disparity in proportion of the population also appeared to make a difference between attitudes toward the experience of crowding in the two field sites. Household population density mattered in Swan in a way that it did not in Carnarvon. It seemed that it was possible for Carnarvon people to predict, in general terms, how long a crowding density situation would last whereas in Swan, this was more difficult due partly to the insecurity arising from the 'three strikes' policy. In Carnarvon there were very few households where crowding density at high levels lasted more than a month, whereas in Swan there were people who had been living at very high densities for some years.

Different kinds of crowding stress seem to be shown in these contrasting situations. In Mount Isa with its high density of Indigenous people in public housing in the suburb of Pioneer, neighbourhood crowding caused by other Indigenous people becomes an important stressor. In Swan, however, low levels of Indigenous population within a largely private rental and freehold suburb can cause stress as people feel relatively vulnerable to non-Indigenous neighbour's complaints under the Western Australian 'three strikes' policy. Mount Isa residents' levels of stress and crowding may be exacerbated at the present time by a severe housing shortage and high rental costs associated with the current mining boom.

The material wealth of people in Inala seemed to be greater than in Mount Isa, but a strong ethic of sharing was still evident. In Inala more people seemed to be in households where at least one person was working, and demand sharing resulted in a greater overall financial stability than seemed to be the case for Mount Isa people. Greater access to employment opportunities, education and other services provided in metropolitan areas would be one likely cause of such differences. This resulted in less stress as households did not struggle to cater for their visitors as much and often visitors also had a greater ability to move to other households if this need arose.

Interviewees in all field sites found a certain amount of stress that had little or nothing to do with numbers. Health was an important factor in people's levels of stress, particularly regarding caring for the elderly. In Swan, age was a worry in another way as people who had been living as visitors in the homes of their kin for at least a decade understandably despaired of ever having a home of their own. They saw themselves growing older with a self-perceived lower standard of health than their householder kin. In regard to household stress in Swan, this was an important factor for those experiencing secondary homelessness directly and for their kin who worried deeply on their behalf that these secondary homeless people had never had a home of their own.

There are some distinct differences in the way crowding is managed between metropolitan sites and regional centres. In Carnarvon and Mount Isa, there were support services that were put in place when the field officers of the local housing department office perceived a household becoming stressed in a variety of ways including in terms of numbers, difficulties in living in town as opposed to bush lifestyle, unwanted visitors who were disrupting the household and putting it in danger of disbanding and so forth. In Swan, there was no such support from the housing department and limited support of this kind in Inala. The most common response reported in these situations was the commencement of visits from the Department of Child Protection which, given the history of the Stolen Generations, was not perceived as support but as a threat that children were in danger of being removed from the care of their parents.

The discussed antecedent factors of an overall housing shortage for Indigenous people in both metropolitan and regional areas, continual stress caused by premature death of family and friends, and relatively high levels of unemployment contributed to stress and crowding in all sites.

### **7.11 Further factors influencing government perceptions of Indigenous crowding**

As discussed by us and additional authors in a forthcoming publication (Memmott et al. 2012 forthcoming), additional factors that are imperative in understanding current Indigenous crowding measurement are the way in which household numbers of residents are counted and recorded by government in instruments like the five-yearly National Census or the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS 2008). To summarise the argument we make there, these survey instruments do not take into account the culturally and economically driven mobility within and between Indigenous households and communities, do not currently record visitors who stay less than six months, and are poorly resourced to record homeless people or those who live in improvised or self-built dwellings.

The relationship between homelessness and crowding is thus not well understood at a quantitative and statistical level, despite well-known definitions of homelessness that include 'couch surfing and serial visitation as forms of secondary homelessness'. While changes to these survey instruments are expensive and would not capture interstitial data, their reform and culturally appropriate revision would seem imperative. Additional means of obtaining fine-grained data to ascertain multiple typical patterns of the interlinked issues of mobility, homelessness and crowding are needed, in order to produce a more holistic understanding.

## 8 POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

### 8.1 National policy implications for crowding definition

In the social sciences, crowding models have employed a stress-based definition of crowding for at least 40 years. In contrast, Australian policy-makers, particularly in Indigenous housing, have consistently employed density models of crowding (usually persons per bedroom), including during the policy period of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Such models have in turn dictated the distribution of Commonwealth housing funds to Aboriginal communities under the Commonwealth Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP) in the 1990s and early 2000s. When the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) commenced in 2008, the reduction of crowding was a primary policy goal of this program also, driven largely by family violence and child abuse reports, particularly the *little children are sacred* report by the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, (Northern Territory Government 2007). However, it has been argued herein that without knowledge of the Aboriginal constructs of crowding and the specific values and rules that, if broken, can generate stress and loss of control, it is not possible to have an accurate understanding of crowding. Furthermore, policy-makers cannot readily guarantee the accuracy, efficacy or validity of their crowding measures because of known issues of undercounting in the Census and NATSISS (Memmott et al. forthcoming 2012b) and a reliance on density measures that do not account for stress as a factor in crowding. Nevertheless media statements from the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) continue to emphasise the importance of reducing Aboriginal household crowding to increase child safety (ABC News online 2011).

Sanders (2008) discusses the dominant approaches to Indigenous policy issues in Australia over the last 40 years which have alternated between striving for equality on the one hand, and the recognition of difference on the other. Elsewhere, one of the current authors (Memmott 1990) has earlier described these policy approaches as mainstreaming versus culturally targeted service delivery respectively. Sanders argues that the concept of equality has been favoured in recent mainstreaming policy trends, but reminds us that social justice can at times be better achieved through the recognition of the different needs of Aboriginal groups. Recognition of different needs on the grounds of 'race' or culture is better aligned with legal principles of avoiding 'indirect discrimination' (Memmott 1990). Sanders argues that a focus on nationwide statistical analysis of Indigenous people's status in, for example, housing, should be complemented with a more specific qualitative approach to Indigenous housing needs (Sanders 2008, pp.96–97). In our view, this would include a definition in policy and a measure of crowding that encompasses relevant Indigenous cultural practices and values.

In Australia, the density model of determining crowding using the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) is currently widely used, which employs bedroom density to determine the residential capacity of a house. The CNOS is also used in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), one of the primary tools employed by Australian governments in determining and assessing Aboriginal household crowding problems. The CNOS rules dictate that children over the age of five of different genders should not share a bedroom. The CNOS is rarely questioned in terms of validity, although the current authors and others did undertake a critique of its use in NATSISS (Memmott et al. forthcoming 2012b) and others have done so over the decades (Jones 1991).

**Table 42: Acceptable bedroom occupants as defined by the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS)**

Canadian National Occupancy Standard Criteria	Bedroom Requirements
<b>General</b>	No more than two people per bedroom
<b>Gender &amp; Age</b>	Children aged under five, of the same or different genders can share a bedroom. Children aged over five and under 18, of the same gender, can share a bedroom. Children aged over five, of different genders should not share a bedroom.
<b>Relationship Status &amp; Age</b>	Couples and their children should not share a bedroom. A household of one unattached individual may occupy a bed-sit. Single household members, aged over 18, should have their own bedroom.

Source: Memmott et al. 2012, Table 2, p.9

The use of the CNOS occurs despite the impact of known Indigenous-specific cultural and behavioural factors such as high residential mobility, cultural obligations to accommodate kin and other visitors, avoidance behaviours that determine the suitability of particular sleeping and other living arrangements based on complex kin relationships, the strong emotional impact of household (or public) shaming for the violation of such sociospatial rules, and preference for outdoor living among some groups. These have all been confirmed as antecedent factors to crowding in our current case studies. The basis of the CNOS is that only gender and age determine who can share a bedroom and these metric rules have a basis not in Indigenous cultures but appear to be derived from assumed Anglo norms of privacy and individuality.

Successive studies have shown that in Aboriginal cultures, the age limit at which children of mixed genders sharing bedrooms is higher than it is in White Australian society (Hamilton 1981; Burbank 1988; Birdsall 1990; Musharbash 2008; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010). There have therefore been analyses available for many years describing Aboriginal sleeping arrangements that contradict the housing design assumptions on household structure, and hence the conceptions of crowding and appropriate sleeping arrangements. It is apparent that these have not been taken into account in planning and policy on Aboriginal housing. It should be noted that this is not always the fault of departments of housing. State and federal housing ministers may occasionally issue directives that leave no time or opportunity for state departments to develop or implement innovative housing design (e.g. Marmion 2010).

In summary, we recommend that Australian Government policy on house crowding shift to recognise a combined density and stress model of crowding, and for the Indigenous population that culturally-specific antecedent and mediating factors be seen as integral to such a model.

## **8.2 The Canadian National Occupancy Standard and the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Social Survey**

Use of the Canadian National Occupancy Standard as a measure of 'crowding' is therefore problematic for government. Despite critiques of CNOS and density measures in general, few alternatives have been proposed.

A key problem then as we have argued elsewhere (Memmott et al. 2012) is that surveys such as the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, which rely on CNOS are, at best, a snapshot of household sizes and profiles and probably offer a blurred vision caused by the inaccurate reporting of visitors. NATSISS does not readily capture the flows of people in and out of households, the periodic formation of large Indigenous households and the various stress-generating pressures that fall on Indigenous households, including factors that are outside householder's immediate control such as the chronic shortage of housing for Indigenous people, high Indigenous unemployment, the early average age of death for Indigenous people, and the prevalence of single parent households. These deficiencies mitigate against an accurate modelling of crowding even though government departments and other agencies persist in extrapolating findings on crowding from the NATSISS data. The complexity we have demonstrated in the antecedent factors, perception, mediating coping mechanisms and culturally-specific drivers of house crowding, makes a survey-based density measure as a stand-alone model of crowding reasonably inaccurate and only partially helpful.

Scaling up or extrapolating NATSISS survey results may also mask local contextual factors, and caution is therefore counselled in the use of NATSISS or Census findings to direct government program expenditure that aims to redress housing shortages. It may be that richer data or more finely-tuned measures are required, despite the potential cost or complexity of gaining such information. In our view, NATSISS findings are better used as a first step to decision-making only, to be followed with more in-depth community surveys or consultation prior to expenditure decisions. We argue that this would produce more targeted and better value outcomes, which relate to a more accurate account of community need. Just as health assessments cannot be made via a simple survey questionnaire, separate from patient diagnoses by medical practitioners, similarly the complexity of house crowding requires a more in-depth and nuanced 'diagnosis'. We have confirmed in this study that crowding exists, that in many cases it is severe, and certainly seems to be more widespread than NATSISS and Census would imply, but the cultural and behavioural nature of the causes of crowding and possible solutions require more investigations than the NATSISS survey data can currently provide. (Memmott et al. 2012)

The findings from this current study support our previous recommendations for improving understandings of Indigenous crowding in association with the NATSISS survey. In addition to improving the NATSISS survey and supplementing it with context-rich and qualitative data, we have made four suggestions (Memmott et al. 2012) on additional research that should be encouraged to obtain complementary findings for those of the NATSISS survey:

- In general, combined quantitative and qualitative methods should be developed and employed to better contextualise and model crowding and spatial needs in Indigenous households.
- More longitudinal case studies should be undertaken so as to understand household dynamics; these to be separate studies to NATSISS, but to complement the NATSISS findings.

- An effective technique needs to be developed to capture flows of people in and out of households.
- More research is needed on the nature of the relationships between core and temporary household members, for example is 'visitor' an appropriate term?

What does it mean to Aboriginal people who are serial or repeated dwellers in a home, do they identify with such a term? We suspect Aboriginal householders never call visiting kin 'visitors', they are all just family.

Finally, there is a need for a new metric to assess Indigenous households and whether they are crowded. A key design issue for such a metric would be the level of complexity and the cost (time involved) of using it. Alternatively, we suggest that a statistical algorithm technique be developed to incorporate a 'visitor factor' and/or a 'household mobility factor' into the NATSISS data weighting process (Memmott et al. 2012)

### **8.3 Housing management policy**

In our view, the prescribed household size in the tenancy agreement needs to be managed with a degree of administrative flexibility dependant on a range of factors, including:

- Availability of spare housing stock in local area and accessibility by Indigenous families to renting such stock (given place-based attachments & the importance of the proximity of living near kin for some people).
- Availability of emergency accommodation facilities for homeless people or people causing crowding in households.
- Availability of TAFE (or similar) courses on housekeeping skills and budgeting, in which householders could enrol.
- Circumstances of large household formation—whether controlled by the householder or not (i.e. whether creating stress or not).
- Neighbourhood crowding pressures on tenancies.

In the absence of a simple metric assessment of crowding, it is recommended that local Department of Housing Offices take full advantage of the skills and capacities of their Indigenous staff who are able to identify the presence among their Indigenous clients of the types of crowding stresses outlined in this report, and to provide some degree of preferential service support for such clients.

Notwithstanding the desirability of flexible support for tenants whose needs are complex and can include the desire for large households, a complementary strategy of moving out visitors who are causing household stress to alternative emergency accommodation, for example Mount Isa's Jimalya Topsy Harry centre. An approach based in understanding and meeting householder and resident needs, rather than the application of inflexible rules is required.

This approach is of course a problem if alternative options such as emergency accommodation are not available. A further recommendation of our report is that regional towns and metropolitan suburbs with substantial Indigenous populations be provided with facilities such as emergency accommodation. To this end we recommend that further research and evaluation of emergency accommodation facilities be undertaken, and good practice facilities be publicised as models for future centres such as the Jumalya Topsy Harry Centre in Mount Isa (Memmott & Nash 2012).



The need for administrative flexibility is contradicted in Western Australia by the recently revised 'three strikes policy'. The content of the policy has already been provided (Section 2.4.3), but it should be emphasised that this policy provides little scope for ameliorative measures and currently has the status of the dominant method through which Indigenous housing management personnel may respond to offensive behaviour emanating from Aboriginal households. Regardless of what the reality of the situation may be, Aboriginal people interviewed in Swan believe that the policy is being deliberately used by racist neighbours to rid the neighbourhood of any Aboriginal presence. It is not difficult to understand why they should believe this, and there is no evidence to show that it does not happen. This belief functions to increase the anxiety with which Aboriginal householders regard their White Australian neighbours. To put it briefly, the 'three strikes policy' is a deleterious influence on race relations in the metropolitan region. Another consideration is the effect of the policy on the DoH (WA) itself. Since the changes in the policy were put in place, the DoH (WA) has had to develop a new department that deals wholly and solely with the assessment of police reports and the complaints of neighbours and providing advice on each report or complaint as to whether it is sustainable or not. This must surely reduce the DoH (WA)'s capacity to act in other, more fruitful areas of housing management and policy development which would go to improving the sustainability of Aboriginal public housing tenancies. The authors would recommend that a socio-economic impact assessment occur of the 'three strikes policy'.

The policy of preventing those from renting public housing who earn above a certain maximum wage should also be revised and refined for Indigenous households. Recognition is necessary that certain more financially wealthy and stable households provide valuable spill-over accommodation and social capital in areas that have limited access to support people. Such stable hub households need to be supported within more flexible policy formulations. Penalising households that have additional social capacity to accommodate others has the effect of exacerbating neighbourhood crowding issues.

Ideally, there should be a managerial process of reassignment of a transformed household to a more suitably sized house as the children grow older and more are born. This is the stated intention of the CNOS and the POS. However, in our study sites, this seems to happen only sometimes, usually because there are few larger houses in the proximity of the existing house where children may be established in school, and where kinship networks have become important to the family. Once a family are housed it is only with severe crowding noted, that they are able to establish a case of extreme need which is required to be allocated a larger house. In fact, what might often happen is that no housing reassignment occurs and the family must find ways to manage the situation within the same structure that was appropriate when the children were young. We therefore recommend the construction of new stock (or extension of existing stock) to ensure there are adequate large houses (five, six-bedroom) in Aboriginal neighbourhoods.

## **8.4 Homelessness policy**

By definition, secondary homelessness includes crowded households<sup>15</sup>. However, as discussed above, measurement of this phenomenon in Australia usually employs a density formula (CNOS). More accurate measurement would require a stress-based definition of crowding. This would include the 'at risk of homelessness' category definition by Memmott et al. (2004) with its sub-categories of 'experiencing crowding'

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<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the newly revised definition paper on homelessness by the Australian Bureau of Statistics of September 2012 (ABS 2012) was released too late to inform the current analysis

and 'dysfunctionally mobile persons'. The latter sub-category involves a stress-based definition of crowding, whereas 'dysfunctionally mobile persons' are those 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 for example violence, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of safety or security in a social sense, personality or identity crisis, lack of emotional support and security.

There is also a matter of social justice involved in this matter. As we have pointed out several times in this and other reports (e.g. Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010) there are few other options for the homeless. In Aboriginal society, the cultural imperative to house one's homeless kinfolk provides Aboriginal people with a safety net that is largely unavailable in Anglo-Celtic Australian society. The situation is not that no-one other than Aboriginal people may be prepared to take in their homeless kinfolk. Rather, Aboriginal culture is unique in that in many communities it is the norm to provide or find shelter for kin when asked. This provides an important public service in that the numbers of homeless people living rough would increase significantly if this systematic approach were not taken in Aboriginal society. This is the primary issue involved in the 'three strikes policy'. It discourages Aboriginal householders from taking in their homeless kinfolk. The effect of this on homeless levels in Western Australia remains to be objectively assessed.

As we have noted, there are Aboriginal people who have never had a house and who have been living with their housed kinfolk all their lives. There are no figures on this, but if there were, it would be of use to all Australian governments (including DoH (WA)) in gauging housing needs. In summary, we recommend that governments develop improved models of Indigenous crowding to better inform identification and measurement of secondary homelessness.

## **8.5 Child welfare and protection policy**

Programs and funding that offer women the opportunity to increase their agency and autonomy would seem to reduce both crowding and children's exposure to abuse or dysfunction. Financial vulnerability and reliance on additional people in the house to make ends meet causes many women household heads to feel stressed and crowded. It also exposes children to living with people that their parents may not choose to if more access to housing was available in the community generally. Nevertheless (as we have discussed) the use of culturally-determined sleeping principles places children in the safest arrangements possible. Improved access to support for those experiencing domestic violence, financial instability and other traumatic life events would assist in reducing stress and crowding.

As a corollary to this, support for alcohol and substance abusers to become more functional, and support for those who perpetrate violence to reform their behaviour would reduce both household stress and crowding, and neighbourhood crowding.<sup>16</sup>

The child welfare and protection system that operates within Aboriginal society is driven by the power and authority of the grandmothers, mothers and aunties of the current generation of adults (e.g. Hammill 2001). Most social workers and housing officers who work directly with Aboriginal communities are well aware of this, and some come to depend on the mothers and aunties for information on particular children, young mothers who are not coping and also households that are not coping. Whether or not these women of authority cooperate with the social workers and

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<sup>16</sup> For example, a recently documented good practice facility to manage and transit people from river-dwelling substance abuse into less harmful drinking practices and house-based domiciliary practices, is that of Topsy Harry Jimaylya Centre in Mt Isa (Memmott & Nash 2012)

housing officers depends partly on how they judge the trustworthiness and competence of the individual. In our fieldwork experience, they do not cooperate if their cooperation results in the removal of a child from the extended family or the eviction of a household. They also are not likely to cooperate if their cooperation does not result in improvement of the living conditions of the extended family.

The sleeping group principles described earlier can reduce the development of environments or situations that are dangerous to children, adolescent girls and their mothers. The description of the permeable household in Carnarvon is an example of the development of a situation that was dangerous to the adolescent girls of the visiting family. The mother's problem was that because this was not her own home, she could not 'make the rules' and this is a common complaint from people who must live with their relations. The chronic housing shortage can exacerbate in this way, the proper applications of the rules in Aboriginal society. It must be remembered that dangerous situations such as this are not the result of household numbers and a particular density threshold being crossed. They are the result of a failure to observe, apply and effectively maintain the rules of Aboriginal culture regarding the proper organisation of people into sleeping groups, and to protect the integrity of the household.

We therefore recommend that both child welfare and housing authorities encourage Indigenous tenants of households with children to discuss and confirm their preferred culturally-based rules for sleeping group behaviours and where possible provide support for those tenants in implementing such.

## **8.6 House design and crowding**

The requests from interviewees for physical improvements to cope with crowding included additional ablution facilities so that several people can bathe and toilet simultaneously; the need for regular repairs and maintenance in general, and more accommodation in some centres (especially Mount Isa), including hostels and five-bedroom houses.

The design of state government housing typically caters for a small nuclear family within an Anglo-Celtic Australian model. Most houses have three bedrooms, one bathroom and a single living area. Outdoor living areas are randomly available as a bonus to lucky householders, as are garden sheds, carports, fenced yards and other useful features. Where additional bedrooms are supplied, as in the case of so-called disability houses, that are sometimes four, and sometimes five bedrooms, these include a second bathroom, but this is often a shared en-suite with a large bedroom for the incapacitated member of the household, and does not include a bath suitable for small children.

Census data states that Indigenous families tend to be larger and Indigenous women have on average more children than their non-Indigenous counterparts (ABS 2011). The Indigenous population is rapidly growing and multi-generation households are common, especially as Indigenous teenage women are six times more likely to become mothers and the highest birth rate for Indigenous women is among the 20–24-year-old age groups, who in our case studies often still live in their family of origin. These larger nuclear families and the desire to live in an extended family with frequent visitors are not catered to by existing state housing infrastructure. This is a problem not unique to Indigenous families, as other cultural groups who heavily use state housing may also have large families or frequent visitors (e.g. Maori, Polynesian, Sudanese). Standards of housing for large families in the wider community are for much larger and better-appointed houses than state housing offers. Nevertheless, as the recent SIHIP housing roll-out demonstrated in the Northern Territory (Davidson et

al. 2011, pp.99–100), there was a final focus on ‘numbers of houses provided’ restricted to an average unit cost (\$450 000) resulting in a predominance of three-bedroom houses, rather than the ‘number-of-people-housed’ approach that was mooted initially. Larger, more flexible houses that cater for large families and visitors would offer the opportunity of fulfilling cultural obligations to house visitors, as well as having adequate infrastructure to do so.

Like cultural factors, house infrastructure factors can alleviate some feelings of crowding, through changes to existing housing stock to provide carports and decks, giving additional spaces for large gatherings, or outdoor sleeping in summer months. Design for larger households should allow for at least two general-purpose internal living spaces. Additional storage in the form of sheds also relieves the internal areas of the house from having to store items that cannot fit due to increased household numbers. Solutions to the problem of storage vary widely. Using green garbage bags and lining them up against the walls was the most common solution, but we also spoke to householders who had given up one bedroom for storage and made the lounge room into a bedroom. Another problem is where to store the mattresses and bedding for visitors. The only solution we saw to this problem was stacking them up along the walls.

**Figure 22: Storage of mattress against the wall, for use by visiting kin in a household in Swan**



Fencing of back yards is a constant request from those public housing tenants who lack such fencing. One reason for wanting this is to prevent strangers from taking ‘shortcuts’ across the back yards. In places where there is a problem with drug and alcohol abuse, the concern is the security of the house from theft and also, the safety of the household. Generally speaking, adequate fencing also keeps children inside and prevents feelings of constant surveillance and the incursion of unwanted visitors.

Practical low-cost design standards need to be developed by state housing offices to suit local circumstances.

Maintenance and upgrading of households that are known to have larger numbers should be moved to a different cycle, hence acknowledging the disproportionate wear and tear load that they take.

Clearly then, a recommendation of our findings is for governments to provide more appropriately designed housing and yard facilities for large Indigenous households using the guidelines set out above and described elsewhere (e.g. Long et al. 2007, pp.45–46); as well as more appropriate neighbourhood planning (e.g. see Davidson et al. 2011, p.100 on the SIHIP ‘cluster housing’ concept) and better articulation of repairs and maintenance for large households.

## **8.7 Indigenous home-ownership policies**

A key finding with respect to housing management policy is the need for more local and regional flexibility within overall jurisdictional policies in response to the range of drivers of Indigenous large household formation and crowding.

Available housing stock for Indigenous people could be increased and thereby reduce crowding by introducing more accessible and flexible forms of home-ownership processes in urban centres (see policy recommendations in Moran et al. 2002; Svaza & Moran 2008; Memmott et al. 2009). One aspect of this could be increasing the capacity of people to write-off previous bad credit ratings. Many people develop a poor credit history when young and find this very difficult to ‘shake’ in later life when they may contemplate home ownership and have become financially more stable. Obviously this needs to be undertaken with a realistic view of people’s capacity to pay and willingness to commit to long-term home ownership goals. Alternative models of home ownership are required for Indigenous people; alternative forms of funding for those who do not fit the typical Western model of life-path.

## **8.8 Summary on the policy impact of the research**

Our findings on the Aboriginal construct of ‘crowding’ clearly have government policy implications not only on how Indigenous crowding is defined and its method of data collection and analysis by the ABS, but also for policies pertaining to Indigenous housing design, housing management, home ownership, homelessness, and child welfare and protection.

The specific recommendations embedded in our Chapter 8 discussion can be summarised as follows:

1. Australian Government policy on house crowding shifts to recognise a combined density and stress model of crowding, and for the Indigenous population that culturally-specific antecedent and mediating factors be seen as integral to such a model.
2. Government housing policies require a definition and a measure of crowding that encompass relevant Indigenous cultural practices and values. (In particular, the deep obligations of many, both to accommodate needy kin, and to be housed close to other kin).
3. In the absence of a simple metric assessment of crowding, it is recommended that local Department of Housing Offices take full advantage of the skills and capacities of their Indigenous staff who are able to identify the presence among their Indigenous clients of the types of crowding stresses outlined in this report, and to provide some degree of preferential service support for such clients.

4. The 'three strikes policy' in Western Australia should be assessed on the basis of social and economic impact factors.
5. The policy of preventing those from renting public housing who earn above a certain maximum wage should also be revised or applied flexibly, so as to make concessions for Indigenous households which act as community hub households.
6. Carry out the construction of new housing stock (or extension of existing stock) to ensure there are adequate large houses (5 & 6-bedroom) in Aboriginal neighbourhoods in cities.
7. Governments develop improved models of Indigenous crowding to better inform identification and measurement of secondary homelessness.
8. That both child welfare and housing authorities encourage Indigenous tenants of households with children to discuss and confirm their preferred culturally-based rules for sleeping group behaviours and where possible provide support for those tenants in implementing such.
9. Governments to provide more appropriately-designed housing and yard facilities for large Indigenous households using the guidelines set out herein and described elsewhere (e.g. Long et al. 2007, pp.45–46); as well as more appropriate neighbourhood planning (e.g. see Davidson et al. 2011. [100 on the SIHIP 'cluster housing' concept) and better articulation of repairs and maintenance for large households.
10. The profiling of good-practice service delivery projects and emergency accommodation facilities with culturally-sensitive services for Aboriginal clients to alleviate crowded households (e.g. the Jimaylya Topsy Harry transitional housing accommodation centre—see Memmott & Nash 2012).
11. Notwithstanding these specific recommendations, a bottom line that remains in national Indigenous housing policy is that more housing stock<sup>17</sup> is needed in many Indigenous population centres to alleviate crowding; the backlog (or deficit) of supply has never caught up with the Commonwealth Government's assessments of need, ever since such needs assessments started in the 1970s in response to the 1967 Referendum (Long et al. 2007, pp.71–74).

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<sup>17</sup> Both rental stock and home-owner stock. With respect to the latter, see Aust IBA (2012), SA Home Start Finance (2012), Keystart Country (2010)

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## APPENDIX

### AHURI Crowding Survey—Interview Schedule

Interviewer:

Location:

What is your background? Where did you grow up? Where have you lived?

1. Record type of house. Who owns it? Who is it rented from? Who is the boss of this place? Who is in charge of the family here [head of the house]?

#### 1.1 Type of house

- Detached dwelling ☐
- Duplex ☐
- Flat ☐
- Other ☐

#### 1.2 Rental or home owner?

Is this house:

- Rented? ☐
- or, do you own it? ☐

#### 1.3 If rented, who owns house?

- State government rental ☐
- Indigenous Community Housing Organization rental ☐
- Other Social Housing Co-op rental ☐
- Private owner rental ☐
- Other ☐

- 1.4 Who is in charge of the people in this house here? [head of house, boss for this place, etc.]

1.
2.

(optional; if two people given)



1.5 Where did you (for both if two people) grow up? What's your home town or community?

2. How many sleeping spaces are there and who stays where?

[Do rough outline plan of the house and allocate people on the plan, or alternatively let the interviewee do the plan drawing.]

Note also the general décor of the house including

- furniture
- location of hearths/ cooking places in the yard if any
- the state of repair of the house
- personalisation of the house, if any.

2.1 Number of Sleeping Spaces and who stays where?

	No	M/F	Age	Names
Bedroom 1				
Bedroom 2				
Bedroom 3				
Bedroom 4				
Bedroom 5				
Garage				
Lounge/dining room				
Kitchen				
Store room				
Veranda 1				
Veranda 2				
Yard camps				
Other room				

2.2 Scale of Household materialization

A. Objects randomly located including refuse, no storage inside house of clothes etc.	
B. Few material possessions, but refuse collected, house swept	
C. Objects randomly located, but house furnished, swept, refuse collected	

D. Object storage visible but some objects randomly located also, house swept, cleaned	
E. Storage used for most possessions, personalization of rooms, decorative components	

N.B. More categories may have to be added. Alternatively discuss variants in analytic discussion. Aim is to see if correlation with visitor behaviour and extent of control of visitors.

Alternatively tick/circle in this table

House cleanliness	Yard/ Veranda Cleanliness	Functionality	Storage	Personalisation
refuse in house	refuse in yard/ veranda	obvious and serious signs of damage to property: broken windows, broken doors, broken taps, broken furniture	Objects on floor of house	no personalisation of space, very limited furniture
house swept but not 'clean'	yard/verand a tidy but not 'clean'	Some damage to property, cracked windows, slight damage to walls	Objects both in storage/cupboards and on floor	some personalisation, e.g. paintings, photographs, TV, limited but functional furniture
house 'clean'	yard/verand a 'clean'	house functions seem to be operational	Objects in storage/cupboards	frequent personalisation of spaces: lots of pictures, photographs, TV, furniture in good condition
house 'clean' and tidy	yard/verand a 'clean' and tidy (e.g. garden beds tended)		Objects given pride of place	

3. How many people live in your house on a regular basis? How many visitors are there? How are they related?

[Draw a rough genealogy showing all residents; identify interviewee]

3.1 Number of people living here

Total number: ☐

Number of people living here on a regular basis/all the time ☐

Number of visitors living here on a regular basis (week or more) ☐

Number of short-term or overnight visitors (a few nights only) ☐

Number of day-time (only) visitors (do not stay overnight) ☐

N.B. May have to enumerate visitors as 'car loads'

How many daytime visitors do you get? How many people eat here? Or use the shower in the daytime?

4. Do you have a tenancy agreement that says how many people can stay? If so, how many?

4.0 Tenancy Agreement

4.1 Do you have a signed tenancy agreement? Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

4.2 Does it say how many people can stay? Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

4.3 (If yes) how many people is it? No.

5. Have you had crowding in your house in the last year (since last winter)?  
[Elicit the separate times and number of incidents, starting from last winter]

5.0 History of crowding

5.1 Have you had crowding in your home in the last year (since last winter)?  
Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

5.2 List incidents or episodes in order of happening  
[Suggest label with a dominant characteristic e.g. 'Uncle Roger's visit', 'Rodeo visitors', 'Nanna's funeral time', etc]

1 <sup>st</sup> time	
2 <sup>nd</sup> time	
3 <sup>rd</sup> time	
4 <sup>th</sup> time	
5 <sup>th</sup> time	
6 <sup>th</sup> time	

Go to Question 6

### 5.3 Visitors

If no acknowledgement of crowding, switch direction of interview to visitors: Do you get many visitors here?

### 6. Describe what happened each time [switch to notebook here]:

Optional questions:

Who came? When was this? Their relationship? For how long?

Which town/community did they come from?

What caused the crowding? Was there more than one cause? [optional]

Did you get upset, have to growl?

How stressed did you get? – just a little bit upset/fairly upset/very upset?  
[Need to elicit if any stress]

Were you worried/shamed/talking strongly/'growling'/angry/fretting?  
Why did you get stressed?

Were the neighbours involved?

Was the house owner (or Department of Housing or Co-op or whatever the case) involved?

What did you do to sort out the problem?

Did you change anything in your house to sort it out? For example more furniture, add blinds, put on new extensions? Or moved people around in the house; or move people out of the house? [Mark on floor plan if convenient]

*What do you think if we leave a camera with you and you take photos of any problem areas that you can identify in your house, and that you think we need to know about it? We don't have to use the photos in our report. Just to help you remember things.*

## **AHURI Research Centres**

AHURI Queensland Research Centre

AHURI RMIT Research Centre

AHURI Southern Research Centre

AHURI Swinburne-Monash Research Centre

AHURI UNSW-UWS Research Centre

AHURI Western Australia Research Centre

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