

# **Service directions and issues in social housing for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas**

authored by

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## ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Ltd.
AHA	Aboriginal Housing Authority (SA)
AHB	Aboriginal Housing Board
AHO	Aboriginal Housing Office (NSW)
AHV	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIH	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing
BBF	Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CHA	Chicago Housing Authority
CHINS	Community Housing and Infrastructure Survey
CHMC	Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation
CHRA	Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
EOC	Equal Opportunity Commission (WA)
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development (US)
ICHO	Indigenous community housing organisation
IEB	Indigenous Elected Body (ACT)
IHO	Indigenous housing organisation
ISH	Indigenous social housing
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council (NSW)
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NAHA/C	National Aboriginal Housing Association (Canada)
NBJP	Nation Building and Jobs Plan
NHI	National Homelessness Initiative
NPP	National Partnership Program

NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territories
PARS	Provider Assessment and Registration System
QATSIHS	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
SA	South Australia
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SEARMS	South Eastern Aboriginal Regional Management Service
SHA	State Housing Authority
SHAP	Supported Housing Assistance Program
SIHIP	Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (NT)
SOMIH	State-owned and managed Indigenous housing (also SOMI housing)
UAH	Urban Aboriginal Homelessness
UNHP	Urban Native Housing Program (Canada)
UNSW	University of New South Wales
WA	Western Australia

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This research is investigating how social housing services are provided to Indigenous clients in urban and regional settings. It is underpinned by recognition of the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as 'first peoples' including the presence of traditional owner residents in urban settings, and the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have endured poor quality of life outcomes (as measured in recent decades but arguably since colonisation) and that these outcomes are often linked to housing.

The primary aim of the study is to better understand how to deliver housing services both to meet housing needs and to contribute to 'closing the gap' on Indigenous disadvantage, in ways that will be consistent with cultural values and Indigenous aspirations. Key themes concern the respective roles of mainstream and culturally specific housing services and how effectively these are integrated across the service system.

A focus on urban and regional areas has been chosen for several reasons. These relate mainly to the high level and variety of Indigenous housing needs in these areas; distinctive government policies that have been applied to Indigenous service provision in urbanised (as compared to remote) areas; a relative lack of housing research related to urban and regional Indigenous populations (Long et al. 2007); and the extent of national reform in Indigenous policy and housing policy that is impacting significantly on housing service systems in urban and regional contexts.

The research has a strong applied purpose. We intend that the findings will be used to guide service providers about the latest positive approaches to service delivery for Indigenous clients. The research will offer examples of leading and innovative practice identified from a review of current practice, evidence from relevant national and international literature and new field research. We will also use the available evidence base to critically examine current barriers to achieving good housing outcomes for Indigenous clients in the social housing delivery system. While the core focus of the study is service delivery, we expect that the study's findings will also have implications for housing policy and funding frameworks that impinge on the service environment.

### **This report**

The Positioning Paper presents outcomes of the first stage of a two-stage research process. It covers four main areas that are summarised below.

First, it provides an overview of the latest policy and service delivery context for Indigenous social housing in urbanised settings and discusses recent strategies being implemented to respond to Indigenous housing needs and service issues. Many of these directions have been developed as an integral part of major intergovernmental commitments made in 2008 to 'close the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage.

Second, it offers a thematically-based review of recent Australian studies of Indigenous housing needs and cultural issues connected to housing in an urban context, with a focus on evidence about the way that current service delivery modes and practices impact on the aspirations of, and outcomes for, Indigenous tenants. The themes covered in the review are cultural values, housing needs, policy and institutional settings, service delivery models and practices, service access and delivery experiences of Indigenous households, and shelter/non-shelter outcomes. The review also uncovers some selected recent examples of culturally adapted or culturally specific service approaches being developed elsewhere in the human services system that may offer good ideas for the housing sector. Views given in a



workshop setting by members of a group of highly experienced Indigenous housing workers, who were consulted specifically about their knowledge and experience for this study, are interwoven with the review.

Third, to complement the review of Australian literature, a thematic review of literature and recent practice related to Indigenous housing service delivery in urban areas in Canada is also presented. Canada has been chosen from among the handful of countries with large Indigenous urban populations because it compares closely to Australia in terms of its colonial past, federal system of government, small social housing sector, and a rapidly growing urbanised Indigenous population, who face comparable issues to their Australian counterparts.

Fourth, the Positioning Paper proposes a framework and broad design for an empirical investigation of the service delivery environment for Indigenous social housing that will form the central component of the next stage of the research.

Below we provide a synthesis of our key findings so far in the study. Topics covered are the policy and service contexts, the evolution of the issues and challenges that are paramount today, a comparison with Canada and cultural frameworks for service delivery.

## **The policy context**

Our study is being undertaken at the beginning of an era of fundamental reform of government-funded service delivery in Australia that is designed to break with the past and herald a new era of outcomes-focused service delivery. At the top level, the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers and the Australian Local Government Association are driving a whole-of-government agenda that strives for service improvements and better outcomes, under a series of major new intergovernmental agreements and reform platforms forged at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

There are two major, interconnected sets of reforms driving directions for change in social housing that have implications for Indigenous households and organisations.

The first set of reforms concerns resources and actions directed to 'closing the gap' in socio-economic disadvantage and health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The framework for reform includes service delivery principles and key performance targets to guide all governments in designing policies and providing services. 'Healthy homes' is identified as one of six core building blocks within a holistic and integrated approach to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. The Commonwealth's core identified contribution to social housing involves a \$5.5 billion ten-year capital funding program to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages in a selection of around 26 remote communities across Australia. In a bid to overcome poor housing service standards in many of these locations, new rules link this funding boost for housing supply and major repairs to a requirement to have government-run or government-directed management of housing. By contrast, in urban and regional areas, specific funding has not been earmarked for housing under the closing the gap strategy. Instead, state and territory (henceforth state) jurisdictions are required to leverage Indigenous specific and mainstream funding agreed by COAG, and other existing resources, to improve Indigenous Australians' outcomes in these areas (COAG 2008d).

The second set of reforms is concerned specifically with the funding and delivery of social housing in Australia and includes additional strategies to address Indigenous disadvantage. A new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (operational

from 2009) sets the framework for an integrated service delivery model for all needs groups, with provision for additional payments to states under national partnership programs that are designed to address specific priorities, such as homelessness. All housing programs are described as having a role to play in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, and strategies for removing barriers and improving access, to home ownership and private rental housing are listed among the intended directions. However, the level of resources that will be available to meet the measured housing needs of urban Indigenous households (see AIHW 2009a) is unclear. Minimum funding for Indigenous social housing is no longer earmarked. A one-off program to expand social housing by about 19 000 dwellings was funded in 2009 as part of the Federal Government's second economic stimulus package. However, additional funding needed to address viability issues and return social housing to a long term growth path has not been allocated.

The main directions that are cited for reform of the social housing system to help reduce Indigenous disadvantage in urban areas are centred on: mainstreaming provision; integrating mainstream and specialist services; and enhancing mechanisms to drive service quality and monitor outcomes (COAG 2009c; Housing Ministers' Conference 2009). This study is examining aspects of these strategies critically, mainly by using evidence about what works in service delivery to Indigenous peoples in housing and other human service areas, and case studies of what happens on the ground in housing services.

A major institutional reform to the delivery of social housing is also proposed. Housing Ministers have agreed to work towards a target of up to 35 per cent of social housing being delivered by non-government providers by 2012. It is not clear yet how Indigenous housing organisations will be incorporated into this system. Presently, an array of policy carrots and regulatory sticks are being directed to structural reform, improving organisational viability and promoting better outcomes in the Indigenous housing organisation (IHO) sector, with a core focus on healthy living. However, in a rush to reform via a top down approach that so far appears to have lacked effective consultation and sufficient time for Indigenous engagement, many IHOs appear to be vulnerable and there is an emerging backlash against government control and coercion becoming evident in some jurisdictions (Pisarski et al. 2009; Scott 2009; Slockee 2009a).

This set of policy directions and their implications for the future shape of social housing services for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas, provides the policy context for our present study.

## **The service context**

Social housing for Indigenous households in Australia has been provided through four main funding and program streams in the past in ways that have left a complex imprint on the current system of provision. The contribution of the various parts of the social housing service system to meeting Indigenous housing needs is outlined below, together with some initial views about the implications of current trends.

*General public housing.* Nearly 40 per cent of all Indigenous social housing tenancies in Australia are in public housing. This is the biggest part of the social housing service delivery system for Indigenous and non-Indigenous households alike, run by eight state housing authorities (SHAs), one in each state or territory jurisdiction. In 2008, just over 7 per cent of public housing was occupied by households that identified as Indigenous. Broken down by jurisdiction, this proportion varied from being less than average in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania, to around average in Queensland and New South Wales, and well above in Western

Australia (15.7%) and the Northern Territory (36.8%) (Table 7). Services have been almost exclusively urban based, although there are current moves for SHAs to take over management of Indigenous run housing in urban and/or remote areas in some jurisdictions. The numbers of Indigenous public housing tenancies have risen sharply in recent years—there was a 35 per cent increase in total numbers across Australia between 2003 and 2008—under policies to give priority for new lettings to households that are assessed to have the greatest (immediate) needs (Table 8). This trend has also produced a wave of service reforms centred on more intensive tenancy management models and other strategies aimed at sustaining tenancies. Many of the service innovations have a specific Indigenous component.

*Public housing that is identified for Indigenous tenants.* Twenty-two per cent of all social housing tenancies presently are earmarked for Indigenous households. This housing is owned by SHAs in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania and managed on largely the same basis as general public housing. In a recent innovation, management of most of the identified public housing in Victoria has been transferred to Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV), a specialised state-wide housing association that aims to contribute to the social, cultural and economic aspirations of the Victorian Aboriginal community by providing appropriate housing services to those in need of them (AHV 2008). In New South Wales, an Aboriginal run statutory authority, the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), owns the identified housing (transferred to their control a decade ago), which is managed under a service agreement by the SHA. National earmarked funding for this component of the system ceased at the beginning of 2009, making the future of the assets, services and any further investment entirely a matter for individual states. (Note that the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory do not have this component in their service system).

*Indigenous run community housing.* At nearly 38 per cent of Indigenous social housing tenancies (Table 4), Indigenous-run community housing represents a large part of the delivery system. However, its place in the system varies significantly by location and jurisdiction. Until recently, it has been almost the only form of service in remote areas where mainstream agencies have not operated. Most jurisdictions also have some Indigenous housing organisations operating alongside other parts of the service system in urban settings, although the number has been declining in several states. Well established, large IHO sectors made up of many small, mostly local providers operate in New South Wales and Queensland. The recent transfer of identified public housing in Victoria has created a distinctive service model in that state—characterised by one large Indigenous service provider operating statewide. The typical operating environment of organisations across the board in this sector involves a maintenance backlog, low rental income, high operating costs and small size, precluding economies of scale (Hall & Berry 2006). The small scale of organisations and limited opportunities for training and development has also hampered the development of their governance and management capacity (Burke 2004).

*'Mainstream' community housing.* This is a service system of generalist community-based housing providers that is small, but parts of it (generally referred to as growth providers) are growing rapidly. Indigenous households are proportionately underrepresented in this sector—about 6.4 per cent of all tenancies identified as Indigenous in 2008—and, because of its small size presently, it provides for less than one per cent of Indigenous households in social housing (Table 7). Strategies to improve Indigenous access to community housing are currently being developed in several jurisdictions alongside growth plans for that sector. Growth in this sector will

present important opportunities for partnerships between IHOs and mainstream community housing organisations, as has occurred in Canada.

## **Evolution of issues and challenges**

Our review of evidence about how the historic development of the social housing service system has impacted on Indigenous clients across Australia highlights several major challenges. Duplication in roles and responsibilities and shifting leadership between levels of government has produced a complex and, at times, bewildering mix of policies, regulations and practices. The provider system is complicated and unbalanced. Services to Indigenous clients in urban areas come mainly from the large institutionalised public housing authorities—62 per cent of all social housing tenanted by Indigenous households across Australia is provided through this part of the system, almost all in urban areas (Table 4). The reminder is provided mostly by many small Indigenous organisations in both urban but, more typically, remote areas. This distinctive part of the social housing system has tended to become isolated from mainstream policy, planning, resource allocation and capacity building processes.

Successive waves of reform and differences in approach across jurisdictions have produced diverging strategies for service delivery over time—alternatively engaging with and supporting Indigenous run housing services or intensifying mainstreaming. There have also been big differences in resource allocations to housing supply and refurbishment, in what governments classify as 'remote' and 'non-remote' areas, based on using particular dimensions of housing need to allocate funds (AIHW, 2009c). Major service quality problems that affect Indigenous households can be found in both mainstream and specialist services and the overall level of resources allocated for both new supply and for maintaining housing over the long term has not been commensurate with needs (AIHW 2009a; Hall & Berry 2006). Indigenous clients in public housing report significantly lower levels of satisfaction with their housing services than their non-Indigenous counterparts and have higher rates of eviction (AIHW 2009d; Flatau et al. 2009). Several independent studies and government reports have highlighted the significant barriers to Indigenous engagement that have arisen partly from ineffective consultation processes and partly as a result of alienation from, and lack of trust of, government processes within the Indigenous community (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; EOC 2004; Prout 2008).

## **Comparisons with Canada**

Canada faces similar challenges to Australia in addressing urban Aboriginal housing needs. The two countries share a common history of federal responsibility for Indigenous affairs that contributed to the separate development of Indigenous and mainstream social housing sectors. In both countries in recent years, federal governments have re-focused their policy priorities primarily towards remote and discrete Indigenous communities, resulting in reduced attention from them to urban Indigenous issues. In both cases also, this shift in focus has been accompanied by the cessation of specific national urban Indigenous housing programs, until the Canadian Government established a new trust fund in 2006. In Canada, absence of dedicated funding for the decade before 2006 impacted negatively on urban Aboriginal housing organisations by creating confusion, financial stress, limited opportunities for growth and uneven participation in mainstream housing policy dialogue across provinces. However, some Canadian Aboriginal housing organisations, faced with stagnation or attrition, responded by engaging with mainstream social and affordable housing programs and by pursuing partnerships with non-Aboriginal housing organisations, the private sector and academic institutions.

The findings of our review of the Canadian experience have some implications for developing principles about delivering appropriate and effective housing assistance to urban Indigenous populations in Australia. These include:

- There is a need for explicit urban Indigenous housing and homelessness policies, strategies, programs and targets.
- A mix of identified Indigenous services and culturally appropriate mainstream services are needed, especially for marginalised clients.
- The difficulties of integrating Indigenous services with mainstream programs and service systems should not be underestimated.
- Indigenous housing organisations have an important role in contributing to closing the gap and community strengthening in urban areas.
- Explicit and ongoing support and funding needs to be directed at building the institutional capacity of Indigenous housing organisations, individually and as a sector.
- Indigenous individuals and organisations should have a strong voice and participation in housing policy discussions.
- Research and evaluation effort needs to be directed at understanding the best approaches to delivering successful urban Indigenous housing services.

### **Cultural frameworks for service delivery**

An initial review for this study of the Australian and international literature related to culturally appropriate service models has uncovered an abundance of high level frameworks and principles emerging across the human services system to underpin action to promote culturally informed services responses. Comparison of these frameworks demonstrates a strong alignment of principles, strategies and priority areas for action and offers new thinking about how to assess the cultural attributes of mainstream organisations (see Table 9).

The ideas that stem from these frameworks that are relevant to the future delivery of culturally appropriate and better coordinated social housing responses in Australia suggest that preconditions for good service must involve:

- An understanding of the history and legacy of prior occupancy and Indigenous–Settler state relations.
- A strong cultural knowledge of and respect for Indigenous people and their cultural values.
- The intentional design of culturally inclusive policies and programs that engage Indigenous stakeholders and promote self-determination, participatory governance and Indigenous institutional capacity.
- Culturally adapted and responsive services that are delivered by culturally competent staff with opportunity for Indigenous clients to interact with Indigenous staff and services that provide culturally safe experiences for applicants and tenants.
- Giving specific attention to cultural values and Indigenous lifestyles in the design and location of housing.
- Culturally proficient service systems comprising both culturally adapted mainstream and culturally specific housing and related services that work effectively together in the best interests of clients and to build community capacity.

Weighed against emerging ideas about how to provide culturally appropriate services, some recent trends in the social housing service system that we have identified give rise to concerns about how that system will contribute to these preconditions and meet COAG's laudable goals and lofty targets. Our concerns are centred particularly on the extent and intensification of mono-cultural mainstreaming that has been occurring; the disempowerment and consequential rapid decline of the IHO sector; an uncertain future for public housing that is identified for Indigenous people (in some jurisdictions at least); and the absence of a long term funding plan that would be sufficient to restore viability and growth to the social housing system overall.

Broader issues about the future of the social housing system notwithstanding, policy-makers concerned specifically with Indigenous housing could start to address some of the principles and concerns that this study has raised. For example, they could move to establish a more certain future for the IHO sector, along similar lines to that envisaged for mainstream community housing. This would include giving consideration to how identified public housing could be transferred to Indigenous-run services to help break down the mono-cultural public housing service system and simultaneously help to create more viable alternative providers (as has occurred in Victoria).

### **Next stage of this research**

The next empirical phase of the research will comprise one case study located in each of three urban or regional locations across New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. These states together have a high proportion of Indigenous social housing tenants and 90 per cent of the Indigenous run housing organisations in urban and regional locations operate in these three states. Recent service reforms in these jurisdictions offer a continuum of approaches to policy and service delivery, ranging from culturally specific arms length provision to state-controlled provision. An analytical framework developed from the literature examined for this Positioning Paper will be used to compare the cultural proficiency and coordination of the housing service delivery system within the case study sites (see Table 10). Examining a small number of localities in detail aims to provide a better appreciation of what happens on the ground in housing services. Examples from three distinctive jurisdictions will help to reveal how varying historical pathways, current policy settings and different reform priorities are shaping this system and its capacity to respond.

The viewpoint that we take to our approach to the next stage of this research is that culturally appropriate and well coordinated social housing services will be necessary to achieve the housing and non-housing outcomes required for Indigenous Australians to reach their potential and participate fully as Australian citizens. Furthermore, to support the rights of Indigenous peoples in urban areas to live in housing that is in keeping with their cultural norms and reflects the diversity of their needs, there is an imperative to maintain and strengthen distinctive Indigenous organisations that provide housing services and support Indigenous tenants. We also approach this phase of the research with the awareness that cultural appropriateness is a complex and multi-layered concept that must embrace actions, experiences, beliefs, behaviours and relationships at systemic, organisational and individual levels. The empirical research is designed to explore these issues in concrete situations through a multi-level approach that examines the interdependencies between the policy and service delivery domains and how they impact on service delivery practice and client outcomes.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose and focus of the study

This research is investigating how social housing services are provided to Indigenous clients in urban and regional settings. The main purpose of this study is to identify how the delivery of social housing services for Indigenous people in such locations can be improved in culturally appropriate ways in order to both meet housing needs and to contribute to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. A key theme concerns the respective roles of mainstream and culturally specific housing services and how effectively these are integrated across the service system.

The research is underpinned by recognition of the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as 'first peoples' including the presence of traditional owner residents in urban settings, and the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have endured poor quality of life outcomes (as measured in recent decades but arguably since colonisation) and that these outcomes are often linked to housing.

The study has an urban/regional focus for a number of reasons:

1. The vast majority of Indigenous Australians live in urban areas and many of them are reliant on the social housing system.
2. Indigenous peoples in urban areas have a range of distinctive housing needs that must be recognised in the social housing service system. These needs arise from many factors, including: aspirations of many urban Indigenous dwellers to preserve cultural identity and maintain links with traditional areas and kinship networks; the legacy of Indigenous peoples' experiences of racism, discrimination and alienation since colonisation under assimilationist and mainstreaming policies that have applied to their access to housing and to other services in the past; and a high incidence of severe poverty that can affect both their level of housing need and individual capacities to sustain a tenancy (Chapter 3 discusses these needs in more detail).
3. Australian governments take different approaches to the funding and delivery of services to Indigenous people in what they designate as 'remote' and 'non-remote' (urbanised) settings, making this distinction a necessary variable in any applied research design.
4. Housing studies related to urban and regional Indigenous populations are underrepresented in the Australian research and policy arena (Long et al. 2007).
5. There are major reforms occurring in Indigenous housing policy and service delivery in urban areas and it is therefore timely to examine their impacts and implications.

## 1.2 Context

While the numbers of Indigenous people in Australia are relatively small (2.5 per cent of the Australian population), proportionally they are over-represented in multiple indicators of housing need (AIHW 2009d) and their housing circumstances are distinctly different in certain ways to those of other Australians. In tenure terms, this situation is reflected in a homeownership rate half that of the general population and a high reliance on social housing. In the 2006 census count, 28.9 per cent of Indigenous households reported living in social housing compared to 4.4 per cent of non-Indigenous households (AIHW 2009d, p.5). There are also signs of increasing reliance on this tenure. There was more than a threefold increase in the total number of identified Indigenous tenancies in public housing between 2003 and 2008 (Table 8).

Nearly one in six allocations to public housing (15%) were made to households with at least one Indigenous member in 2007/08 (AIHW 2009a, Table 6.9).

These figures suggest that the way in which social housing is provided in Australia will be highly significant for the many Indigenous households who rely on this tenure. Indigenous households are also likely to be disproportionately impacted by wide-ranging reforms that are underway to the social housing system, which we discuss in Chapter 2. Indeed, at the core of many of these reforms is a goal to transform the existing service delivery system to improve outcomes for Indigenous households. In the context of improving housing services for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas, such reforms have focused largely on mainstreaming provision, integrating mainstream and specialist services, and enhancing mechanisms to drive service quality and monitor outcomes (COAG 2008c).

This broad policy thrust, and its implications for the future shape of social housing services for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas in particular, provides the context for, and the critical focus of, this study. The central question for the research is to understand better what works, and what will be likely to work, in order to provide secure, affordable and appropriate social housing to Indigenous households, whether through mainstream organisations (which may be operated either by governments or community-based providers) or through specialist Indigenous-run services or other integrated models.

We have limited the geographical focus of the study to urban and regional settings, where around 80 per cent of Indigenous people currently reside (COAG 2008a). Many of these urban and regional settings are also where the greatest variety of social housing service providers operate. Limiting our geographical focus in such a way will enable us to compare the roles of different agencies in a single local context, and to learn how multiple service providers and other stakeholders work together through service networks at the local or regional level to provide effective responses to the specific needs of communities and individual clients. While we do not examine provision in rural and remote locations and discrete Indigenous communities specifically, some of our findings may have applicability in these areas, especially where mainstream agencies are being brought in by governments to deliver new services or to take over existing services (see Chapter 2).

Policy and service integration is a strong theme underpinning this study. Following previous research in which some of the researchers were involved (see Jones et al. 2008; Phillips et al. 2009), the study takes a critical view of service integration. On the one hand, policy consistency and driving for more effective linkages across housing services as well as other service domains can be beneficial for client access and outcomes. On the other hand, integration initiatives may have unintended consequences for vulnerable clients, including Indigenous people, if they contribute to reducing diversity, limiting choice or constraining “flexible, discretionary local service delivery” (Jones et al. 2008, p.30).

Past policy, program and institutional arrangements have contributed to fragmentation and, in large part, separate development of mainstream housing services and specialised Indigenous housing services in both policy and service delivery arenas. In part, this separation has been underpinned by legitimate aspirations of Indigenous people for self-determination and self-management, and by a holistic goal of the service system to strengthen local linkages between a variety of Indigenous services—especially housing, employment, community health and personal support—that are often used simultaneously by clients. However, it can also be argued that the way these intentions have been pursued in the past has failed to recognise the inter-cultural sphere in which Indigenous policy and service delivery operates (Martin



2003). Indeed, past policies pursued under the banner of self-determination have contributed to the isolation of specialised Indigenous services, to the extent that they have:

- discouraged system-wide consideration of Indigenous needs and priorities
- limited dialogue and transfers of knowledge and skills between Indigenous and non-Indigenous services and workers
- circumscribed access of Indigenous organisations to mainstream resources for growth, asset management and organisational development (Phillips et al. 2009).

There are also negative impacts on the mainstream sector of having two separate delivery systems. For instance, there is evidence of a tendency to reduced accountability for recognising cultural needs and adopting culturally appropriate policies and practices in general services (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2001; Memmott 2004). Walker and Barcham (2010) have characterised typical approaches of governments (in Australia, New Zealand and Canada) in offering self-determination and self-management of programs as having a strong tendency to offload state responsibility to Indigenous organisations, without a sufficient transfer of control and resources. Subsequent shortcomings are then, all too readily, put down to the lack of capacity or skill of the Indigenous organisation.

Currently in Australia, various jurisdictions are pursuing different forms and levels of integration of the social housing service delivery system in what is the latest attempt by government agencies concerned with housing to contribute to a whole-of-government agenda to reduce Indigenous disadvantage and to improve their social and economic outcomes. However, the evidence base to inform their decisions about how best to do this is limited and engagement with Indigenous stakeholders has reportedly been poor in several jurisdictions (Pisarski et al. 2009; information from project workshop participants—see Appendix 1). This research aims to help address this gap and, in doing so, to give greater consideration to the experience and knowledge of Indigenous consultants (residents, housing workers and community representatives) who are involved in the urban social housing service system.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The primary aim of the research is to identify culturally appropriate ways to deliver housing services to Indigenous households in urban and regional contexts. The research questions that have been set to guide the study are:

1. What are the modes of social housing provision to Indigenous households in urban and regional areas and what relationships and linkages are there between the modes of provision at present?
2. What is known about how well present service models address the needs of Indigenous households living in urban and regional locations?
3. What have been the key objectives and strategies adopted to address service delivery issues in Indigenous housing in similar settings internationally?
4. How do service delivery models for Indigenous households operate and interact in specific geographic contexts?
5. What are the views of Indigenous stakeholders (service providers and community members) on how to improve the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households?
6. What strategies have the most potential to improve the delivery of housing to Indigenous households?

7. What principles and practices should underpin endeavours to improve service delivery and to better integrate policies and services in the social housing service delivery system for Indigenous households?

These questions are being addressed in a two-stage research process. Stage 1, of which this report is part, has involved:

- An appraisal of the latest policy, program and service delivery context for the provision of social housing as it applies to Indigenous clients—tenants, applicants and those outside the present system with an unmet housing need.
- A literature review of relevant concepts and evidence about service delivery issues that concern and involve Indigenous households.
- Talking with expert Indigenous consultants in the social housing system to identify relevant issues, challenges and positive initiatives from their perspectives.
- Developing a methodology for an in-depth review of service practices in selected locations, where a variety of service models and initiatives operate.

Indigenous participation is integral to the design and conduct of the study in order to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are given voice and to inform culturally appropriate research methods. In developing and conducting the first stage of the research, we used a number of engagement strategies including:

- Involvement of Indigenous researchers from the Nura Gili Centre at University of New South Wales (UNSW).
- Liaison with the Australasian Housing Institute Māori, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working group.
- Participation in an Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) conference on urban Indigenous service delivery to promote the study and obtain feedback about its design.
- Hosting a national workshop with Indigenous housing workers employed in public and community housing organisations.
- Engagement with key Indigenous leaders and Indigenous housing networks in New South Wales and Queensland.

Stage 2 of the research will examine service delivery in more depth, using a case study research method. In the Final Report of the study, the understanding and ideas drawn from the fieldwork stage will be combined with the existing knowledge base—reviewed for this Positioning Paper and kept up to date as the study proceeds—to help formulate a set of principles and practice guidance for further consideration by housing policy-makers, service providers and Indigenous stakeholders. While the core focus of the study is service delivery, the findings will also have implications for housing policy and funding frameworks that impinge on the social housing service environment.

## **1.4 Report structure**

As outlined above, the main intentions of the research to this stage have been to review current policy directions for social housing service delivery impacting on Indigenous organisations and clients in urban settings; to assess relevant ideas and debates about service delivery for Indigenous households; to better understand current issues that are being experienced in the housing service delivery system, particularly from the viewpoint of knowledgeable Indigenous workers; and to use this information to develop plans for a more detailed empirical study. Resulting from the work so far, this Positioning Paper sets out the context, scope and conceptual

framework for the study and describes the design of the proposed empirical investigation. The report is focused mainly around addressing questions 1 to 3 above and is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 describes the current policy and service delivery environment for Indigenous social housing in urbanised settings and the latest reform directions, using information that has been obtained from government policy and program documents, web sites and statistical records related to Indigenous social housing. The desktop review has been supplemented by information obtained through interviews and emails with policy-makers and program managers in the major urban jurisdictions (New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania).

Chapter 3 provides a thematic overview of recent research on housing service delivery models and service delivery theory and practice that is related to cultural standards, particularly as evidenced through the housing literature. The review draws on relevant material about culturally appropriate housing governance and management; integration of human services and service delivery in a multi-cultural context; and reports of the experience of Indigenous households of mainstream and specialised housing service models. Six themes are extracted from the literature: cultural values; housing needs; policy and institutional frameworks; service delivery modes and practices; Indigenous experience of social housing; and shelter/non-shelter outcomes for Indigenous tenants. Apposite views given by members of a group of highly experienced Indigenous housing workers in a workshop setting are interwoven into the thematic review. The workshop (held in November 2009) included participants drawn from the five most populous jurisdictions (New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia), who came together to discuss the main issues and challenges facing the Australian social housing service delivery system from an Indigenous perspective. Details are given in Appendix 1.

Chapter 4 provides a thematic review of literature and recent practice related to Indigenous housing service delivery in urban areas in Canada. Canada was chosen after a preliminary investigation that established:

- that it had a similar set of Indigenous housing issues and challenges in urban areas to Australia
- that it had a close resemblance to Australia in broader terms, including its colonial past, federal system of government and dynamic federal state roles in Indigenous affairs, a small under resourced social housing system, and a rapidly growing and increasingly urbanised Indigenous population.

Information drawn from the Canadian literature review was extended and validated using emails and a telephone interview with a leading Canadian action researcher.

Chapter 5 sets out the framework for, and broad approach to, our proposed empirical investigation of the service delivery environment for Indigenous social housing that will be the central element of the next stage of the research. A case study approach will be applied in three local areas—one chosen in each of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. Examining a small number of localities in detail is intended to give the researchers a better appreciation of what happens on the ground in this service area. Comparing three distinctive jurisdictions (see Section 2.5) will help to reveal how varying historical pathways and current policy settings shape this system and its capacity to respond. In particular, the case studies will:

- Explore the extent of culturally-adapted developments in the housing service system.

- Allow closer examination of how the interface between different housing providers and their services has developed and operated.
- Identify current barriers to achieving good housing outcomes for Indigenous clients in the social housing system.
- Pinpoint local service practices that are viewed positively by Indigenous stakeholders.

## **1.5 Definition of key terms**

Usage of key terms and concepts in this report is explained below.

### *Cultural appropriateness*

Following Thomas (2002, p.51), cultural appropriateness refers to the 'delivery of programs and services so that they are consistent with the cultural identity, communications styles, meaning systems and social networks of clients, program participants and other stakeholders'.

### *Indigeneity*

In Australia, Indigenous people are those who are descendent from, identify as and/or are accepted by their community as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both. Use of the generic term Indigenous in this report is not intended to detract from the distinctive identities of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples or those of their discrete communities. In the report, the terms Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are also used where they apply specifically to agency names, program titles and so forth in particular places.

### *Indigenous social housing*

In this report, social housing refers to housing that is acquired with government funding for long-term letting to eligible households at rents that are geared to a tenant's capacity to pay. This includes both public housing and community housing. Indigenous social housing may be earmarked for Indigenous occupancy or it may be general social housing that is occupied at the time of an allocation or resident survey by one or more Indigenous people. It encompasses housing that is provided to Indigenous households by either government or community-based providers of social housing. This includes housing that is owned and/or managed by state housing authorities (SHAs), other government agencies (such as the Aboriginal Housing Office in NSW), community housing organisations and Indigenous organisations, both those involved mainly with housing services and multifunctional agencies (such as community councils, land councils, social service organisations etc.) that may provide a wide range of services, including social housing.

### *Indigenous housing organisations*

Indigenous housing organisations (IHOs) are Indigenous controlled organisations that provide social rental housing for households with Indigenous members exclusively. A large variety of organisational types can be found across Australia depending on the jurisdiction, forms of incorporation and functional roles. In some places, IHOs are referred to as Indigenous community housing organisations (ICHOs).

### *Locality*

Responsibilities for funding, policies and services for Indigenous people are often differentiated by location. The means of doing this varies and can lead to controversy, especially if resource levels and service priorities are perceived not to be distributed equitably across geographic areas and settlement types.

When using published statistics to describe the locational aspects of the social housing system, this report adopts the geographical classification system of remoteness areas that is used by most official data agencies in Australia to differentiate locations by their level of accessibility to services.

Remoteness areas are broad geographical grouping of local areas with common characteristics in relation to accessibility, based on distance from population centres of various sizes. Note that this does not necessarily correspond to settlement densities or patterns, so that, for instance, Alice Springs, a large urban settlement in Central Australia, is included within the remote category. There are five levels of remoteness in the typology:

- Major cities of Australia.
- Inner Regional Australia.
- Outer Regional Australia.
- Remote Australia.
- Very remote Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Our study is focusing on the social housing system in the first three types of areas, broadly described as urbanised, or urban and regional or, sometimes, non-remote. These locations include small rural and outback towns, regional cities and large metropolitan settings, including all capital cities. Within these areas, housing for Indigenous people is provided in many ways. It may be dispersed within an urban area, clustered on estates on the outskirts of an urban area or located in a discrete settlement, such as former reserves, outstations or homelands, with services accessed in a nearby town or urban centre. Thus a study of housing service provision in an urban context has to take these diverse settlement patterns into account. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

### *Self-determination*

Self-determination refers to the principle whereby people have the right, and the ability, to determine their own lives. In addition to having maximum opportunities for self-governance and self-reliance, for Indigenous people this concept is associated with having choices and options, as well as responsibilities, that are consistent with cultural norms and practices (adapted from discussion in SCRGSP 2009, p.11.12).

There is increasing understanding in post-colonial developed countries, such as Australia, that self-determination does not equate to absolute autonomy or separatist development. Rather, self-determination is a relational concept that embodies a recognition that Indigenous peoples operate in an interdependent, inter-cultural sphere and seek recognition of their status as 'first peoples', respect for cultural values, and legitimisation of their right to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes affecting them (Bishop 1996; Durie 1998; Smith 1999).

### *Service delivery integration*

Service delivery integration is concerned with the capacity of multiple service providers to work together through service networks at the local or regional level to provide effective and complementary responses to the specific needs of communities and individual clients (Jones et al. 2008). In the context of service provision to Indigenous households and communities, the challenge is to evolve service delivery

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on these classifications, refer to *Statistical Geography Volume 1: Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), 2006* (cat. no. 1216.0).

arrangements that will be consistent with cultural values and simultaneously lead to effective and efficient outcomes for them (Burke 2004).

## **2 POLICY AND SERVICE DELIVERY CONTEXT**

### **2.1 Social housing policy directions for Indigenous households**

Until 2009, responsibility for funding social housing for Indigenous households was bifurcated, with the national government mainly funding remote localities and both the national and state/territory governments jointly funding other (urban and regional) areas. Depending on specific jurisdictional arrangements, either national or state/territory level governments or both were responsible for setting policies and delivering services in non-remote areas. This mishmash of roles and responsibilities resulted in multiple and often inconsistent policies and a plethora of programs that often functioned with little or no coordination within single jurisdictions or even local areas.

Following new intergovernmental arrangements forged in 2009 under the direction of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), states have direct responsibility for delivering housing to Indigenous households in all locations, although the funding and program arrangements remain different between very remote and remote localities, on the one hand, and all other 'non-remote' locations, on the other (COAG 2008a; 2008d). In particular, the Commonwealth under a special intergovernmental agreement, the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, has provided an additional \$5.5 billion over ten years from 2008/09 for building and upgrading housing for Indigenous households in remote locations (COAG 2008b). It is understood that the intended Commonwealth investment will cease in 2019, when backlog needs (both in terms of new construction and maintenance of existing housing stock) have been addressed and more effective service arrangements developed. Additional funding for social housing in urban and regional settings has also been provided for a shorter period (until 30 June 2012) through new program arrangements (specifically the National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing) (COAG 2008d) and as part of a stimulus package, whereby building additional social housing has been adopted as one measure to promote jobs in the residential sector in the context of an economic downturn that was anticipated to follow from the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (COAG 2009c). However, while Indigenous households are often recognised in mainstream housing program initiatives as a high needs target group, funding is not earmarked for this group in urban areas. In effect, this means that the access of Indigenous clients to housing will occur either through their ability to access mainstream services or it will depend on the decisions of state governments to allocate additional resources to Indigenous housing organisations. Table 1 summarises the social housing program arrangements for 2008/09 onwards and offers our initial assessment of some of the likely implications of these arrangements for Indigenous applicants, tenants and housing organisations.

Accompanying this shift in responsibility for Indigenous housing is a new set of requirements for states to achieve improved outcomes for Indigenous households. At the highest level, achievement of this requirement will be measured by the extent of reductions in the gap in health and socio-economic outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The way housing is provided is recognised as a direct contributor to these broader outcomes and a number of housing-related strategies for Indigenous households are foreshadowed. These include strategies for removing barriers, and improving access, to home ownership and private rental housing; specific targets to reduce Indigenous homelessness (which occurs at a rate almost four times that of non-Indigenous households) (AIHW 2009d); and compliance of all providers with standards of service provision in social housing (COAG 2009c).

This latter provision is of particular relevance to this study. In response to a long record of documented problems in the quality of delivery of social housing to Indigenous households through both mainstream and community-based agencies,<sup>2</sup> it is now the responsibility of states to ensure that housing providers comply with service standards. For remote communities, the intergovernmental agreement specifies that states are to provide 'standardised tenancy management and support consistent with public housing tenancy management' (COAG 2009b; Travers et al. 2010). How this is to be achieved is being approached in different ways across jurisdictions (see Section 2.4). Significant implications for urban areas are becoming apparent, as states give consideration to taking a consistent approach to service provision within their jurisdictions, move to outcomes (not program) based reporting and develop new regulatory and compliance systems that are likely to be applied incrementally across different parts of the social housing service delivery system (Travers et al. 2010).

A major reform to the delivery of social housing is also proposed. Institutional arrangements for social housing in Australia have been dominated by single SHAs in each jurisdiction. In 2007/08, SHAs provided about 89 per cent of all social housing services across Australia, with the remainder provided by non-government organisations, both so-called mainstream community organisations and Indigenous community organisations (AIHW 2009c). Now, under a direction proposed by the Federal Minister for Housing (Plibersek 2009b), state Housing Ministers have agreed to work towards a target of up to 35 per cent of social housing being delivered by non-government providers by 2012. This target is very ambitious. Achieving it will require a mix of strategies comprising ownership or management transfers of large portfolios of existing SHA-owned stock to alternative providers and directing the majority of investment in new social housing through these agencies. Alongside rapid expansion of the not-for-profit sector, a nationally consistent regulatory framework has also been foreshadowed (Plibersek 2009a). Capacity issues in the not-for-profit sector will also have to be addressed.

Implications of this set of reforms for Indigenous households in social housing and for the responsiveness of the mainstream community housing sector to Indigenous clients are two key issues arising that have not yet been given detailed policy consideration. A third central issue concerns whether, and under what conditions, the existing Indigenous community housing sector will be included in a more diversified provider system. To date, there has been little clarity at a national level about how Indigenous housing organisations will be impacted by these reforms, increasing the likelihood that responses could vary significantly across jurisdictions. In this context, some commentators have noted that the directions being proposed by the Australian Government for social housing are ambiguous and inconsistent, as they involve a strong emphasis on growth, organisational entrepreneurship, asset transfers and capacity building for mainstream community housing providers, on the one hand, but make no commitment to similar strategies for Indigenous housing organisations (IHOs) on the other. For that sector, government rhetoric in Canberra and in some state jurisdictions has been starkly divergent, emphasising compliance with government directives, performance management and the hand back of control of community-owned assets to government (Pisarski et al. 2009; Scott 2009; Slockee 2009a).

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<sup>2</sup> Long et al. 2007 provide a review of relevant studies up to 2006, see also Chapter 3.



**Table 1: National social housing initiatives and Indigenous households**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Scale and targets</i>	<i>Implications for Indigenous sector</i>
National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)	<p>Integrates housing assistance funding under a new Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Finance Relations.</p> <p>Overarching objective for all Australians to have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to economic participation.</p>	\$1.16b recurrent payment indexed	<p>Architecture for an integrated service delivery model for all needs groups with provision for additional payments to states under national partnership programs (NPPs) designed for specific purposes (see below).</p> <p>All programs and parties have a role to play in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.</p> <p>Indigenous people have the same housing opportunities as other Australians, and Indigenous people have improved amenity and reduced overcrowding, particularly in remote and discrete communities.</p> <p>Minimum funding for Indigenous housing no longer earmarked. No additional funding to address viability issues and return social housing to a long-term growth path (Hall &amp; Berry 2006).</p>
NPP Social Housing	Improve capacity for homeless clients to exit temporary accommodation into long-term housing.	\$400m capital funding over two years	<p>Indigenous households are a key target group for homelessness reduction.</p> <p>Small scale program (up to 2100 dwellings) expiring in 2009/10 cannot meet needs (see text).</p>
NPP Remote Indigenous Housing	Improve the living standards of Indigenous people in defined remote and very remote areas.	<p>\$5.5b capital funding over 10 years for new housing (up to 4200 dwellings) and major repairs to 4800 existing dwellings.</p> <p>Targeted to 26 communities in NT (15), Queensland (4), WA (3), SA (2) and NSW (2).</p>	<p>Recognition of contribution of housing to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous households.</p> <p>Earmarked funding to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and server housing shortages in selected remote communities.</p> <p>Small components may be spent in non-remote areas (e.g. New South Wales and Queensland received \$100m and \$60m respectively for backlog maintenance in IHO sector that can be applied across all locations).</p> <p>Ensuring management of Indigenous housing is consistent with 'public housing standards'.</p> <p>Maintains separate approach to addressing Indigenous needs in remote versus non-remote areas.</p> <p>Top down and prescriptive elements of approach (e.g. hand back control of land in return for additional services and requirement for 40-year leases to government) have raised Indigenous community concerns.</p>

<i>Name</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Scale and targets</i>	<i>Implications for Indigenous sector</i>
Nation Building and Jobs Plan (NBJP) Social Housing Initiative	Aims to stimulate building and construction industry and help retain jobs in the residential sector through building additional social housing and some refurbishment.	\$5.65b for construction of 19 300 new social housing dwellings plus refurbishment, from 2008/09 to 2011/12.	<p>Indigenous households waiting for social housing benefit from significant one off increase in social housing.</p> <p>Three-quarters of additional housing to be allocated to community based providers. In some jurisdictions a specific share is being earmarked for Indigenous households and IHOs (for example, in NSW 10 per cent of allocations through community organisations will be targeted to Indigenous households; in NSW and Victoria IHOs will receive 300 and 200 dwellings, respectively).</p> <p>The injection of additional funding is being used to drive wide ranging reforms to social housing that have been agreed with COAG. Proposed reforms include: coordinating access to housing managed by diverse providers; increasing transparency and accountability of outcomes for tenants and taxpayers; greater contestability for funding; reducing place-based concentrations of disadvantage; improving tenure pathways for social housing tenants; leveraging additional resources outside of government; additional regulatory provisions and improved efficiency in use of existing social housing.</p>
National Indigenous Reform Agreement	Series of interconnected COAG agreements and management frameworks for developing and reporting on how major service areas (health, housing, childhood education and employment) are actively targeting and servicing Indigenous households to reduce Indigenous disadvantage.		<p>Details service principles and performance measures for major service areas to Indigenous Australians with a focus on six building blocks—early childhood, schooling, health, healthy homes, safe communities and governance and leadership.</p>
National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery			<p>Attempting to drive integrated strategies to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.</p>
Closing the Gap National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy for Indigenous Australians			<p>Housing focus in urban areas is centred on increasing rental housing supply, reducing homelessness, reducing housing overcrowding, improving housing design and increasing home ownership. In 2010, Housing Ministers are developing a set of strategies and actions to increase Indigenous Australians' access to private rental housing and home ownership.</p> <p>States will develop Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plans and implementation plans through which monitoring of outcomes will occur. A 3-year review is planned for 2012.</p>

Sources: COAG (2008b; 2008c; 2008d; 2008e; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c); Housing Ministers' Conference (2009)

## 2.2 Whole-of-government strategy for improving service delivery to Indigenous households

Broader reforms to service delivery for Indigenous households that are being driven by COAG are also highly relevant.

A *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* forged in 2008 is designed to frame COAG's overall task of closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage (COAG 2008d). This agreement sets out a comprehensive and integrated framework for reform of Indigenous service provision, lists governments' commitments across all service areas and establishes a performance monitoring regime that will be used by the COAG Reform Council to assess progress. It includes service delivery principles to guide all governments in designing policies and providing services (see Box 1). 'Healthy homes' is one of six core building blocks for an integrated approach to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage (see Box 4).

### Box 1: Service delivery principles for services for Indigenous Australians

**Priority principle:** Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.

**Indigenous engagement principle:** Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services.

**Sustainability principle:** Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.

**Access principle:** Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.

**Integration principle:** There should be collaboration between and within governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services.

**Accountability principle:** Programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

Source: COAG 2008d, p.A-24. More details on these principles are provided at Schedule D, p.D75-78

In July 2009, COAG released *Closing the Gap: The National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy for Indigenous Australians* (COAG 2009a), which has been appended to the primary agreement for reform to specifically guide service provision in urban and regional areas. This identifies five main types of factors arising from prevailing program and service approaches driven by governments that are assessed to have contributed to unsatisfactory outcomes for Indigenous households in employment, education, income and housing, and thus need to change.

The factors identified in the COAG report are:

- *Structural factors*—such as poor planning and coordination across government resulting in gaps, overlapping services and lack of clear roles and responsibilities between mainstream providers and Indigenous community service organisations; Indigenous organisations and clients having to deal with multiple programs and agencies; up-front costs; lack of infrastructure and transport issues.
- *Service provider staffing issues*—ranging from difficulties in recruiting and maintaining staff, the challenges in securing skills and competencies required to

manage complex issues (including lack of culturally aware staff and Indigenous staff) and inappropriate staff attitudes.

- Indigenous people's reticence to use government services.
- *Ineffective engagement* by service providers with Indigenous communities.
- *Levels of disadvantage*—Indigenous Australians in urban and regional areas ... experience higher levels of disadvantage relative to other Australians' (COAG 2009a, p.3).

The next chapter examines in more detail available evidence and Indigenous views about how these general concerns and problems have manifested in housing services.

In response to their analysis, COAG has set the following six high level aims for reform of government funded services:

- 'Targeting of existing and future investments in housing, homelessness, education, employment, health and early childhood services to address Indigenous disadvantage in urban and regional areas.
- Improved access by Indigenous people to better coordinated and targeted services.
- Local need/place-based approaches enabling initiatives to be delivered in a manner appropriate to needs in a particular location.
- Strengthened Indigenous capacity, engagement and participation to promote a strong and positive view of Indigenous identity and culture and strengthening individual, family and community wellbeing and capacity as a necessary impetus to improved access to, and take-up of, services.
- More effective program accountability and sustainability, with governments required to enhance statistical collection services and other information sources to improve the detail and accuracy of reporting on outcomes.
- COAG monitoring progress in utilising Indigenous-specific and mainstream National Partnerships (NPs) to improve outcomes in urban and regional locations' (COAG 2009a, pp.3–4).

The Final Report of this study will give consideration to how such generic aims could be further developed and applied in the social housing system.

Specific funding has not been committed for Indigenous programs in urban and regional areas as it has in remote areas. Instead, the strategy 'requires jurisdictions to leverage Indigenous specific and mainstream funding agreed by COAG, and other existing resources, to improve Indigenous Australians' outcomes in urban and regional areas' (COAG 2008d, pp.4–5). While this implies intensifying the use of mainstream resources, we contend that it need not, and should not, signify that services are simply mainstreamed or that a 'one size fits all model' is pursued.

A specific consideration in the housing field will be how far strategies that are designed to alleviate the (over)reliance of Indigenous households on social housing are pursued. The Federal Government has nominated improving Indigenous access to home ownership and to private rental housing as key aims. However, these currently stand only as aspirations with no specificity about what should, or will, be done to make them feasible and appropriate. Major barriers of affordability and discrimination facing Indigenous people who want to use private market housing will need to be recognised and overcome to move such strategies forward (AIHW 2009a; Memmott 1990).

Both the housing-specific and whole-of-government reforms outlined in this chapter so far help to set the immediate policy context for a contemporary discussion about culturally strong and effective ways to deliver housing services to Indigenous people and communities in urban and regional areas. They also highlight the timeliness of this study's aims to contribute to the development of more robust principles and guidance about good practice in the social housing delivery system.

**Table 2: Estimated resident Indigenous population, by state/territory and remoteness areas, 2006(a)**

<i>State/territory</i>	<i>Proportion by remoteness area</i>						<i>Indigenous people as proportion of total state population (%)</i>	<i>Proportion of total Australian Indigenous population (%)</i>
	<i>Major cities (%)</i>	<i>Inner regional (%)</i>	<i>Outer regional (%)</i>	<i>Remote (%)</i>	<i>Very remote (%)</i>	<i>No. of Indigenous people</i>		
NSW	43.3	33.2	18.4	4.3	0.8	152 685	2.2	29.5
Victoria	49.6	34.9	15.4	0.1		33 517	0.7	6.5
Queensland	28.1	20.6	29.1	8.6	13.7	144 885	3.5	28.0
WA	34.4	8.0	14.9	17.1	28.5	70 966	3.4	13.7
SA	48.9	9.2	23.3	4.3	14.4	28 055	1.8	5.4
Tasmania (b)		53.9	42.5	1.2		18 415	3.8	3.6
ACT	99.9	0.1				4282	1.3	0.8
NT (b)		20.2	23.4	4.56	4.64	64 005	30.4	12.4
Australia (c)	32.1	21.4	21.9	9.3	15.4	517 043	2.5	100.0

(a) ABS Experimental Estimated Resident Population, based on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

(b) Hobart is classified as Inner regional. Darwin is classified as Outer regional.

(c) Includes Other Territories, so components may not add to total.

Source: AIHW (2009d, Table 2.1)

## 2.3 Indigenous households in social housing

This section uses published data on housing services to Indigenous Australians taken from various official sources to provide a national overview of population and tenure forms and the providers that manage social housing for Indigenous households. The data is broken down by locality type where appropriate, to the extent that is possible using the information that is published.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3.1 Indigenous population and tenure

In 2006, the estimated resident Indigenous population was 517 000, or 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population, although this is likely to be an undercount (ABS 2008). Three-quarters (75%) of the Indigenous population were living in major cities and regional areas, with the remaining 25 per cent in remote or very remote areas.

The distribution of the Indigenous population across remoteness areas and jurisdictions is shown in Table 2. The data highlight the significance of service models in 'non-remote' areas to the Indigenous community overall.

The proportion of the Indigenous population resident in urban and regional areas rose markedly from 44 per cent in 1971 to 74 per cent in 2001, when almost one-third of the population was resident in major cities (Taylor 2006, p.13). Steady growth in this population is projected to continue along with increasing urbanisation, which is strongly influenced by policy settings, such as where subsidised housing is provided (Habibis et al. 2010). A recent conservative projection indicates that Indigenous people will comprise 3.25 per cent of the Australian population by 2031 as a result of both increases in the Indigenous population (2% per annum) and a small projected decrease in the non-Indigenous population (Biddle & Taylor 2009, p.7). The rate of growth is directly proportional to remoteness category: the highest growth rates are projected for major cities and the lowest for very remote areas (Biddle & Taylor 2009, Table 6). Growth between 2006 and 2031 is forecast to be highest among working age adults (2.2% per annum) and the over 55 age group (4.4% per annum) (Biddle & Taylor 2009, Table 7), suggesting there will be a growing need for forms of housing suited to older Indigenous people.

Indigenous households are larger than non-Indigenous households on average (having 3.3 persons per household compared with 2.5). Higher numbers of dependent children in Indigenous households help to explain this situation. Household size increases with remoteness, from an average of 3.1 persons per household in 'major cities' to 4.9 in 'very remote' areas (AIHW 2009d, p.4).

Table 3 compares the tenure of Indigenous households with non-Indigenous households in 2006. It highlights the distinctive tenure profile of Indigenous households, notably their reliance on social housing and under representation in both the home ownership and private rental sectors.

One factor influencing the extent of reliance shown by Indigenous households on social housing is the geographic distribution of this population. Typically, the only form of housing provision in remote and very remote locations is social housing because

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<sup>3</sup> Data in this section has been sourced from the collections of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census and surveys, and the administrative collections of the Productivity Commission and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). As discussed in detail in the cited reports of those agencies, data collection in this area is challenging, but it has been improving slowly and is an ongoing priority area, recently boosted by additional government funding to support COAG's plans. The types of limitations in the data that affect the accuracy and quality of data generally include incomplete coverage (e.g. of IHOs), under enumeration (e.g. of homelessness or Indigeneity), gaps (e.g. in data on normative needs indicators), limited comparable trend data and inconsistencies of data definitions and standards across jurisdictions, timeframes and collection agencies.

housing markets and private provision have not developed. However, unlike for much of the rest of the social housing system, this has not been serviced by public agencies because they too have not operated in these areas. The lack of markets and service infrastructure has placed responsibility on the local Indigenous communities and their organisations to respond directly to their housing needs. Government involvement in how this is done has changed frequently over time and by place.

While the absence of public and private infrastructure may help to account for the form of housing tenure and service models (community-owned rental) in remote areas, use of social housing by Indigenous households is almost as significant in areas where regular housing markets operate. Nearly 80 per cent of all Indigenous social housing tenants were living in urban and regional settings in 1996 (Table 5). The main factors explaining the highly distinctive tenure position of Indigenous households in cities and regions is the profound economic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians; discrimination in the private rental market; broader social exclusion processes impacting on Indigenous people in urban areas; the comparatively poor physical and mental health of Indigenous Australians,<sup>4</sup> and a lack of culturally appropriate housing forms, such as larger housing suitable for extended families and visitors (COAG 2008b; 2008d).

**Table 3: Households by tenure type and Indigenous status, 2006**

<i>Tenure type</i>	<i>% of Indigenous households</i>	<i>% of non-Indigenous households</i>
Home owner/purchaser	34.2	68.9
Private and other renter (a)	31.3	23.0
State or territory housing authority	20.0	3.9
Indigenous and mainstream community housing	8.9	0.5
Other tenure/not stated (b)	5.6	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0
Total number	166 659	6 977 437

(a) Includes dwellings being rented from a real estate agent and from persons not in same household and the category 'landlord not stated'.

(b) Includes: 'other tenure type' and 'tenure type not stated'.

Source: ABS 2006 reproduced in AIHW (2009d, p.5)

<sup>4</sup> The gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non- Indigenous Australians is currently estimated at 11.5-years for Indigenous men and 9.7-years for Indigenous women (Rudd 2010).



## **2.4 Modes of provision of social housing for Indigenous households**

### *2.4.1 Social housing sub sectors*

Social housing for Indigenous households in Australia has been provided through four main funding and program streams.<sup>5</sup> The contribution of the various parts of the social housing service system to meeting Indigenous housing needs is outlined below.

#### *General public housing*

This is government owned and managed housing that is let to eligible Indigenous households through generic (i.e. not Indigenous specific) policies and processes, with funding provided under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and, since 2009, the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA). In 2007, 40 per cent of Indigenous social housing tenants lived in general public housing, nearly all of which (98%) is located in 'non-remote' areas (see Tables 4 and 5 and AIHW 2007, p.A5.6). Generally, policy and service standards and practices in this part of the system have been standardised for all client groups. However, in recent years, as targeting to households with complex and differing needs has intensified, and there has been more focus on customer satisfaction and on the importance of both shelter and non-shelter outcomes, SHAs have developed more flexible and responsive policies and practices, including adopting cultural guidelines, targeting additional tenancy service provisions to at risk groups and establishing a wider range of partnerships with other service providers. For example, several SHAs have introduced special programs such as homemaking or tenancy support for tenants who are considered at risk of not sustaining their tenancy and some of these are targeted to Indigenous households (e.g. in Victoria and the Northern Territory).<sup>6</sup>

#### *Public housing earmarked for Indigenous households*

This form of housing, specifically for Indigenous applicants, has been acquired with special purpose funding largely from the Commonwealth under the CSHA from 1984 (or prior programs that have since closed).<sup>7</sup> Following the cessation of those special purpose funding arrangements in 2009, future funding allocations for this program are now up to states to determine within the NAHA framework (to meet outcomes that as yet are defined only broadly). In most jurisdictions this housing is also owned and managed by SHAs, but is usually identified separately in reporting frameworks as state-owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH or SOMI housing elsewhere in this report). However, in NSW and Victoria other arrangements apply. In NSW, public housing that was acquired with earmarked funds was transferred to the ownership of the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), a statutory agency with a Board of Aboriginal Directors, in 1998 (*Aboriginal Housing Act 1998*). Since that time, management of that housing has been contracted back to the NSW public housing agency (Housing NSW), pending possible transfers to IHOs. In Victoria, between January 2008 and June 2009, with the agreement of tenants, tenancy management for most of the portfolio of Aboriginal social housing has been transferred to Aboriginal Housing Victoria, which is a state-wide registered housing provider under the Victorian

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<sup>5</sup> Short-term accommodation services such as homelessness services and specialist programs such as Aboriginal hostels are not considered in the scope for this study.

<sup>6</sup> See Flatau et al. (2009) for a description of these services and the results of the first national survey of their operation and effectiveness in mainstream social housing, with a focus on Indigenous households.

<sup>7</sup> The ACT did not receive specific allocations of funding under this program. In the Northern Territory specific funding for Indigenous housing need (through a variety of programs over time) was directed to IHOs, mainly in areas where public housing was not provided.

Housing Act (*Housing Act 1983*, as amended 2005). Section 2.5 provides more information on these models and their purpose.

In 2007, there were 12 622 Indigenous households living in SOMI housing, representing about 22 per cent of all Indigenous social housing (Table 3). This housing is also located mostly (82%) in areas classified non-remote, which includes some large regional centres in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia that have government housing offices (AIHW 2007, Table 5.7). A separate waiting list is maintained for this housing and an additional eligibility criterion (for those applicable for general public housing)—Indigeneity of at least one household member—applies. However, usually policy, service planning and operational practices do not differ significantly to those that apply to mainstream public housing. Nevertheless, SOMI housing is administered and reported separately (see AIHW 2009a). Thus, while SOMI housing is culturally identified, policies and services are generally not culturally specific. In effect, the program has operated as an additional source of supply of public housing, specifically for Indigenous households, thus helping to improve their access to this tenure.

### *Indigenous community housing*

This is housing owned and managed by various forms of IHOs, with funding provided directly by the Australian Government in the past under a range of programs and also by state governments using CSHA or other funding sources. These may be agencies providing mainly housing services or multi-function service providers. The latest survey of these organisations in 2006 identified 496 IHOs, which managed a total of 21 854 permanent dwellings. The total number of IHOs decreased by 120 from 616 in the previous (2001) survey, but the number of permanent dwellings managed by the remaining organisations increased slightly, reflecting some consolidation in the sector (ABS 2008). Nearly one-third of the dwellings managed by IHOs (7006) were in non-remote areas in 2006 and IHOs in non-remote areas represented 47 per cent of all IHOs. Ninety per cent of permanent dwellings managed by IHOs in urbanised settings were in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria in 2006 (Tables 5 & 6).

Policies adopted by IHOs (such as eligibility, rent-setting, tenure and housing entitlements) vary considerably to those applying in the remainder of the social housing system by location, type of provider and individual provider organisations. Policies also vary across organisations and regions within this sub-sector. The situation of varying but often inconsistent policies that has developed reflects two main factors: prescription by government funders that has varied by program and over time; and local decision-making that responds to local needs, community values and priorities. One of the most significant differences is found in rent-setting and rent collection. Different rent levels charged by providers under different programs have directly affected demand, service standards and viability of providers. Service quality has been found to be mediocre to poor generally, although many organisations, especially those operating at scale, perform well (Eringa et al. 2008). Service problems have been attributed mainly to poor financial viability in the sector (a result of a combination of low operating subsidies; high service costs, especially in remote areas; and low rent revenues) and a lack of professionally trained tenancy and property workers (Eringa et al. 2008; Hall & Berry 2006).

### *Mainstream community housing*

This is government-funded housing that is managed by community-based organisations and let to public housing eligible households, including Indigenous households. Community housing forms a comparatively small part of the social housing system (11% nationally) and generally Indigenous people have not been

targeted through mainstream community housing programs. Indigenous households are proportionately underrepresented in this sector, which provides for less than one per cent of Indigenous households in social housing, although it is likely that community-based organisations in some areas with high Indigenous populations have significant numbers/shares of Indigenous clients. The overall situation could reflect a number of factors, including: client preferences for Indigenous community housing; undeveloped strategies to attract Indigenous people to mainstream community housing; and the location of community housing organisations. Another possible reason for underrepresentation in community housing was identified by the peak body for community housing, the Community Housing Federation of Australia, in 2005. They suggested that separate development of the IHO sector had helped to create the view—in the context of self-determination principles—that Indigenous households were being catered to by Indigenous service providers (Flatau et al. 2005, p.98).

**Table 4: Indigenous social housing by mode of provision**

	<i>No. Indigenous households/dwellings</i>	<i>% all Indigenous social housing</i>
Mainstream public housing 2007/08	23 102	39.8
Indigenous only public housing 2007/08 (a)	12 622	21.7
Mainstream community housing 2007/08	522	0.9
Indigenous community housing (b)	21 854	37.6
Total	58 100	100.0

(a) Data include publicly-managed housing owned by the Aboriginal Housing Office in NSW. In Victoria, 348 units of former SOMI housing had been transferred to the IHO sector by this date and are included in row 4.

(b) Data relate to an earlier year (2006).

Sources: SCRGSP 2008; ABS 2007, Table 4.7

#### *2.4.2 Location of providers of social housing to Indigenous households*

Providers of social housing to Indigenous households, whether government or community-based, are highly differentiated by locality (Table 5). The data confirm that government providers are overwhelmingly dominant in urban areas. Community-based providers dominate in rural areas and discrete communities. As with many other aspects of the service arrangements for Indigenous households, this pattern directly reflects past policies and program and administrative arrangements for providing social housing to Indigenous households. It also highlights the extent to which housing services to Indigenous households in urban and regional areas have been mainstreamed prior to reforms that are being implemented presently. The pattern shown in the table could be expected to have intensified since 1996, mainly as a result of greater emphasis on allocations of public housing to high needs groups, including Indigenous households. Between 2002 and 2007, lettings to new tenants in public housing fell by 19.6 per cent (reflecting declining capacity in the tenure) while lettings to Indigenous households increased by 4 per cent and the total number of Indigenous households in public housing increased by 30 per cent (SCRGSP 2008, Table 16A.1). This suggests that an outcome of further mainstreaming will be a growing concentration of Indigenous households in a minority and stigmatised tenure

(Atkinson & Jacobs 2008) under control of a state landlord, unless other countervailing processes eventuate, such as the breakup of SHAs.

**Table 5: Providers of social housing to Indigenous households by locality, 1996**

<i>Locality (a)</i>	<i>Government provider</i>	<i>Community – based provider(b)</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total no dwellings</i>	<i>% all Indigenous social housing (c)</i>
Major urban	93.1%	6.9%	100%	9558	30.2%
Other urban	76.8%	23.2%	100%	15 402	48.7%
Bounded locality	26.7%	76.3%	100%	3702	11.7%
Rural balance	13.0%	87.0%	100%	2957	9.4%
Total	100%	100%			100%
Total no.	22 105	9515		31 620	

(a) Definitions of locality as applied in 1996—remote and very remote communities are included in the latter two categories.

(b) Includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous community organisations.

(c) Permanent dwellings earmarked for Indigenous households and other social housing occupied by Indigenous households.

Source: Calculated from McLennan (1998, p.30)

## **2.5 State level systems for social housing service delivery for Indigenous households**

Differences in governance and modes of service delivery between state governments can be explained partly by the long history of fragmented government policy making in this area. However, differences also reflect differing responses by jurisdictions to a highly diverse population group with differing needs, and political choices that are made at state level. Below we highlight some characteristic aspects of the social housing policy and service delivery system for Indigenous households in each jurisdiction, focusing on arrangements that apply in urban and regional areas and recent directions for reform. This is intended as a snapshot, not a comprehensive review of state level arrangements. It aims to highlight similarities and differences in present arrangements and in strategies for reform. More detail on the policies and institutional arrangements in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, where fieldwork is planned, will be provided in the Final Report. Because this is such a rapidly moving area of policy development at present, we also point out that some of the situations described can be expected to have changed before completion of this research.

## *New South Wales*

New South Wales has the largest share and number of social housing dwellings occupied by Indigenous households. Drawing on various data sources (see Table 6), it can be estimated that over 18 200 Indigenous households were living in various forms of social housing in NSW in 2008. Around 80 per cent of this housing is located in urbanised areas, showing the importance of having appropriate and effective policies and practices for urban Indigenous households.

The largest provider to Indigenous households in NSW is the SHA. However, the other provider sectors are significant and distinctive in several respects. NSW stands alone among jurisdictions by having a separate government decision-making and administrative agency for Indigenous housing. This agency, the Aboriginal Housing Office, is a statutory body established in 1998 and governed by a Board of Aboriginal people, who are selected on a merit basis (*Aboriginal Housing Act 1998*). The AHO controls SOMIH dwellings in NSW, is responsible for the funding and regulation of IHOs and advises the state government on housing policies for Indigenous households. However, while the AHO owns the earmarked Indigenous public housing in NSW, day-to-day management has been undertaken by the SHA under a service agreement with the AHO since the asset transfer took place over the period 1998–2000. At that time, this was intended to be an interim arrangement pending possible transfer of the ownership and/or management of this stock to IHOs to achieve a number of goals. These included promoting self-determination and self-management, increasing the scale and financial viability of IHOs, reducing reliance of Indigenous tenants on the SHAs through developing alternative rental and ownership models, and enhancing policy flexibility and responsiveness (AHDC 1996; Knowles 1998). The unique Indigenous governance model operating in NSW provides an opportunity to assess how service delivery has developed over more than a decade under separate governance and administration. Impacts of these arrangements will be examined in a selected NSW community as part of the fieldwork for the second stage of this study (see Chapter 5).

NSW is also distinguished, along with Queensland, by having a comparatively large urban-based IHO sector<sup>8</sup>, which currently owns and manages over 18 per cent of total Indigenous social housing in NSW. Another 4 per cent is managed by IHOs in remote areas. The existence of this numerically large and diversified sub sector can be traced partly to the foundation of Aboriginal Land Councils in NSW in 1983 (*NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*), as well as to the foundation of separate Aboriginal corporations under Commonwealth legislation. The 2006 Community Housing and Infrastructure Survey (CHINS) identified 169 IHOs in NSW of which 130 were managing less than 20 permanent dwelling properties each and only two were managing more than 100 dwellings (ABS 2008, Table 2.3). The small size of the housing portfolio of most IHOs (in all jurisdictions) is a major issue affecting the viability of these organisations and their capacity to deliver effective services (Eringa et al. 2008).

In NSW, the AHO has had a long term strategy to improve the viability of IHOs by restructuring the sector, especially by consolidating management in larger regional agencies (known as Regional Aboriginal Housing Management Services) that manage housing on behalf of local IHOs. This model has been designed to enable local Land Councils and Aboriginal corporations to retain ownership and control of their assets,

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<sup>8</sup> While located in urban regions, a number of the organisations and their dwellings are located in former reserves or missions that are often some distance from the nearest town centre and general services network.

while generating operational economies of scale and a professional approach to tenancy and property services. Four regional services have been established in NSW with a combined portfolio so far of 900 dwellings that are owned by 46 local organisations (NSW Government n.d.). The prototype for this service model was the South Eastern Aboriginal Regional Management Service (SEARMS), which was founded as a cooperative in 2003 with six neighbouring Aboriginal housing providers as members. SEARMS aims to provide culturally appropriate social housing services to Aboriginal communities between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay on the NSW South Coast.

Reforms to the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* executed in 2007 are also directed to improving the governance of Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) specifically, such as compulsory training in governance and a requirement for annual business plans. A specific amendment relates to the social housing business of LALCs. By 30 June 2010, they will require the consent of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council to continue to provide social housing (NSW Government 1983, p.S52A(2)). Consent will be based on an assessment of the financial viability of their social housing program and the organisation (NSW Government 1983, p.S52B(2)). While LALCs cannot be compelled to do so, it is expected that these reforms will encourage more of them to participate in outsourcing management of their housing or to form other service partnerships.

The latest reform direction in NSW, released in February 2010, involves a new strategy, *The build and grow Aboriginal community housing strategy*, to reform the Aboriginal community housing sector so that future growth is sustainable and Aboriginal housing organisations are independent, financially viable and accountable. A central feature of the strategy is new administrative arrangements for the registration of all IHOs that are funded by the AHO. In an important integrative move, registration of IHOs and mainstream community housing organisations will be brought together under one administrator, the Registrar of Community Housing,<sup>9</sup> commencing in April 2010, following an initial round of community consultations in March (NSW Government n.d.). Registration of IHOs through this process, to be known as the Provider Assessment and Registration System (PARS), will be modelled on the NSW Regulatory Code for Community Housing Providers (NSW Government 2009), adapted by the AHO in consultation with Aboriginal housing providers, the AHO Board and relevant stakeholders. It will satisfy requirements under the *Aboriginal Housing Act 1998* (NSW Government 1998) for registration of IHOs and replace current separate arrangements administered by the AHO.

Rent-setting for AHO-owned and funded properties will also be reformed. Rent-setting in the IHO sector will be brought into line gradually with mainstream social housing. A new rent formula will further improve the rent revenue of IHOs and the AHO, by capturing Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) paid to eligible tenants, as occurs in mainstream community housing.<sup>10</sup> Current operating subsidies paid to IHOs will be withdrawn progressively, as rent reforms are implemented. Taken together these reforms, when fully implemented, should reduce discrepancies in rent-setting for Indigenous housing across the social housing system and help to improve the viability of the IHO sector and its financial independence. This in turn will help to support successful registration of Aboriginal providers. However, some of our Indigenous advisors (see Chapter 3) were concerned that the new formula for rent-setting was complex and lacked transparency making it more difficult for clients to understand and

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Registrar of Community Housing see <http://www.rch.nsw.gov.au>

<sup>10</sup> Tenants of SOMI housing in NSW and Victoria are eligible for CRA because control of the stock has been transferred from the SHA. Tenants of SHAs are not eligible for CRA.

accept. They suggested that payment of additional operating subsidies to providers (equivalent to CRA) might have been more practical. This debate highlights the importance of careful consideration being given to whether there are different ways of achieving similar outcomes in an integrated system.

The reform direction just outlined is intended to promote consistent performance standards and outcomes across the whole not-for-profit housing system in NSW. Importantly, the intention is to have an integrated system that reflects the diversity of the non-government sector (Registrar of Community Housing, pers. comm., 5 February 2010). The new arrangements should also help facilitate registered IHOs having direct access to a broader array of housing funds, such as the new National Rental Affordability Scheme, beyond the (limited) funding for expansion that has been available from targeted social housing programs in the past. As the system will be aligned with regulatory requirements for mainstream community housing organisations, successful registration should enable IHOs to receive funding from both the SHA (Housing NSW) and the AHO (see Registrar of Community Housing 2010). However, it is not clear how this will relate to the requirements for LALCs under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*. While the overall directions for reforming housing service arrangements in the IHO sector in NSW seem to be constructive generally, previous experience (see Chapter 3) suggests that success in promoting a sustainable Indigenous community housing model will depend crucially on how and *how respectfully* they are negotiated with IHOs and Indigenous stakeholders, and on sufficient resources being provided to support the change process.

Within the mainstream delivery system, there are two other relevant service-related developments of note in NSW. The first is the imminent release of a new Aboriginal Service Strategy for Housing NSW. Priorities under this strategy include reducing rates of eviction from public and SOMI housing for Aboriginal clients and increasing Aboriginal employment rates within the SHA (with a target of 7 per cent of agency staff). The second is the development of an Aboriginal Access Strategy that aims to increase Indigenous access to mainstream community housing and to promote culturally appropriate service delivery and Aboriginal employment in that sector (Housing NSW staff, pers. comm., 10 February 2010).

### *Victoria*

Victoria has a mainly urbanised Indigenous population and nearly all social housing services are located in non-remote areas. Victoria has recently established a new service model for provision of housing that was acquired through the Aboriginal Rental Housing program under the CSHA from 1979. Utilising an agency structure that was established in 1981 principally to advise the Victorian Government on Aboriginal housing policy and strategy, the Government and Aboriginal Housing Victoria, in consultation with Indigenous tenants, have begun a staged approach to the transfer of Aboriginal-identified public housing properties to Aboriginal Housing Victoria. Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) (previously known as the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria) is an incorporated non-profit organisation that was registered as a housing provider under the Victorian registrar of housing agencies in 2009.

The first stage of the new service model, which was completed in June 2009, has involved the transfer of tenancy agreements and tenancy management services to AHV. Around 90 per cent of Aboriginal-identified public housing properties in Victoria (1249 dwellings) were transferred in this stage. This outcome indicates a high degree of tenant support for the move to Aboriginal-run housing services and the large numbers of transfers will help to ensure that financial viability targets that were set at the outset for AHV can be achieved. The next stage involves the transfer of property management activities in accord with an asset management plan to be agreed with

the Victorian Government, and is targeted for completion by mid 2010. A final stage, targeted for achievement in 2011, will involve transfer of ownership of the properties under AHV management. AHV also has a small portfolio of properties acquired mainly with their own funds or under former Commonwealth programs and has embarked on a program of dwelling acquisitions, which will build their balance sheet and revenue, and assist the agency to secure finance to support further growth (AHV 2008).

The recent management transfers make AHV the largest non-government housing provider in Victoria and the largest independent Indigenous housing provider nationally. This move has also nearly halved the concentration of Indigenous tenants in public housing in Victoria and created a viable new Indigenous-governed tenancy and property service that operates state wide. There are around 20 other small IHOs in Victoria operating in urban and regional areas that own and manage about 500 dwellings. These organisations now have an option to register as housing providers with the Victorian registrar of housing agencies, which, if successful, will enable them to access housing funding in future and to partner with other registered housing agencies.

### *Queensland*

Queensland has the nation's second highest number of Indigenous social housing tenancies, after NSW. Nearly 71 per cent of tenancies are located in non-remote areas. Provision of these is spread fairly evenly across the public housing (26%), SOMIH (22%) and IHO (19%) sectors, with very few (4%) reported in mainstream community housing (Table 6).

From 1992 (when responsibility for Indigenous housing was transferred from the Indigenous welfare agency to the Queensland Department of Housing) until 2004, Indigenous specific housing policy and service delivery was the responsibility of a designated Indigenous housing unit within the SHA, advised by a ministerially appointed advisory committee comprising community members. This unit, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing (ATSIH) unit provided leadership and strategic advice on Indigenous housing policy, managed delivery of SOMI housing and allocated funding to remote communities. Identified construction teams and housing management teams co-located with public housing service outlets operated in Brisbane and regional Queensland. In 2004, the SOMIH program was integrated with general public housing so that, while properties remained reserved for Indigenous applicants, the policy, service delivery practice and property functions were absorbed into public housing operations and public housing service practices were adopted.

Recent policy and service delivery initiatives for public housing clients include new assessment and allocations policies that have contributed to a 50 per cent increase in Indigenous tenancies between 2003 and 2008 (see Table 8). These policies do not specifically target Indigenous clients, but the priority given to high needs results in more allocations to Indigenous applicants.

In 2008, the SHA implemented a five-year 'Improving Indigenous Service Delivery Plan' with goals relating to cultural awareness, staff capability, community communication and engagement as well as continuous improvement in policy and effectiveness. Each area office is expected to develop an annual local plan in keeping with the state-wide plan. Another initiative involves targeting additional public housing supply for Indigenous households wishing to re-locate from overcrowded conditions in discrete Indigenous communities to major urban and regional centres.

In relation to community-based providers, pooling of housing funding between the state-administered housing programs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which took place in most other jurisdictions in the 1990s, did



not occur in Queensland. Urban and regional IHOs were funded and regulated primarily by ATSIC, although a small number of these organisations received some state funding and, consequently, were also supervised through mainstream community housing accreditation and regulatory systems. One legacy of continuing Commonwealth administration in Queensland has been that IHOs developed business models based on ATSIC policies. Since the demise of ATSIC in 2004, protracted negotiations have taken place between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments, and between the SHA and IHOs, about transition to state funding and regulation (Habibis et al. 2010; Pisarski et al. 2009). The policy intent is that IHOs will be required to adopt mainstream social housing policies and to meet the same regulatory requirements as mainstream community housing providers, under the 'one social housing system' rubric to receive access to state funding (see Phillips et al. 2009). IHOs have expressed concerns about their ability to remain financially viable and flexibly meet community needs under these conditions (Pisarski et al. 2009).

Ongoing negotiations between the housing authority and IHOs have centred on concerns expressed by IHOs about the imposition of a variety of state policy and regulatory requirements, including those regarding targeting, allocation through the common social housing register, rent-setting, security of tenure and registration of state interest in IHO properties. Delays in resolving these issues have meant that most IHOs have received no funding for additional housing for several years and, when accompanied by changes in other programs, such as cutbacks in the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), this situation has increased financial pressures in IHOs. A recent meeting of IHOs resolved to establish a state-wide representative body to represent their interests, to present a united voice and to negotiate collectively with the state government (QATSIHS 2010).

### *Western Australia*

The Department of Housing is the predominant provider of social housing to Indigenous households in non-remote Western Australia and has experienced over 100 per cent increase in this client group between 2003 and 2008 (see Table 6 & 7). About one-third of the Indigenous public housing tenants occupy SOMIH dwellings, although tenancy conditions and policies are consistent across mainstream public housing and SOMIH tenants. Only a small number of Indigenous housing organisations operate in non-remote areas and these are being integrated into broader community housing funding and regulatory regimes. One of the most high profile of those is Noongar Mia Mia Pty Ltd, which brings both Indigenous and commercial perspectives to its role of providing and managing public housing for Aboriginal people within the Perth metropolitan area and encouraging Aboriginal home ownership. Noongar Mia Mia is a finalist in the 2010 Indigenous Governance awards. <<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/igawards/pages/nominees.php>>

Formal structures to enable community participation in Aboriginal housing policy development have been in place in Western Australia since the 1970s when the Aboriginal Housing Board (AHB) was established. The AHB was restructured in 1994 to include representation from ATSIC and its role expanded to provide advice on integrated planning for Commonwealth and state housing and infrastructure programs. Subsequent transfer of ATSIC functions to the state led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Council, which reports to the Minister for Housing.

An Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure Unit within the mainstream department has responsibility for both remote and urban housing programs and policy advice on Indigenous housing issues. The department has a range of mainstream and specialist

policies and services that support Indigenous tenants. Department of Housing tenants have access to assistance through the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP), Aboriginal Customer Support Officers and the Aboriginal Tenant Support Service. Other specialist assistance includes the Private Rental Aboriginal Assistance Loan Scheme and the Aboriginal Home Ownership Scheme.

The Western Australian Department of Housing acknowledges that in non-remote areas 'cultural needs are often unknown, overlooked or not taken seriously' (DoH (WA) 2009). This acknowledgement follows an inquiry by the WA Equal Opportunity Commission in 2004 (EOC 2004) that made wide-ranging recommendations for improvements in communications, community engagement and public housing policy and practice. As a direct result of this inquiry, the department identified priority areas for improvement and established a taskforce to oversee implementation.

### *South Australia*

In the context of development of a multi-provider housing system and in keeping with the 1992 'National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders' (see Section 2.6), South Australia introduced new governance arrangements for Indigenous housing policies and resource allocations in 1998, by establishing a statutory agency, the Aboriginal Housing Authority (AHA). The AHA was given overall responsibility for planning, coordination, service delivery and evaluation of housing provision for Aboriginal people in South Australia and control of earmarked Indigenous public housing was transferred to the AHA in 2000.

However, in 2006, as part of wider reforms to housing administration in SA, the AHA was abolished and its staff functions and assets were re-integrated into the mainstream agency for housing, Housing SA, within the Department of Families and Communities. At the time, the Minister for Housing committed the South Australian Government to the creation of an 'Aboriginal Housing Association' to specifically focus on providing access to safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing for Aboriginal South Australians (Weatherill 2006). This has not occurred. The trajectory just described reflects the changing attitudes in government to service integration (see Section 2.6), but it also shows how rapidly the development of culturally specific models of provision may be disrupted by central government decision-making, which is not representative of Indigenous people.

Since 2006, the SA Government's approach to Indigenous services has centred on the adoption of a *Cultural Inclusion Framework* to guide, monitor and regulate the performance of mainstream services (Government of SA 2006). The purpose of the framework 'is to assist South Australian government agencies to develop services that are culturally inclusive and thus more accessible to Aboriginal people' (Government of SA 2006, p.3).

'The core elements covered by the framework are:

- A culturally inclusive and competent workforce.
- Culturally inclusive services planning.
- Culturally inclusive program/service design, including accountability and reporting mechanisms.
- Culturally inclusive inter-agency collaboration.
- Culturally inclusive governance.' (Government of SA 2006, p.9).

The framework provides step-by-step processes for addressing each of these core elements. It also includes a self-assessment instrument and a cultural inclusion checklist. This model predates principles for service to Indigenous households that are now enshrined in COAG agreements (Box 1), but it is compatible with those. Thus it may offer an early opportunity to assess the operations and impacts of a culturally inclusive approach.

Presently, Housing SA has committed to a service framework and place-based service model that values cultural diversity and is developing an implementation plan concerned with cultural inclusion in regional offices, among other priorities. The Department of Families and Communities has a position 'Principal Aboriginal Consultant' to oversee the implementation of the framework and Housing SA includes an Office of Aboriginal Housing and an Aboriginal housing services team (Housing SA staff, pers. comm., 6 October 2009). The provision of a specialised home loan product for Aboriginal households, (the HomeStart Nunga Loan, HomeStart Finance 2010) to improve Aboriginal access to home ownership (and reduce pressure on social housing) is a distinctive feature of the SA housing services system for Indigenous households.

### *Northern Territory*

The modes of social housing provision to Indigenous households in the Northern Territory are uniquely different to the remainder of Australia, reflecting the culturally significant and distinctive population profile and settlement history of that region. For social housing, the main delivery mode in remote areas and in discrete communities in or near urban areas has been Indigenous community organisations and the dominant delivery mode in Darwin and major towns is public housing. A mainstream community housing sector has not developed, although there are moves to encourage this at present.

Fourteen per cent of all Indigenous households living in social housing in Australia are in the Northern Territory, compared to around one per cent of non-Indigenous households (SCRGSP 2010). Of these, over three-quarters had an Indigenous landlord (until recently) and less than one-quarter a public landlord. Over 36 per cent of tenants in the public housing system are Indigenous, over five times the national average (Table 7). However, to a greater extent than elsewhere in Australia, much *social* housing has taken the form of a collective tenure, where local communities own the land on which individual households control their homes and pass them on through kinship, family or community networks.

Under the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response* to the abuse of children (see Section 2.6), known as the Intervention, and the subsequent *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, far-reaching and complex reforms to these tenure and provider patterns have begun in the Northern Territory. The foci of the housing reforms are:

- A federal and territory-funded strategic response (the *Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP)*) to address housing and local infrastructure needs in 16 remote communities designated high need and refurbishment work in a further 57 smaller communities. A total of \$674 million is allocated to this program over five years. Under the approach, it is intended that the 16 larger communities selected for growth will become central hubs serving smaller surrounding communities. A feature of the program is its commitment to Indigenous training and employment—with many employees likely to come from IHOs and other Indigenous organisations. Contentious aspects of the implementation of this reform so far have included requirements for communities to provide 40-year leases over their land to government; government takeover of

management of housing; the lack of funding for around another 150 remote communities with housing needs; a slow start to dwelling construction; and lack of government responses to many specific community recommendations (National Indigenous Times n.d.).

- Additional funding of \$103 million directed to town camps and urban areas. This is considered inadequate, in the face of increasing urban drift (under the Intervention) and constant mobility between urban and remote areas (Vine Bromley 2008).

Consultations about the new public housing management model for remote communities in the Northern Territory began in 2008. Housing Reference Groups are now being formed in each community receiving SIHIP funding. These are intended to advise government on cultural and family matters related to the design, construction and long term use of housing (Australian Government and Northern Territory Government 2009). This model has potential to demonstrate a new culturally adapted mode of public housing management that could also be implemented in urban and regional areas, but it is too early yet to assess its effectiveness and appropriateness.

### *Tasmania*

Social housing for Indigenous people in Tasmania is provided through mainstream public housing, SOMIH and three IHOs, only one of which operates in an urban setting. There is no significant community housing provision to Indigenous people.

SOMIH is managed as a distinct program with a state-wide Aboriginal housing services manager and identified Aboriginal tenancy officers located within three area offices. The program had 347 properties in 2007/08 (AIHW 2009c). There has been a local commitment to continue to allocate capital funds for investment in this portfolio at least to the level previously available under the CSHA (Aboriginal Housing Services Tasmania staff, pers. comm., 26 February 2010).

Aboriginal Housing Services Tasmania operates broadly within public housing policies and procedures and Indigenous applicants may elect to apply for either or both programs. Supplementary guidelines provide for culturally appropriate decision-making principles, outline the specific roles of Aboriginal tenancy officers and establish the role and operational guidelines for community engagement. The role of Aboriginal housing officers includes regional responsibility for community engagement, liaison with Indigenous tenants and advice to other tenancy management staff on cultural issues. They are proactive in supporting tenancies through strategies such as arrears management. Housing Tasmania recognises the inter-cultural nature of the role by acknowledging the accountability of Indigenous housing officers to their community and excluding them from attendance at Residential Tenancy Tribunal hearings in recognition of kinship and community relationships. Management support is provided through both local management and by the state-wide manager for Indigenous services, and peer support is facilitated by regular state-wide meetings and informal networks between Indigenous housing workers.

A commitment to community participation within Aboriginal Housing Services Tasmania is formalised through community-elected Aboriginal Tenancy Allocation Panels that make recommendations on allocations, as well as asset management decisions such as SOMIH property purchases and disposals. The panels operate under culturally appropriate decision-making principles that allow them to make recommendations that take account of specific needs and the cultural context for applicants. For example, locational issues, such as proximity to extended family or potential for conflict in community relations may be considered; additional bedrooms

may be allocated where fluctuating household composition is likely and the sensitive future use of housing may be considered, where previous residents have passed away. Similar attention is paid to property acquisition to avoid over-concentration but promote access to services and community connections (Aboriginal Housing Services Tasmania staff, pers. comm., 26 February 2010).

Increases in allocations of public housing to high need Indigenous households in recent years has resulted in some community tensions and management issues, especially on public housing estates with high proportions of Indigenous tenants (Aboriginal Housing Services Tasmania staff, pers. comm., 26 February 2010). Cultural safety training is provided to Housing Tasmania staff and staff are encouraged to take advice from Aboriginal housing services staff where they face culturally sensitive issues and to inform culturally appropriate decision-making.

As in Queensland, negotiations are underway with IHOs to transfer from Commonwealth to state funding and regulatory regimes. Previously divergent approaches to rent-setting are a source of contention and a staggered implementation of either social housing (income-related) or affordable housing (discount to market) rent-setting is under negotiation. While the number of IHOs in Tasmania is very small, a broader range of multi-purpose Indigenous organisations are active in working with homeless people and supporting clients to access and sustain social housing.

### *Australian Capital Territory*

Canberra has a small Indigenous population and members of the local community with housing needs rely entirely on mainstream housing services. The ACT Government has never received identified funding for providing Indigenous housing in Canberra.<sup>11</sup> Only 228 Indigenous households lived in mainstream social housing in 2007 (Table 6). A distinctive feature of the ACT service provision system generally is a statutory mechanism that gives a representative voice to Indigenous people about the impacts on their population in the ACT of all government policies and programs (SCRGSP 2009).

In 2008, the ACT Government established the ACT Indigenous Elected Body (IEB) to advise the government on policies and services to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders living in the ACT (ACT Government 2008). The seven elected members of the IEB can be asked to provide advice, and can advocate, on the interests of their community in all government service areas, including housing. To support these roles they can consult with their community and promote discussion of issues of concern to them, monitor service practices and outcomes and commission independent research. The IEB is the only statutory and democratically-elected Indigenous organisation in urban and regional Australia.

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<sup>11</sup> Some data identify a few community housing dwellings, but these are located in the discrete community of Wreck Bay on the NSW South Coast, which is part of the Australian Capital Territory for administrative purposes. These dwellings were funded under Commonwealth and NSW Government programs.

**Table 6: Share of social housing dwellings having Indigenous tenants by mode of provision by jurisdiction**

<i>Mode of provision</i>	<i>Mainstream public housing 2007</i>	<i>Indigenous specific public housing 2007</i>	<i>Mainstream community housing 2007</i>	<i>Indigenous community housing-non-remote 2006</i>	<i>Indigenous community housing-remote 2006</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total no. social housing dwellings with identified Indigenous tenants</i>
NSW	51.5	21.7	4.9	17.9	4.0	100.0	19 039
Victoria	43.0	40.8	1.1	15.0	-	100.0	3 134
Queensland	26.0	22.2	4.4	18.2	29.2	100.0	13 147
WA	43.9	21.1	1.3	2.3	31.4	100.0	10 269
SA	32.3	43.5	1.4	5.5	17.2	100.0	4 111
Tasmania	59.5	28.6	0.7	7.0	4.2	100.0	1 194
NT	21.6	-	-	2.2	76.1	100.0	8 229
ACT	89.5	-	10.5			100.0	228
Total no.	23 102	12 622	1 773	7 006	14 848		59 351

Sources: SCRGSP (2008, Tables 16A.1; 16A.14; 16A.25), ABS (2007, Table 4.7)

**Table 7: Proportion of households accessing mainstream social housing that are Indigenous, 2008**

	<i>Mainstream public housing</i> %	<i>Mainstream community housing</i> %
NSW	8.2	5.7
Victoria	2.2	9.7
Queensland	7.4	11.6
WA	15.7	4.4
SA	3.4	1.4
Tasmania	6.5	2.6
NT	36.8	n.a
ACT	2.4	4.2
Australia	7.2	6.4
Total no.	23 953	2298

Source: AIHW (2009c, Table 2.32). See original table for data limitations.

## 2.6 Service integration endeavours and challenges

Complexities in the delivery system for social housing for Indigenous households, which are revealed in the account above, reflect contested responsibility for, and divergent approaches to, providing social housing to urban Indigenous people over a long period. In particular, Commonwealth intervention in this area since the 1970s has contributed to the separate development of Commonwealth-funded Indigenous community housing programs and jointly funded but state run Indigenous public and Indigenous community housing programs. The program arrangements and service delivery practices that have resulted are generally characterised by duplication, inconsistency and confused accountability (Phillips et al. 2009). There have been a series of attempts at policy, funding and service integration and the legacies of these remain strongly embedded in current policy settings and service delivery systems. Below we summarise periodic approaches to integration that have been directed at overcoming problems with these arrangements, largely as perceived by governments.

What can be characterised as a first wave of integration stemmed from the inaugural meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 1992, which endorsed a 'National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders' as the principal policy framework for negotiating Commonwealth-State agreements for Indigenous services (COAG 1992). The commitment at the time was to coordinate services and programs to Indigenous people and communities and to enhance their involvement in planning and service delivery, commensurate with self-determination principles (Jones et al. 2008)). In the housing domain, implementation plans varied considerably across jurisdictions and over time, but integration strategies have generally been weak (Phillips et al. 2009). For example, funds and administration for Indigenous housing programs were pooled in some jurisdictions but not others. Some jurisdictions intensified mainstreaming of services (e.g. Queensland), while others have strengthened community-based approaches (e.g. New South Wales, Victoria), and some have altered their approach (e.g. South Australia). The main thrust of this wave of integration concerned funding and programs rather than service delivery changes. It was guided by the principle of increasing self-determination in policy-making and the allocation of resources.

A second wave of integration activity specific to housing was associated with a new national direction for Indigenous housing launched by Housing Ministers in 2001, known as 'Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010' (Housing Ministers' Conference 2001). *Building a Better Future* (BBF) focused attention on ten outcome areas for achieving better housing (see Box 2) and included a key strategy to improve access to mainstream services for Indigenous households who were homeless, facing severe affordability problems, or who were living in poor standard and/or overcrowded conditions.

**Box 2: Building a Better Future: Indigenous housing to 2010, outcome areas**

- Better housing quality.
- Better housing services.
- More housing.
- Improved partnerships.
- Greater effectiveness and efficiency.
- Improved performance linked to accountability.
- Coordination of services (whole-of-government approaches).

Source: Housing Ministers' Conference (2001)

By 2005 there was discernible evidence that this strategy was working numerically with increased numbers of Indigenous households appearing in national data records on public housing (Flatau et al. 2005). Many Indigenous applicants were given priority access to a tenancy as a result of an assessment of being in severe and immediate need (AIHW 2009d). The general trend to an increasing share of Indigenous households in public housing has continued, as the latest data shows clearly (Table 8). The data in Table 8 also highlight that increasing Indigenous access to public housing has been occurring in a system with declining capacity.

Significant service challenges linked to the trend are also evident, however. These include evidence that Indigenous tenancies have shorter tenancy durations and are much more likely to receive termination notices and evictions than non-Indigenous households, as well as evidence of high rates of overcrowding among Indigenous tenants in public housing (AIHW 2009d; Flatau et al. 2005). There is also recent evidence from one jurisdiction (WA) that relationships between Indigenous clients and the SHA are often characterised by conflict over housing-related debt, standards of service and the transparency of administrative processes to Indigenous people (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008). As well, highly publicised social problems in some public housing estates and smaller towns have allegedly been associated with disruptive behaviour of some Indigenous tenants (for example, West Dubbo, Rosemeadow and Moree in NSW). The trend has broader implications for the public housing system's capacity to meet overall need for public housing, as it is occurring in the context of continuing financial problems for SHAs and a dramatic overall decline in allocations—20 per cent between 2002/03 and 2006/07 (Hall & Berry 2006; SCRGSP 2008) (see also Table 8).



**Table 8: Changes in number of Indigenous tenancies and all tenancies in public housing, 2003–2008**

	<i>Indigenous households in public housing 2003</i>	<i>Indigenous households in public housing 2008</i>	<i>% change Indigenous households</i>	<i>Public housing occupied dwellings 2003</i>	<i>Public housing occupied dwellings 2008</i>	<i>% change public housing 2003–2008</i>
NSW	8700	9800	12.6	123 087	118 839	-3.5
Victoria	1006	1379	37.1	62 598	62 964	0.6
Queensland	2491	3742	50.2	48 562	50 243	3.5
WA	2363	4751	101.1	30 366	30 299	-0.2
SA	1118	1421	27.1	45 351	41 625	-8.2
Tasmania	447	750	67.8	11 624	11 492	-1.1
NT	1451	1850	27.5	5476	5032	-8.1
ACT	185	260	40.5	10 895	10 642	-2.3
Total	17 761	23 953	34.9	337 959	331 136	-2.0

Source: Calculated from SCRGSP (2008). Limitations of data specified in original table.

Abolition of ATSIC, the Commonwealth's dedicated Indigenous agency, which operated from 1989 to 2005, and the integration of housing policy making and program administration for Indigenous housing in the (then) Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs intensified pressure on state run mainstream services in urban areas. By this time, anticipated additional funding for states to support BBF outcomes in urban areas had not materialised and the Commonwealth determined that it would redirect earmarked funding for housing to remote Indigenous communities, expecting mainstream services and states to compensate in urban areas. This shift reignited an ongoing debate between the Commonwealth and states about historic funding levels for Indigenous social housing in urban areas that has not been resolved. From 2004/05 to the end of 2008, when the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program under the CSHA ceased, the Commonwealth reduced earmarked funding to the states for Indigenous housing by \$25 million (nominal).<sup>12</sup> Funds saved and additional Commonwealth funds have since been directed to remote areas. As a result, the focus in this period became increasing targeting of Indigenous clients in urban areas into existing mainstream housing services that were already under resourced and in decline (Hall & Berry 2006).

To indicate the scale of recent efforts to assist Indigenous households in public housing, Table 8 shows the change in the number and share of Indigenous tenancies between 2003 and 2008 across all jurisdictions, and compares this with the overall change in the capacity of the public housing systems. The pattern revealed across all states and territories is one of rapidly intensifying concentration of Indigenous tenants in a static or declining tenure. Growth in Indigenous tenancies ranged from a low 13 per cent in NSW, which has the largest alternative provider system, to over 100 per cent in Western Australia. In a very real sense, lower income Indigenous households have nowhere else to go in most jurisdictions.

The most recent wave of integration is characterised by loss of culturally specific services and of community control of housing delivery in the context of emergency

<sup>12</sup> Calculated from AIHW (2009a: 253, Table 6.2)

measures to improve outcomes. This phase began with the introduction by the Howard Government of the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response* to high incidences of child sexual abuse in some remote communities in 2007 (known as 'the Intervention'), which included a strategy to transfer management arrangements for Indigenous housing in remote areas to public housing. Now under the leadership of the Rudd Government, COAG has established a normative standard for remote areas that management of Indigenous housing should be consistent with 'public housing standards' (COAG 2009b). At least two other jurisdictions (Queensland & South Australia) intend to adopt the strategy of transferring management of Indigenous housing in remote areas to public housing (Queensland Department of Communities, pers. comm., September 2009; Housing SA staff, pers. comm. 6 October 2009). In parallel in urban areas, there is an emerging trend to integrate IHOs into mainstream community housing policy and regulatory processes (as discussed in Section 2.5), and there has been explicit discussion among administrators in NSW of prescribing outsourcing of management of IHO housing where standards of service delivery are not being met. In Queensland, IHOs deemed unviable are encouraged to transfer their housing to the Department or an alternative community housing provider.

While it is too early to assess implementation plans and outcomes of the latest approach to integration of services into the mainstream service delivery system, Indigenous people's experience with mainstreaming and other lessons from past approaches (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) give rise to serious questions about intensification of mainstreaming. If mainstreaming is to be successful, financial and social viability issues across the whole social housing system must be tackled. Stronger and better resourced approaches to how cultural values and needs are to be inculcated into the service approach will also be required.

## **2.7 Overview and implications for study**

The present is a time of tumult in the service delivery system for Indigenous housing. The largest ever and most far reaching reforms to housing supply and condition in (selected) remote centres have begun under Commonwealth funding and direction with a view to overcoming serious unmet need for housing in those areas by 2018. While most of this funding is for social housing, individual home ownership models are being debated, trialled and promoted (Memmott et al. 2009). New rules link funding for housing supply and major repairs to a requirement to have government run or government directed management of social housing in these areas (COAG 2008d).

Addressing Indigenous housing needs in urban and regional areas is also high on the national reform agenda, in the context of the intergovernmental commitment to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in health outcomes and socio economic disadvantage. In urban and regional contexts, the main route to reform is through state government responsibility under COAG guidance, but additional resources have not been earmarked to any significant extent. As shown in Section 2.5, states and territories take different approaches to providing social housing to Indigenous households. While provision is heavily mainstreamed at present in urbanised areas across Australia, some jurisdictions, notably New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, have sizeable Indigenous-run housing systems that operate in urban areas also. These have developed under a variety of previous policies, which often had contradictory goals: for example, some promoted self-determination in housing or Indigenous land tenure, while others were more geared to segregating Indigenous populations on missions and reserves.

The future of the Indigenous-controlled housing sector appears to be at a crossroads. An array of policy carrots and regulatory sticks are being directed to structural reform,

improving organisational viability and promoting better outcomes in this sector, with a core focus on healthy living. However, in a rush to reform via a top down approach that so far appears to have lacked effective consultation and sufficient time for Indigenous engagement, many IHOs appear to be vulnerable and there is an emerging backlash against government control and coercion.

There may also be an uncertain future for state-owned and managed public housing for Indigenous tenants, built with previous earmarked funds. From 2009, there has been no intergovernmental agreement governing protection of these assets or funding earmarked for future investment. New South Wales and, later, Victoria have led the way in transferring these assets to an Indigenous-controlled organisation (in the government and non-government sectors, respectively), but in most jurisdictions, including New South Wales, this housing is effectively run as public housing. State governments, other than Victoria, now have the choice (in the absence of Commonwealth controls) of further integrating these properties into their mainstream mode of delivery or using them as a platform to develop a more viable, and larger scale, independent service delivery system with appropriate Indigenous governance.

Access of Indigenous households to mainstream public housing has intensified over the past decade under policies that encouraged greater targeting to high needs households. Over the same period, deepening affordability problems in the housing market (Yates & Milligan 2007) are likely to have made it more difficult than ever for lower income Indigenous households to access private housing, especially in the major cities. The trend to targeting public housing to those deemed most in need has also produced a wave of service reforms centred on more intensive tenancy management models and other strategies aimed at sustaining tenancies. Several of these initiatives have had a specialised Indigenous component. Now, all jurisdictions operating under COAG guidelines are moving to give more attention to strengthening the cultural frameworks that operate in government service agencies. This is becoming evident in recent initiatives across SHAs, being adopted under the umbrella of 'cultural appropriateness', that range from setting Indigenous employment targets, through establishing dedicated Indigenous housing service teams to organisation-wide cultural training.

Our aim in this chapter has been to give a picture of the current service system that is providing social housing for Indigenous households and to identify particular trends in policy, resource allocation and administration impacting on that system, as a prelude to learning more about what is happening on the ground. This brief overview shows that, in relation to Indigenous clients and organisations, the present service delivery system and the policies shaping it are complex, messy, sometimes ambiguous, and subject to frequent change.

### 3 HOUSING SERVICE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES: A THEMATIC REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine concepts, ideas and evidence about what works, and what does not work, in service delivery to Indigenous households, with a focus on knowledge related to social housing.

Information was collected through several processes. A web based review used Google Scholar and Australian Policy Online of post 2000<sup>13</sup> to locate publications and reports referencing Indigenous, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander housing. References to culturally appropriate service delivery models in other service domains that were cited in this material were followed up. A secondary review of a comprehensive audit of Indigenous housing research from the 1970s to 2006 by Long and his colleagues at the University of Queensland was also conducted (Long et al. 2007). The literature reviews were augmented by an examination of web sites of state housing agencies and other Indigenous housing organisations in urban areas, and face-to-face or telephone interviews and email exchanges with key housing policy and Indigenous policy informants to update and validate key developments. A workshop held with highly experienced Indigenous housing workers in both government agencies and community organisations was also convened to access Indigenous knowledge and firsthand experience (see Appendix 1).

It is intended that this repository of information will be used later in the research process to help inform exploration of how service provision operates in a selection of local case study areas and to help the researchers formulate their recommendations about how culturally appropriate management practices could be further developed in the social housing system. In this chapter, we provide an overview of the information collected about what is known of requirements for, and effectiveness of, providing culturally appropriate services in Australia.

#### 3.1 Issues by meta theme

We have organised the ideas and debates that emerged from our review process into six meta themes that relate to the delivery of housing services, as follows:

1. *Cultural values*—explores the culturally significant values and lifestyles of Indigenous people that are relevant to the way that social housing is, or should be, provided in urban settings.
2. *Housing needs*—concerns the types and levels of housing need of urban Indigenous households and their housing preferences.
3. *Policy and institutional settings*—examines key housing policy, governance and regulatory settings for urban Indigenous housing provision and their implications for service provision.
4. *Service delivery models and practices*—considers the ways that services are delivered and what is known about how mainstream agencies work with Indigenous organisations, clients and community stakeholders.
5. *Service access and delivery experiences*—centred on what is known about Indigenous experience of social housing services.

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<sup>13</sup> The rapidly changing environment for Indigenous housing service delivery in Australia means that material before that time would be out of date.

6. *Outcomes*—concerned with evidence of the appropriateness and effectiveness of different social housing models in meeting the shelter needs of Indigenous households and contributing to non-shelter outcomes.

These six themes cover different facets of the service delivery environment. The focus on cultural values and housing needs sets the cultural context, purpose and rationale for examining the way housing services provide for urban Indigenous households. Discussion of policy and institutional settings underscores the role these play in facilitating or constraining service delivery, while the service delivery theme examines different frameworks for understanding concepts of 'cultural integrity' or 'cultural appropriateness' in service delivery. The final two themes address the range of outcomes of housing provision, including from the perspective of Indigenous clients.

These themes are not covered equally well in the evidence base and, as Long et al. (2007, p.39) also observed, there appears to be general under representation of detailed housing studies of urban and regional areas having large Indigenous populations in the housing literature. The latest contributions by AHURI researchers address some of the gaps—for example, Birdsall-Jones and Corunna (2008; 2010) concerned with the housing careers of urban Indigenous people; Eringa et al. (2008) concerned with the viability of Indigenous organisations with housing functions in a variety of remote and non-remote locations; Flatau et al. (2009) concerned with policy responses to at-risk Indigenous tenancies in mainstream housing services; Habibis et al. (2010) concerned with improving housing responses to Indigenous patterns of mobility and population drift to urban areas, and a comparative analysis of Indigenous homelessness in major cities and regional settings by Birdsall-Jones et al. (2010). The overview below is limited by the gaps in the information that is available to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the social housing service system.

### **3.2 Cultural values and lifestyles**

Literature in this area illustrates some of the culturally important values and lifestyles of Indigenous people that may be significant to the way that social housing is, or should be, provided in urban settings. The cultural values of Indigenous householders are likely to vary considerably between and within the urban towns and metropolitan cities of Australia. First, we consider why this is so from an historical viewpoint.

At the time of sovereignty in Australia, there were some 200 or more Indigenous language groups, mutually displaying distinctive cultural attributes and cultural diversity, albeit with overlapping commonalities of customs throughout cultural regions. Different processes of cultural change then occurred with varying time depths, dependent upon when the frontier reached a particular region and what the interests were of the local colonisers (e.g. pastoral labour versus Christian conversion versus dispersal and land squatting), and to what extent people were subjected to policies of assimilation, removal from country and kin. Modern electric and electronic media have injected further global influences into these change and identity processes. So much so that it is risky to generalise about cultural values without a lengthy set of qualifiers. Nevertheless, some key points can be made.

For our focus on social housing (as opposed to privately owned or privately rented housing), we can assume that tenants are relatively low income earners, but not necessarily that their values are strongly traditionally oriented. Instead, we must assume that there is a spectrum of values from more traditionally oriented to westernised Anglo-Australian values held by Indigenous people in social housing. Objectivity is further exacerbated by the relative paucity of research on urban Indigenous people or those living in dispersed housing settlements (towns, cities) versus discrete settlements (remote communities), as discussed above.

The record that is available clearly demonstrates a high degree of Indigenous residential mobility between all forms of Indigenous settlements, albeit with some strong patterns of intra-regional mobility in rural and remote areas, as well as cyclic movement between rural regions and capitals (ABS 2008, p.21; Foster et al. 2005; Habibis et al. 2010; Memmott et al. 2006; Taylor & Bell 1999). The end result is that people with traditional values from discrete remote communities are likely to move into small rural towns and regional centres (such as Cairns, Mt Isa, Tennant Creek, Broome, Port Augusta). Here they may seek to become tenants in their own right or opt to stay with relatives as household visitors for indefinite periods. Some may end up in capital cities, for example, those people needing specialist medical assistance.

Traditional Aboriginal behavioural norms are likely to manifest in rental housing circumstances, and include externally oriented lifestyles, household formation and room sleeping compositions based on kinship principles and culturally distinct constructs of crowding and privacy. Houses may not be used in the ways that their designers intended them to be and houses may be informally modified or adapted by householders to create a better 'fit' with their behavioural needs (Long et al. 2007, p.5.3; Memmott 2003).

A core traditional value is respect for kin, which is often accompanied by acceptance of demand sharing (Peterson 1993).<sup>14</sup> This value can compete with (and win over) values of conforming to tenancy agreements. The range of behavioural outcomes arising from failure to manage visitors according to Anglo-Australian norms, which typically threaten or undermine tenancies, include crowding, verandah sleeping, outside socialising, revelry noise (these being common subjects of neighbour complaints), and excessive wear and tear on house hardware due to high repetitive usage. While much current public policy discourse views demand sharing as a negative trait resulting in a lack of household control over resources and inhibiting assimilation into mainstream economy, others view it as a culturally valuable form of social capital (see Altman 2008).

In one of the few published papers that has recently explored Aboriginal values, carried out as part of a study on Aboriginal social capital, the traditional values of 'personal and community sharing' and 'reciprocity' were found to have high currency. Other Aboriginal social values recorded were 'trust', 'respect', 'kindness and concern', 'motherly love', 'tough love', and 'belief in self-capacity'. Although these values were recorded at the discrete remote settlement of Wadeye in the Daly River region, many of its members regularly visit and reside in Darwin (Memmott & Meltzer 2005, p.114). It can be hypothesised from the above list of values that respect for particular categories of kin (e.g. adult brothers for sister, for elders, parents-in-law, maternal uncle) can result in an obligation to allow such persons to reside in one's house, leading into the type of tenancy problems cited above. 'Motherly love' and particularly 'tough love' coming from senior matriarchal figures may work to curtail the excesses of younger adults and impose strength in household management. Similarly, belief in self-capacity, which motivates one to commit to an employment or training path, could result in a relatively stable tenancy with regular rental payment. The full range of values identified in this case study could thus work either to strengthen or to destabilise tenancies.

Processes of Aboriginal identity formation, maintenance and revision in urban and metropolitan settings can draw as much on resistance and oppositional statements to

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<sup>14</sup> Demand sharing occurs when surpluses are visible, and is but one form of kin-based distribution of resources employed by Aboriginal people (as opposed to market-based distribution) (Altman 2008).

mainstream norms, as they can on persistent traditional values (Greenop and Memmott 2007, pp.236–7; Keefe 1988). Colonial cultural elements may be assimilated but at the same time may be ‘recontextualised’ and ‘Aboriginalised’ (Byrne 1996, p.83).

Greenop’s (2009) recent research on Aboriginal lifestyles in the Brisbane suburb of Inala, an area dominated by public housing, indicates that despite much diversity, certain culturally rich practices can be identified in this metropolitan setting, such as: identity with, and respect for, extended family; frequent child rearing by aunts and uncles; address of first cousins as siblings; regular residential mobility of children to their grandparents’ houses; maintenance of socio-spatial identities in relation to enclaves of the suburb (e.g. Biota Street Boys, Skylark Street Mob); a sense of who has rights to speak for parts of the suburb based on a depth of residential history and on household identities; and the translation of such territorial identities into tags, tattoos, graffiti, artwork and other forms of personalisation of house and yard spaces (Greenop 2009). One outcome of these types of values is the tendency for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons on public housing waiting lists to want a rental house in a specific place that is linked with their extended family identity and hence a preparedness to return to the bottom of the waiting list, if they cannot readily obtain a socio-spatial location of their preference.

Appreciation of, and respect for, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity and cultural values and understanding the implications of cultural norms and life styles for housing aspirations and the variety of needs and living patterns, such as discussed briefly above, is the fundamental starting point for designing and delivering housing service responses in urban contexts, as well as in traditional settings.

### **3.3 Housing needs**

This theme focuses attention first on normative approaches to measuring Indigenous housing need in Australia. It then addresses the complexity inherent in understanding and responding to culturally specific housing needs.

#### *3.3.1 Level and type of need for housing in urban areas*

The development of normative measures of Indigenous housing need over the last two decades in Australia has been based on a multi-measure approach, first developed at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Australian National University) in the early 1990s (see Jones 1994). Eight dimensions of Indigenous housing need have now been proposed by the government’s health, welfare and housing information service, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. These cover measures of: homelessness, overcrowding, affordability, dwelling condition, connection to essential services (power, water and sewerage), security of tenure, the appropriateness of housing and emerging needs. Of these, the first five measures were endorsed by Housing Ministers in 2002 for use in determining Indigenous housing need and for monitoring the performance of housing policies and programs under the BBF (see Chapter 2). The selected five measures were last calibrated using a 2006 survey, census and administrative data. While the three other identified measures are under development, there has been no agreement with governments about how to measure and use them (AIHW 2009d). As a result, indicators that can be measured numerically have been given more attention so far than measures that require a qualitative assessment of need.

The latest national report on Indigenous housing needs (AIHW 2009d) presents the most recent data on the level of Indigenous housing need across the five official dimensions; compares the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations on

these dimensions; estimates the current dwelling need gap using those measures; and provides projections of Indigenous housing need. The 'dwelling gap' indicator is a summative measure of the additional amount of resources that will be required to address outstanding need. The analysis provides estimates for alleviating 'extreme need' and 'all need'<sup>15</sup> by location (remoteness area and jurisdiction). The estimates show that at least 4012 dwellings were required in 2006 to meet extreme need in non-remote areas, and at least 10 550 dwellings were required to meet all Indigenous housing need in those areas, mainly as a result of overcrowding and unaffordable housing.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, those estimates of dwelling need by remoteness category do not include dwellings required to meet homelessness need (as the data on this measure is not enumerated by area), which in total across all areas equated to another 3285 dwellings. Estimated extreme need for dwellings in non-remote areas is 35 per cent of the total extreme need across all areas (remote and non-remote). Over 50 per cent of total assessed need across all areas, including homelessness, is in non-remote areas (AIHW 2009d, Tables 8.6 & 8.7).

The approach taken to estimating *dwelling gap* does not imply that meeting this total quantum of assessed need will necessarily require the provision of equivalent numbers of new dwellings. Instead, the numbers give an indication of the order of magnitude of the housing task, which strategies for non-remote areas—such as increasing access to mainstream social housing, increasing access to affordable private rental and providing home ownership options—would have to tackle. Thus, to assess the effectiveness of proposed strategies for meeting need in urban areas, future measurement will have to be expanded to include market responsiveness, as well as monitoring access to social housing or other forms of housing assistance (AIHW 2009d).

As additional funds for meeting the dwelling gap in urban and regional areas have not been earmarked, there is community concern that needs in those areas will continue to 'blow out' (Narushima 2009). This situation has led to criticism by Indigenous leaders that the indicators used to determine the allocation of resources have been selective, giving rise to false distinctions in need.

The government has identified remote Australia as the area of greatest need, which is a lack of recognition of need in urban areas. It's how they're defining need. In remote areas it's availability and in the city it's affordability. It's the same need. (Gooda, quoted in Narushima 2009).

Presently, there are no detailed plans that show how and to what extent quantified Indigenous housing needs in urban areas will be met by the strategies that are proposed. The suggestion that mainstream responses to urban housing needs will be sufficient and have strong elements of cultural appropriateness was strongly contested in the initial workshop convened to inform this study.

### 3.3.2 *Culturally specific housing needs*

As discussed in the previous section, certain aspects of Indigenous cultures and lifestyle have direct implications for how housing and tenancy management services should be provided to be effective and appropriate. A strong theme that emerges from the literature concerned with combating disadvantage is the need for policy-makers

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<sup>15</sup> Extreme need': includes primary and secondary homelessness, households that require two or more extra bedrooms, low-income households paying more than 50 per cent of household income in rent and all dwellings requiring replacement. 'All need' additionally includes all other needs as defined in the multi-needs measure (AIHW 2009d).

<sup>16</sup> Projections for 2008, 2013 and 2018 are also provided but not by remoteness category (AIHW 2009d).



and service providers to better understand the causes and complexities of Indigenous disadvantage—especially the composite impacts of experiences of racism, poverty and violence on health, well being and family life (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008; Habibis et al. 2010). These factors directly affect the experience of many Indigenous households as tenants in urban communities. For instance, racism may be perpetuated through discrimination from neighbours or service providers. Chronic mental and physical health issues may affect household behaviour and a tenant's capacity to manage their housing. Patterns of home life will also be impacted on by the consequences of profound disadvantage, such as incarceration of family members and family violence. While overcrowding can act as a hedge against homelessness, it can also drive people into homelessness or into other risky situations (such as health breakdown or substance abuse) as a result of intolerable living conditions (Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010). Specialised service delivery models and practices that recognise and work to combat complex forms of disadvantage are required, therefore, to meet these kinds of needs. Flatau et al. (2009) describe an expanding range of responses that are emerging in service delivery systems at present, designed to address the housing and non-housing needs of vulnerable Indigenous tenants in social housing. Fieldwork for the current study will consider evidence of how well some of these innovations operate in particular local contexts.

Another theme concerns cultural norms and lifestyle factors, which affect tenant satisfaction and behaviour and ultimately may determine whether a tenancy succeeds. As discussed above, a defining cultural issue is changing occupancy levels in housing, such as occurs because of extended family visits, hospitality duties or tenant absences for cultural reasons. In rental housing, occupancy patterns have particular implications for the financial circumstances of tenants (and hence capacity to pay rent), breaches of lease conditions (because of overcrowding) and wear and tear (and hence housing maintenance demands) (Flatau et al. 2009; Prout 2008). One set of responses required of mainstream agencies to these kinds of needs involves more flexible policy settings and administrative protocols that recognise and respond to particular cultural needs with the aims of improving tenant satisfaction and sustaining tenancies (such as by preventing arrears). Another set of responses concerns spatial and physical attributes, such as housing location, design and fit out standards, and offering a greater range of housing forms (Memmott 2003). Most attention to culturally appropriate housing design has been given to provision in remote communities. In urban areas, it is specialist Indigenous providers with a dedicated portfolio of housing who are best placed to flexibly interpret policy and to develop more specialised housing to cater to particular locational and design needs.

While the multi-need measures outlined in the previous section include a measure of cultural appropriateness, this has not yet been defined, calibrated or endorsed. Defining cultural dimensions of housing needs in Australia is a key next step to providing more appropriate responses, as recognised in the literature (AIHW 2009a; Long et al. 2007, p.6.15).

### **3.4 Policy and institutional settings**

This theme examines some key housing policy, regulatory and governance settings for urban Indigenous housing provision that have implications for service provision. While the focus of this study is service delivery, policy, governance and regulatory arrangements are important because they establish the opportunities and constraints within which services are delivered and help to shape the outcomes achieved (Phillips et al. 2009).

### 3.4.1 *Urban Indigenous housing policy: a contested mainstreaming agenda*

The genesis of the mainstreaming agenda in urban areas can be traced to assimilationist policies of earlier periods (Morgan 2006). From the 1960s, Aboriginal matters were allocated to mainstream government departments in recognition that Aboriginal people were entitled to the same level of service as all other citizens. However, as noted by Morgan (2006, pp.104–5) referring to housing in NSW, this resulted in housing being treated as a discrete category of service provision, considered in isolation from other areas (health and welfare, for example) and meant that Aboriginal people were subject to the impersonal regime of the Housing Commission.

The most recent shift in the national policy approach to delivering urban Indigenous services reflects the wider public policy context for Indigenous affairs in Australia. Policy and research attention has been diverted away from urban responses and dedicated urban Indigenous programs and earmarked funding has been retracted.

This shift in policy focus towards those Indigenous people living in rural and remote areas has received strident criticism. For example, Morgan (2006, p.xiii) claims that it has restored 'the old hierarchy and mindset of the assimilation era where 'real Aborigines' live only in the bush' and has undermined 'the politics of self-determination under which Aboriginality was indivisible and inclusive'.

There are now strongly contested and sometimes polarised views about the best ways to 'close the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage in urban areas. Proponents of 'human rights' perspectives emphasise the centrality of Indigenous cultural integrity and self-determination, while proponents of 'practical reconciliation' emphasise equitable outcomes and favour better access to mainstream services in areas such as health, housing, education and employment (EOC 2004; Sanders 2002; Wilkinson 2005).

In social housing, policies and programs promoted under the banner of Indigenous 'self-determination' contributed to development from the 1980s of a separate policy and service system for 'identified' Indigenous services, which has been considered to have had both positive and negative impacts. Positively, it has opened up more service choices for Indigenous people and encouraged a greater variety of creative responses to individual and community needs. Indigenous participation in service planning and governance has engendered identity, engagement and a sense of ownership (see Section 3.4.2). High rates of Indigenous employment have also been achieved in the IHO sector—nearly 80 per cent of employees in IHOs surveyed in 2007/08 were Indigenous (AIHW 2009d, Table 2.10).<sup>17</sup> This is important to ensure that services are appropriate to the needs of Indigenous people, to provide opportunities for self-management, and to overcome economic disadvantage among this group.

However, there is also clear evidence of some negative impacts of having separate policy-making and administration for Indigenous housing. In 2001, the Commonwealth Grants Commission (2001) suggested that these settings had provided an excuse for mainstream housing providers to abrogate responsibility for developing culturally appropriate responses for Indigenous people. In a study of service integration in the social housing system, Phillips et al. (2009) also found that while responsive policies had developed in SOMIH programs and the IHO sector, fundamental policy principles of fairness and consistency across the system had been lost sight of, resulting in

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<sup>17</sup> Data on Indigenous employment in SHAs is not reliable, but proportions are very low generally.

arbitrariness and discrepancies in core policies, such as rent-setting and eligibility, in the IHO sector.

We have noted previously the variation in approaches to addressing policy and viability issues within the IHO sector in both remote and non-remote areas—from passive abandonment through active restructuring of organisations to asset takeover. In some jurisdictions (Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia), failure to protect and support a viable Indigenous housing sector in the context of wider policy changes (such as retraction of CDEP) has left only a handful of services operating in urban areas. Comparing results from a survey in 2001 with one in 2006, showed that the number of IHOs in non-remote areas had fallen from seven to two in the Northern Territory and from eighteen to six in Western Australia (ABS 2006, p.7). At the time of the more recent survey, the number of IHOs in South Australia stood at twelve, but many of these are understood to have closed since (Housing SA staff, pers. comm., 6 October 2009).

Overall, the trajectory of Indigenous housing policy over the past three decades can be characterised as shifting from an approach that created conditions for separation and differentiation between mainstream and culturally specific services; through a phase where policy attempts were made to retain this diversity but improve service quality and coordination, such as through pooling program funds; to the most recent phase that emphasises mainstreaming of service delivery and consistency in policy and regulation under a 'public housing management framework' (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the jurisdiction) (see also Sections 2.5 & 2.6).

However, gains in Indigenous access to mainstream public housing come at a cost; specifically growing concentration in a mono-tenure form that has limited capacity for flexible responses. Our workshop participants confirmed the potential risks associated with the prevailing directions in policy in urban areas, including unintended consequences of greater concentrations of Indigenous tenancies in public housing, loss of culturally specific housing services and less likelihood of culturally appropriate housing responses.

#### *3.4.2 Changing institutional settings: What future for Indigenous housing organisations?*

The case for having robust Indigenous specific institutions, including specialised housing services, in urban areas is not as well articulated in Australia as in other countries with Indigenous populations, such as Canada and the US. In Canada (see also Chapter 4) according to Walker (2008a; 2008b), multi-functional Indigenous organisations, in particular, add value by providing integrated housing, community services and access to employment and training. In the US, evidence is available that:

When [Indigenous people] make their own decisions about what approaches to take and what resources to develop they consistently outperform [non-Indigenous] decision makers (Harvard project 2003-04, SCRGSP 2009, p.11.12).

In Australia, arguments in support of Indigenous controlled services include the potential for community-based services to meet local needs, engender responsibility; build democratic participation and provide Indigenous advocacy in policy processes (Neutze et al. 2000; Sanders 2002). As well, it is suggested that diverse service delivery models provide opportunities to meet a wider range of client needs and preferences, and can engage people who are reluctant to deal with government institutions (DHS 2008; Lumby & Fareilly 2009). Writing in the context of addressing Indigenous homelessness, Birdsall-Jones et al. (2010) have argued that engaging with the institutions of Indigenous society is one way to develop policies and programs

that are more likely to be in keeping with Indigenous culture and thus to be more effective.

The importance of Indigenous organisations to maintaining Indigenous lifestyles and cultural values in urban areas is another aspect of this theme. Behrendt (2005) argues that service specialisation in urban areas is required not only to highlight cultural values but also to combat racism. Slockee (2009b) goes further by placing the desire to have stronger involvement in management of housing for Indigenous people by Indigenous people in the context of survival—securing core education, training, employment and health outcomes for future generations.

Evidence in favour of Indigenous services notwithstanding, the majority of Indigenous housing organisations operating in both urban and remote locations face endemic financial viability and capacity challenges in Australia. The typical operating environment involves a maintenance backlog, low rental income, high operating costs and small size, precluding economies of scale (Hall & Berry 2007). The small scale of organisations and limited opportunities for training and development also hamper development of their governance and management capacity. In the most comprehensive study of IHOs completed in Australia, Eringa et al. (2008) found it was the interaction of a wide range of factors, including location, scale, governance and function that affected the performance of IHOs. Burke (2004) suggests that separate development has contributed to this situation, through under-resourcing of Indigenous providers and by effectively excluding them from accessing resources in general housing programs.

Walker et al. (2003, pp.13–14) noted that successive governments in Australia over a long period seem to have been unable to ‘establish the necessary structures, processes, mechanisms and resources to genuinely and effectively implement, support and actualise Indigenous self-determination. Reasons for this situation given in the literature cited by Walker et al. (2003) include institutionalised racism, the influence of a managerialist ethos in public services and the lack of political and moral will. Referring to housing specifically, an Indigenous leader has characterised the investment approach adopted by successive governments as the ‘build and abandon’ model, whereby they invested in supplying, but not in sustaining, housing and did not invest in organisational capacity (Slockee 2009b, p.28). Walker and Barcham (2010) have observed that such an investment and governance model *coincided* with the prevailing neo-liberal philosophy to reduce state responsibility and resourcing.

Past approaches by governments to funding and regulating IHOs and sudden and unilaterally determined shifts in government requirements that are being placed on organisations have been increasingly challenged from within the Indigenous housing sector (QATSIHS 2010; Slockee 2009b) and by policy analysts (Housing Ministers’ Conference 2001; Phillips et al. 2009). Indigenous housing organisations are now calling for their inclusion in mainstream housing policy settings and processes, and seeking investment in housing supply and sector capacity at a sufficient level to secure the viability of well performed organisations and to attain sustainable growth (QATSIHS 2010; Slockee 2009b).

However, mainstream regulatory codes and performance standards that are now being applied to the IHO sector in several jurisdictions (see Section 2.5) may, in actuality, have negative impacts on the cultural appropriateness of housing services, unless the regulatory system strongly recognises the cultural values and responsive style of Indigenous housing providers. Governance approaches adopted by IHOs have tended to emphasise community representation, which is qualitatively different to skills/expertise-based boards that now dominate mainstream community housing organisations (workshop; Burke 2004). Increasingly, Indigenous organisations are

being challenged to develop governance approaches that simultaneously meet the expectations of their communities and those of mainstream-oriented regulatory regimes. We noted from our review that, in response to this issue, developing new approaches to Indigenous governance models is emerging as an area of innovation within the Indigenous field and has become an expanding research interest (Sanders 2002; SCRGSP 2009, Ch.11). For example, Martin (2003, p.iv) argues that:

... nowhere in Australia do Indigenous people live in self-defining and self-reproducing worlds of meaning and practices; rather they inhabit complex and contested inter-cultural worlds' ... and therefore that to pursue strategic engagement Indigenous organisations need to 'draw not only from Indigenous values and practices, but also from those of the general Australian society, and indeed from relevant international experience'.

Workshop participants offered a number of specific perspectives on the contemporary situation of IHOs. They highlighted that they faced additional burdens and costs because they are subject to multiple and often different policy, reporting and regulatory requirements that have arisen from the plethora of past programs. In addition, multi function Indigenous agencies that operate a housing function are also subject to complex program-based accountability. Some workshop participants were of the view that IHOs faced much greater, and more critical, scrutiny than mainstream housing organisations, reflecting a lack of trust in community run models. They also pointed to the paradox that overly prescriptive and risk averse public sector management can stifle the very innovations and local responsiveness that are necessary to respond to the variety and uniqueness of needs in their communities.

Evidence from research about IHOs clearly demonstrates that if we are to retain culturally specific housing services that meet contemporary regulatory standards, successful IHOs in Australia will need to grow to benefit from economies of scale and to secure additional resources to develop their organisational capacity and systems. The account above shows why the future for IHOs in Australia is at a crossroads. It is clear that the ways that policies, regulatory regimes and government support for the IHO sector develop from hereon will be critical to their future and, consequentially, to choices and outcomes for Indigenous clients. The findings also make apparent that reform must grapple with the multiple causes of underperformance in an integrated way.

### *3.4.3 Indigenous participation in policy-making and service planning*

Current policy and service delivery strategies for improving the circumstances of Indigenous households incorporate commitments to Indigenous participation (AIHW 2009c; COAG 2008d). The independent literature also includes ample evidence of the critical importance of Indigenous participation and ownership to successful implementation of policies and programs (Cooper & Morris 2005; EOC 2004; Flatau et al. 2009). Nevertheless, reports of meaningful engagement are rare.

Participants in our workshop, who are experienced public and community sector Indigenous housing workers, reported that in their experience most reform is *top down* and driven by central policy-makers with timeframes that do not allow for meaningful consultation, either across spheres and agencies of government or with Indigenous communities and organisations. Participants expressed concern that Indigenous voices are not heard because Indigenous people and communities are not formally represented in housing policy forums and there is little scope for meaningful non-government participation in policy processes (that is, before decisions are made). The massive pace of reform underway across Indigenous affairs at present, including housing, has exacerbated these difficulties leaving no time for even well intentioned

bureaucrats to engage. One participant explained that in this environment Indigenous members of an organisation who are 'at hand' may be asked for their views on the run regardless of whether the policy matters under consideration are related to their expertise, skills or responsibilities.

A key impediment to Indigenous participation in policy and program development is a lack of institutions and other structures to represent Indigenous interests (Sanders 2002). Such institutions are crucial to Indigenous voices being heard in the policy process. Presently, there is no national Indigenous strategic advisory group to advise on social housing. Any representation of Indigenous viewpoints in the main national policy development forums (such as the Policy Research Working Group of Housing Officials) reportedly occurs only incidentally, if an Indigenous person happens to be present. The record at state level is patchy but better, with advisory forums or community committees in some form consulted by SHAs from time to time. However, only New South Wales has a permanent state-wide structure that enables Indigenous experts and community leaders to provide specialised housing policy advice (see Section 2.5). Importantly in view of the spatial diversity of Indigenous society, this is underpinned by regional planning forums, which include Indigenous providers and stakeholders and public officials. In the Indigenous housing sector, there is no peak body at national or state levels to represent the interest of providers, as is the case in the mainstream community housing sector, which receives government funding for this purpose (ARTD Consultants 2009). In an effort to address the absence of structures that can represent Indigenous housing interests, Indigenous organisations in Queensland and NSW are moving at present to establish state-wide member networks to help them to develop more effective dialogue within their own sector, to advocate to governments and to collaborate with the mainstream community housing sector (Housing NSW staff, pers. comm., 10 February 2010; QATSIHS 2010).

At a service delivery level, the involvement of Indigenous tenants and community members is crucial to obtain local knowledge, understand local needs and aspirations, and to underpin the kind of relationships and interagency connections that contribute to effective service planning and delivery. Regional/local community committees for such purposes do operate in urban areas in some states, such as NSW and Tasmania. However, a significant barrier to tenant and community engagement arises from the alienation and lack of trust within the Indigenous community of government processes. Recent research on Aboriginal interactions with mainstream services (including housing) in one jurisdiction (WA) summed this feeling up:

... some Aboriginal people have relegated mainstream social services to the realm of "whitefella business"—an area of governance in which they have little desire to participate. In most cases, this deliberate dissociation from whitefella business is mediated by [a] combination of ... historical alienation; perpetuated contemporary marginalisation; and divergent conceptualisations of health, housing, and education.' (Prout 2008, p.25)

Indigenous people's past exclusion from, or negative experiences of, decision-making that affects their lives in profound ways means that carefully considered and culturally informed strategies are needed to overcome barriers to participation. Longer timeframes to build trust and explicit, honest and open interactions and approaches to negotiation are required. Approaches also need to be placed in a reconciliation framework that acknowledges the mistakes of the past and builds capacity for increased self-determination within a respectful inter-cultural space.

### 3.5 Service delivery models and practices

This theme explores the concept of *culturally appropriateness* in service delivery to identify issues and evidence that may be useful to the social housing system. It begins by examining a selection of different approaches to developing cultural appropriateness and then considers challenges faced by, and achievements in, applying this concept to the delivery of mainstream social housing, and to strengthening relations between mainstream and Indigenous housing providers.

#### 3.5.1 Cultural frameworks for service delivery

An extensive Australian and international body of literature is emerging on how to engender 'culturally appropriate' service delivery for Indigenous populations. In the context of governments' drive for mainstreaming, much of the literature suggests a consensus is emerging on the importance of having culturally appropriate services—but there are dissenting voices. For example, Gibson (2009) argues that this risks becoming yet another socially and politically constructed concept that helps to protect dominant and dominating power relations.

Nevertheless, following the reasoning of the Equal Opportunity Commission in Western Australia, one powerful reason for promulgating cultural appropriateness frameworks is to redress the potential for endemic indirect discrimination in what are already largely mainstreamed services:

Although indirect discrimination can be more difficult to grasp conceptually, it can reveal well camouflaged and considerably far-reaching discriminatory acts, including systemic, policy-based and management-led practices, which are supported by the highest levels of government and business ... indirect discrimination may continue undetected in the workplace, in education and in the provision of housing for years ... in the form of an apparently neutral policy or procedure [and] can adversely impact hundreds of people simultaneously. (EOC 2004, p.40)

These findings are backed by other research that has found evidence of a strong potential for direct and indirect discrimination in the management of social housing and the negative impact of such policies, practices and behaviours on housing access and outcomes for highly disadvantaged Indigenous tenants (Cooper & Morris 2005; Flatau et al. 2005; HORSCATSIA 2001).

For this review, we examined a number of prominent cultural frameworks including: international recommendations for 'Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Solutions' (United Nations 2008, pp.40–41); a review of programs and services for Māori people in New Zealand (Thomas 2002); Australian intergovernmental service principles for achieving 'Closing the Gap' targets (COAG 2008d); research into family violence service provision in NSW (Lumby & Farelly 2009); a cultural competency framework for child safety services in Victoria (DHS 2008); and a guide to cultural competency for serving people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the health system (NHMRC 2005).<sup>18</sup> Comparison of these frameworks demonstrates a strong alignment in principles, strategies and priority areas for action (see Table 9) and promotes new thinking about how to assess the positive cultural attributes of mainstream organisations.

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<sup>18</sup> This guide is not specifically designed to address the specific status and circumstances of Indigenous peoples in the health system.

For a start, Thomas (2002) provides a potentially useful framework for recognising the cultural dimensions of service delivery by distinguishing a continuum of approaches:

- Programs and services that are culture specific for non-dominant ethnic groups (such as Indigenous specific housing services).
- Bicultural and multicultural mainstream services.
- Mainstream mono-cultural services.

As indicated in Chapter 2, these types of service models are all represented in the social housing delivery system across Australia, although mainstream mono-cultural services dominate provision.

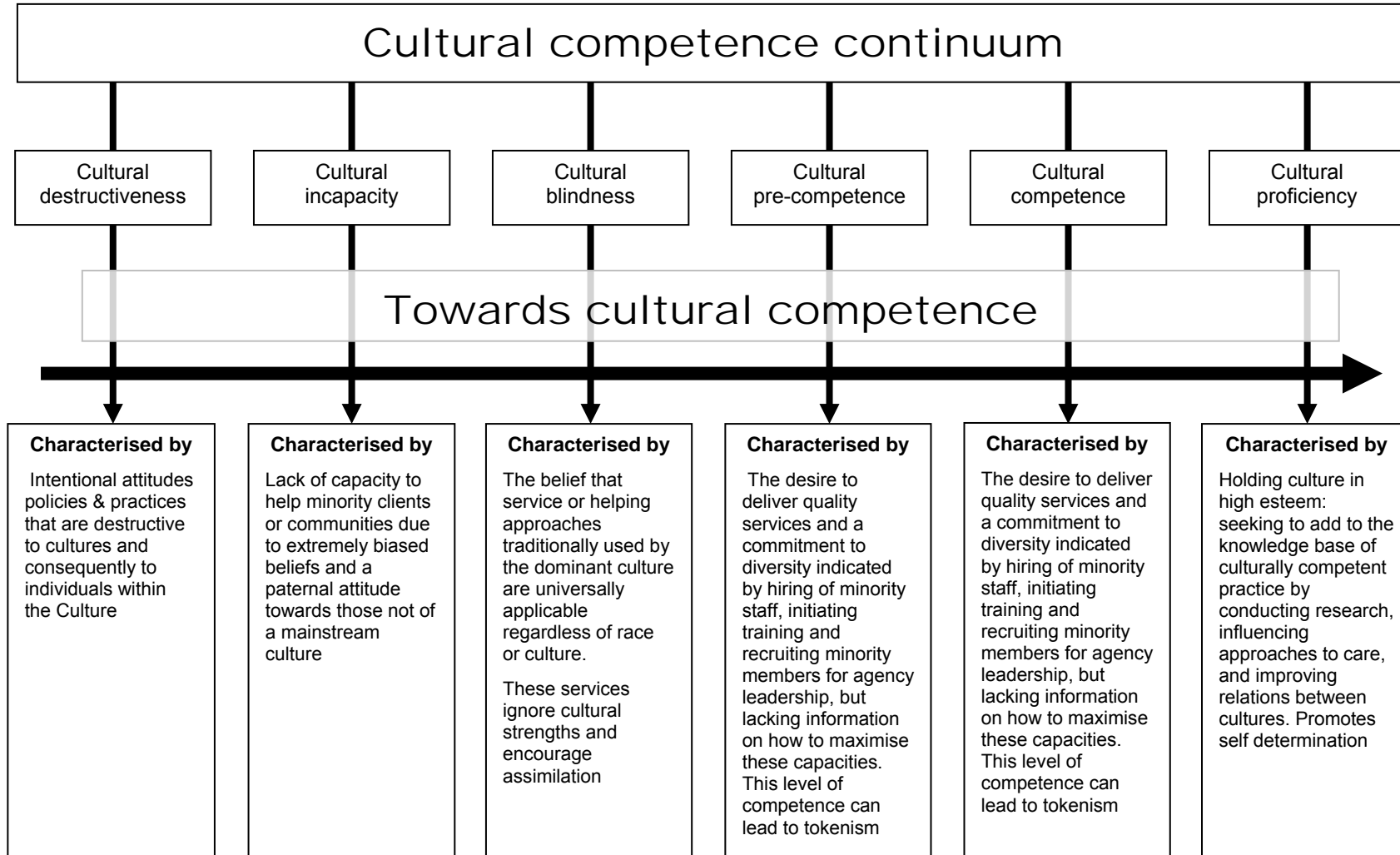
To drive reform of a mainstream system, the Victorian Department of Human Services has adopted a conceptual framework that identifies a continuum of six cultures in organisations from cultural destructiveness through cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competency, cultural competency to cultural proficiency (Figure 1). Their purpose in using this categorisation is to support services and workers in their organisation to self assess their practice and to take responsibility for improving cultural competency.

Another model with potential applicability for social housing is a cultural competency framework developed by the NHMRC (2005) for service to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This particular framework emphasises the need to focus across all dimensions of the service provision system: systemic, organisational, professional and individual. Asserting that cultural competency is underpinned by knowledge, conviction and capacity for action, the approach recognises interdependencies where systems need to support organisations, organisations and professions need to support individuals, and the individual needs to inform the organisation, profession and system by applying their knowledge, conviction and capacity for action (NHMRC 2005, p.31). This framework also stresses the broad range of activities, processes and capacities that will be required to achieve cultural competency covering: policy and evaluation; resource allocation, consumer participation, leadership and management, information, education, skills, professional development and self-reflection.

The various but overlapping strategies reviewed in this sub-section help to demonstrate the multiplicity of factors that are involved in improving cultural competence and participatory governance strategies designed to suit the specific service delivery context. Some of the examples chosen also highlight the importance of having mutually re-enforcing strategies that operate across the service system at systemic, policy and program levels, as well as in service delivery practice and for individual workers (NHMRC 2005, p.30).



Figure 1: Cultural competence continuum



Source: DHS (2008)

**Table 9: Comparison of cultural appropriateness frameworks**

	<i>Thomas (2002)</i>	<i>Lumby and Farelly (2009)</i>	<i>Department of Human Service, Victoria (2008)</i>	<i>NHMRC (2005)</i>	<i>UN Millennium Devt. Goals (2008)</i>
<b><i>Service provider organisations promote cultural respect and awareness</i></b>	Management policies and practices	Mission statements Resources allocated to cultural diversity Recognise Indigenous concepts and definitions	Vision, purpose, values, policies, demonstrate cultural awareness Codes of conduct promote cultural respect	Using leadership and accountability for sustained change Resource allocation	Human rights approach Universal access to quality, culturally sensitive social services Culturally sensitive policies
<b><i>Staff demonstrate cultural competence</i></b>	Staff skills and training	Staff performance emphasises cultural competencies Communication and language	Cross-cultural competency training	Professional Development Training Self reflection	
<b><i>Physical environment and service delivery respect cultural diversity</i></b>	Program or service operating environment	Physical environment Service delivery (tools, etc.) are culturally appropriate and evidence-based	Ensure Aboriginal people feel safe and welcomed Positive representations of their culture	Building on strengths—know the community, know what works	Inter/bi-cultural materials Prior, free and informed consent
<b><i>Service delivery is informed by Indigenous clients, staff and communities</i></b>	Consultation and advice Active community involvement	Seek active involvement of communities Employ/mentor Indigenous staff. Accountabilities to org. & community recognised	Commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and respectful partnerships	Engaging consumers and communities and sustaining reciprocal relationships	Effective participation in designing, monitoring and implementing programs
<b><i>Strong networks: Indigenous/mainstream service providers</i></b>	Local networking Liaison with specialist providers	Collaborate and coordinate with specialist providers	Commitment to partnership and training from Aboriginal organisations	A shared responsibility—creating partnerships and sustainability	

	<i>Thomas (2002)</i>	<i>Lumby and Farelly (2009)</i>	<i>Department of Human Service, Victoria (2008)</i>	<i>NHMRC (2005)</i>	<i>UN Millennium Devt. Goals (2008)</i>
<b><i>Providers are accountable for practice and outcomes</i></b>	Monitoring and program effectiveness	Continuing monitoring, review and adaptation	Evaluation emphasises feedback from children, families, services, communities		Ensure Indigenous input to monitoring, reporting Improved aggregate data

Source: DHS (2008); Lumby and Farelly (2009); NHMRC (2005); United Nations (2008); Thomas (2002)

### 3.5.2 *Mainstream service challenges and responses*

In response to government commitments to improve Indigenous housing outcomes via access to mainstream programs, SHAs in Australia have adopted a variety of strategies that aim to improve the cultural appropriateness of public housing service delivery such as having specialist programs to improve sustainability of tenancies; reconciliation strategies; service delivery reforms and Indigenous workforce strategies (Flatau et al. 2009; see also section 2.5; Flatau et al. 2005).

SHAs continue to face significant challenges in this area as the number of Indigenous tenants increases in a highly resource constrained environment and the cultural dimensions of Indigenous housing need create imperatives for better understanding of what constitutes effective housing management in that context. While there is a lot of attention being given presently to the performance of IHOs (see above), the extent of mainstream service provision in social housing makes it imperative that emerging social housing regulators (see Travers et al. 2010) actively promote a high standard of cultural competency in mainstream services as well.

Undoubtedly, strengthening and sustaining culturally appropriate systems and practices in a large bureaucracy, such as an SHA, is a difficult and ongoing challenge. The breadth of change required was exemplified by the number and scope of recommendations made by the Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry in Western Australia (EOC 2004, p.239). The Inquiry concluded that:

... Aboriginal people experience disadvantage and less favourable treatment in relation to many aspects of public housing access, services and residence.

Our workshop participants reported mixed outcomes from their observations of the application of cultural frameworks and strategies. Concerns that they raised included: questions about the level of commitment, skills and awareness of senior management; the availability of resources for implementing better cultural practices; and the embedded nature of overly bureaucratic cultures within SHAs, along with a widespread absence of cultural knowledge. Participants emphasised the importance of attracting and retaining Indigenous staff in mainstream housing organisations to achieve a critical mass and to ensure that they held positions across the full range of functions from policy to service delivery. They described tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff over issues such as recognition of cultural expertise and stigmatisation of identified positions. Several participants had experienced discrimination in their workplace first hand. These experiences are corroborated by evidence from Indigenous housing staff given to the 2004 Western Australian inquiry (EOC 2004, pp.227–229).

One characteristic of public sector management regimes over the last decade or more has been the drive for improved efficiency. In public housing, this has led to a strong emphasis on arrears management and vacancy control, two key areas that are measured in the national performance monitoring regime. Workshop participants gave clear illustrations of how, in practice, these measures can operate systemically to worsen the situation of some Indigenous tenants. For example, tenancy managers may be more concerned about their arrears performance than whether evictions occur, as this is not a performance measure. Similarly, vacancy control may prevent staff from holding property to achieve a more suitable location or dwelling match for an Indigenous applicant. The views of workshop participants underscore findings of previous research that having more flexibility in policy and practice, often in subtle ways, could have a significant impact on sustaining tenancies for Indigenous tenants and also help other 'at risk' tenants (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008; Cooper & Morris 2005; EOC 2004; Flatau et al. 2005).

Increasing concentrations of Indigenous households in already disadvantaged social housing neighbourhoods can also have wider implications for community relations and tenant outcomes. Pro-active, localised and culturally adapted approaches to housing management and community building are going to be vital to ensure that the growing reliance of Indigenous people on the already marginalised tenure of public housing does not exacerbate tensions on public housing estates and contribute to disconnectedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in urban areas (Atkinson et al. 2008; Walker et al. 2007).

Turning briefly to the mainstream community housing sector, we found little information about what is occurring within the sector to improve services for Indigenous people. Workshop participants confirmed that connections with mainstream community housing providers were undeveloped (with isolated exceptions—see below). The difficulties facing Indigenous people in dealing with the community housing system that workshop participants identified included: poor information about community housing and how to access it; difficulty in understanding the complexity of rent-setting policies that involve capturing Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA); low numbers of Indigenous staff, and the lack of culturally friendly offices.

One example of a formal strategy adopted by a community housing provider is found in Queensland, where a provider that manages both generic housing and a specialist Indigenous housing service has established an Indigenous housing sub-committee and developed an Indigenous service delivery policy and strategy to expand housing options for Indigenous people, to improve the responsiveness of its generic service and strengthen Indigenous participation in service planning (Bric Housing 2009). As the service delivery system diversifies through the growth of community housing, a more proactive approach to networking, partnering and engaging with Indigenous communities, organisations, workers and clients will be required to ensure that high standards of culturally appropriate services develop within this sector.

### *3.5.3 Links between Indigenous and mainstream agencies*

It is a widely held view that the historic record of collaborations between mainstream agencies and Indigenous organisations is littered with good intentions that have not been delivered, although explanations proffered for this experience diverge. From their working experience in the health system in Victoria, Waples-Crowe and Pyett (2006) locate the explanation of the types of breakdowns that typically occur in different time frames, work practices and priorities.

Drawing on their experience in a successful community-based health initiative involving mainstream and community-based organisations, they identify ten steps to successful partnerships (Box 3).

### **Box 3: Ten steps to successful partnerships between Indigenous and mainstream collaborative projects**

1. A long time-frame.
2. Building trust.
3. Valuing each other.
4. Knowledge and cross-cultural training prior to collaboration.
5. Good planning.
6. Having a useful product.
7. Community initiated.
8. Formalising partnerships.
9. Supportive work environments.
10. Cultural awareness & sensitivity-building exercises at the start of partnership.

Source: Waples-Crowe and Pyett (2006)

Most cultural appropriateness models (such as those discussed in Section 3.4) emphasise the value of engagement between mainstream and specialist services. The Department of Human Services framework acknowledges the unique role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and the need for respectful and mutual relationships that respect their local knowledge and specialist expertise. Similarly, Lumby and Farelly (2009) identify collaboration and coordination with specialist providers as one key component of their cultural appropriateness model.

There is little published information about the extent and nature of relationships between mainstream and specialist housing providers (Phillips et al. 2009). Overall indications are that linkages are weak. Workshop participants reported some isolated examples of effective local relationships, but also noted examples of inappropriate or under-resourced referrals to IHOs, abrogation of responsibility by mainstream services for difficult and complex cases, and IHOs not being treated equally in the system.

There are many potential barriers to building more effective working relationships between mainstream and Indigenous housing sectors and providers: a product of different cultural values, histories, business models, governance approaches and accountabilities. For example, under ATSI's administration, IHOs developed business models, often based on low rents and cross subsidy with programs, such as CDEP, that were not sustainable. Such differences have historically created tensions and broken down trust, undermining opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships. Given the priority given to integrated service delivery as part of national Indigenous policy reforms, there is clearly much to do to develop more effective relationships that are built on mutual respect, trust and having differing but fair approaches across the social housing system.

### **3.6 Indigenous experience of mainstream social housing services**

Contemporary perceptions and attitudes of Indigenous people to social housing have to be understood as a product of not only current policies and practices but also past approaches of public housing authorities that many experienced as exclusion, discrimination and alienation.

Since colonisation, housing has been an arena for intervention in the lives of Indigenous Australians and the imposition of dominant non-Indigenous cultural values (Prout 2008; Sanders 2000). In contrast to today's dominant public policy thinking, early policies supported segregation through housing on reserves or in institutions and largely excluded Indigenous people from mainstream housing options (Prout 2008). Later, assimilationist policies - including transitional housing and public housing - imposed Eurocentric expectations that assumed sedentary lifestyles and nuclear families as the norm and were counter to traditional housing forms and Aboriginal mobility, among other differences (Prout 2008; Sanders 2000; Walker & Barcham 2010).

Accounts of the experience of Indigenous public housing tenants are given in Birdsall-Jones and Corunna (2008), Cooper and Morris (2005), EOC (2004), Morgan (1999), Prout (2008) and Sanders (1990; 1993). This literature highlights Indigenous experiences of alienation, discrimination and other barriers to accessing and sustaining tenancies. Such experiences occur in the broader context of Indigenous disadvantage that can include extreme poverty, lack of suitable housing, overcrowding, responsibilities to extended family and problems for mobile or displaced households in adapting to urban life (HORSCATSIA 2001).

Prout (2008) has characterised the dynamics of interactions between many Indigenous people and public housing as a 'cycle of alienation' where procedural and administrative approaches to overcrowding, property damage and/or disruptive behaviour and rent arrears lead to eviction and re-location to another household, where overcrowding is exacerbated and the cycle is repeated (Figure 2). Hansen and Roche's account highlights a key factor in triggering this cycle: the disconnect between a 'one size fits all' rule-bound public housing system and the lived experience of Aboriginal families and the ways they use their housing, which, for example, is often characterised by high numbers of visitors during family crises and cultural events. On occasions, such living arrangements can contribute to higher utility and living costs (leaving less capacity to pay rent), more wear and tear and utility breakdowns ('property damage') and more noise ('disruptive behaviour') (Hansen and Roche in Prout 2008, p.11).

According to the Equal Opportunity Commission (2004, Section 80) many public housing policies and practices in Western Australia constituted indirect discrimination that occurs '... when a policy or practice results in discrimination against a particular group of persons although it appeared non-discriminatory'.<sup>19</sup>

The issues and themes identified by the Inquiry covered a wide range of areas of policy and practice, including: awareness of policy; eligibility; waiting list; allocation; priority assistance; emergency housing; rent to income; transfer; tenancy management; maintenance; evictions; tenant liability; appeals mechanism; anti social behaviour; family and domestic violence; relationship with Homeswest staff; Aboriginal staff; staff training; and programs. In summing up the evidence, the Inquiry report concluded:

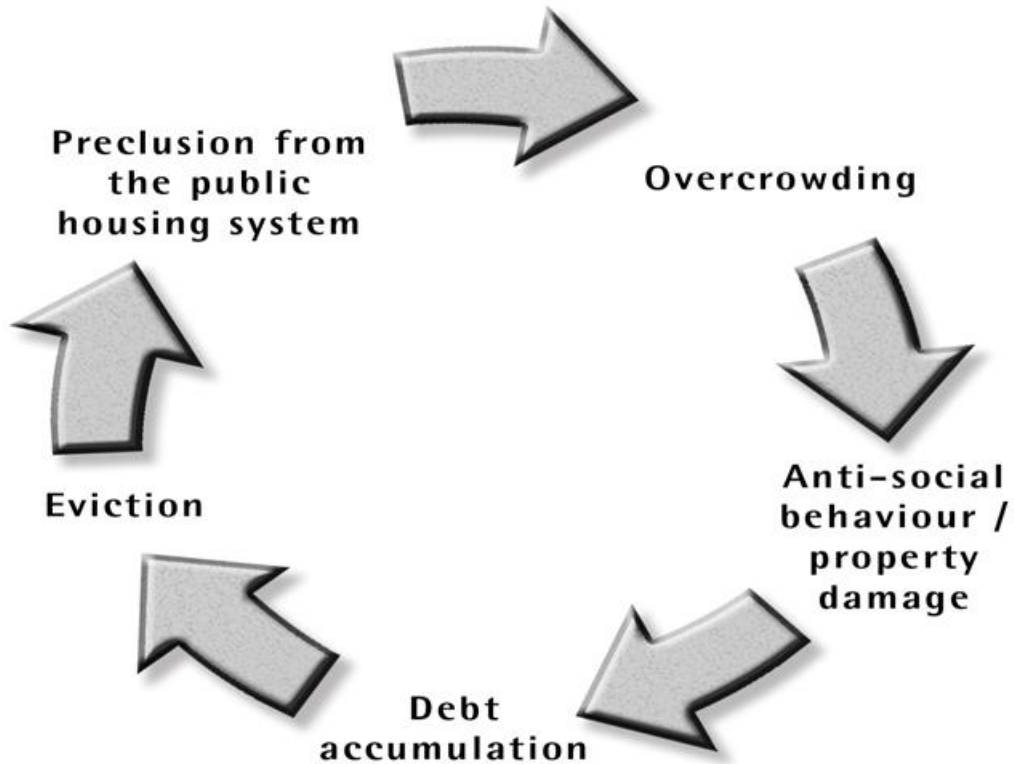
According to the lived experiences documented in the submissions in relation to each of these issues and themes, details of Homeswest policy do not always correspond with the practice, and in the operation of policy there is a sense that the Aboriginal population is disadvantaged and treated less favourably. (EOC 2004, p.236)

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<sup>19</sup> Between 1996 and 2004, the EOC reported over 400 complaints by Aboriginal people claiming to have experienced direct or indirect discrimination from the government housing provider (EOC 2004: 43).

The Commission also concluded that discrimination results because housing service delivery approaches are ‘... predicated on Eurocentric conceptualisations of mobility and housing that are often incongruent with Indigenous lived experience’ (Prout 2008).

**Figure 2: A cycle of alienation from the public housing system**



Source: Prout (2008, p.9)

While the situation of Indigenous tenants in public housing has been examined most extensively in Western Australia,<sup>20</sup> there is collaborating evidence from other jurisdictions (Cooper & Morris 2005; Flatau et al. 2005). Indigenous people report experiences of vulnerability, humiliation and shame in dealings with public housing around issues such as rent arrears, and previous debts and difficulties in managing their housing (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008). They may have difficulties in communication where the primary contact is through written correspondence that they cannot read, do not understand, or do not receive if they are mobile (Prout 2008). Some are concerned about being allocated poor quality housing (which they accept in preference to having no housing at all); or about the lack of responsive maintenance or living in unsafe neighbourhoods (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna 2008). Overall, compared to other tenants, Indigenous households in mainstream social housing have shorter tenancies that result partly from higher rates of abandonment and eviction (Flatau et al. 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Western Australia has the second highest proportion (to Northern Territory) of mainstream public tenants who are Indigenous (16%) (AIHW 2007, p.55; Table 2.32).



A qualitative study of the views and experience of Aboriginal people in the wider human services environment in Sydney found many similar problems, particularly so in housing (Baldry et al. 2006). Use of Aboriginal liaison officers was one approach that was regarded by participants in this study as essential to promoting understanding and communication with them in many circumstances. However, liaison officers often were expected to operate in a service environment, where they have to do all the work with Aboriginal clients. This was regarded as not appropriate—mainstream staff have to take responsibility and build their relationships with Aboriginal clients (Baldry et al. 2006, pp.368–9). Of relevance to one of the themes of this study concerned with service integration, the study also noted that Aboriginal people expected agencies to coordinate their services:

If agencies don't get together to know what the other does or who else is around, they can't make appropriate referrals, and then they can't share the load. (Aboriginal participant quoted in Baldry et al. 2006, p.372).

This study concluded that the expectations of Aboriginal clients are centred on having civil respectful relations with service providers. Relationships should be based on their rights and responsibilities as citizens, rather than being seen as a response to disadvantage (Baldry et al. 2006, p.373).

Some limited quantitative evidence of the satisfaction of Indigenous tenants with their housing is provided through findings of biennial national surveys of tenant satisfaction in social housing. The latest surveys (AIHW 2009b; 2009e; 2009f) showed that satisfaction rates across the social housing system were highest in community housing, followed by general public housing and lowest in SOMI housing—with satisfaction levels of 82 per cent, 71 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively.<sup>21</sup> However, satisfaction rates for Indigenous tenants of public housing were even lower at 57 per cent, representing a considerable gap (15%) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous public housing tenants. Levels of dissatisfaction also followed a similar pattern being least for community housing (11%), 16 per cent for those in public rental housing and greatest for SOMI housing (23%) (AIHW 2009b; 2009e; 2009f).<sup>22</sup> While these data indicate that more than half of all Indigenous tenants surveyed in government-managed and identified housing are satisfied with their housing, a substantial minority are not. The limited information that is published on the factors that may be contributing to lower satisfaction among Indigenous households corroborate qualitative research, discussed earlier, relating to unsatisfactory housing quality and maintenance services (Roy Morgan Research 2007).

Social housing is a vital housing option for many Indigenous households and successful for many too, offering affordable housing, the potential for long-term occupancy and connections to a variety of tenancy support services, if required. However, the experience of public housing has been, and continues to be, problematic, for some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable Indigenous people. Recent initiatives aimed at improving access and support for Indigenous tenants are in a positive direction and should assist to improve service outcomes. It is clear from the evidence, however, that the causes of conflict with, and tenancy breakdown among, Indigenous clients are deeply entrenched and sustained effort, time, goodwill and resources will all be required to address them.

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<sup>21</sup> Figures refer to tenants surveyed who reported that they were very satisfied or satisfied overall with their housing quality, amenity, location and services.

<sup>22</sup> Note that the survey of public and community housing tenants will include some Indigenous people. Note also that there are difficulties in comparing data across surveys as noted in the source document, so the information should be taken as indicative only.

### 3.7 Shelter and non-shelter outcomes

Much of what we have discussed so far in this chapter indicates some of the outcomes—either positive or negative—that arise from Indigenous households' use of social housing. Overall, however, the evidence base concerned with the housing outcomes of social housing (in its various forms) for Indigenous clients is patchy and limited (Walker et al. 2003). Quantitative and qualitative assessments of some indicators of housing outcomes—match of dwelling to household size, affordability, property condition and services, and tenant satisfaction—are included in the current social housing performance monitoring regime that is managed by the Productivity Commission in accord with the national housing data agreement (e.g. see SCRGSP 2010). However, most of these indicators are not measured separately for all Indigenous tenants. Measurements provided for tenants in specially identified housing (SOMIH) provide a proxy for comparing outcomes for Indigenous households with those for all public tenants. Aside from the indicator of tenant satisfaction already discussed, the attribute where a significant difference in outcomes is apparent from this limited set of indicators is the 'match of dwelling to household size'. In 2007, whereas less than two per cent of mainstream public housing dwellings were overcrowded, nearly seven per cent of households in SOMIH dwellings were overcrowded (defined as two or more additional bedrooms required). This is unsurprising given the extent of discussion in the literature about Indigenous living patterns and the myriad cultural factors that contribute to high rates of housing occupancies. New research is needed to assess how effectively mainstream providers are responding to this need, for example, through dwelling extensions, building larger dwellings, proactively offering transfers to more suitable dwellings, or creating additional tenancies where there are multiple family occupancies.

The lack of data on housing outcomes for Indigenous households is part of the wider problem that independent evaluation of housing programs in Australia is sporadic and uncommon (Milligan et al. 2007). A scholarly and comprehensive framework Rogers et al. (2005a; b; c) developed to evaluate the outcomes of the *Building a Better Future* 10-year initiative, which concludes in 2010, was intended for use in 2011 but this is unlikely to proceed given the advent of new intergovernmental agreements that include a new set of targets and timeframes. However, many of the concepts and ideas in this framework could be adapted to the new arrangements as, although they are framed and worded differently, they have similar themes and underlying goals.

In the context of calls for holistic strategies to combat social and economic disadvantage and government goals to improve overall efficiency in resource allocations, there has been growing research interest in the 'non-shelter' (beyond housing) effects of the ways that housing services are provided (e.g. see Bridge et al. 2003; Dockery et al. 2008; Phibbs & Young 2005). A wide range of potential interactions and impacts is documented in the literature, including: connections with health status (both physical and mental); education outcomes, especially for children; labour market participation; crime levels; community participation and social cohesion; income and wealth effects; and locational advantage/disadvantage. However, there has not been much specialised research that has focused on the connections between the way housing is provided and non-shelter outcomes for Indigenous households in particular. One significant exception is research on the links between housing and health for Indigenous households. Much of this has drawn attention to relationships between dwelling design, utilities in housing and overcrowding, and health outcomes in remote communities (see Long et al. 2007, p.6.16). In considering the nature of the causal links in non-remote areas, Booth and Carroll (2005, referred to in Long et al. 2007, p.6.16), found that education and income variables, rather than

housing condition or overcrowding, were more significant factors affecting health outcomes. Analysis undertaken by public officials for COAG has highlighted how overcrowding in housing contributes directly to health and disability, family and community violence and literacy outcomes:

... there is sufficient evidence for education, health and justice departments to be concerned about housing issues (SCRGSP 2009, p.8).

Recognition of the complex direct and indirect links between the way housing is provided and Indigenous disadvantage is essential in informing the closing the gap model for reforming service delivery to tackle Indigenous disadvantage in Australia (COAG 2008d). The six interconnected building blocks that have been chosen as the focus of intergovernmental efforts to improve Indigenous outcomes (Box 4) align closely with the non-shelter impacts of housing discussed in the housing literature (Bridge et al. 2003).

What is required now to inform well founded aspirations for improving the contribution of the social housing system to this agenda is more specific evidence about how social housing policies and service approaches influence a variety of critical outcomes when Indigenous households are involved. Generally, for the social housing population, we know that locational factors play a big part in economic participation (Dockery et al. 2008) and that housing stability and security of tenure has been positive for schooling (Phibbs & Young 2005). Recent research by Birdsall-Jones and Corunna (2008) and the views expressed by workshop participants suggest that these are also critical factors for Indigenous households.

**Box 4: Building blocks for closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage**

- Early childhood.
- Schooling.
- Health.
- Economic participation.
- Healthy homes.
- Safe Communities.
- Governance and leadership.

Source COAG (2008c, pp.6–7)

Finally, there is a larger body of overseas research that relates using housing improvements to address non-shelter outcomes for racially disadvantaged groups. The US in recent years has made several large-scale attempts to improve outcomes for its low-income (mainly African-American) population by improving their housing conditions. There have been three major program initiatives. The first was Chicago's Gautreaux Housing Desegregation Program. This program stemmed from a legal settlement in which the courts found that the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had discriminated against African-American tenants by concentrating them in large-scale developments located in poor, black neighbourhoods. The decision against the housing authority in 1969 called for the creation of new public housing at 'scattered sites' in predominantly white communities. Research on the outcomes of this program demonstrated a number of positive outcomes for the households that were relocated (e.g. see Popkin et al. 2000).

The Moving to Opportunity Program followed the Gautreaux experiment. It focused on relocating households out of high poverty neighbourhoods in five cities. The Hope VI program involved redeveloping entire public housing communities. Evaluation studies have shown that these two programs have not generated significant benefits for many households. While people, in particular women, have reported lower levels of stress and improved mental health from their changed housing conditions, neither of the programs has led to any significant changes in employment outcomes, physical health or educational outcomes for children (Popkin et al. 2009).

In the case of employment, this is not surprising given that most of the factors that affect employment outcomes—such as level of skills and training, discrimination and previous work history—are not impacted by changing housing conditions. This US evidence seems to lend support to the position underlying the closing the gap model of service reform that well-integrated strategies across housing, employment, health and education will be required to overcome the entrenched disadvantage of some Indigenous households. However, in urban settings, we know that simple mainstreaming has often activated the cycle of alienation portrayed above. Frameworks for achieving transformational reform of how mainstream services operate do not appear to be well developed and more nuanced approaches will be needed.

### 3.8 Implications

The issues and evidence examined in this chapter offer many insights into ways to improve the delivery of social housing for urban Indigenous households. They also help to inform the design of the empirical research stage of this study. A brief summary of key implications follows and the implications for our next stage of research are discussed in Chapter 5.

First, the preceding discussion highlights the imperative for greater acknowledgment of the cultural factors that impact on the housing experience and outcomes of Indigenous urban dwellers. Our literature review has identified cultural values, lifestyles, housing need, entrenched disadvantage and the legacy of past Indigenous affairs and housing policies and practices as significant factors. These factors play out differently in the lives of individuals, families and communities meaning that ‘one size fits all’ approaches will not work. Appropriate service delivery responses depend crucially on a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the issues involved and of the embedded connections between the way services are provided and the experiences, values, attitudes and personal circumstances of Indigenous clients and their communities.

Second, there is an abundance of high level frameworks and principles emerging across government agencies to underpin action. These frameworks are developed with good intentions and through influential leadership. However, there is a lack of urban-focused strategies and implementation so far appears to fall well short of the lofty goals.

Third, the evidence in the housing sector underscores recent analysis by officials for COAG of the ‘things that work’ in Indigenous service delivery. Their assessment proposed that the general ‘success factors’ to address Indigenous disadvantage centred on having:

- Cooperative approaches between Indigenous people and government—often with the non-profit and private sectors as well.
- Community involvement in program design and decision-making—a *bottom up* rather than *top-down* approach.

- Good governance—at organisation, community and government levels.
- Ongoing government support—including human, financial and physical resources. (SCRGSP 2009, p.8).

Fourth, the implications for social housing are that strategies across a range of functional areas must underpin and support service responses. Priority action across all aspects of the social housing service system might involve:

- Systemic change—designing the system to achieve an appropriate mix of viable mainstream *and* specialist services, strengthening IHOs and developing the cultural capacity of public and community housing agencies.
- Policy adaptation—understanding where policy differences are necessary and justified.
- Cultural practice—overcoming the legacy of past approaches; achieving a high standard of cultural competency.
- Engagement—having the structures and resources to support meaningful community participation in decisions about housing design, housing policy and service issues.
- Relationships—building sustainable partnerships between service providers and across sub-systems (public, community and Indigenous housing sectors).
- Accountability—adopting cultural competency standards, evaluating outcomes, culturally appropriate regulation of all providers.

## 4 SOCIAL HOUSING AND URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA

This chapter provides an overview of urban Aboriginal<sup>23</sup> social and affordable housing policy and service delivery in Canada. The purpose of including a Canadian perspective in this study is to position the Australian experience in a wider international context and to identify lessons and initiatives that may be of relevance here. The chapter begins with descriptions of some key characteristics of Canadian urban Aboriginal populations and their housing needs and of urban Aboriginal housing policy and programs. It then examines the service delivery context, including the history, institutions and perspectives of urban Indigenous housing organisations. The analysis is based on information gathered through a review of academic literature, websites and policy documents as well as personal email and phone conversations with Professor Alan Anderson, University of Saskatchewan, who commented on draft material and also discussed the study with service delivery informants.

### 4.1 Canadian urban Aboriginal housing context

The Canadian situation has many similarities to Australia; specifically that Canada has a federal system of government, a small social housing sector and a rapidly growing and increasingly urbanised Aboriginal population. The diversity of Aboriginal identities (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) in Canada also has parallels with the Australian context where Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have distinct cultures, while sharing common experiences as Indigenous people and of colonisation. There are also major differences between the two countries, including legal structures and institutions for recognising the status and rights of Aboriginal peoples.

#### *Urbanisation*

In Canada, Aboriginal people make up almost 4 per cent of the population, nearly twice the proportion in Australia. Over 70 per cent of the Aboriginal population live outside of reserves and traditional or northern (remote) communities, with 54 per cent living in urban centres. Both the total Aboriginal population and the proportion who are urban dwellers are increasing in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the Canadian urban population (Statistics Canada 2006b; Walker 2008b).

#### *Housing need*

Urban Aboriginal people in Canada face many of the same types of housing problems as their Australian counterparts. They have low levels of homeownership; a high reliance on the rental market, and they are over represented among those experiencing affordability stress (NAHA/C 2004; Statistics Canada 2006a). The condition of much of their housing is poor with high levels of overcrowding and housing in need of major repair, especially in those urban neighbourhoods where they are most heavily concentrated (Statistics Canada 2006a). Urban Aboriginal people constitute a significant proportion of homeless people, including those who sleep rough (Homeless Action Task Force 1999; NAHA/C 2007).

#### *Mobility*

Mobility of the Aboriginal population is fairly well documented in Canada and, as in Australia, takes diverse forms (Norris & Clatworthy 2003). The highest level of mobility

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<sup>23</sup> In Canada, it is accepted practice to use the term 'Aboriginal' when referring to First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. The term *Indigenous* is used for the purpose of making international comparisons in this report.

for Aboriginal households is between urban areas and long-term Aboriginal residence in cities is evident (Anderson, pers. comm., 16 February 2009). There is also migration between Reserves and urban areas in both directions; with some research indicating that net migration is to Reserves (Norris & Clatworthy 2003). Aboriginal people may move from Reserves to urban areas in search of education, employment, health services or other benefits of urban life. They may flee violence and poor housing on a permanent or temporary basis. However, mobility is not uni-directional and, for some, includes relocation from urban centres to traditional lands or moving regularly between urban and Reserve locations for family, community, cultural or personal reasons. Housing is widely recognised as a factor in Aboriginal mobility, with lack of affordable housing in urban areas contributing to high levels of movement within and from urban areas, while overcrowding and poor standard of housing is often a factor in movement from communities and reserves. The high level of mobility makes having clear distinctions between rural/remote and urban populations very difficult and has significant implications for the type of housing and housing assistance required and how it is delivered (Walker 2006). Temporary housing, transitional assistance to establish and maintain tenancies, ability to accommodate visitors and temporary and sometimes extended absences to deal with community obligations are reported, as some of the housing implications of mobility patterns (Graham & Peters 2002; Homeless Action Task Force 1999; Norris & Clatworthy 2003).

### *Cultural identity and urban Aboriginal peoples*

A recurring theme in the Canadian literature is the importance to urban Aboriginal Canadians of maintaining their identity, both as Aboriginal people and, specifically, as First Nation, Metis or Inuit. Aboriginal identity is associated with strong and ongoing community connections within the urban environment, as well as with communities of origin. Strong cultural identification, even by middle class Aboriginal people, is reflected in a propensity to socialise within the Aboriginal community and use Aboriginal services accompanied by limited interactions with the non-Aboriginal community (Graham & Peters 2002; Hanselmann 2003; Walker 2006). Research emphasises the continuing importance of identity for urban Aboriginal peoples, community connection and the need for services that respect cultural practices and embrace cultural values (Hanselmann 2002a; Newhouse & Peters 2003; Peters 2005).

The research evidence challenges a prevalent portrayal of contemporary urban Aboriginal peoples as having lost culture and identity. It also raises questions about the appropriateness of culturally blind or assimilationist policies that assume mainstream services can adequately meet the needs of urban Aboriginal people. Such assumptions and policies are in direct contrast to the recognition and public resources allocated to those living on, and with recognised connections to, traditional land (Anderson & Denis 2003; Barcham 1998; Walker 2008a).

## **4.2 Social housing provision**

### *4.2.1 Social housing policy and programs*

The primary focus of Aboriginal housing policy in Canada has been to improve remote housing conditions, including on First Nation reserves. Nevertheless, from the 1960s to the early 1990s, Canada's national social housing programs for urban Aboriginal people were highly progressive (Walker 2008a). The Urban Native Housing Program (UNHP) and its predecessors supported the establishment of urban Aboriginal housing corporations across Canada that grew to a combined portfolio of 11 000 housing units by 1993 (Devine 1999; Walker 2008b). The UNHP provided deep capital and recurrent subsidies to ensure affordability for low-income tenants, and to

enable flexibility in housing management practices and the provision of tenant counselling services to support high needs tenants. The program aimed to provide culturally appropriate housing and to build institutional capacity within urban Aboriginal communities by enabling Aboriginal-controlled housing organisations (Walker 2008b).

In 1993, the Canadian Government withdrew from direct involvement in social housing and devolved responsibility to provinces. Additionally, the Federal Government retains responsibility for on-reserve Aboriginal housing but relinquished responsibility for urban Aboriginal issues, including housing. The UNHP was discontinued and there has subsequently been ongoing contention between the federal, provincial and municipal governments about respective responsibilities for urban Aboriginal housing issues (NAHA/C 2004; Walker 2008a). As a result, urban Aboriginal housing corporations operated for over a decade in a national policy vacuum and without access to a dedicated funding stream for new housing supply (NAHA/C 2007; Walker 2008a).

Since 1993 there has been no coherent national policy for urban Aboriginal issues, and especially for housing (Hanselmann 2003). However, some Federal Government re-engagement in urban Aboriginal housing issues is evident through the establishment of a CAN\$300 million Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Trust, announced in the 2006 Federal Budget. The purpose of the Trust is to increase the supply of rental housing and enhance home ownership opportunities for Aboriginal Canadians living in urban areas. Provinces have discretion about the use of Trust funds and have been slow to roll out the program (NAHA/C 2007; Walker 2008b). In another recent national response under the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), an Urban Aboriginal Homelessness (UAH) component was established to support culturally sensitive homelessness services and encourage local partnerships.

At a more local scale, some individual provinces and municipalities have supported smaller urban Aboriginal housing and homelessness initiatives, generally through the mainstream affordable housing and national homelessness funding (Hanselmann 2002b; 2003; NAHA/C 2007; Walker 2008a; 2008b).

#### *4.2.2 Aboriginal housing organisations*

Urban Aboriginal housing corporations emerged in the early 1970s, initially funded as demonstration projects under non-profit and cooperative provisions of the National Housing Agreement and later under the UNHP (Walker 2008a; 2008b). By 1999, 110 Aboriginal urban and off-Reserve housing providers identified as members of the National Aboriginal Housing Association (NAHA/C) and collectively managed over 10,000 dwellings (Devine 1999). NAHA/C was established as a national representative body for off-reserve Aboriginal housing providers in 1993 in the wake of the discontinuation of the UNHP and provides a continuing voice for their interests (Devine 1999; NAHA/C 2004; 2007).

In 1999, the NAHA/C reported that urban Aboriginal housing providers predominantly housed young families, with 50 per cent of residents under the age of 18 years and 78 per cent under the age of 35 years. Half of all tenancies were single-parent households and 90 per cent of these were headed by women. About 14 per cent of residents had moved directly from an Aboriginal community or reserve, while the remainder had moved from private rental, homelessness or social housing (Devine 1999).

Research by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) (1999) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1996 found that Aboriginal organisations produced better housing and other social well-being outcomes for Aboriginal people than mainstream services. Benefits cited by the Commission



included: improved access to social services; better informal support networks; greater security and independence; increased capacity to engage in education and employment; and enhanced cultural identity (Walker 2008b).

Since 1993, urban Aboriginal housing providers have adapted to, and continued to challenge, the housing policy context. In the period until recently when there was no dedicated national funding, the organisations have survived by diverse means including: deferring maintenance and upgrades; selling houses; competing for mainstream affordable housing funding; and building local partnerships. The success of these strategies has depended on provincial and municipal policies and funding sources and the entrepreneurial skills and reputations of the organisations (Walker 2008b). Access to funding for growth has been limited, in part because of a shortage of capital funding opportunities, but also because individual Aboriginal housing organisations have either resisted, or been marginalised in their attempts to participate in mainstream policy and program processes (Walker 2006; 2008b).

Some organisations have attracted funding to develop small affordable housing projects, but overall there has been attrition of housing stock in the sector over nearly two decades. Most have deteriorating portfolios and have been forced to curtail activities, such as tenant support and financial counselling services (Devine 1999; NAHA/C 2002; Walker 2008b). Some successful supply strategies have involved engagement with mainstream social and affordable housing programs, especially where provinces and municipalities are supportive, and pursuit of partnerships with non-Aboriginal housing organisations, the private sector and academic institutions (Walker 2008b).

Aboriginal housing organisations have used participation in a variety of policy fora to pursue their interests including making submissions to inquiries, and participating in government policy processes and industry bodies. In addition to the NAHA/C, individuals and organisations have been active in the national social housing body, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), through membership as well as holding dedicated and general Board positions, including as President in 2008 (CHRA 2010).

#### *4.2.3 A provider agenda for action*

The NAHA/C has been active in advocating for the survival and expansion of Aboriginal-controlled housing providers. In 2004, NAHA/C proposed a National Non-Reserve Housing Strategy and in 2007 made ten recommendations for action to the Senate Committee on Social Issues on Aboriginal Housing in Canada.

The *Agenda for Action* included the following six priorities:

1. *Setting the Framework*: a policy framework based on housing need, cost of remedies and guiding principles.
2. *Fixing the Existing Programs*: enhancements to federal/provincial/municipal affordable rental housing programs to dedicate funds for Aboriginal housing and increase the subsidy to ensure affordable rents.
3. *Developing a Consultative Framework*: opportunities for Aboriginal housing interests to participate in national policy discussions.
4. *Protecting the Existing Portfolio*: funding to maintain properties and protection from being absorbed into mainstream program regimes.
5. *Recognising Aboriginal Housing as a Cornerstone to Sustainable Communities*: acknowledging the benefits of safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing

for social and economic well-being including early childhood development, education, health and eradication of violence and crime.

6. *Measuring Success*: an accountability framework that measures success and works in partnership with public participation in the process.

This agenda does not seek separate development but emphasises targeted and culturally appropriate responses within mainstream housing policy and programs. Canadian Aboriginal housing providers seek to maintain and expand Aboriginal housing organisations as significant institutions that support individual, household and community development. They emphasise, however, that subsidies must be adequate to achieve affordability and financial viability outcomes and there must be a voice for Aboriginal people in policy processes (NAHA/C 2007).

### **4.3 Importance of strong Aboriginal urban institutions**

The Canadian literature includes a strong theme that emphasises the importance of strong Aboriginal institutions to delivering appropriate services, maintaining cultural identity, and building community capacity. Dosman (1972) argues that any development of a more viable, well-adjusted urban Aboriginal minority is dependent upon the successful merging of two basic strategies: first, the provision of expanded opportunities in education, housing and employment by the larger society; and second, the stimulation of urban Aboriginal institutions that can create social, cultural, and political infrastructure and provide an entryway to the benefits of the wider society. Twenty-six years later, Walker (2008b) echoed the words of Dosman (1972, p.18) when he concluded that:

Representatives of Aboriginal housing organizations, academics, community advocates, politicians and government officials will have to perform at least two basic but difficult tasks in order to effect real progress in this (urban housing) sector: they must articulate and implement a return to common social citizenship goals relating to housing for all Canadians; and they must articulate and implement a vision of inclusive citizenship based on understanding that the key to better outcomes is to ensure Aboriginal self-determination in program design and delivery and in the evaluation of outcomes.

This theme was reiterated by the RCAP (1996) and is reflected in much Canadian contemporary research and policy literature (Newhouse & Peters 2003; Walker 2008a; 2008b). The arguments are both values-based and utilitarian. Recognition of self-determination as a foundation for inclusive citizenship appears to be a widely accepted value in Canada and is closely linked to Aboriginal legal rights under treaties and the Canadian constitution. While self-determination can imply separate development, most of the Canadian literature emphasises the importance of Aboriginal-controlled programs and services operating alongside mainstream services and within accepted accountability frameworks (Walker 2008b).

The literature also presents convincing evidence of the barriers faced by Aboriginal people in accessing and using mainstream services and the positive outcomes for individuals and communities that can be achieved by Aboriginal-controlled organisations (Hanselmann 2002a; 2003; Newhouse & Peters 2003; RCAP 1996; Walker 2008a; 2008b).

Urban Aboriginal people report direct and indirect discrimination within the mainstream service system. This has resulted in their reluctance to use mainstream services that are perceived to be culturally inappropriate or insensitive (Devine 1999; Homeless Action Task Force 1999). Aboriginal people have a strong preference for community-controlled housing and homelessness services and feel alienated and

excluded from services that do not acknowledge and respect Aboriginal culture and identity. Aboriginal services, in contrast, are trusted by, and accessible to, Aboriginal people, especially those who are marginalised, homeless or who have recently migrated from communities and reserves (Devine 1999; Homeless Action Task Force 1999).

Although there has been limited evaluation of the outcomes achieved by Aboriginal-controlled services, an evaluation of the UNHP undertaken by the CMHC (CMHC 1999) concluded that outcomes for tenants were better than in mainstream housing programs. Compared with mainstream social housing, tenants of Aboriginal housing providers funded under the UNHP achieved higher indicators of well-being including in the areas of access to community services, informal social supports, feeling secure, settled and independent (CMHC 1999; Walker 2008b).

In addition to the benefits to individuals and households who use services, the literature includes arguments about the importance of Aboriginal institutions for community strengthening. These include promoting a sense of community and shared identity as well as building capacity by providing opportunities for participation, employment and leadership development (CURA 2004; Graham & Peters 2002; Hanselmann 2003; RCAP 1996; Walker 2006; 2008b).

#### **4.4 Research gaps**

This brief review of the research and policy literature on urban Aboriginal housing in Canada reveals that urban Aboriginal research is relatively sparse and housing-specific academic literature is very limited. Available urban research tends to focus on the transition of Aboriginal people from reserves or traditional and northern (remote) communities to the urban environment and the disadvantages faced by urban Aboriginal residents. There is some mention of the establishment of urban services and the role they play in ameliorating or reinforcing poverty and disadvantage (Anderson unpublished). A small amount of Aboriginal housing research and evaluation has been commissioned by the CMHC, but the vast majority is concerned with remote and on-Reserve housing and infrastructure provision.

The urban Aboriginal housing policy literature is also not very extensive and mainly comprises documentation of federal, provincial and municipal policy, including a small number of housing and homelessness strategies and initiatives. NAHA/C has produced a number of reports and submissions that advocate for greater policy attention and funding for urban Aboriginal housing.

For this review, it has been particularly difficult to identify literature about innovative or effective service delivery models, documented examples of integrated service responses, or information about Aboriginal people's use of mainstream housing services.

#### **4.5 Conclusions and implications**

In Australia, as in Canada, 'Aboriginal people are now a part of the urban landscape and will remain so, most likely in increasing numbers' (Newhouse & Peters 2003, p.5). Canada faces very similar challenges to Australia in addressing urban Aboriginal housing needs. The two countries share a common history of federal responsibility for Indigenous affairs that contributed to separate development of Indigenous and mainstream social housing sectors. In both countries in recent years, federal governments have re-focused policy attention to prioritise remote and discrete Indigenous communities and diminished core responsibility for urban Indigenous issues. In both countries this has been accompanied by the absence of specified urban Indigenous housing programs, until the recently announced Canadian Off-

Reserve Aboriginal Housing Trust. This has impacted negatively on urban Indigenous housing organisations by creating confusion, financial stresses, limited opportunities for growth, and exclusion from mainstream housing policy dialogue. Some Canadian Aboriginal housing organisations faced with stagnation or attrition have responded by engaging with mainstream social and affordable housing programs, pursuing partnerships with non-Aboriginal housing organisations, the private sector and academic institutions. There is very little analysis or evaluation of the service delivery implications of these developments or of the impact on tenant outcomes.

The findings of this review of the Canadian experience leads to some tentative conclusions about the implications for developing principles for delivering appropriate and effective housing assistance to urban Indigenous populations in Australia. These include:

- There is a need for explicit urban Indigenous housing and homelessness policies, strategies, programs and targets.
- A mix of identified Indigenous services and culturally appropriate mainstream services are needed, especially for marginalised clients.
- The difficulties of integrating Indigenous services with mainstream programs and service systems should not be underestimated.
- Indigenous housing organisations have an important role in contributing to closing the gap and community strengthening in urban areas.
- Explicit and ongoing support and funding needs to be directed at building the institutional capacity of Indigenous housing organisations, individually and as a sector.
- Indigenous individuals and organisations should have a strong voice and participation in housing policy discussions.
- Research and evaluation effort needs to be directed at understanding the best approaches to delivering successful urban Indigenous housing services.

It seems apt to conclude this review with the words of Newhouse and Peters (2003, p.5), who, when introducing their study of urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada, said:

Understanding this complex reality in sufficient detail and depth is a major research challenge. Using this understanding to guide policy-makers is the policy challenge.

## 5 FURTHER RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND PLAN

The purpose of this study is to identify how the delivery of social housing services for Indigenous people in urban and regional locations can be improved in culturally appropriate ways in order to meet housing needs and contribute to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. The study endeavours to examine contemporary ideas about the provision of culturally appropriate and integrated services; review current and emerging policy and service responses to urban Indigenous housing need; obtain a deeper understanding of current practice and the opportunities for, and barriers to, better service delivery; and identify principles, practices and priorities to underpin improvements in the experience and outcomes for Indigenous social housing tenants.

The research questions outlined in Chapter 1 establish the high level focus for the study. In this Positioning Paper we have reported on the first phase of the study and have begun to address these questions through a review of academic and grey literature supplemented by interviews with a small number of policy-makers; a workshop with Indigenous service providers, and a review of urban Indigenous housing in Canada. Chapter 2 identified the complex and dynamic policy, program and service delivery context in which the study is located and the high reliance of Indigenous people on social housing. Chapter 3 identified key themes of cultural values, housing needs, policy and institutional settings, service delivery models and practices, service access and delivery experiences, and outcomes that have informed, and further refined, the focus and questions for the empirical study that will constitute the second stage of the research. Chapter 4 examined the similarities and differences between Australia and Canada and the importance and benefits of having a strong Indigenous housing sector. It also highlighted the challenges that Indigenous organisations face in building stronger links with mainstream policy, funding and service delivery systems. Overall, the analysis confirms both the timeliness and importance of this study in addressing gaps in conceptual and research evidence and providing evidence to inform the design of future policies, programs and service delivery modes and practices.

### Research approach

The research takes a critical stance that questions prevailing political and policy discourse and service delivery practice. It aims to examine social housing policy and service delivery from the perspective of Indigenous organisations and communities in order to better understand how the provision of housing can better contribute to building individual, family and community capacity and to Indigenous well being.

Following from the evidence examined in the body of this report, the intended research method for the empirical phase of the study is based on a proposition that a variety of culturally appropriate and well-coordinated social housing services is necessary to achieve the housing and non-housing outcomes required for Indigenous Australians to reach their potential and participate fully as Australian citizens. The approach also recognises the viewpoint that cultural appropriateness is a complex and multi-layered concept, which involves actions, beliefs, behaviours and relationships at systemic, organisational and individual levels. Delivery of cultural appropriateness and integrated social housing responses requires:

- Cultural knowledge and respect for cultural values.
- Intentional design of culturally inclusive policies and programs that engage Indigenous stakeholders and promote self-determination and institutional capacity.

- Culturally adapted and responsive services delivered by culturally competent staff with opportunity for Indigenous clients to interact with Indigenous staff and services that provide culturally safe experiences for clients and tenants.
- Attention to cultural values and Indigenous lifestyles in the design and location of housing.
- Culturally proficient service systems comprising both culturally adapted mainstream housing and culturally specific housing and related services that work effectively together in the best interests of clients and to build community capacity.

### *Research themes*

The empirical part of the study will build on the evidence compiled in this report to contribute to the knowledge base on this important issue. The primary research will reflect the key themes identified in Chapter 3 by examining:

- How the current and historical policy and institutional context influence service delivery.
- Service delivery modes and their capacity to meet urban Indigenous housing needs.
- Cultural frameworks informing service delivery.
- Relationships, cooperation and coordination between housing providers.
- Experiences and perceptions of the social housing service system from the viewpoint of Indigenous tenants, staff, organisations and communities.

### *Analytical approach*

The case studies will use a multi-level approach that focuses on systems, organisations and individuals. The systemic level will examine the national and state policy and institutional context, local housing market conditions and the local social housing service delivery arrangement. The focus at the organisational and individual levels will be on the cultural proficiency of housing providers and workers, including their administration of policies, local practices and the extent of relationships with the local Indigenous community.

Analysis at the systemic level aims to assess how the policy and institutional complexity and reform processes (discussed in Chapter 2) impact on service delivery. Our use of the theme of integration to explore policy and service will be based on previous research involving some of the research team. (see Jones et al. 2008; Phillips et al. 2009). Integration is emphasised as a key objective of national Indigenous service delivery and housing policy frameworks and widely accepted as necessary for effective service provision. The case studies will examine the governance, structures and processes that strategically link Indigenous housing policy and programs with those of other social housing and related policies to understand the implications for effective service delivery. They will also examine the capacity of service providers to work together through service networks at the local or regional level to provide effective responses to the specific needs of communities and individual clients that are consistent with cultural values (Jones et al. 2008).

Another key theme is the changing institutional environment, whereby Indigenous housing organisations are being marginalised from policy processes and face additional financial and regulatory pressures that are contributing to sector restructuring and loss of identified Indigenous organisations. The study will examine the implications of these trends for the strength and growth of IHOs and for the delivery of housing services to urban Indigenous communities.

At the organisational and individual levels, the study is concerned with both cultural appropriateness of service delivery and the effectiveness of service providers working together in the interests of Indigenous clients. Table 10 presents a framework for analysing the cultural proficiency of housing service delivery within the case study sites. Components of this framework are drawn from the literature examined in Table 9 and Section 3.5.1. The framework will inform the case study design, including the detailed research questions, data collection methods, data sources and informants, as well as the data analysis and interpretation.

**Table 10: Urban Indigenous housing service delivery: An analytic framework**

<i>Service delivery domain</i>	<i>Research questions</i>
<b>Housing provider organisations promote cultural respect and awareness</b>	<p>Do the organisation's vision, purpose, values and priorities demonstrate cultural awareness?</p> <p>Do codes of conduct promote cultural respect?</p> <p>Do organisational leaders drive sustained change?</p> <p>Are resources allocated to support cultural proficiency?</p> <p>Do planning, housing supply responses and housing management policies recognise and respond to the diversity of local Indigenous cultural values, lifestyles and housing needs?</p>
<b>Staff demonstrate cultural competence</b>	<p>Do staff have access to training and professional development that promote cross-cultural competency?</p> <p>Do staff performance systems emphasise cultural competency?</p> <p>Do staff exhibit appropriate language and communication styles?</p>
<b>The physical environment and service delivery responses respect cultural diversity</b>	<p>Is the physical environment welcoming and does it present positive representations of local Indigenous culture?</p> <p>Do Indigenous clients perceive the service as safe and accessible?</p> <p>Is service delivery practice (tools, etc.) culturally appropriate and evidence based?</p> <p>Do service responses build on community strengths (know the community, know what works)?</p> <p>Is the design, location and amenity of housing appropriate?</p>
<b>Service delivery is informed by Indigenous clients, staff and communities</b>	<p>Does the organisation seek active engagement with consumers and communities that sustain reciprocal relationships?</p> <p>Are Indigenous staff employed and mentored and their accountabilities to both the organisation &amp; their community recognised?</p> <p>Does the organisation demonstrate a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and respectful partnerships?</p> <p>Do consumers and communities effectively participation in designing, monitoring and implementing programs?</p>
<b>Strong service networks exist, especially between Indigenous and mainstream services</b>	<p>Do strong local networks operate that involve Indigenous and non-Indigenous housing services?</p> <p>What is the nature of trust, power relations, collaboration, coordination and partnerships between mainstream and specialist providers?</p> <p>Is the status and expertise of Indigenous organisations recognised by mainstream services? Is their advice and training sought by mainstream organisations?</p> <p>Is there evidence of shared responsibility for creating and sustaining relationships and working together?</p>

<i>Service delivery domain</i>	<i>Research questions</i>
<b>Housing providers are accountable for practice and outcomes</b>	<p>Are services continually monitored, reviewed and adapted?</p> <p>Does evaluation emphasise feedback from Indigenous tenants, staff, services and communities?</p> <p>Are there efforts to improve data collection and analysis?</p>

Source: authors

## Research methods

The empirical research will comprise one case study located in each of three urban or regional locations across NSW, Queensland and Victoria. This multiple case study method is adopted because it provides an opportunity to study, in detail, the service delivery dynamics in a specific context. Case studies are an accepted research approach to investigating contemporary phenomena within its real life context, when the boundaries between the phenomena and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin 2003). Case studies are also a means of generating powerful, contextualised descriptions, illustrating examples of practice, and getting close to complex real life dilemmas (Flyvberg 2001).

### *Case study locations*

The decision to locate the case study sites in NSW, Queensland and Victoria is based on two primary considerations:

- the extent of both urban Indigenous social housing clients and Indigenous housing organisations
- the degree of diversity in policy and service delivery contexts.

These states collectively comprise 88 per cent of the non-remote IHOs and have 60 per cent of the nation's Indigenous social housing tenants. Each has a distinctive policy and service delivery system (as described in Chapter 2) that is the product of different geographic, historical, cultural and institutional factors. The policy and service delivery arrangements across the three states can be conceptualised as operating along a continuum of approaches to delivering Indigenous housing services based on the degree of diversification and state control. Victoria has adopted a service delivery model that lies at the arms length end of the continuum, featuring a state-wide independent Indigenous housing association, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, which operates under the mainstream community housing regulatory system and has been scaled up through transfer of the management of identified public housing. Further along the continuum, NSW has a separate government authority, the AHO, established by the state with responsibility for funding and regulating Indigenous housing, which is delivered through a mixed model of provision by the SHA and Indigenous housing organisations. Still further along the continuum, Queensland has centralised control of SOMIH service delivery that is largely indistinguishable from public housing and is seeking to incorporate IHOs into a tightly integrated mainstream social housing policy and regulatory regime, that operates under the banner of 'one social housing system' (see Phillips et al. 2009).

The selection of the individual case study sites will be finalised following consultation with local stakeholders. This is essential to build trust in the researchers, develop support for the study and to ensure active participation of key stakeholders. The boundaries for the sites will be flexible and determined through the fieldwork to encompass service provider interactions and ensure that client mobility between



related locations within a region or sub-region is captured. The criteria for selecting sites include:

- Having a mix of urban or regional locations among the case study areas (two regional and one urban or vice versa).
- Sites where the Indigenous population is significant, but not over-represented or concentrated in a discrete place.
- Sites that have multiple government and community housing mainstream and Indigenous specific services operating in the area.
- Sites where there is evidence of recent innovations or initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of Indigenous housing services.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The case studies will use qualitative methods involving semi-structured discussions with groups of stakeholders and semi-structured interviews with non-Indigenous and Indigenous informants, as well as observation and non-structured discussions. It is expected that fieldwork will involve up to ten individual interviews and one or two group discussions involving four to six people, from up to eight government and non-government agencies. The final number and makeup of the groups will depend on who the stakeholders are in the local service delivery environment and the local activities that are of interest (e.g. a service initiative or innovative housing project). A snowballing technique will be used to identify potential participants after initial community contacts have been established. Relevant policy guidelines and organisation records, as well as quantitative data on Indigenous tenancies, will also be sought. The researchers will visit (by invitation) innovative services and projects and will pursue any other opportunities offered by their hosts to observe local service practice formally or informally. Efforts will be made to apply triangulation, wherever possible, by obtaining and corroborating data from multiple sources.

Data will be collected at a range of levels including: structural (policy, institutional and service delivery context); service system (types and interactions between providers); organisational (organisational policy and practice); and individual (beliefs and actions of housing workers). It follows, therefore, that the sample of interview and group participants in each site will cover:

- Policy-makers (FaHCSIA national or state offices, state Aboriginal affairs and housing agencies including specialist Indigenous agencies where they exist).
- Public, community and Indigenous housing providers, other local Indigenous organisations and community leaders.
- Other government and non-government human service agencies with a local presence serving Indigenous social housing tenants.

It is expected that Indigenous social housing tenants may participate where they are also members of the participating organisations. However, the resources available for the project and the study design do not provide for in-depth engagement with tenants. The study is focused on the service system and is not designed to evaluate the services or the outcomes for tenants. These are important research questions that require specialised studies to do justice to the complexity of the issues involved.

Interviews will be semi-structured in order to obtain a base of consistent data while leaving open opportunities for unexpected issues to emerge. The interview questions will be tailored for each category of participants and will be based on the questions identified in Table 10 above. The interview data for each case study will be analysed thematically and categorised—first into systemic (policy and institutional) and service

delivery issues and second into sub-themes. These sub-themes will be based on those identified from the academic literature reported in Chapter 3 and detailed in Table 9. Data from other sources, such as organisational documents, tenant data, informal discussions and observation will be used to cross check key data wherever possible to inform interpretation and maximise validity. Research team members will then workshop the themes emerging from across the case studies to identify common and divergent findings. Analysis will involve categorising data according to themes and interpreting findings with reference to the broad research questions, and the analytical framework presented in Table 10. A workshop will be convened to discuss the draft findings and their policy implications with service providers and policy-makers who have contributed to the study (either in stage 1 or 2 of the research) as well as other stakeholders identified by the research team as important participants.

### *The research team and Indigenous research protocols*

The researchers collectively bring to the study diverse disciplinary perspectives and a range of experiences related to both Indigenous-specific and general housing research and policy. However, while there are Indigenous researchers participating in the project, the core researchers are non-Indigenous. The researchers are acutely aware of the ethical, cultural and political dimensions of the research process. The research aims to contribute to improving housing services and outcomes for Indigenous peoples and the researchers acknowledge that this cannot be achieved without working closely with Indigenous housing organisations and housing workers, as well as Indigenous leaders in the study site communities, to ensure the research provides a voice for Indigenous knowledge and experience.

The researchers acknowledge and respect the necessity to abide by culturally appropriate and ethical principles when undertaking research concerned with Indigenous peoples and their communities (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Walker et al. 2003). Relevant guidelines for the conduct of Indigenous research have been consulted (AHURI 2009; AIATSIS n.d.). University ethics approval was received for the stage 1 research and further approval is being sought for stage 2 to enable fieldwork to proceed. Non-Indigenous members of the research team will also be seeking further advice on and developing their knowledge of appropriate Indigenous research methodologies before embarking on the fieldwork. Key Indigenous stakeholders will be contacted in the field work planning stage to ensure that the design and methods are appropriate and respectful, and to help establish trust between the researchers and local organisations and community members. Indigenous researchers will guide the case study teams at the sites, facilitate local engagement, and assist in identifying and working with the implications of local expectations, cultural norms, and the nature of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous players. Opportunities will be provided for participants to provide feedback on draft notes of local meetings. A summary of research findings will be made as a basis to communicate with participants and the broader Indigenous community, using Indigenous media and housing networks, and by speaking at conferences and workshops.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### *Workshop on housing service models for Indigenous people in urban and regional areas*

A one-day workshop with Indigenous public officials and service providers was held in Sydney on 11 November 2009. Juanita Sherwood from the Nura Gili Indigenous Programs and Resource Centre at the University of New South Wales facilitated the workshop. Other researchers in attendance were Vivienne Milligan and Hazel Easthope (University of New South Wales) and Rhonda Phillips (University of Queensland). A background paper on the research was provided to participants before the workshop.

### *Purpose of the workshop*

The main aims of the workshop were to:

- Learn about current approaches to service delivery to Indigenous people and particularly to identify recent changes in those approaches.
- Hear from knowledgeable Indigenous housing workers about their experience of and views about what works well and what doesn't in delivering housing service to Indigenous people.
- Develop some principles about how services should be delivered to Indigenous households in urban and regional areas that could be discussed more widely with service providers and clients.
- Identify specific examples of good service delivery models and innovative approaches that work well in urban and regional areas.

### *Structure*

Group discussion was structured around three topics:

- Issues faced by service providers in providing housing to Indigenous people in urban and regional areas.
- Specific experiences of government and community-based service providers.
- Good practice in service delivery to Indigenous people.

### *Participants*

Participants in the workshop were selected from around Australia on the basis of their experience in developing, administering and delivering Indigenous housing services. Invitations were extended to a mix of senior officials within either government or non-government housing organisations, although several participants had experience working in both sectors. Four of the participants invited currently hold senior positions within government housing agencies and five hold management positions in Indigenous housing organisations. Several participants had additional roles in the sector, such as membership of an advisory committee or as an organisation board director. One invited participant was unable to attend on the day due to illness. Participants who attended came from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.

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