



Final Report

Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services

authored by

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for the

**Australian Housing and Urban Research
Institute**

UNSW-UWS Research Centre
Queensland Research Centre

August 2011

AHURI Final Report No. 172

ISSN: 1834-7223

ISBN: 978-1-921610-78-3


AHURI
Australian Housing
and Urban Research Institute

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Title	Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services	
ISBN	978-1-921610-78-3	
Format	PDF	
Key words	Urban, Indigenous, social housing, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders, culture, adapting, service, housing	
Editor	Jim Davison	AHURI National Office
Publisher	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Melbourne, Australia	
Series	AHURI Final Report; no. 172	
ISSN	1834-7223	
Preferred citation	Milligan, V. et al. (2011) <i>Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services</i> , AHURI Final Report No.172. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This material was produced with funding from the Australian Government and the Australian states and territory governments. AHURI Limited gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from these governments, without which this work would not have been possible.

AHURI comprises a network of universities clustered into Research Centres across Australia. Research Centre contributions, both financial and in-kind, have made the completion of this report possible.

The authors would like to thank their colleagues Professor Susan Green and Ms Jenine Godwin for their participation in the case study research and for their guidance about Indigenous research methods and engagement. The research team would also like to thank all of the people who agreed to be interviewed for the study and the participants in the group discussions that were held in Dubbo, Townsville and Dandenong for the quality and generosity of information and knowledge that they offered, which has been very informative to the study.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	V
LIST OF FIGURES	V
ACRONYMS	VI
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 Purpose of the study.....	10
1.2 Previous research and present context	11
1.2.1 Social housing provision to Indigenous households in urban and regional areas	11
1.2.2 Service delivery issues and challenges for housing Indigenous people.....	13
1.2.3 Principles of service delivery for Indigenous households internationally....	14
1.3 Research design and methods	15
1.3.1 Case studies.....	15
1.3.2 Reflections on the research process	21
1.4 Report outline	22
2 THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	24
2.1 Key concepts and themes	24
2.1.1 Urban Indigenous social housing	24
2.1.2 Culturally appropriate services	25
2.1.3 Service integration.....	27
2.1.4 Governance.....	28
2.2 Policy principles and their influence on service delivery	29
2.2.1 Equality: mainstreaming, assimilation or integration?	30
2.2.2 Difference and diversity: segregation, guardianship or choice?.....	31
2.3 Service delivery in an intercultural space	32
2.4 Concluding comments	33
3 POLICY AND SERVICE DELIVERY CONTEXT FOR CASE STUDY AREAS ..	34
3.1 Dubbo (NSW)	34
3.1.1 Housing needs and issues	35
3.1.2 The social housing service delivery system	36
3.1.3 Policy context and initiatives	39
3.2 Townsville (Queensland)	45
3.2.1 Housing needs and issues	46
3.2.2 The social housing service delivery system	46
3.2.3 Policy context and initiatives	49
3.3 Dandenong (Victoria).....	53
3.3.1 Housing needs and issues	54
3.3.2 The social housing service delivery system	55
3.3.3 Policy context and initiatives	57
3.4 Concluding comments	60

4	EXAMINING POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS.....	62
4.1	Policy and program frameworks	62
4.1.1	Major issues arising in the mainstream public housing system.....	62
4.2	Resource allocation and service and asset planning.....	68
4.2.1	Funding and resource allocations for Indigenous housing	68
4.2.2	Planning for Indigenous housing	69
4.3	Institutional arrangements for Indigenous involvement across the service system.....	70
4.3.1	Indigenous engagement with policy, strategic planning and decision making.....	71
4.3.2	The role of Indigenous housing provider organisations.....	72
4.3.3	Contributions of other Indigenous institutions	75
4.4	Accountability and regulation.....	76
4.4.1	Accountability of mainstream services for Indigenous housing service standards and client outcomes.....	76
4.4.2	IHO regulation	77
4.4.3	IHO governance	78
4.5	Concluding comments	80
5	EXAMINING THE SERVICE DELIVERY ENVIRONMENT	81
5.1	Service integration and relationships.....	81
5.1.1	Relationships between housing service providers.....	81
5.1.2	Linkages with other service sectors	85
5.2	Intercultural practice	86
5.2.1	Housing workforce issues	86
5.2.2	Service delivery modes	90
5.2.3	Engagement of tenants and community.....	92
5.3	Concluding comments	95
6	FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS	97
6.1	Summary of findings.....	97
6.1.1	Current patterns of Indigenous involvement in social housing	97
6.1.2	The strategic framework for service delivery.....	98
6.1.3	The institutional framework for service delivery.....	100
6.1.4	Service practice and culture	101
6.2	Principles and strategies.....	102
6.3	Concluding reflections	106
	REFERENCES	107
	APPENDIX 1: NATIONAL SOCIAL HOUSING INITIATIVES AND INDIGENOUS HOUSEHOLDS	114
	APPENDIX 2: URBAN INDIGENOUS HOUSING SERVICE DELIVERY: AN ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK	117
	APPENDIX 3: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS IN CASE STUDY SITES.....	119
	APPENDIX 4: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN CASE STUDY SITES	121

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Strategic domain criteria and indicators for social housing for urban Indigenous households.....	8
Table 2: Service delivery domain criteria and indicators for social housing for urban Indigenous households.....	9
Table 3: Provision of social housing to Indigenous households in Australia.....	12
Table 4: Housing tenure by Indigenous status of household for the case study areas 2006.....	17
Table 5: Summary of empirical research activities undertaken	19
Table 6: Recent government initiatives impacting on housing service delivery system in Dubbo	41
Table 7: Recent government initiatives impacting on housing service delivery system in Townsville	50

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Competing principles in Australian Indigenous affairs	30
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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
AHBV	Aboriginal Housing Board (Victoria)
AHO	Aboriginal Housing Office (NSW)
AHV	Aboriginal Housing Victoria Ltd
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ARHP	Aboriginal Rental Housing Program
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIH	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing program
CBD	Central Business District
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHRW	Community Housing Resource Worker (Queensland)
CHVL	Community Housing Victoria Ltd
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
CRS	Community Rent Scheme (Queensland)
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
CTTT	Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (NSW)
DHS	Department of Human Services (NSW)
DHS(V)	Department of Human Services (Victoria)
DACWP	Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party (NSW)
EOC	Equal Opportunity Commission (WA)
FaHCSIA	(Australian Government Department of) Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FEAT	Family Emergency Accommodation Townsville (Queensland)
IHO	Indigenous housing organisation (also ICHO: Indigenous Community Housing Organisation)
ITAR	Indigenous Tenancy at Risk program (Victoria)
JAHS	Joint Aboriginal Housing Service (NSW)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council (NSW)
MOU	Memorandum/Memoranda of Understanding

NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NBESP	Nation Building Economic Stimulus Program
NHPA	National Homelessness Partnership Agreement
NPA	National Partnership Agreement
NQRIH	North Queensland Regional Indigenous Housing
NRAS	National Rental Affordability Scheme
NSW	New South Wales
NSWALC	NSW Aboriginal Land Council
NT	Northern Territory
OSHS	One Social Housing System (Queensland)
PARS	Provider Assessment and Registration System (NSW)
QATSIHSC	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Coalition
RAHC	Regional Aboriginal Housing Committees (NSW)
RIHNP	Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership
SA	South Australia
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index for Areas
SHA	State Housing Authority
SHASP	Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (Victoria)
SOMIH	State-owned and managed Indigenous housing (also SOMI housing)
TAFE	Tertiary and Further Education
UNSW	University of New South Wales
VHS	Victorian Homelessness Strategy
VISHN	Victorian Indigenous State Wide Homelessness Network
WA	Western Australia
WATAAS	Western Aboriginal Tenancy Advocacy Service (NSW)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social housing is a very significant tenure for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders (Indigenous people) in Australia with three in ten Indigenous households living in social housing. Demand for social housing from Indigenous applicants is also high due to population and household growth, the lower average incomes in this group, the significant numbers of homeless Indigenous people, and barriers faced by many Indigenous people in accessing private rental and home ownership, including affordability and discrimination.

The central concern of this research is how social housing is provided to Indigenous households in urbanised areas of Australia, where an estimated 80 per cent of Indigenous social housing tenants live. Underpinning the study is the viewpoint that social housing in all areas should be provided in ways that are consistent with cultural values and Indigenous aspirations. Accordingly, this research examines the cultural appropriateness of service responses across the social housing system to the diversity of housing needs of Indigenous people in Australian cities and towns. A key theme is the respective roles of mainstream and culturally specific housing services and how effectively these are integrated across the service system.

We have focused on urban areas for this study for several reasons. These include:

- High reliance of Indigenous people living in towns and cities on social housing.
- Recent devolution of responsibility to state and territory governments for housing Indigenous people living in non-remote locations after a long period of shifting intergovernmental roles and blurred responsibilities.
- Current debates, especially within the government sphere, about appropriate forms of service provision in social housing that are centred on the respective roles of, and connections between, mainstream and specialised agencies.
- Limited comparable research.

While the geographic scope of the study is urban, we acknowledge that urban and remote housing issues for Australia's first peoples have common underpinnings, including the legacy of historical alienation and racism, profound economic disadvantage, social exclusion and cultural damage.

Other significant contextual factors influencing the study have included 'whole-of-government' policy aims and targets to 'close the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage; growing development and application of culturally adapted policy and service frameworks by mainstream human service providers; and development in all jurisdictions under Council of Australian Governments (COAG) leadership of specific 'urban and regional service delivery strategies' for Indigenous households. (Appendix 1 gives more details on this policy context.)

Research stages

This research has been undertaken in two stages, each producing a research report. First stage results were published in a Positioning Paper 'Service directions and issues in social housing for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas' (Milligan et al. 2010). The Positioning Paper:

- 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.

- 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 social housing service delivery modes and practices impact on the aspirations of, and outcomes for, Indigenous tenants.
- Examines evidence from Canada about Indigenous housing service delivery practices and outcomes in urban areas.
- Proposes a framework and broad design for an empirical investigation of the service delivery environment for Indigenous social housing in selected locations in Australia to guide the empirical stage of the research.

The Final Report 'Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services' presents the empirical findings of the research and proposes a set of principles to guide endeavours to improve service delivery and better integrate policies and services in the social housing service delivery system for Indigenous households.

This Executive Summary is largely concerned with the second report. It can be read in conjunction with the Executive Summary for the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010, pp.1–7).

Research design and methods

For the empirical phase of this research, qualitative research techniques and a multiple case study approach have been used to analyse how the social housing service system operates and interacts for Indigenous households in specific geographic contexts.

Case studies were undertaken in each of New South Wales (NSW), Queensland and Victoria as these states have a high proportion of Indigenous social housing clients and Indigenous housing organisations (collectively they comprise 88% of the non-remote Indigenous Housing Organisations (IHOs) and have 60% of the nation's Indigenous social housing tenants), and each state has a distinctive policy and service delivery system that is the product of different geographic, historical, cultural and institutional factors (as outlined in Milligan et al. 2010).

After consultation with Indigenous stakeholders and service agencies, two regional urban sites, Dubbo in NSW and Townsville in Queensland, and one metropolitan site, Dandenong in Victoria, were chosen as the locations of the case studies. These final selections were made from a short list of sites that met the broad selection criteria that we had established. These were sites that had a significant but dispersed Indigenous population, a mixed service delivery environment of mainstream and Indigenous-run services, and recent initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of Indigenous housing services.

Dubbo is a major regional population and service centre located approximately 300 kilometres northwest of Sydney, and is the hub for much of the western region of NSW. It has the third largest Aboriginal community in NSW. The population is also highly diverse with up to 57 Aboriginal nations and language groups. Townsville is a major regional population and service centre located midway on the Queensland coast and is the hub for much of its surrounding region and far north Queensland. Townsville has a significant Indigenous population, and almost 6 per cent of the total population are Indigenous. The population is also highly diverse with up to 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes and language groups.

The city of Dandenong is located approximately 30 kilometres southeast of the centre of Melbourne. Victoria has a mainly urbanised Indigenous population and Dandenong is typical of many suburban areas where there is a small dispersed Indigenous population that has moved there from many different areas across Victoria and interstate. Dandenong is also a service hub for Aboriginal people from the Gippsland region. Compared with Dubbo and Townville, the Indigenous population is relatively small, making up less than 1 per cent of the total population. Descriptions of the housing service system and its features in each of these locations are provided in Chapter 3 of this report.

The researchers' core intent in all stages of the study has been to ensure effective Indigenous participation in order to ensure Indigenous perspectives are given voice and to inform culturally appropriate research methods. Engagement strategies that were adopted in the first stage of the research are set out in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010, p.11). In our case study areas, this goal was addressed through two primary methods:

1. Face-to-face interviews with staff and directors of Indigenous housing organisations and with Indigenous community leaders.
2. Including Indigenous stakeholders in all service provider group discussions, facilitated by Indigenous research team members.

Both interviews and group discussions were concerned with the operation of the service environment and ideas about how to improve the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households. We asked about current issues and challenges, the strategies that had been tried to address these and the lessons learnt from these experiences (Appendices 3 and 4 provide the guiding questions for the interviews and group discussions, respectively.).

These methods were supplemented by observations, informal conversations and information gathering at each location. In addition, we conducted interviews with senior government officials in the housing and Indigenous policy areas in each of the three states. Table 5 in the report provides a summary of all research activities in the empirical phase of the research.

While our analysis has been grounded in the real service environment of three urban places, it cannot claim to be comprehensive or representative of the whole urban social housing service system. Nevertheless, these cases provide some strong and consistent evidence of systemic and practical issues facing local housing service providers.

Concepts underpinning the analysis

To inform our interpretation of social housing for Indigenous households in urban contexts, we conducted a literature review and identified a number of useful key concepts. These traverse ideas about: models of service delivery; service integration; culturally appropriate service frameworks; competing approaches to policy making in the Indigenous domain; and an emerging concept in the anthropological literature of an 'intercultural' space, within which Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and players operate on a mutually respectful, interdependent basis to effect better service outcomes. Examining these concepts in Chapter 2, we contend that current evidence suggests that a 'one size fits all' service model and a standard approach to governmentality are inadequate to respond effectively and appropriately to the diversity of housing needs and aspirations of Indigenous people residing in urban areas. Following Altman (2004, 2009) and Sanders (2008, 2009), we suggest that there is value in looking past ideologies and practices that have been dominated by

one of the competing policy principles of equality and diversity in Indigenous policy making and embracing an emergent paradigm in Indigenous thinking that is realistic, takes account of both equality and diversity principles, and allows for agency to be exercised by Indigenous Australians. We also suggest that it is useful to adopt an intercultural view of interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to emphasise interdependence.

There is no neat, simple solution as to how best to deliver social housing for disadvantaged Indigenous Australians. Indigenous housing is a complex, messy problem that is highly contextual: one where solutions will differ depending on local conditions and the cultural norms and lifestyles of Indigenous clients in specific local situations. The idea of 'intercultural' approaches to delivering housing services implies that different solutions involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, adjusted to local context, may be necessary and appropriate. This is not to ignore the very real issues of power imbalances and the highly disadvantaged situation of many Indigenous Australians. However, the challenge is to move beyond approaches that are simplistic and rigid to find better pathways through complex and relational problems, especially through the use of adaptive policies, and by privileging local capacity and influence to a greater extent.

Broad findings

These ideas have been applied in the empirical research. The key findings have been grouped into those relating to the following.

- The policy and institutional settings impacting on the delivery of social housing services for Indigenous clients. This includes policy and program frameworks; resource allocation and service and asset planning processes; institutional arrangements for Indigenous involvement across the service system; and accountability and regulation in service delivery. These findings are presented in Chapter 4.
- The local service delivery environment, especially service practice, workforce issues, service culture and connectivity across the service system. These findings are presented in Chapter 5.

The key findings from the case study research about how systemic policy and institutional settings impact on the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households in specific locations are as follows.

- Mainstream housing policy settings in urban contexts are largely undifferentiated and not responsive to the needs and preferences of Indigenous clients. There is scope for much more adaptation of policies and local flexibility to allow for cultural values, preferences and lifestyles and to improve client outcomes.
- System-wide social housing strategic service planning processes, resource allocation decision frameworks and asset plans that are directed to addressing Indigenous housing needs are weak or absent. There are no permanent dedicated funds and few specific targets for improving social housing services to Indigenous clients in urban locations. A dedicated and well-resourced Indigenous social housing service strategy for urban areas that is framed at a state level but can be locally adapted is needed in order to overcome major limitations in the existing service system (especially investment to reconfigure inappropriate assets), to drive better performance across the system (e.g. reducing abandonment and sustaining a higher proportion of Indigenous tenancies), and to stimulate policy and service innovation.

- Indigenous organisations (both housing agencies and others) have made many positive and innovative contributions to the housing service system and this is recognised in mainstream agencies, especially at the local level where heavy demand and regular crises tend to provoke problem solving. However, much more could be done to systematically engage Indigenous agencies and networks in policy making and planning processes and to build capacity across the housing service system to enable them to play a more integrated role alongside mainstream organisations. This direction would be consistent with self-determination principles and could be expected to achieve better client outcomes across the whole service system. It will require long-term commitments and leadership to imbue mainstream agencies with greater capacity to work with Indigenous agencies, as well as resources dedicated to building appropriate capabilities in existing (or newly established) Indigenous institutions.
- Strengthening accountability frameworks for all mainstream providers, specifically around outcomes (e.g. successful tenancies) for Indigenous clients, is one priority area for attention. A second priority area is development in each jurisdiction of a culturally appropriate regulatory approach that can assist Indigenous housing organisations to be effective players, linked to a purpose-designed and resourced capacity-building strategy. This would parallel the well-resourced strategy to support growth of the mainstream community housing sector that is being implemented already across most jurisdictions in Australia. Such strategies should be developed jointly with key players from the Indigenous housing sector.

The key findings from the case study research regarding service delivery practices in the social housing system, with a particular focus on issues of service integration and culturally proficient practice, are as follows.

- While some progress is being made in creating linkages between Indigenous, public and community housing sectors and providers, more commitment and direction is required to improve integration. Top-down integrative initiatives, especially those that impose mainstream policies on Indigenous clients and housing providers, can be counter-productive to local integration unless they are supported by local implementation strategies that provide good information, build networks and relationships and empower front-line workers to flexibly apply policies.
- At the local level, there is a high level of recognition of the need for strong relationships with other service systems, especially in order to support tenants to sustain tenancies and provide pathways to alternative housing solutions. Program linkages, including between housing and homelessness and pathways to the private rental market and home ownership, were identified by local informants as priorities for improving the housing situation within Indigenous communities. This requires a more holistic policy approach and more flexible use of resources from federal and state/territory governments that, while talked about, have not been forthcoming.
- There is a continuing need for better workforce strategies that address the recruitment, retention and development of Indigenous staff and the cultural proficiency of non-Indigenous staff. Such strategies need to embrace a wide range of issues, including attracting Indigenous staff to housing, workplace culture, training and mentoring for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, career progression opportunities for Indigenous staff and managing the inevitable and inherent pressures and tensions between work and family/community obligations for Indigenous staff who are embedded in local Indigenous communities. Having Indigenous people in leadership roles and at all other levels of the mainstream service system should be key targets.

- The barriers faced by many Indigenous social housing clients in accessing services and the lack of flexible service delivery practices and options must be addressed. Initiatives that should be actively pursued include more Indigenous staff, culturally safe and welcoming service settings, greater use of outreach and partnering with well-connected Indigenous services. Such service modes will help to improve access, empower clients and sustain tenancies.
- Much greater attention needs to be given to establishing or nurturing opportunities for tenant and community engagement. This requires an understanding of Indigenous community structures and institutions, relationship building, allowing sufficient time and dedicating resources, and creation of spaces and processes that are conducive to meaningful engagement.

These key findings show that there are major shortcomings in the urban social housing service system with regards to Indigenous needs and values. The social housing system is poorly aligned with the culturally guided principles and practice that we have derived from theoretical and applied sources. Underpinning these shortcomings are serious systemic problems that stem from social housing's small and poorly configured dwelling portfolio (compared to needs) and a chronic lack of funding for investment in growing and renewing this portfolio.

Systemic problems notwithstanding, local case studies have also served to highlight specific examples of emerging policy and practice in social housing that are consistent with achievement of a more culturally adapted service system. These constructive examples and ideas can be used to inform incremental improvements in the system, but which should be subject to more fundamental reform.

One of the most significant initiatives we examined has been the move by the Victorian government in partnership with the Aboriginal community to establish a viable and sustainable Aboriginal housing service in Victoria (Aboriginal Housing Victoria Ltd (AHV)) that will operate alongside the mainstream social housing service system. Key components of this model include: new governance and regulatory arrangements for the provider; staged transfer of nearly 1200 former public housing dwellings that were designated for Aboriginal people to AHV to help to create a sustainable business that will be capable of some self-generated growth; rent reform to improve rent revenues and, thereby, service standards; and extensive organisational capacity-building activity. The core aim has been to respond to Aboriginal people's right to self-determination through a housing service model that delivers accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing and meets social, cultural and economic aspirations of the Victorian Aboriginal communities. Key lessons so far that can be taken from the Victorian experience of building a robust Aboriginal housing organisation through a stock transfer process have included the need for a long-term commitment from the mainstream organisation and the need to resource extensive capacity building.

A dedicated legislative and institutional framework to support Indigenous engagement in housing operates in NSW. Guided by a unique Aboriginal-governed policy and regulatory body (the Aboriginal Housing Office), NSW is implementing a strategy to systematically build and grow its Aboriginal housing sector so that it can operate effectively as a key component of a diversified services system alongside the well-developed mainstream public and community housing sectors in that state. New service standards, rent reform, backlog maintenance funding, a customised regulatory model and a sector-strengthening strategy form key elements of that strategy. The outcomes of the strategy will not be able to be assessed for some time; however, much of the sector is fragile and sustained commitments will be required to ensure positive outcomes for Indigenous housing organisations and their tenants.

These initiatives in NSW and Victoria are state-wide and government endorsed (although subject to political change). While there is no similar framework guiding the future of Indigenous social housing services in Queensland, Townsville provided a positive example of a local service system that was adapting to high levels of Indigenous need in innovative ways. Strong and effective relationships and high levels of collaboration exist across the social housing service system in that city. Mutual respect and trust is evident among providers, and there is regular and open communication, particularly between the public housing staff and individual community-based providers. Providers meet regularly and report an open exchange of information, ideas and problem solving. A particular focus is on negotiating appropriate allocation decisions and sustaining 'at-risk' tenancies. A key participant is Townsville's main Indigenous housing service agency, Yumba Meta. This organisation provides a positive example of an Indigenous housing provider retaining its cultural identity, while adapting to operate in the intercultural space and relating well to the mainstream housing services system. This has been an intentional strategy by Yumba Meta since the 1990s to ensure its long-term viability through strong governance, embracing mainstream accountability standards, striving for high quality and culturally appropriate services for tenants and engaging in mainstream housing networks.

The way forward

Our broad findings and the specific positive examples highlighted above, as well as many other smaller, well-directed initiatives that are described throughout this report, are indicative of the range of issues to be tackled if the social housing service system is to become more responsive and culturally adapted to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous dwellers in urban and regional areas. In an attempt to summarise from our research what an integrated, culturally adapted housing service system might look like, we set out at the end of this Executive Summary (Tables 1 and 2) a service framework of key criteria and indicators of performance that could be applied to both systematically review and improve the strategic and service delivery domains of the social housing service system, respectively.

Our research brief also required the development of a set of principles to guide endeavours to improve service delivery and to better integrate policies and services in the social housing service delivery system for Indigenous households. Principles and associated strategies that we consider to be consistent with the findings of this research and to accord with Indigenous thinking about how service systems for Indigenous clients should operate are set out in Chapter 6. In summary, these principles address the following themes.

1. Respect for first peoples and recognition of their urban disadvantage.
2. Indigenous participation and institutional capacity building.
3. Increasing housing choices.
4. Inclusion of Indigenous housing organisations.
5. Increased capital investment.
6. Transparent planning and resource allocation.
7. Cultural appropriateness in mainstream policies and services.
8. Indigenous employment across the social housing system.

Table 1: Strategic domain criteria and indicators for social housing for urban Indigenous households

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
Intentional policies	Specific urban Indigenous housing policies, plans and targets. Effective linkages with other housing and Indigenous affairs urban policies and programs. Specific policies and programs to support appropriate and sustainable forms of Indigenous home-ownership.
Policy engagement	Support for development of Indigenous institutions and networks with capacity to engage actively in strategic policy processes. Opportunities for meaningful participation by Indigenous stakeholders in policy decision making.
Dedicated resources	Specific urban Indigenous Housing Programs and/or quarantined resources. Access by IHOs to mainstream housing programs and funding.
Capacity building	Strategies and resources to strengthen IHOs. Strategies for improving cultural capacity of mainstream services.
Evaluation and research	Data collection and monitoring against targets. Dedicated, ongoing research effort. Evaluation of outcomes.

Source: authors

Table 2: Service delivery domain criteria and indicators for social housing for urban Indigenous households

Criteria	Indicators
Choice of provider	Intentional system design to achieve a balanced mix of mainstream and Indigenous-specific services. Viable and well-governed IHOs. Culturally proficient mainstream services.
Appropriate housing	Diversity of housing design, size and location to meet local needs, climate and lifestyles.
Service integration	Effective and sustainable relationships between: → mainstream and Indigenous housing providers → housing providers and other Indigenous services → housing providers and other mainstream services.
Policy adaptation	Adoption of specific policies for Indigenous tenants where necessary and justified to address cultural and lifestyle differences.
Culturally proficient practice	Cultural respect and relevant cultural knowledge demonstrated. Understanding of Indigenous history and disadvantage. Recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff. Non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff demonstrating cultural competence. Physical environment and service delivery respects cultural diversity.
Community/tenant engagement	Service delivery is informed by Indigenous clients, staff and communities. Indigenous workers mediate relations between mainstream services and Indigenous clients and communities.
Accountability	All housing providers are accountable to clients, funders and local communities for practice, outcomes and use of public funds. All services are transparently monitored, reviewed and adapted.

Source: authors

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The primary aim of this research 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 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 many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have endured poor quality of life outcomes and that these outcomes are often linked to housing.¹

The focus on housing services in urban and regional areas is important for a number of reasons, including that the large majority of Indigenous Australians live in those areas, Indigenous people living in urban areas have a range of distinctive housing needs, and many rely on the social housing system. Furthermore, Australian governments take different approaches to the funding and delivery of services to Indigenous people in 'remote' and 'non-remote' settings.² Over the course of this study, major reforms were being implemented in Indigenous housing policy and service delivery in urban areas focused on 'closing the gap' in socio-economic disadvantage and health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, concurrent with reforms concerned with the funding and delivery of social housing in Australia, including strategies to address Indigenous disadvantage (see Milligan et al. 2010 for a more detailed discussion). Despite the significance of urban living among Indigenous peoples, housing studies related to urban Indigenous populations are under-represented in the Australian research and policy analysis arenas (Long et al. 2007). Our research suggests that there have been very few studies that specifically focus on how the policy and practice of the social housing service delivery system in urban locations operates for Indigenous clients.

The research questions set to guide the study are as follows.

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?

¹ In Australia, Indigenous people are those who are descendent from, identify as and/or are accepted by their communities 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 (Milligan et al. 2010, p.13).

² These terms refer to broad geographical grouping of local areas with common characteristics in relation to accessibility, based on distance from population centres of various sizes. This study is focusing on the social housing system in areas either described as urbanised or urban and regional or, sometimes, non-remote. For further details on these classifications, refer to *Statistical Geography Volume 1: Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), 2006* (cat. no. 1216.0).

5. What are the views of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders³ (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?

Research questions 1–3 were addressed in the Positioning Paper for this project (Milligan et al. 2010). A brief summary of the findings of that report is presented in Section 1.2 below. This Final Report will further address questions 1–3, as they relate to the local context of our three case study areas, in addition to questions 4–7.

1.2 Previous research and present context

This section considers some key findings on the Positioning Paper for this study (Milligan et al. 2010) and subsequent policy developments. It provides a brief review of the findings of our earlier research and updates the policy context within which the ongoing research has been conducted. More detailed information on the issues referred to can be found in the previous report.

1.2.1 *Social housing provision to Indigenous households in urban and regional areas*

Social housing has been provided for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas through four main funding and program streams.⁴ Table 3 presents a summary of the latest data on the profile of Indigenous tenancies in social housing.⁵

Between 2007–08 and 2009–10 there have been significant changes in how social housing is managed for Indigenous households. In particular, there have been further shifts to mainstreaming in most jurisdictions. The share of all Indigenous social housing tenancies provided by public housing agencies rose to 41 per cent from under 40 per cent over the period 2007–08 to 2009–10, resulting in a rise of Indigenous occupancy in that tenure from 7.2 per cent to 8.1 per cent. Similarly, mainstream community housing⁶ increased its share of Indigenous tenancies from less than 1 per cent of its tenants to 5 per cent, so that mainstream community housing had 7.4 per cent of all Indigenous social tenancies in 2009–10 (up from 6.4% in 2007–08). While much of this growth resulted from greater targeting to Indigenous households, some resulted from the take-over of Indigenous managed community housing (AIHW 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

³ This question was expanded from the original research brief to include non-Indigenous stakeholders working closely with Indigenous clients and organisations in the social housing system.

⁴ Section 2.1.1 explains Indigenous social housing in more detail.

⁵ As discussed in more detail in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010, p.24), all census, administrative and survey data that are collected on the Australian Indigenous population are subject to recognised limitations on quality and coverage.

⁶ As distinct from Indigenous community housing, which refers to housing owned and/or managed by Indigenous-run organisations primarily for Indigenous people.

Table 3: Provision of social housing to Indigenous households in Australia

	General public housing	Public housing identified for Indigenous tenants	Indigenous-run community housing	Mainstream community housing
No. and percentage of tenancies in social housing occupied by households with Indigenous members by sub-sector	26,363 41% (2009/10)	11,451 18% (2009/10)	23,025 (est.) ¹ 36%	3,153 5% (2009/10)
Percentage of tenancies with Indigenous members in each sub-sector	8.1%	100%	100%	7.4%
Ownership and management	Owned and managed by state housing authorities (SHAs) in each state or territory.	Owned and managed by SHAs in Queensland, WA, SA and Tasmania; owned by the AHO in NSW and managed by the SHA. Transferred to AHV in Victoria between 2007 and 2009. ² Not provided in ACT or NT.	Owned and managed by IHOs. One large state-wide provider in Victoria (AHV).	Owned and/or managed by mainstream community housing organisations
Geographic distribution	Services almost exclusively urban based.	Services almost exclusively urban based.	Until recently, almost the only form of service in remote areas. Most jurisdictions have some IHOs in urban settings.	Services almost exclusively urban based.
Notable policy developments	Recent service reforms centred on more intensive tenancy management to sustain tenancies, many with a specific Indigenous component.	National earmarked funding ceased at the beginning of 2009. The future of the assets, services and further investment is now a matter for individual states.	Negotiations to hand over management in discrete communities to SHAs proceeding in NT, WA, Queensland and SA.	Strategies to improve Indigenous access being developed in several jurisdictions.
Other	Thirty-five per cent increase in total Indigenous public housing tenancies 2003–08.		Earmarked national funding no longer available for non-remote IHOs.	Some providers growing rapidly.

1. This is a composite figure to give an up to date estimate of the size of this sector. It includes the latest (2006) data from ABS on Indigenous community housing plus the housing that was transferred between 2007 and 2009 to the AHV in Victoria (see Chapter 3).

2. A small amount of SOMIH in Victoria that is occupied by Indigenous tenants who elected not to transfer to AHV has been reclassified as general public housing.

Sources: ABS, 2007, Table 4.7; AIHW 2011a, Table 2.1; 2011b, Table 2.1; 2011c, Table 2.1.

The delivery system for social housing for Indigenous households is complex. In part, this complexity has resulted from the separate development of Commonwealth-funded Indigenous community housing programs and jointly funded but state-run Indigenous public and Indigenous community housing programs, in parallel with a long period of contested responsibility for providing social housing to urban Indigenous people.

The policies and practices that have resulted from this political environment have been characterised by duplication, inconsistency and confused accountability (Phillips et al. 2009). In particular, Indigenous-run community organisations have tended to become isolated from mainstream policy, planning, resource allocation and capacity-building processes. This situation has been further complicated by successive waves of reform and differences in approach across jurisdictions, which have produced diverging strategies for service delivery over time, with some jurisdictions engaging with, and supporting, Indigenous-run housing services and others focusing on increased mainstreaming of housing services.

In response to these problems, there have been a series of attempts at policy, funding and service integration, the legacies of which are embedded in current policy settings and service delivery systems. The Positioning Paper for this project (Milligan et al. 2010) provides a more detailed overview of the attempts at integration of the social housing system that have taken place since the early 1990s. In the Positioning Paper, the authors argued that any moves toward the intensification of mainstreaming in the social housing system must also tackle concerns around financial and social viability across the whole social housing system. Stronger and better resourced approaches to incorporating Indigenous cultural values and needs into the service approach will also be required. Our thinking around these issues is developed further throughout this Final Report.

1.2.2 Service delivery issues and challenges for housing Indigenous people

An overarching objective of government policy in Indigenous affairs is for Indigenous people to have access to the same opportunities as other Australians (COAG Reform Council 2010). In housing, tenure patterns for Indigenous Australians are almost the reverse of those of non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians have a home-ownership rate that is less than half that of non-Indigenous households and are over five times more likely to be social renters (ABS 2007, Table I01).

A key thrust of current Australian Government policy is to enable opportunities for real choice for Indigenous people and especially to assist pathways to home ownership in both urban and remote areas (FaHCSIA, n.d.). This is a long-term goal, with social housing continuing as the only feasible form of housing provision for large numbers of the most disadvantaged Indigenous households. A recent analysis of housing affordability for Indigenous households showed that only 1.4 per cent of housing sold in 2007–08 would have been affordable to low-income Indigenous households and 11.4 per cent to those on moderate incomes (COAG Reform Council 2010, Figure 8.7, see original for method of calculation).

The existing evidence suggests that present social housing service models need to be substantially improved in order to better address the diverse and distinctive needs of Indigenous households living in urban and regional areas. 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) and major service quality problems that affect Indigenous households can be found in both mainstream and specialist services (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 (SCRGSP 2010; Flatau et

al. 2009). Furthermore, 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; Prout 2008; EOC 2004).

In addition, there is no specifically identified funding for social housing for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas allocated by the Commonwealth government, as there is for remote areas. However, under the recent Nation Building Economic Stimulus Program (NBESP) (2008/09–2011/12) and the National Partnership Agreement for expanding social housing (see Appendix 1), specific targets for allocating a share of new acquisitions to homeless people (including Indigenous homeless people) were negotiated with states and territories. These programs are now concluding and no major new supply is anticipated.

1.2.3 Principles of service delivery for Indigenous households internationally

The Positioning Paper for this project (Milligan et al. 2010) considers some of the key objectives and strategies adopted to address service delivery issues in Indigenous housing in Canada. Canada was chosen as a comparative case study as both Canada and Australia have many similarities in regards to issues affecting Indigenous social housing service delivery. Both Canada and Australia have an increasingly urbanised Indigenous population and the diversity of Aboriginal identities in Canada (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) has parallels with the Australian context where Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have distinct cultures while sharing common experiences of colonisation. Both countries have a federal system of government and have had federal responsibility for Indigenous affairs that contributed to the separate development of Indigenous and mainstream social housing sectors. Furthermore, in recent years, both countries have refocused their policy priorities primarily toward remote and discrete Indigenous communities, resulting in reduced attention to urban Indigenous issues.

The findings of our Canadian review offer a useful backdrop for developing principles of service delivery for Indigenous households in Australia. Drawing on the Canadian experience we concluded that:

1. There is a need for explicit urban Indigenous housing and homelessness policies, strategies, programs and targets.
2. A mix of identified Indigenous services and culturally appropriate mainstream services are needed, especially for marginalised clients.
3. The difficulties of integrating Indigenous services with mainstream programs and service systems should not be underestimated.
4. Indigenous housing organisations have an important role in contributing to 'closing the gap' and community strengthening in urban areas.
5. Explicit and ongoing support and funding needs to be directed at building the institutional capacity of Indigenous housing organisations, individually and as a sector.
6. Indigenous individuals and organisations should have a strong voice and participation in housing policy discussions.
7. Research and evaluation effort needs to be directed at understanding the best approaches to delivering successful urban Indigenous housing services (Milligan et al. 2010, p.77).

Using the methodology outlined next, this report will address how to draw upon and further develop these principles in the Australian context.

1.3 Research design and methods

Stage 1 of the research, reported in the Positioning Paper, involved: an overview of the policy, program and service delivery context for the provision of social housing as it applies to Indigenous clients; a thematic review of relevant concepts and evidence about service delivery issues that concern and involve Indigenous households; talking with expert Indigenous informants in the social housing system to identify relevant issues, challenges and positive initiatives from their perspectives; and developing a methodology for an in-depth review of service practices in selected locations, where a variety of service models and initiatives operate.

Stage 2 of the research uses qualitative research techniques and a multiple case study approach. The aims are to examine how the service system operates in detail at specific urban sites and to assess the applicability of various principles and concepts of culturally appropriate service (that have been derived from the research methods) using information and observations taken from those locations.

The researchers have striven in all stages of the study to achieve Indigenous participation in order to ensure Indigenous perspectives are given voice and to inform culturally appropriate research methods (see Milligan et al. 2010). In describing the empirical phase of the research below we highlight the engagement strategies that were adopted.

1.3.1 Case studies

The empirical research carried out consisted of three case studies. Case study locations were chosen in NSW, Queensland and Victoria as these states have a high proportion of Indigenous social housing clients and Indigenous housing organisations (collectively they comprise 88% of the non-remote IHOs and have 60% of the nation's Indigenous social housing tenants) and each state has a distinctive policy and service delivery system that is the product of different geographic, historical, cultural and institutional factors (as outlined in Milligan et al. 2010).

The criteria for considering possible sites were:

- Sites where the Indigenous population is significant but dispersed rather than being concentrated in a discrete place.
- Sites that have multiple—mainstream and Indigenous-specific, government and community—housing services operating in the area.
- Sites where there is evidence of recent innovations or initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of Indigenous housing services.

Final site selection was made in consultation with policy-makers and local Indigenous stakeholders who were asked to advise on suitable locations in their jurisdiction that met those criteria. This resulted in a shortlist of six locations (two per jurisdiction). To achieve a mix of metropolitan and regional locations across the three jurisdictions, the final sites chosen by the research team were two regional urban sites (Dubbo NSW and Townsville Queensland) and one metropolitan site (Dandenong Victoria).

Dubbo is a major regional population and service centre located approximately 300 kilometres northwest of Sydney, and is the hub for much of the western region of NSW. It has the third largest Aboriginal community in NSW. The population is also highly diverse with up to 57 Aboriginal nations and language groups.

Townsville is a major regional population and service centre located midway along the Queensland coast, and is the hub for much of the surrounding region and far north Queensland. Townsville has a significant Indigenous population, and almost 6 per cent of the total population are Indigenous. The population is also highly diverse with up to 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes and language groups.

The city of Dandenong is located approximately 30 kilometres southeast of the Melbourne CBD. Victoria has a mainly urbanised Indigenous population and Dandenong is typical of many suburban areas where there is a small dispersed Indigenous population that has moved there from many different areas across Victoria and interstate. Dandenong is also a service hub for Indigenous people from the Gippsland region. Compared with Dubbo and Townsville the Indigenous population is relatively small, making up less than 1 per cent of the total population.

In all three case study areas, the Indigenous population is comparatively young and dominated by families with children.

The tenure status of Indigenous households in each of the three case study areas is consistent with the distinctive tenure patterns of Indigenous Australians, which diverge significantly from those of non-Indigenous Australians (Table 4). However, in all three areas home-ownership rates are consistently less and rates of public housing are higher than national averages for households with Indigenous persons. This may be due to the relatively low socio-economic status of these areas and the presence of clusters of public housing. In fact, these figures may be more indicative than national averages of the tenure divide for Indigenous households in towns and suburbs where they live in greater numbers, although it should be noted that 'other tenure arrangements and not stated' is a larger category for this population group than for the remainder of the Australian population, especially in Dandenong.

More detailed information on the case study sites is provided in Chapter 3.

Three members of the research team visited Dubbo (for three days) and Townsville (for four days). Because none of the researchers had established contacts in the Dandenong area, two visits were made to Dandenong: an initial day scoping visit by the research leader followed by the three-day visit by three research team members.

All extended visits included an Indigenous member of the research team, who facilitated the group discussion and participated in some local interviews. Primary field work took place in Dandenong in May 2010, in Townsville in July 2010 and in Dubbo in October 2010 and findings reported about those cases relate to that time, unless otherwise indicated. In addition to local interviews, face-to-face interviews were also conducted in Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne throughout 2010.

We conceptualised each of the case study locations as hubs within the broader region, rather than as bounded areas. For example, in speaking with people about social housing provision for Indigenous people in Dubbo, we were aware that Dubbo acts as an important regional centre for far western NSW and this has significant implications for the provision and use of social housing in the area.

Table 4: Housing tenure by Indigenous status of household for the case study areas 2006

Tenure		Case study area			National
		Dubbo (a)	Townsville (b)	Dandenong (c)	
Home ownership (d)	Households with Indigenous persons	32.8%	25.6%	29.1%	34.2%
	Other households	68.9%	59.5%	65.8%	68.9%
Public rental	Households with Indigenous persons	25.3%	26.5%	28.6%(e)	20%
	Other households	3.8%	4.4%	3.8%	3.9%
Private rental (f)	Households with Indigenous persons	32.7%	34.3%	22.4%	31.3%
	Other households	21.4%	28.5%	22.5%	23.0%
Co-operative, community and church group-provided housing	Households with Indigenous persons	3.1%	2.7%	2.1%(e)	8.9%
	Other households	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%
Other tenure/not stated ¹	Households with Indigenous persons	6.1%	10.9%	17.8%	5.6%
	Other households	2.9%	7.2%	7.6%	3.7%

(a) Dubbo (Statistical Subdivision)

(b) Townsville City Part A (Statistical Subdivision)

(c) Greater Dandenong City (Statistical Subdivision)

(d) Including fully owned and being purchased

(e) Predates transfers to AHV described in this report

(f) Including rented from a real estate agent and person not in same household

1. Includes households renting under a variety of other circumstances (such as from employers, in caravan parks and retirement villages, etc.) and when landlord is not stated. No explanation is offered for the comparatively high incidence of households with Indigenous persons in this category.

Sources: ABS 2007, Table I18; Milligan et al. 2010, Table 3

The case studies used qualitative methods, involving semi-structured discussions with groups of stakeholders involved with service provision to Indigenous clients; semi-structured interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous informants working in the areas of Indigenous service provision and social housing, as well as community leaders; non-structured discussions; and observation. Appendix 3 provides the list of questions on which interviews were based. Appendix 4 provides the framework that was used to guide group discussions. As well as the qualitative data collected during these discussions, some informants were also asked to provide quantitative data to the research team (e.g. about the number of Indigenous tenancies managed by their organisation). After initial community contacts were identified, a snowballing approach

was used to identify potential participants. Participants were contacted over the phone and via e-mail or letter and invited to participate.

We approached people with knowledge about the delivery of social housing services in order to get a better understanding of the opportunities for better service delivery, as well as the barriers that make it difficult to provide high-quality social housing services. We approached policy-makers, public housing providers, community housing providers, Indigenous housing providers, other local Indigenous organisations, community leaders, and other government and non-government human service agencies with a local presence serving Indigenous social housing tenants.

We sought information from participants 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, workforce profiles and strategies).
- Individual (beliefs and actions of housing workers).

The specific lines of enquiry concerned with cultural appropriateness and service effectiveness that we wanted to pursue in the field stage were developed in the Positioning Paper (see Appendix 2). These themes permeated the group discussion and interviews.

The group discussions were structured around four main questions.

1. What are some of the main challenges and obstacles that you/your organisation face in supporting Indigenous applicants and tenants?
2. What initiatives taken by either government agencies or community organisations (or acting together) in this local area (or state-wide) have helped to address these challenges? What are they and how well have they worked/what has been learnt so far?
3. What changes have you observed in recent times in the ways mainstream government agencies and community-based agencies work with Indigenous clients and support Indigenous staff?
4. How could services or service capacity for Indigenous clients in this area/state be improved?

One group discussion was held in each of Dubbo and Dandenong. The research team offered to hold separate Indigenous-only discussions with some Indigenous participants in both areas, but those who were approached advised that this would not be necessary and welcomed the opportunity to talk with their non-Indigenous colleagues. In Townsville two group discussions were held, one with a cross-section of service providers and one specifically with the board and staff of a leading IHO. The IHO board comprised Indigenous leaders with a strong knowledge of Indigenous housing issues in Townsville. Contributions from the group discussion are separately identified in quotes used throughout this report.

Each interview was unique, and interview questions were developed to respond to the particular experiences, knowledge and expertise of the interviewee. Interviews were typically around one hour in duration.

Across the interviews, the following discussion points were covered:

- 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, co-operation and coordination between housing providers.
- Experiences and perceptions of the social housing service system from the viewpoint of Indigenous tenants, staff, organisations and communities.

Table 5 summarises the research activities carried out for each case study.

Table 5: Summary of empirical research activities undertaken

	Participants
National	
Interview	One interview conducted in person with policy-maker at FaHCSIA
Dubbo (NSW)	
Group discussion	Nine participants and three researchers. Organisations represented: Housing NSW, Western Area Aboriginal Tenants Advice Service, Aboriginal Housing Office, Thubbo Aboriginal Medical Service, and Gilgandra Local Aboriginal Land Council.
Semi-structured interview	Twelve interviews conducted with 14 people (10 in person and two over the phone). Organisations represented: Housing NSW, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, Department of Human Services, Aboriginal Housing Office, Western Area Aboriginal Tenants Advice Service, Dubbo Koori Interagency, Aboriginal Community Working Party, Compass Housing, Local Indigenous community leaders.
Observation/site visits	Site visits to public, community and AHO housing around Dubbo.
Non-structured informal discussions	Yes, with Indigenous housing providers.
Information received	From Housing NSW, Aboriginal Housing Office, Housing Appeals Committee, Community Housing Registrar and NSW Fair Trading in person and via e-mail.
Townsville (Queensland)	
Group discussion 1	Eight participants and three researchers. Organisations represented: Department of Communities Housing and Homelessness Services; Family Emergency Accommodation Townsville; Townsville Community Rent Scheme; Yumba Meta social housing provider and diversionary centre; Health Homeless Outreach Team; community elder.
Group discussion 2	Five directors and one researcher. Attended by five directors of the Yumba Meta Board, including elders and a long-term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Program tenant.
Semi-structured interview	Twelve interviews conducted with 17 people (11 in person and one over the phone). Organisations represented: Regional Indigenous Housing Company; Public Housing; Yumba Meta; Red Cross; local member of parliament; Department of Communities Aboriginal

	and Torres Strait Islander Services; Public Housing, Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service; Life is More Homelessness Hub.
Observation/site visits	Site visits to Indigenous housing in Townsville.
Non-structured informal discussions	Yes, with policy-makers.
Information received	From Department of Communities.
<i>Dandenong (Victoria)</i>	
Group discussion	Nine participants and three researchers. Organisations represented: Bunurong Co-operative (board member and staff); Ngwala Willumbong Indigenous Advocacy Group; Department of Human Services Dandenong regional housing office; AHV (board member and staff); Westernport Accommodation and Youth Support Services Housing and Support Services.
Semi-structured interview	Six interviews conducted with nine people (four in person and two over the phone). Organisations represented: AHV; Department of Human Services Office of Housing; Community Housing Ltd.
Observation/site visits	Site visits to Aboriginal housing around Dandenong.
Non-structured informal discussions	Yes, with policy-maker.
Information received	From AHV; Department of Human Services Office of Housing; and Swinburne TAFE.

The researchers 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, most of the researchers are non-Indigenous. 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 were consulted (AHURI 2009; AIATSIS n.d.) and University ethics approval was received before the fieldwork began.

Key Indigenous stakeholders were contacted in the fieldwork planning stage to ensure that the design and methods were appropriate and respectful and to establish relationships between the researchers and local organisations and community members. Indigenous researchers guided the case study teams at the sites, facilitated local engagement and assisted in identifying and working with the implications of local expectations, cultural norms and the nature of relationships between individuals. The researchers worked closely with Indigenous housing organisations and housing workers, as well as Indigenous leaders in the case study areas to ensure that the research benefited from, and provided a voice to, Indigenous knowledge and experience in working toward improved housing services for Indigenous people.

The interview and case study data for each case study was analysed thematically and categorised, first into systemic (policy and institutional) and service delivery issues and second into sub-themes. These sub-themes were informed by those themes identified from the academic literature reported in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010), and further developed to reflect the findings of the fieldwork. Data from other sources, such as organisational documents, tenant data, informal discussions and observation was used to cross-check key data wherever possible to inform interpretation and maximise validity.

The research team members then met to workshop the themes emerging from across the case studies to identify common and divergent findings. Analysis involved categorising data according to themes and interpreting findings with reference to the broad research questions. This analysis is presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this report.

Toward the end of the research, consultation about the draft final list of principles and their policy implications took place with groups of Indigenous stakeholders and with policy-makers who have guided the study. 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.

1.3.2 Reflections on the research process

Setting up the case studies was a time-consuming process, which had not been sufficiently allowed for in the initial research design and contributed to delays in completing the research. In particular, it was important to have previously established relationships with people in the case study areas and to make time to establish new relationships before conducting the fieldwork. One difficulty in this regard was not being resourced for multiple site visits. Local contacts were particularly helpful in advising on who should and could attend the meetings, and helping to arrange interviews and group discussions.

We found that while formal approaches to participate in the research and formal explanations of the research aims and process were important, informal discussions about why we were really in these locations asking questions about Indigenous housing were equally important. Some of the researchers were approached by participants and asked what the purpose of the study really was, and what we were trying to find out, despite having previously received a formal description of the project.

Once we were at the case study locations and inviting people to participate in interviews and group discussions, one of the biggest challenges we faced was in explaining the University ethics system and procedure. Despite following guidelines set out by AIATSIS in terms of the ethics process and the preparation of written ethics documents (such as information sheets and consent forms), we found that it was very important to take time to explain verbally what these procedures and forms were about, and their impact on participants. In some cases there was a reluctance to sign these forms, meaning that the information provided by these participants could not be used in this report.

Also reflecting this apparent preference to discuss issues in person, rather than through documentation, while participants in the group discussions were given the opportunity to provide feedback on notes from these meetings, we did not receive any feedback on these notes. Given more time and resources, it may have been useful to return to each of the case study sites in order to seek this feedback in person. However, while subsequent feedback on the group discussions was scarce, these discussions were successful in bringing together local stakeholders and identifying the main challenges faced by service providers, examples of initiatives to address these challenges, observed changes in mainstream agencies, and ideas about how service delivery could be improved.

Furthermore, one of the unintended consequences of the research approach was to provide a platform for communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff from different agencies and organisations, and this benefit was explicitly raised during the group discussion in both Dubbo and Dandenong. In the case of Dandenong, the workshop was also used by participants as a forum in which to air grievances. If

information exchange between agencies and organisations is poor, then it is likely that a group discussion will be used for this purpose. Future research in this area might look at how this role could be enhanced and expanded in the research design, while simultaneously managing the tendency to air grievances (as was the case in the Dandenong workshop) and making the most of the benefits that can flow to participants of this networking opportunity (as was the case in the Dubbo workshop).

In summary, we found that familiarity with local identities, meeting in person/visibility, communicating verbally and contacting people via inter-personal networks were essential to engaging Indigenous stakeholders in our case study areas. We suggest that future research in this area also look at ways in which the research itself might be able to facilitate the development of networking opportunities between (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) service providers working in the area of Indigenous housing and service provision so as to provide some direct benefits to the research participants.

1.4 Report outline

The next chapter of this report outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis of our research findings. It reviews concepts that were presented in the Positioning Paper on culturally appropriate service delivery and service integration, examines the key concepts and principals that inform Indigenous affairs policy, program and service delivery responses, and develops a framework for analysing and interpreting the empirical findings of the research.

Chapter 3 presents descriptive information about the case study sites. For each area, this information covers what we learnt from participants, data supplied about the housing needs and the most pressing service issues affecting social housing service delivery for Indigenous households. The chapter also gives an overview of the policy and service delivery context of each area at both macro and local levels and highlights local service innovations.

Chapter 4 provides a more in-depth thematic analysis of issues and challenges identified across the case study areas in respect to policy and institutional settings. This chapter considers issues around policy adaptation, resource allocation and planning, the role of Indigenous institutions, and regulation and accountability of service agencies.

Chapter 5 focuses on service delivery models and practices, and presents a thematic analysis of the issues and challenges identified across the case study areas in respect to cultural practice, engagement, networks and relationships between service providers.

Both Chapters 4 and 5 provide information about how service delivery models for Indigenous households operate and interact in specific geographical contexts, the views of stakeholders on how to improve the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households, and those strategies that were thought to have the most potential to improve the delivery of housing to Indigenous households.

Chapter 6 presents a summary of our research findings and conclusions and considers the principles and strategies that should underpin endeavours to improve service delivery and better integrate policies and services in the social housing service delivery system for Indigenous households. This chapter takes a systems-wide approach and discusses the potential for systemic change and local action to improve the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households. In particular, it focuses on the importance of policy adaptation, the centrality of having Indigenous engagement at all levels and parts of the service system, the future of IHOs, building sustainable partnerships between service providers across sub-systems, achieving a

high standard of cultural competency, developing structures and resources to support meaningful community engagement, and ensuring system-wide accountability and culturally appropriate regulation of all service providers.

2 THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter builds on ideas and themes discussed in the Positioning Paper for this study (Milligan et al. 2010) in order to articulate a framework for collecting, analysing and interpreting findings from the empirical research. It examines some key concepts that have been used to interpret relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It discusses in broad terms how these ideas have informed Indigenous affairs policies, programs and service delivery responses, and shows how they can be specifically applied to an interpretation of the provision of social housing services in urban and regional locations.

In the Positioning Paper we drew on policy and research literature in Australia and overseas (primarily from Canada) to review the policy context and available evidence on approaches to delivering Indigenous housing in urban contexts. The findings emphasised complexity of Indigenous social housing provision in towns and cities and the significant impacts of shifting policy approaches. A number of concepts emerge from the literature and are proposed in the Positioning Paper as potentially useful to the study; namely 'urban Indigenous social housing', 'cultural appropriateness', 'service integration' and 'governance'. The chapter commences with a discussion of these four concepts, drawing on, and further developing their articulation in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010).

This is followed in Section 2.2 by a discussion of Indigenous social housing policy that applies ideas from recent literature (Altman 2009; Sanders 2008, 2009) about how competing policy principles have influenced Indigenous policy making. In Section 2.3 we examine the idea of 'intercultural analysis' (Hinkson & Smith 2005) and how it might be usefully applied to the dynamics of urban Indigenous housing service delivery.

This further exploration of ideas and attention to additional literature has been driven by a need to identify a theoretical basis for interpreting issues emerging from the empirical research. This has led us to ideas in recent Indigenous policy and anthropological literature that might help us interpret the dynamics at play in the delivery of urban Indigenous social housing services. While such ideas have potential to add explanatory value and bring insight to our study domain, we acknowledge that they are contested concepts that have changeable standing with long-standing scholars in the Indigenous field.

2.1 Key concepts and themes

2.1.1 Urban Indigenous social housing

This study is specifically interested in 'social housing' and has a spatial focus on what is variously described as 'urbanised', 'urban and regional' or 'non-remote' locations. These include small rural towns, regional cities and large metropolitan settings, including all capital cities. Within these areas, 'social housing' for Indigenous people is provided in many forms. 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 reserves or homelands, with services accessed in a nearby town or urban centre (Phillips & Milligan, forthcoming).

Indigenous social housing, for the purposes of this study, refers to rental housing that attracts funding from government, charges rent that is affordable for those on low incomes and where at least one household member identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Providers of Indigenous social housing include SHAs, mainstream community housing organisations and IHOs. IHOs comprise both those involved

mainly with housing services as well as multifunctional agencies (such as community councils, land councils and social service organisations) that may provide social housing as only one of a number of services. This broad and inclusive definition of Indigenous social housing is adopted in recognition of major changes that are occurring in the modes and providers of social housing to Indigenous Australians.

In spite of the widespread historical use of a 'remote/urban' binary in Indigenous policy and program design, it is difficult to apply this typology to analysing the system of Indigenous social housing in practice. One reason for this difficulty is the high levels of mobility of Indigenous people between remote communities and rural/urban towns and cities (Habibis et al. 2011). This mobility is, in part, a response to the poor housing and other social conditions in remote Indigenous communities that consequentially create challenges for housing planning and for operational policy and practice in the destination communities (Milligan et al. 2010).

Another problem with the remote/urban binary is a tendency for remoteness to be associated with traditional culture and absence of market forces and for urbanisation to be associated with loss of culture and assimilation into the market economy. In housing policy, the influence of this perspective can be seen in the retention of dedicated housing programs in remote areas (where there is effectively no housing market) and increasing reliance on existing mainstream social housing and market responses for urban dwellers. Such bifurcated policies fail to recognise the wide diversity of cultural values and lifestyles of Indigenous Australians that are found in both remote and urban locations, as well as patterns of circular mobility between remote areas and urban centres. Distinct urban Indigenous identities draw not only on traditional culture but also emerge from processes of resistance to dominant mainstream norms (Byrne 1996; Keefe 1988; Greenop & Memmott 2007, pp.236–7, quoted in Milligan et al. 2010). Along with widespread social and economic disadvantage, these factors have implications for the potential of either mainstream social services or the private housing market to be able to meet adequately and appropriately the housing needs of many urban Indigenous people.

For these reasons, we consider it is impossible and misleading to regard different geographical domains of Indigenous society as distinctly different or separate. In the light of this, our study acknowledges the diversity of cultural values and lifestyles of Indigenous Australians, aims to draw attention to social housing issues in contemporary urban contexts that have not been addressed elsewhere, and conceptualises urban areas as hubs within networks of relations that extend well beyond the urban centres.

2.1.2 Culturally appropriate services

The concept of 'cultural appropriateness' is closely aligned in the policy and research literature with notions of 'self-determination' and 'self-management' that, under previous Australian policy regimes, influenced the separate development of Indigenous-specific organisations and service provision (Martin 2003; Altman 2009). Over the past decade there has been a public policy retreat from this approach and considerable academic and policy debate about relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, in which the contested concepts of self-determination and 'culture' have been central (Martin 2003; Hunt et al. 2008). In response to critiques of the conceptualisation of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations that emphasise culture as bounded and distinct, there is increasing interest in the idea that post-colonial relationships in countries such as Australia are best viewed through an 'intercultural' lens (Hickson & Smith 2005; Moran 2010).

In this study, we have adopted a meaning of self-determination that draws on an intercultural analysis. According to this view, self-determination is not absolute autonomy or separate development but assumes engagement in, and is constrained by, dominant social, economic, legal and political norms and institutional settings. Taking this perspective in our Positioning Paper, we drew on the work of previous writers and described self-determination as 'a relational concept that recognises that Indigenous peoples operate in an interdependent, intercultural 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' (Milligan et al. 2010, p.14 with reference to Bishop 1996; Durie 1998; Smith 1999).

A significant outcome of current policy settings is an increasing expectation that mainstream or generalist services cater to the needs of Indigenous people in urban settings. This has led to considerable attention being paid to the cultural appropriateness of mainstream service provision across various public policy and human service domains. Policy drivers for this have included various national agreements on improving Indigenous service delivery and reconciliation (Milligan et al. 2010). Initiatives to improve the cultural appropriateness of services are many and varied, as are the terms used to describe them, including cultural awareness, adaptation, competency and proficiency. We attempt to use these terms carefully in ways that highlight nuances in their meaning in different contexts. Initiatives under the broad umbrella of 'cultural appropriateness' range from specific strategies in areas such as cultural awareness training, Indigenous workforce strategies and reconciliation plans, to comprehensive frameworks aimed at transforming the policy settings and service delivery experience for Indigenous clients (Milligan et al. 2010).

Following Thomas (2002, p.51), we have adopted a viewpoint of culturally appropriate service delivery as 'delivery of programs and services so that they are consistent with the cultural identity, communications styles, meaning and value or normative systems and social contexts of clients, program participants and other stakeholders'. Thus we take a normative position that mainstream services should intentionally adapt their modes of service delivery in order to improve their accessibility and acceptability to, and outcomes for, Indigenous service users.

A review of some of the frameworks examined in the literature indicates that provision of culturally appropriate social housing services for Indigenous people in urban areas involves a multiplicity of intentional and mutually reinforcing actions emanating from the policy, program design and service delivery practice arenas. Key areas for corporate and individual attention in each of these arenas include:

- Cultural knowledge and respect.
- Policy flexibility that responds to a diversity of needs.
- Alignment with cultural values and lifestyles.
- Opportunities for engagement and participation in decision making.
- Robust agency/client relationships.
- Accountability (Milligan et al. 2010).

These concepts of cultural appropriateness and self-determination are constructs through which the various ways that housing is delivered in urban areas can be examined, and are applied as such to inform our analysis of the empirical data in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.1.3 *Service integration*

Indigenous disadvantage has been labelled as a 'wicked' policy problem in Australia. According to the Australian Public Service Commission, a wicked policy problem is highly resistant to change, it goes beyond the capacity of any one organisation to respond and there may also be a lack of agreement about causes of the problem and the best way to tackle it (Australian Public Service Commission 2007, p.1). In such circumstances, a collaborative or 'network governance' approach to effecting change for the better will require very significant government and community effort, innovative solutions working across organisational boundaries, and re-engagement with stakeholders who have been disaffected (Stoker 1998). Such collaborative approaches to human service provision are commonly referred to as 'service integration'.

Service integration has been referred to in previous work involving members of the research team as 'all structures and processes that bring together participants in social housing and related fields with the aim of achieving goals that cannot be achieved by the participants acting autonomously and separately' (Phillips et al. 2009, p.7).

One aspect of service integration is 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 the complexity of the housing service delivery domain described above, the challenge is to evolve service delivery arrangements, including the roles and relationships between Indigenous-specific and mainstream services, that are consistent with cultural values and simultaneously optimise outcomes for Indigenous households (Burke 2004).

Policy consistency and driving for more effective linkages across social housing services, as well as with other human service domains, can be beneficial for client access and outcomes. However, integration initiatives may have unintended consequences for vulnerable clients, including Indigenous people, if they contribute to reducing diversity, limiting choice or constraining the sort of 'flexible, discretionary local service delivery' (Jones et al. 2008, p.30) associated with local engagement and demand-driven service responses (Memmott 2010).

From the historic record, which we reviewed in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010), it can be argued that collaborations between mainstream agencies and Indigenous organisations are littered with good intentions that have not been delivered. Explanations proffered for this experience diverge. From their working experience in the health system in Victoria, Waples-Crowe and Pyett (2006) explain that the types of breakdowns that typically occur result from different time frames, work practices and priorities between organisations. In social housing we would add to this the constraints imposed by a supply-driven service system and a lack of resources for updating housing and reforming service models.

Most cultural appropriateness models emphasise the value of engagement between mainstream and specialist services. For example, the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS(V)) framework acknowledges the unique role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and the need for respectful and mutual relationships that value 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, a situation this study aims to in

part address. Previous research (Phillips et al. 2009) found that linkages between housing providers were weak, as were linkages between housing providers and employment, community health and personal support services that are often used simultaneously by clients. Some isolated examples of effective local relationships are reported, as are accounts of inappropriate referrals to IHOs, abrogation of responsibility by mainstream services for difficult and complex cases, and IHOs not being treated equally in dealings with mainstream service providers (Phillips et al. 2009).

Past policy, program and institutional arrangements have contributed to fragmentation and largely separate development of mainstream housing services and specialised Indigenous housing services in both policy and service delivery arenas (Milligan et al. 2010). This legacy presents many potential barriers to building more effective working relationships between mainstream and Indigenous housing sectors and providers, as these are a product of different cultural values, histories, business models, governance approaches and accountabilities. For example, under ATSIC'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, intercultural relationships.

In view of 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. By including an exploration of service integration in this study, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of the potential of and challenges in pursuing service integration and the role it has to play in improving the provision of social housing in diverse urban contexts.

2.1.4 Governance

The concept of governance and its importance for Indigenous communities is receiving increasing international and Australian attention (Hunt & Smith 2007; Limerick 2009). The term 'governance' has a diversity of meanings in different contexts, but is increasingly identified as a critical factor in better managing the economic and social challenges faced by Indigenous Australians (Hunt & Smith 2007). Based on an understanding of governance as the structures and processes through which decision making occurs, there is a need to recognise that decisions within Indigenous communities are affected by both cultural norms specific to that community and the broader social, economic and political context (Moran 2010).

In their report on a comprehensive empirical study of Indigenous community governance in a variety of settings, Hunt and Smith (2007, p.xi) found that the challenges for government policy-makers and for Indigenous community groups involved six major governance issues. These are:

- conceptual complexity
- nodal leadership
- networked governance and associated Indigenous design principles
- cultural legitimacy
- governance capacity development
- the governance capacity of governments (Hunt & Smith 2007, p.xii).

The study found that the governance challenges for policy-makers include the complexity of the issues and absence of quick or easy solutions. For Indigenous organisations, key governance challenges include access to useful information on what works and 'facilitated support' to achieve their aspirations.

It follows that governance considerations for social housing organisations, service provider networks and policy-makers are likely to be critical in achieving the intrinsically related and overlapping goals of culturally appropriate service delivery, self-determination and service integration.

The concept of governance has particular relevance to three issues that run through the study. The first is in relation to the governance of Indigenous housing organisations and the challenges of operating and making decisions in ways that meet local Indigenous community expectations, while also complying with government regulatory requirements and funding conditions. This can be understood as a corporate governance challenge for Indigenous corporations that 'arises from their significance as key sites of transformation and engagement between Indigenous people and the wider society' (Martin 2003, p.2). The second issue relates to decision making at local or regional service system levels and the participation of Indigenous people and organisations in how services are provided to Indigenous communities. This can be viewed as a network governance challenge (Moran 2010). The third issue is the governance capacity of the state and the implications for addressing Indigenous housing and homelessness problems. This is a policy governance challenge (Hunt & Smith 2007).

Viewing Indigenous housing problems through a governance lens provides an opportunity to understand how structures and processes of decision making impact upon intra-organisational and inter-organisational relationships, as well as interactions with the state. Each of these dimensions is analysed within the case studies discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.2 Policy principles and their influence on service delivery

A significant challenge for this study has been to apply a rigorous approach to analysing the competing evidence and value positions encountered in the Indigenous affairs and Indigenous housing policy and research literature. As most of the research team are occasional researchers in the area, it has been a struggle to find a way through this ethical and methodological minefield in order to achieve outcomes for the study that are defensible and provide transparency regarding assumptions, value positions and methods where these are relevant.

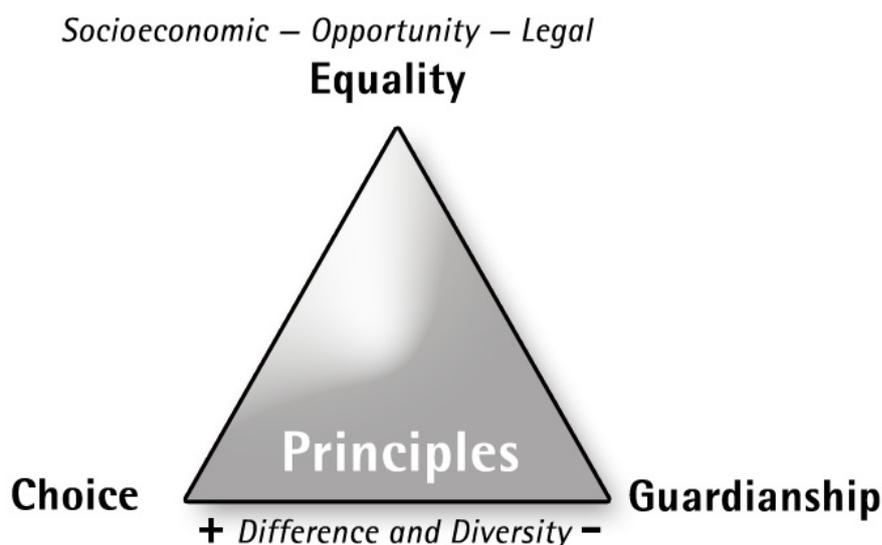
It is increasingly apparent to the research team that engaging with the conflicting perspectives and interpretation of the research evidence in the Indigenous affairs policy discourse is assisted by an appreciation of the historical dynamic between competing ideologies and policy principles. We have come to appreciate and agree with Sanders' view (2009, p.22) that:

Australian Indigenous affairs needs to transcend the simple dichotomy of evidence being good and ideology being bad. The idea of competing principles, however schematised, is a far more powerful analytic device.

In this section we apply this idea of competing 'principles' to contemporary debates and trends in Indigenous social housing policy. In doing this, we draw heavily on the work of Sanders (2008, 2009) and others (Altman 2004, 2009; Nussbaum 2009). As illustrated in Figure 1, Sanders argues that the two dominant and competing principles in Australian Indigenous affairs are 'equality' and 'difference and diversity'. These principles are multi-dimensional. According to Sanders (2009), the 'equality' principle

comprises three components that focus on different aspects: legal or civic equal rights; equality of opportunity; and equality in socio-economic outcomes. The second principle, 'difference and diversity' encompasses a spectrum, with one end emphasising choice and self-determination and the other end emphasising vulnerability to exploitation or inability to self-manage. This end of the spectrum, referred to by Sanders (2009) as the 'guardianship' principle, encompasses both protectionist policies and notions of passive welfare (Pearson 2000 quoted in Sanders 2009, p.10).

Figure 1: Competing principles in Australian Indigenous affairs



Source: Sanders 2009, p.7

Each of the competing policy principles has positive and negative potential depending on how it is applied and each is limited in achieving governments' sets of desired outcomes of Indigenous policies to address needs, recognise citizenship rights and overcome legacies of failed policies. In the following section, these principles are discussed with reference to improved housing outcomes and individual, family and community wellbeing.

2.2.1 Equality: mainstreaming, assimilation or integration?

In the Positioning Paper we traced the changing policy approaches to Indigenous social housing in Australia and noted a strong bias in recent years toward undifferentiated mainstream responses, especially in non-remote locations. In the main, this entails absorption of Indigenous-specific programs into public housing policy and service delivery systems and the simultaneous disempowering of IHOs. The exceptions are models in Victoria and NSW that support retention and growth of Indigenous-specific models, but that are being drawn into operating under mainstream regulatory regimes (Milligan et al. 2010).

The articulated policy rationale for mainstreaming can be viewed as being grounded in principles of equality, human rights and citizenship (Altman 2004; Sanders 2009). Such mainstreaming projects in housing, and across the Indigenous affairs domains, are justified with reference to policy discourse that highlights the supposed 'failures' of past 'segregationist' approaches and the need for 'social inclusion' and more 'integrated' approaches (Nussbaum 2009; Sanders 2008). We can thus see how

seemingly neutral service concepts such as service integration are conscripted to justify mainstreaming.

Past 'failures' of Indigenous-specific or community-controlled housing services are often cited as reasons for mainstreaming. However, this narrative fails to recognise the past and current shortcomings of mainstream public housing provision (Milligan et al. 2010). It also fails to acknowledge causal factors that contributed to the sub-optimal performance of Indigenous housing organisations, including inadequate funding and lack of capacity building and institutional supports (Eringa et al. 2008; Hall & Berry 2006).

A key limitation of relying solely on the principle of equality in addressing Indigenous disadvantage is that it fails to recognise that 'equality' within mono-cultural policies, service delivery practices and needs-based resource allocation does not necessarily result in equality of outcomes (Nussbaum 2009; Sanders 2008). Rather, such a principle can result in homogeneity in policies and programs that are not culturally appropriate or responsive to the diversity of Indigenous needs and circumstances. At worst, the result is imposition of dominant cultural norms that resemble past assimilationist policies. The inevitable results of implementation of such policies include direct and indirect discrimination, alienation, failure to achieve intended outcomes and unintentional creation or exacerbation of disadvantage (EOC 2004). At best, policies and services built on notions of 'equality' will protect civil rights and promote formal or legal equality. However, in practice, such formal equality is often inappropriate and ineffective in achieving either equality of opportunity or socio-economic equality because it fails to account for differentials in the capability of many Indigenous people to exercise their rights and may even work to diminish such capability (Altman 2009; Nussbaum 2009; Sanders 2008).

2.2.2 Difference and diversity: segregation, guardianship or choice?

Australian Indigenous housing policy and programs have also been influenced by the principle of difference and diversity. Examples include the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP) which was supported by designated special-purpose funding to the states and territories under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) from the late 1970s, and dedicated home lending programs and the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

This principle embodies the 'distinctive historical and cultural origins and contemporary circumstances' of Indigenous people (Sanders 2009, p.8) and privileges informed choice by Indigenous people and special recognition by the state over full equality (Altman 2009; Sanders 2009). It acknowledges the history of dispossession and disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. It allows the nation to accept responsibility for the negative impact of past policies and accommodates restitution in the form of positive discrimination and redress. This principle may also lead to paternalism and, at its extreme, justify policies of state guardianship such as have informed previous 'native protection' regimes and more recently, the Northern Territory intervention (Merlan 2010).

Adherence solely to the principle of diversity and difference can also lead to segregation (Sanders 2009). We have argued previously that the negative impacts of separate development of Indigenous-specific housing programs have included duplication and gaps in services, under-resourcing of Indigenous housing providers and abrogation, by mainstream services, of responsibility for addressing Indigenous housing needs. This engendered a situation where inadequate transparency and

accountability measures applied to both mainstream and Indigenous-specific housing providers (Milligan et al. 2010).

At best, principles of difference and diversity validate aspirations for self-determination and provide real choice for Indigenous people. In regard to service delivery, the typologies proposed by Thomas (2002) and Memmott (1990) represent the cultural dimensions of service delivery as a continuum of approaches (discussed in Milligan et al. 2010). These typologies distinguish between:

- Culture-specific services for non-dominant ethnic groups (such as Indigenous-specific housing services).
- Culturally adapted (bi-cultural/multicultural) mainstream services.
- Mainstream mono-cultural services.

Recognition of difference and diversity allows a space for both bi-cultural mainstream services and identified Indigenous-controlled services. Ideally these services would not operate independently but would collaborate in order to plan and deliver an integrated service response and real choice for service users. Mainstream services would recognise the necessity for, and value engagement and participation of, Indigenous service users and communities in service planning and decision-making processes and accountability for performance and outcomes.

2.3 Service delivery in an intercultural space

The characterisation of the competing policy principles of 'equality' and 'difference and diversity' and their application in social housing as discussed above is intentionally polarised to illustrate the potential positive and negative implications of sole adherence to each principle. This leads to a conclusion that there is a need for a new way forward that captures the positive potential of each approach. This has been referred to as the radical centre (Pearson 2007), a synthesis (Sanders 2009) or culturally sensitive mainstreaming (Memmott 1990).

Each of these advocates for a new approach to Indigenous affairs argues that this should not be seen merely as a compromise or middle ground. Rather, it is necessary to grapple with the inevitable equality/diversity dichotomies such as assimilation/segregation, integration/choice and guardianship/mainstreaming.

The concept of 'intercultural analysis' (Hinkson & Smith 2005) provides another way to consider such relations. The idea of an 'intercultural space' is gaining interest within the anthropology discipline as an arena within which interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are interdependent and can occur under conditions of mutual respect and recognition. In a service delivery context, this concept provides an opportunity to apply the best of the principles of equality, difference and restitution in ways that are negotiated and contextually specific.

The idea of 'intercultural' was introduced earlier in this chapter in a discussion of 'self-determination' and culturally appropriate service provision. It is used in an attempt to avoid dichotomous and solidaristic analytical devices and to recognise the interdependency that is integral to Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in the 21st century. Applying this framework to the provision of social housing to Indigenous households, we can conceptualise that intercultural service delivery could comprise a mix of bi-cultural, mainstream and culturally specific services working collaboratively, and thus providing a diversified and integrated response that promotes culturally respectful and proficient services and enables choice for Indigenous clients. Service providers would operate within broadly common rules, standards and accountability but with flexibility

to apply policies and practices appropriate for their client base and the local context. Drivers of service performance would focus on client experience and client outcomes.

There is no neat, simple solution as to how best to deliver social housing for disadvantaged Indigenous Australians. Indigenous housing is a complex, messy problem that is highly contextual: one where solutions will differ depending on local conditions and the cultural norms and lifestyles of Indigenous clients in specific local contexts. The idea of 'intercultural' approaches to delivering housing services implies that different solutions involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, adjusted to local context, may be necessary and appropriate. This proposition will be tested in the following chapters.

2.4 Concluding comments

This chapter argues that effectively and appropriately responding to the diversity of housing needs of Indigenous people residing in urban areas must be recognised as a very complex challenge that does not lend itself to 'one size fits all' service models, or to standard approaches to, and instruments of, governmentality. Following Altman (2009) and Sanders (2008, 2009), we suggest there may be value in looking past ideologies and practices that have been dominated by one of the competing policy principles of equality and diversity. This means embracing an emergent paradigm in Indigenous thinking that is realistic, takes account of both equality and diversity principles and allows for agency to be exercised by Indigenous Australians. We also suggest that it may be useful to adopt an intercultural analysis of interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that emphasises interdependence. This is not to ignore the very real issues of power imbalances and the highly disadvantaged situation of many Indigenous Australians. Rather, we suggest the challenge is to move beyond approaches that are simplistic and rigid to find better pathways through what are complex and relational problems, especially through adaptive policies, and by privileging local capacity and influence to a greater extent within the constraints of policy and program rules.

We turn now to the case study evidence to see what that tells us about the robustness and application of these ideas to policy settings and service delivery in the urban social housing system with a view to assessing their value and refining them. In keeping with the conception of a service system set out in the Positioning Paper, our analysis will cover policy and program frameworks; planning, resource allocation and asset frameworks; institutional settings; service delivery systems and networks; service practice; and accountability.

3 POLICY AND SERVICE DELIVERY CONTEXT FOR CASE STUDY AREAS

This chapter describes the local social housing service system in the three case study areas (research question 1) and begins to interrogate how this system operates in each of these specific contexts (research question 3). It also makes some reference to how well present service models address the housing needs of Indigenous households (research question 2). The material in this chapter is 'scene setting' and provides the context for deeper analysis of the effectiveness of current and emerging directions in delivering social housing services to Indigenous clients, presented in the next two chapters.

This chapter does not provide an exhaustive description of the policy and service delivery context of each case study area, but rather identifies the most pressing issues facing social housing delivery for Indigenous households and recent responses to those issues. Our analysis should be understood in the context of broader 'whole-of-government' approaches to service delivery, including human services integration and integrated client service strategies, as discussed in Chapter 2.

3.1 Dubbo (NSW)

Dubbo is a major regional population and service centre located approximately 300 kilometres northwest of Sydney, servicing the western region of NSW (approximately one-third of the total area of NSW). In 2006, it had a Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) score of 952 for Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage, placing it at the 34th percentile within NSW.

Dubbo has the third largest Aboriginal community in NSW. The recorded resident Indigenous population in Dubbo (statistical subdivision) in 2006 was 3815 people or 11.1 per cent of the total population of 34 316 (ABS 2007, Table B01). However, the Aboriginal community considers this may be an undercount (interview, Aboriginal community leader). The current population is very young with 31.0 per cent of the total population and 54.2 per cent of the Indigenous population of Dubbo under the age of nineteen (ABS 2007, Table I03). Households are predominantly families with children (67.0% of all Indigenous households compared to 41.0% for all other households) (ABS 2007, Table I22). The population is also highly diverse and the Aboriginal community estimates that up to 57 Aboriginal nations and language groups may be found in Dubbo at any one time (Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party 2006). The traditional caretakers of the majority of Wiradjuri lands within Dubbo are the Tubba Gah People (Council of the City of Dubbo 2007).

Dubbo is the hub for much of far western NSW, which also has a large Indigenous population living in many small towns and discrete communities that have a majority of Indigenous people. There is significant movement of Indigenous people from this region to Dubbo, for both short stays and more permanent moves. In-migration is linked to a wide variety of activities, especially family connections; accessing health, housing, welfare and legal services or education and training; and for employment. In the first half of the last decade there was also significant movement of Aboriginal people from the far west to Dubbo specifically to take up public housing, many in the Gordon estate (see below). This trend has now slowed, as we discuss later (Housing NSW, internal data). Reflecting Dubbo's role as a regional attractor of Indigenous people, the Indigenous population in the city is projected to double by 2021 (Stubbs 2007, p.42).

3.1.1 *Housing needs and issues*

Households with Indigenous person(s) are significantly under-represented among home owners and over-represented in public housing. The proportions of households in private rental are also higher for household(s) with Indigenous persons than for other households, as are the proportions in co-operative, community and church group-provided housing (see Table 4).

Homelessness is marked in Dubbo and its surrounding region. In 2006 the rate of homelessness in western NSW was 105 per 10 000 persons compared to a state rate of 41 per 10 000 persons (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2009). The number of Indigenous people reported as homeless in 2006 in the region was 374. This represented 5 per cent of the NSW homeless population (NSW Government, n.d.).

Augmenting the data on Aboriginal housing needs in Dubbo, participants in this study cited a number of key pressure areas.

First, there is continuing and unpredictable demand arising from families moving to Dubbo for a variety of reasons, partly driven by government policies such as centralisation of services or Centrelink employment and training requirements. At June 30 2010, there were 412 applicants on the government's housing waiting list⁷ in Dubbo, of whom 226 (54.9%) were Aboriginal (Housing NSW, internal data). This is a very significant increase on figures reported in 2007 by Stubbs (2007, p.41) when there were 136 applicants of whom 70 (51.5%) were Aboriginal, indicating that there is escalating local demand from both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people for social housing. The 2007 study noted that expressed demand for public housing from Aboriginal households at that time seemed to be lower than levels suggested by other indicators of need (such as tenants receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)). This could be attributed to a number of factors, including lack of appeal of location and/or amenity of public housing on offer, lack of larger housing, mobility of Aboriginal people, higher rent and less security than for community-managed housing, and bureaucratic barriers (Stubbs 2007).

A second concern is the limited number of options in the private rental market. During our local research, it was widely commented that discrimination against Aboriginal households seeking housing in the private market in Dubbo is significant, although hard evidence is limited.⁸ Both the Aboriginal tenancy advice service and Housing NSW staff administering programs that assist people to access private rental indicated that many Aboriginal clients report knockbacks when trying to obtain rental housing and that some Aboriginal people are reluctant to go to real estate agents. However, this situation may be improving as a result of community-led efforts to support the Aboriginal community in Dubbo. However, there are also additional problems in regards to accessing private rental. Private rental offers less affordability and less security, such as when a family crisis puts a tenancy at risk. Furthermore, placement in private housing reduces the chance of an allocation of social housing because priority standing is lost.

A third area of concern is the disparity of quality that may occur between individual offers of social housing. Many Aboriginal applicants receive what they consider to be inappropriate offers but feel compelled to take these either because of the 'two offers'

⁷ Separate lists are currently maintained by other social housing providers and it is not known how these compare. Following the introduction of the new social housing access system in NSW, Housing Pathways, in 2010, a consolidated waiting list is being developed but the waiting list of Indigenous providers will be included last. This delays recognition of their needs in the short to medium term.

⁸ A case of discrimination on the grounds of race by a Dubbo real estate agent against an Aboriginal woman was proven in the Equal Opportunity Tribunal in 1995 (Supreme Court of NSW 1998).

limit in social housing⁹ or because their circumstances mean that they are unable or unwilling to wait for another offer.

Furthermore, occupancy rules, the shortage of larger housing and/or lack of more flexible housing designs, are all contributing to problems for larger families. There is marked difference in the profile of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households either living in, or applying for, social housing in Dubbo, reflecting the different demographic characteristics of these two groups. Many more Aboriginal applicants and tenants require larger family homes (three or more bedrooms), while most non-Aboriginal people in this community require smaller housing, typically one or two bedrooms (Housing NSW, internal data). This has important implications for planning and resource allocations and for the extent to which need can be met from existing stock, which is predominately three-bedroom cottages and town houses (Housing NSW, internal data).

Participants also noted that there is no planned expansion of social housing in Dubbo, although realignment of the housing mix will continue. Moreover, resources for other tenure options (such as low-cost home ownership or other forms of affordable housing) that could help respond to these unmet needs have not been forthcoming. Service issues are embedded in a social housing system with too few resources. There is a severe mismatch between housing demand and supply in terms of quality, house size and overall number of dwellings. There is also a lack of housing options and pathways for clients. This underpins the inability of the main agencies to respond effectively to many individual clients.

3.1.2 The social housing service delivery system

As discussed in our Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010, pp.30–31), an Aboriginal-governed state agency, the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), which 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 (see NSW Government 1998). The AHO operates alongside the state housing authority (Housing NSW), which is responsible for public housing provision. Additionally, the day-to-day management of SOMIH housing is undertaken by Housing NSW under a service agreement with the AHO that commenced in 1998.

In 2010, the administration of Housing NSW and the AHO were brought within the one 'super department', the DHS, which also includes the state's Aboriginal policy agency, Aboriginal Affairs. Each of these agencies has separate offices in Dubbo, which is the sub-regional administrative centre for many of the outreach and local services in the far west of the state, as well as management of town-based services. The AHO regional office is responsible for the SOMIH housing assets and for the IHO provider system across a broad region surrounding Dubbo. The Dubbo area office of Housing NSW provides local housing services and outreach services into the far west.

While the service delivery system for social housing across NSW is diversified, the vast majority of Aboriginal households assisted in Dubbo are clients of the mainstream public housing provider. In 2010, there were 807 mainstream public housing tenancies with an estimated 20 per cent occupied by households with Aboriginal members (interview, Housing NSW officer). Another 118 properties that are owned by the AHO in Dubbo are occupied by Aboriginal households and managed by Housing NSW. In practice, there is no differentiation between these two service options for clients. In the Indigenous community housing sector there are three small

⁹ This refers to policy whereby an applicant whose turn to be allocated housing has been reached is only entitled to an offer of two specific dwellings in succession unless he/she has an acceptable reason for refusing an offer.

providers operating in Dubbo with an estimated 99 properties between them (Housing NSW and AHO, internal data). However, these providers currently appear to have little interface with the rest of the service system and attempts to involve them in this study were unsuccessful.¹⁰ There is one mainstream community housing provider with services in Dubbo, Compass Housing Ltd. They have a small number of tenancies with Aboriginal members, estimated currently at around 22 (interview, community housing provider). This provider is also managing 31 properties for the Dubbo Aboriginal Land Council and four for the AHO in Dubbo. Recently this provider has been increasing its engagement with Aboriginal housing providers and the AHO and it is offering to take on a capacity-building role in the sector (interview, community housing provider). Having over 440 social housing tenancies with Indigenous members in Dubbo highlights the prominence of this client group in the local social housing service delivery system.

In the surrounding region, Housing NSW and the AHO hold some properties but most social housing provision is through a plethora of very small town-based IHOs, which include LALC, Aboriginal Corporations or other incorporated groups. To improve service viability, the region has developed two larger-scale innovative housing service delivery models, the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation Ltd (180 dwellings) and the Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Management Co-Operative Ltd (202 dwellings), which are Aboriginal-controlled organisations that offer professional housing management services to local IHOs in parts of the region. This model has been designed to enable local Land Councils and Aboriginal corporations to retain ownership and control of their assets, while generating operational economies of scale and a professional approach to tenancy and property services (Milligan et al. 2010).

Other important housing-related services for Aboriginal clients include:

- *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)* services in the western region of NSW, serving Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients who are homeless and have emergency housing needs. The western region has 18 per cent of all SAAP services across the state, reflecting a high demand for emergency accommodation and associated supports. Half of all SAAP clients in Dubbo are Indigenous.
- *Western Aboriginal Tenancy Advocacy Service (WATAAS)*. This service, which is under the auspices of the Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation, is dedicated to providing tenancy information, advice and support to Aboriginal tenants across western NSW, including advocacy in disputes before the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) or with housing providers. When WATAAS began operating in 2005, they had 200 queries in their first year and this had escalated to 2000 in 2010. They deal mostly with repairs issues, rental arrears and eviction proceedings. Social housing tenants are their major client group (interview, WATAAS).
- *Aboriginal Housing Information Service*. This is a free telephone service introduced by the AHO for Aboriginal clients who have queries about housing options and issues. It operates largely as a referral system to connect enquirers to the most appropriate service response. The Dubbo office of the AHO also receives enquiries from many Aboriginal clients who are referred on to other agencies, although this is not an intended function of that office.

¹⁰ However, two IHOs in Dubbo are registered under the NSW community housing registration system (Registrar Community Housing 2011)

There is a web of coordinating mechanisms that link the different parts of the housing service system directly or indirectly in Dubbo and support engagement of Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal workers with this system. The most significant of these concerned with housing services are:

- *The Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party*. This group of Aboriginal community members was founded in 2001 and has become a resilient and well-recognised means for service providers to engage with the Aboriginal community in Dubbo and more broadly, to build pride in the Aboriginal community and promote understanding of Aboriginal culture in the city as a whole (DACWP 2006). It receives some administrative support from the Commonwealth and NSW governments, including some from Housing NSW and AHO. The Working Party has developed cultural protocols and Memoranda of Understanding with other agencies that aim to advance reconciliation and to apply the citizenship rights of the Dubbo Aboriginal community. It has also developed a Dubbo Aboriginal Community Plan 2006–10 which places high priority on developing 'safe, secure, long term, good quality accommodation for Aboriginal families where they have a sense of control and self-determination' (DACWP 2006). Further development of this kind of participatory governance model is a priority for NSW Office of Aboriginal Affairs under their Partnership Communities initiative, which aims to increase community resilience and promote community engagement in improving government service delivery at the local level (interview, Office of Aboriginal Affairs).
- *Dubbo Koori Interagency Network*. This network established in the late 1990s comprises Aboriginal staff from government and non-government agencies, who meet regularly to exchange information, support each other and coordinate activities with other networks and organisations that have links to the Aboriginal community in Dubbo. Over 20 organisational members are identified on the network's website, included Housing NSW and the AHO. Membership numbers have fluctuated between 80 and 100; attendance at monthly meetings vary from 10 to sometimes as many as 30 (Dubbo Koori Interagency Network, n.d). The Dubbo Koori Interagency Network works closely with the Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party.
- *Dubbo Housing Network*. This is a new town-based mechanism established by Housing NSW to promote coordination of services for individual clients. Currently its focus is managing responses in support of the Regional Homelessness Action Plan in Dubbo. Members are government and non-government human service agencies. Aboriginal housing providers have not been included in the network as yet, apparently pending the outcome of the Provider Assessment and Registration System (PARS) (see Table 6).
- *Housing NSW Aboriginal staff reference group*. This is a regular forum for Aboriginal staff within Housing NSW to meet to obtain briefings on policy and procedures, raise and address issues related to their work, and develop their capacity.
- NSW Fair Trading is planning to set up a *Joint Aboriginal Housing Service (JAHS)* in Dubbo, based on a model operating in northern NSW. This service is designed as a forum for Aboriginal housing providers to keep up to date with information about tenancy and property management, including good practice, rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants and CTTT processes and to help refer or resolve issues that arise through the forum (e-mail, NSW Fair Trading officer, 16 December 2010).

Two significant service issues were highlighted by participants in this study in Dubbo.

1. A major issue in the social housing service system throughout the region has been the timeliness and quality of maintenance services provided by the maintenance contractors of Housing NSW. Factors known to be contributing to these problems include labour shortages, contractors bundling work to reduce their costs, and too little investment in this work to sustain skills development and employment (e.g. of apprentices). Following extensive complaints from the Aboriginal community and WATAAS, contractual arrangements were changed in 2010 but it is too early to determine whether this problem has been adequately addressed.
2. While culturally appropriate information and personal support are considered to be critical, especially face-to-face interaction between Aboriginal clients and Aboriginal staff, it has been difficult to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff in this area. There was also some discussion around the appropriateness of support and compliance roles and responsibilities of staff overlapping—for example, it can be difficult for an Aboriginal staff member to provide support to an Aboriginal household when they are also required to pursue rent arrears or neighbour complaints when they arise. This conflict is being addressed by creating specialised positions for Aboriginal staff that do not involve compliance work (interview, Housing NSW manager).

Despite the identified importance of culturally appropriate housing and support, reliance on mainstream service delivery for Aboriginal clients remains very high and the housing choices of Aboriginal clients are highly constrained.

3.1.3 Policy context and initiatives

As discussed in the Positioning Paper for this study (Milligan et al. 2010), the recent period has been one of active policy development and change in the domains of Indigenous affairs, housing and homelessness. The result is a plethora of initiatives that are simultaneously impacting on the provision of housing services in local communities like those included in this research. An overview of national policy initiatives that was provided in our Positioning Paper is reproduced in Appendix 1. In this section we discuss the implications of policy directions originating at national, state and regional/local levels that were identified through our research as impacting on the social housing service system and Aboriginal clients in Dubbo and the immediate surrounding area in the period leading up to our study.

The main policy initiatives affecting Dubbo that are evident from this review involve:

- Renewal and replacement of hundreds of mainstream social housing dwellings linked to the dispersal of Aboriginal families from the West Dubbo housing estate.
- Dwelling and community facility upgrades and strengthening of community development initiatives in the remaining large social housing estates in Dubbo, utilising Aboriginal community networks.
- Employment strategies for Aboriginal tenants.
- Regional attempts to increase Aboriginal employment in Housing NSW.
- Proactive strategies to sustain Aboriginal tenancies at risk and to reduce homelessness, in keeping with national targets and priorities.
- Growing use of, and participation in, local networks that support Aboriginal staff and organisations, and foster stronger interaction between the Aboriginal community and government agencies, such as through the networks described above.

In the IHO sector, new policy, regulatory and management models have been developed to promote service improvements and address backlog maintenance.

These are in the early stages of implementation and the sector is in a state of transition with previous plans suspended and uncertainty about the future shape of the sector, especially in the context of so many dispersed small providers. Two Aboriginal-governed regional management services are well-established and have recently participated in the pilot provider assessment and registration process.

There are early signs of a new partnership developing between providers in the IHO sector and community housing in this region. This has the potential to assist capacity building in the former and also to offer partnering opportunities to IHOs. It could also increase contestability and choice as the community housing provider could offer an alternative tenancy management service to the public housing provider for AHO properties.

A summary of current government-driven activity and its impacts in Dubbo is given in Table 6. This table includes the most significant recent initiatives related to the housing service system. It does not cover a wide variety of other national, regional and local initiatives that are more broadly impacting on the human service system in Dubbo.

Table 6: Recent government initiatives impacting on housing service delivery system in Dubbo

National	Overview	Impacts in housing service system for Indigenous households in Dubbo
Nation Building and Jobs Economic Stimulus Package	Provision of over 19,000 new social housing dwellings nationally to boost jobs (economic stimulus) and address high housing needs.	Six additional dwellings at one site are being provided for Indigenous households in Dubbo through the AHO.
The Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership (RIHNP) NSW (DHS, n. d.,b)	<p>Under RIHNP the Australian and NSW governments have agreed to a 10-year plan for addressing overcrowding, poor housing conditions and housing shortages in remote Indigenous communities.</p> <p>The main components of the program are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Procuring around 310 homes in remote and very remote NSW (mostly the far west). → \$100 million funding for refurbishment of 4,650 community-owned and managed providers across NSW. → An Employment Related Accommodation Program in regional centres in NSW to facilitate Aboriginal people moving from remote areas to access employment and training opportunities. 	<p>Intensive construction activities associated with the implementation of the RIHNP in western NSW, centred on stock assessment and refurbishment and dwelling acquisitions.</p> <p>Dubbo has received four houses under the Employment Related Accommodation Program.</p> <p>IHOs in the region will be eligible for allocations of funding for refurbishments once they have attempted registration through PARS. Different arrangements will apply depending on their registration status.</p>
National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)	Tax incentives or cash grants to stimulate provision of new affordable rental dwellings.	Awareness of this scheme in the region was poor and there have been no allocations to Indigenous organisations.
Urban and Regional Indigenous Service Delivery Strategy	Agreement by Australian and state governments to address poor coordination and access barriers to services by Indigenous urban dwellers.	No impacts were noticeable as strategy has not yet been implemented.
State		
Build and Grow Aboriginal Community Housing Strategy 2010 (DHS, n.d.,a)	<p>AHO-led initiative that comprises a number of reforms aimed at strengthening the IHO sector across NSW. Key reform areas involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → a new Provider Assessment and Registration system 	Opportunities for IHOs in this region to grow are subject to PARS implementation over the next two years. Under PARS, providers will be approved, conditionally approved or not approved. Not approved providers will have the

	<p>(PARS) for IHOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → rent setting reform to increase IHO rent revenues through collection of CRA payments to tenants → provision for head leasing to AHO of dwellings of poorly performing IHOs → a review of IHO operating subsidies → business development and capacity-building mechanisms to build the scale and capacity of registered providers. 	<p>option of head leasing their dwellings to the AHO for subleasing to approved or conditionally approved providers.</p> <p>Two regional IHOs were included in the PARS pilot program.</p> <p>Some head leasing arrangements are emerging in the region.</p> <p>It is too early to assess the impacts of PARS. While it is intended to lift housing service standards, there is concern in the sector about how many organisations can meet the requirements and that the net effect could be less provider choice in many areas (Eastgate & Moore 2011).</p>
Housing NSW commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People 2010 (DHS, 2010)	<p>Five-year plan for improving service outcomes for Aboriginal clients of public housing across NSW and to build relationships between mainstream providers and the Aboriginal housing sector.</p> <p>One-year action plan for 2010 developed so far.</p>	<p>First action plan focused on prevention and early intervention approaches to sustaining tenancies and on improving cultural appropriateness of Housing NSW's service delivery, through supporting staff and promoting Aboriginal employment.</p>
Housing Pathways	<p>New access system designed to streamline access of all clients to social housing. Participating providers adopt a common approach to application and assessment and use a single waiting list to register applications for housing assistance.</p>	<p>Too early to assess impacts on Aboriginal clients. Complexity of application forms, process flagged as an issue in workshop for this study.</p> <p>Does not apply yet to IHOs. This delay perpetuates barriers to the Indigenous sector accessing opportunities under new mainstream housing initiatives.</p>
NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983	<p>Under reforms to this act in 2007, local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC) require the consent of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) to continue to provide social housing (NSW Government 1983, S52A(2)). Consent is based on an assessment of the financial viability of their social housing program and the organisation (NSW Government 1983, 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</p>	<p>No information on how the large number of LALCs in the region are responding. The option to head lease LALC dwellings to the AHO to meet this requirement have been accepted in principle by the NSWALC.</p>

	partnerships.	
Regional		
Dubbo Transformation Strategy	<p>Announced by the state Housing Minister in May 2006, the strategy centred on the relocation of all public housing tenants who were mostly Aboriginal people from the (former) Gordon estate in West Dubbo and the subsequent sale of all sites in the precinct as modest-priced owner-occupied housing.¹ Around 300 existing tenancies were affected.</p> <p>This decision was taken in the context of very high levels of crime, severe conflict and property damage in the community, much of it alleged to be arising from a small number of feuding family groups.</p> <p>The strategy had an estimated cost of \$52 million with up to half expected to be funded from land and house sales and the remainder from Housing NSW funds. It is due for completion in June 2011 (Financial Review Business Intelligence, 2010).</p>	<p>By 2011, all but three Aboriginal tenants have been successfully relocated from West Dubbo to alternative social housing in town or elsewhere, if they nominated. 124 houses and 31 blocks of land had been sold by April 2010.</p> <p>Between 2007 and 2010, 47 new seniors living units and 65 new one- and two-bedroom units have been added to the social housing portfolio in Dubbo to house displaced tenants and to meet other priority local needs. (Financial Review Business Intelligence 2010).</p> <p>Following announcement and during its implementation, the strategy has had an enormous impact in the local community. The sudden and unilateral nature of the initial intervention acted to force the community and service providers to come together in response (interviews, government officials, and community leaders, Dubbo.) Long-term outcomes are generally agreed to have been positive for the tenants who were displaced. Issues and outcomes relevant to this study are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.</p>
Dubbo Regeneration Partnership Project (Housing NSW, n.d.)	<p>Four-year (2006–10) investment plan (\$6m) targeted to improvement of physical and social environment and learning and employment opportunities in social housing areas of East Dubbo, South West Dubbo and South Dubbo.</p> <p>Dubbo is one of 18 areas across NSW funded under the Building Stronger Communities program.</p>	<p>Broad range of community development activities that include promotion of cultural awareness and positive outcomes for the Aboriginal community in Dubbo.</p> <p>Project ending but follow-up initiatives being developed and implemented. Some concern about early withdrawal of necessary resources.</p>
Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2010–2014, Western NSW (NSW Government, n.d.)	<p>Developed under the National Partnership on Homelessness and the NSW Homelessness Action Plan to prevent homelessness and its recurrence and to respond effectively to homelessness.</p> <p>Includes headline targets for each strategy to be achieved over the coming decade.</p>	<p>Specific projects in Dubbo include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → young Aboriginal parents project → intensive case management support for single men with complex needs → early intervention in identified social and private

		tenancies with Aboriginal families at risk in Dubbo (and other selected towns) aiming to prevent Consumer Trade and Tenancy Tribunal action and eviction.
Housing NSW Far West Aboriginal Recruitment and Retention Strategy	<p>Developed under the Housing NSW commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal people 2010 (see above).</p> <p>Reinstatement of permanent staff in far western NSW towns, comprising two full-time and two part-time housing officers.</p> <p>Enabling role centred on information and support rather than tenancy management and compliance.</p> <p>Includes specific strategies to attract and retain Aboriginal staff.</p>	<p>Aboriginal people serve as the front-line of Housing NSW in towns with majority Aboriginal clients.</p> <p>Local staff can assist local people who come to Dubbo and need housing.</p>

Notes

1 Properties sold have seven-year covenants placed on the title preventing re-sale without prior agreement from Housing NSW. This practice has been adopted to prevent 'slum landlords' moving in.

Source: Milligan et al. 2010, references given in table, interviews

A number of key pressure areas were identified by research participants in regard to the housing and service delivery policy context in Dubbo. First and foremost, the complexity and frequently changing nature of housing and wider human services systems adversely affects both Aboriginal clients and Aboriginal staff in Dubbo. Furthermore, Aboriginal services are often the last to be brought into new arrangements. There is slow penetration of new top-down initiatives to local level and little opportunity for local engagement or to generate flexible responses. There is little empowerment of local agencies to make resource planning and allocation decisions and limited means to negotiate resource responses across a diversified system, as many national and state-provided resources are bounded or tied. Furthermore, implementation is often driven by rigid targets and timelines rather than quality outcomes. Forward-planning and evaluation processes are weak or nonexistent and monitoring is often not consistent with values and principles of culturally appropriate service delivery with Aboriginal needs under-counted or hidden. Indeed, many mainstream policies are not culturally appropriate or responsive to other agendas. For example, gaining employment can threaten the tenure security and rental affordability of social housing tenants.

However, community–government linkages and enormous local effort have been critical to the progress that has been achieved, such as the outcomes from the Dubbo estate transformation strategy. While new resources have flowed to respond to a severe crisis in the West Dubbo housing estate and to help prevent further incidences of estate conflict, systematic change remains elusive and contributing policies (especially allocations policies) remain unchanged.

Within the IHO sector, there is a clear strategic framework (the Build and Grow strategy), institutional settings (AHO) and operating mechanisms (PARS, capacity building, rent reform) for development of a stronger sector operating at a higher standard of service. These will require lasting commitment and certainty going forward to ensure positive outcomes for IHOs and Aboriginal clients.

In the mainstream system, the housing complaints and appeals mechanism is being used to help to drive service accountability to Aboriginal clients. In the western division of the Department, all complaints and appeals from Aboriginal tenants are reviewed by area management to inform their regular assessments of the quality and consistency of decision making. Requests for an independent review of decisions that are made by Aboriginal tenants to the state-wide Housing Appeals Committee are always heard by an Aboriginal member of that body (interview government manager and information supplied by Housing Appeals Committee). These are positive examples of practical steps that can be taken to improve the responsiveness of mainstream service delivery.

In Chapters 4 and 5, which present thematic reviews of the problems that we have identified from the three case study areas, we will expand on the factors underpinning all of these issues and reforms that could be pursued.

3.2 Townsville (Queensland)

Townsville is a major regional population and service centre located midway on the Queensland coast in north Queensland. Often referred to as the Capital of the North, Townsville has a large public service presence, a major military presence, significant and growing commercial and services sectors, and provides a base for mining, manufacturing and agricultural industries in the city and surrounding region. In 2006, it had an average SEIFA score of 997 for Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage for the whole metropolitan area, with the suburb of Garbutt having the lowest score of 852, placing it in the sixth percentile in Queensland. Palm Island had a

very low SEIFA score of 652 for Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage, placing it at the first/lowest percentile in Queensland.

The resident Indigenous population of the Townsville statistical subdivision in 2006 was 4868 or 5.3 per cent of the total population of 91 750 (ABS 2007, Table I03). In addition 1986 people live on Palm Island, which is a discrete Indigenous community located off the eastern coast 65 kilometres northwest of Townsville on which 1855 (93.4%) are Indigenous (ABS 2007, Table I03).

The current population is very young with 50.0 per cent of the Indigenous population of Townsville under the age of nineteen, compared with 29.6 per cent of the total Townsville population (ABS 2007, Table I03). Households are predominantly families with children (59.6% of all Indigenous households compared to 37.7% for all other households) (ABS 2007, Table I22). The population is also highly diversified: the Aboriginal community estimates that families in Townsville and Palm Island are descendants of up to 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes and language groups originating from all over Queensland and interstate. The traditional caretakers of lands within the Townsville vicinity are the Bindal and Wulgurukaba peoples (Townsville City Council 2011).

Townsville is well serviced with public infrastructure, including a major hospital and the James Cook University, and is the location of a significant prison. As a result there is considerable mobility to and from Townsville by Indigenous people, with temporary and permanent relocations from Palm Island as well as from smaller population centres within the immediate region and from across the far north of Queensland.

3.2.1 Housing needs and issues

Housing supply and house prices are under pressure and the rental market is tight (Queensland Government 2008). These housing market pressures are associated with growing population and high levels of renting, with 36 per cent of households in rental accommodation compared to 27 per cent for Australia (ABS 2007). This is driven, in large part, by expansion of the military base, public sector workforce mobility, and the mining industry in the region.

Indigenous households are particularly disadvantaged in the Townsville housing market. The lowest rates of home ownership and highest rates of private renting by Indigenous households occurred in Townsville, among our case study areas (see Table 4). Furthermore, according to study informants, blatant discrimination is common in the private rental market.

Homelessness, including rough sleeping, is a particular problem in Townsville, with homelessness reported to be 20 per cent higher than for the whole of Queensland (Department of Communities 2008, p.10). Indigenous rough sleepers and public space dwellers are commonly referred to in Townsville as 'parkies' and have been the subject of recurring media and political attention over 20 years. Policy responses to this problem are discussed below.

3.2.2 The social housing service delivery system

The primary provider of social housing in Townsville is the state housing authority (Department of Communities), with the relatively small-sized community housing sector dominated by three providers, including one IHO. In addition, there are two other IHOs, a scattering of community service agencies with small numbers of long-term social housing properties and several homelessness services located in Townsville that manage very small crisis and transitional housing portfolios.

The overwhelming majority (approximately 90%) of the estimated 3500 social housing properties were state-owned mainstream public housing (2725 dwellings) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing (ATSIH) program housing (398 dwellings) (Queensland Government 2008). Public housing is managed through a local office, the Townsville Housing Client Service Centre of the Department of Communities' Housing and Homelessness Services. This office manages housing across the north Queensland region and also manages over 300 dwellings in Palm Island on behalf of the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council. The state government is currently negotiating 40-year leases on these properties and integrating their management into standard public housing policy and management regimes. At the time the fieldwork was undertaken, the Client Service Centre employed no Indigenous staff, although plans were in train to provide temporary employment to the Council housing officer from Palm Island.

The main Indigenous housing provider, Yumba Meta, managed approximately 60 social housing properties funded under both state and Commonwealth programs. This number is set to more than double as a result of Yumba Meta being nominated as a preferred growth provider and attracting capital funding for 21 new dwellings and management of 53 dwellings procured under the NBESP social housing initiative. In addition, Yumba Meta manages a 15-bed Indigenous women's domestic violence refuge and a 30-bed diversionary centre. The organisation has been strongly engaged with the state funding programs and the mainstream community housing sector since the mid-1990s and is a registered housing provider and was one of the first organisations accredited under Queensland's community housing standards and accreditation system. Yumba Meta employs Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff to provide a mix of skills and perspectives. It assists Indigenous people to apply for mainstream housing and to stay connected to that service system. It is now developing new housing options using mainstream funds, which it can access as a result of its registration status (e.g. capital funding from NBESP). At the same time, it has a strong record of staying well connected to its local community and a commitment to protecting its organisational culture in a dynamic environment (group discussion and interviews, board and staff of Indigenous provider).

There are two other IHOs based in Townsville. ABIS Community Co-operative Society Ltd is small (estimated 35 dwellings), targets housing specifically for Torres Strait Islanders, and has only received Commonwealth funding. This service has very low tenant turnover and has minimal engagement with other local social housing providers. North Queensland Regional Indigenous Housing (NQRH) was established as a regional resourcing organisation, in line with previous ATSIC policies, by Indigenous housing providers in the region to resource and manage ATSIC-funded construction, maintenance and repairs for its member organisations. Over time NQRH has assumed service delivery functions and currently manages housing on behalf of two of its regionally based members. NQRH does not currently manage any housing in Townsville City, although the organisation has actively, but unsuccessfully, pursued growth opportunities through the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and social housing stimulus funding.

The mainstream community housing providers are Townsville Community Rent Scheme (CRS) and Family Emergency Accommodation Townsville (FEAT). Townsville CRS manages transitional housing head leased from the private market and some long-term housing. CRS organisations are a preferred provider for management of housing acquired under the NBESP in Queensland. FEAT provides crisis accommodation and long-term housing, primarily for families. Both organisations house a high proportion of Indigenous tenants and report making attempts to employ Indigenous staff. At the time of the fieldwork, CRS had recently employed their only

Indigenous worker as a housing manager and FEAT had recently lost their only Indigenous worker.

An important housing-related service for Indigenous households is dedicated 'sustaining tenancies' teams within the state housing authority. Public housing in Townsville over recent years has experienced increasing numbers of high-needs tenants, including a high proportion of high-needs Indigenous families and individuals, some of whom were 'parkies' moving in directly from the streets. In response, the local manager re-allocated staffing resources to establish a dedicated 'sustaining tenancies' team with responsibility for a portfolio of potentially 'at-risk' tenancies. This team operates on an outreach basis, engaging actively with tenants and working in partnership with a wide range of government and non-government agencies, including Indigenous workers and services. The relationships with Indigenous workers from other agencies are seen as important because the team, although experienced in working with Indigenous clients, has no Indigenous workers. This team is highly regarded within the human services sector and survived a head office attempt to abolish it, following vocal local opposition to the move.

All key housing providers—public, community and Indigenous—report strong and effective relationships and high levels of collaboration. Mutual respect and trust is evident, and there is regular and open communication, particularly between the public housing staff and individual community housing providers. These core providers meet regularly and report an open exchange of information, ideas and problem solving. A particular focus of the relationship is on negotiating appropriate allocation decisions and sustaining 'at-risk' tenancies.

The core housing providers also participate in a broader housing and homelessness network recently established to replace the previous regional housing network. All report that this forum is valuable and provides an opportunity to network with other housing and homelessness support services. However, all agree that it serves a different purpose from the housing provider meetings where it is safer to have open and frank discussions because of the small size of the group and the high level of trust that has been established.

Relationships with the broader human services sector is more fragmented, with public housing participating in various government interagency structures that do not involve the community housing providers. Each housing provider negotiates their own relationships with government and non-government human services agencies based on common clients, interests and established relationships.

The collaboration between the core social housing providers in Townsville provides a good example of cross-sectoral and cross-cultural practice. This collaboration is attributable to the leadership of the local manager of the public housing client service office and the capacity and relationships between the managers of all providers. It is also supported by clear structures and processes such as regular meetings and agreed protocols. The relationships are based on a shared commitment to best utilise available resources and to achieve the best outcomes for clients and each organisation. This establishes a culture that encourages innovation, as for example public housing sustaining tenancies staff working with a community housing provider to support a newly allocated high-needs tenant where the community housing provider is considered the best long-term solution, but without the resources to provide intensive support at the commencement of the tenancy. Some local innovative proposals such as transferring properties between providers have experienced implementation difficulties where they conflict with state-wide policy or require central office approval.

3.2.3 Policy context and initiatives

The past six years has seen massive changes in the policy environment in which social housing for Indigenous people has been delivered in Queensland. These changes have been driven by both national and Queensland-specific reforms in social housing, homelessness and Indigenous affairs. Key policies initiatives and their impact on social housing delivery for Indigenous people in Townsville are discussed below (see Table 7). The focus of these reforms includes:

- Tighter targeting and common access to all social housing programs.
- Undifferentiated policy settings across social housing programs.
- Reducing homelessness, especially among rough sleepers.
- Consolidation and modest growth of community housing providers.
- Coordination of services to Indigenous people in urban and regional locations.

Table 7: Recent government initiatives impacting on housing service delivery system in Townsville

<i>National</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Impacts in housing service system for Indigenous households in Townsville</i>
Nation Building and Jobs Economic Stimulus Package	Provision of over 19 000 new social housing dwellings nationally to boost jobs (economic stimulus) and address high housing needs.	Yumba Meta received capital funding to construct housing, including for seniors. Also head lease of state-procured housing to manage.
The Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership (RIHNP) Queensland	Under RIHNP the Australian and Queensland Governments have agreed to a 10-year plan for addressing overcrowding, poor housing conditions and housing shortages in remote Indigenous communities. The main components of the program are: 1. Funding for new homes and refurbishment in remote and very remote Queensland (mostly discrete communities in the far north). 2. State acquires 40-year leases over housing in discrete Indigenous communities and management by state under public housing policy settings.	Construction of new housing for Palm Island. Acquisition of additional 50 homes in Townsville to enable Palm Islanders to relocate to the mainland.
Transition of responsibility for non-remote IHOs	\$60 million to fund the backlog of maintenance for IHO properties on conditions including a state mortgage over the properties, registering under community housing regulatory regime and complying with OSHS policies.	Protracted negotiations with IHOs creating uncertainty and mistrust. Some IHOs able to reach agreement on terms while others have decided not to participate.
Urban and Regional Indigenous Service Delivery Strategy	Agreement by Australian and state governments to address poor coordination and access barriers to services by Indigenous urban dwellers.	No impacts were noticeable as strategy has not yet been implemented.
National Partnership Agreement Homelessness	State agrees homelessness action plan with key aim to permanently end chronic homelessness and rough sleeping with focus on Indigenous homelessness.	Additional funding for new services targeting 'parkies' in Townsville. Funding for service integration demonstration project to improve coordination of responses to rough sleeping.
National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)	Tax incentives or cash grants to stimulate provision of new affordable rental dwellings.	Awareness of this scheme in the region was not consistent and there have been no allocations to Indigenous organisations.

State		
One Social Housing System	Introduced in 2005 with the intent of integrating service delivery and aligning policy across state-funded public, community and Indigenous housing. Core reforms included allocations from a common housing register, alignment and tightening of eligibility, prioritisation, allocations and rent policies.	Increase in high-needs Indigenous tenancies and associated problems in sustaining tenancies. Strong relationships between providers, including IHOs, have enabled coordination of allocation decisions to improve likelihood of tenancy success.
Mainstreaming of SOMIH	Formerly identified Indigenous housing absorbed into mainstream public housing, apart from retaining the stock of identified properties that are only available to Indigenous applicants.	Loss of Indigenous staff and opportunities for Indigenous tenant and community engagement. Loss of policy flexibility and differentiation. No specific property acquisition briefs for Indigenous housing.
The Queensland Urban and Regional Indigenous Strategy	'Whole-of-government' strategy to address urban Indigenous disadvantage. Aligns with and extends the national Urban and Regional Indigenous Service Delivery Strategy.	Area of high public housing concentration and Indigenous populations targeted for coordinated interventions. Implementation had not commenced at time of undertaking case studies.

Source: Milligan et al. 2010; interviews

In Townsville the impacts of the One Social Housing System (OSHS) reforms have been mixed. On a positive note, the core local providers (public housing, Yumba Meta, CRS and FEAT) have utilised the common housing register and alignment of allocations policies to further strengthen relationships and to collaborate on allocation decisions. Efforts are made to match applicants to the most appropriate property and provider and to minimise over-concentrations of disadvantage in particular properties or neighbourhoods. By collaborating on allocations, the combined knowledge and housing opportunities of the providers can be leveraged, especially for challenging sites and high-need applicants.

On a less positive note, the increased focus under the OSHS on housing those in most need has increased pressure to raise the proportion of high-needs public housing allocations in Townsville from an already high 85 per cent pre-OSHS, to the state-wide target of 95 per cent. Interviewees noted that this new high target is problematic and further exacerbates social problems in Townsville where there are a number of estates with already high concentrations of public housing and social disadvantage.

A number of negative impacts resulting from the mainstreaming of the ATSIH program were also reported by interviewees. Several interviewees, both Indigenous community members and those with first-hand knowledge of both the previous and current regimes, commented on the sense of loss and fear experienced by Indigenous tenants as a result of these changes. They reported high levels of community pride and ownership for the ATSIH program associated with the widespread belief that the housing was, at least in part, funded from stolen wages held in trust by the government, and many houses were built by Indigenous workers employed and apprenticed in the ATSIH construction teams. Interviewees reported fear by long-term, older tenants who were deemed no longer eligible for social housing under the new policies because of the household incomes, which in some cases were only high because children remained at home on commencing work. Concern was also expressed at the loss of Indigenous housing workers who understood issues faced by Indigenous tenants and the loss of identified Indigenous tenant and community engagement opportunities.

As well as the impacts of the OSHS reforms and the mainstreaming of the ATSIH program, the IHO transition has been particularly contested and problematic. The concerns of IHOs relate to: a lack of trust of the state's intentions and the risk that properties will revert to the state; concern that existing tenants' security of tenure and tenancy conditions would be adversely affected;¹¹ concern that OSHS allocations and rent policies would undermine the financial viability of the organisations and achievement of their social objectives; and concern about the administrative burdens of state registration and reporting requirements. Overall, many IHOs have expressed concern that bringing all their housing under the OSHS umbrella will further stigmatise their tenants and limit their options as providers of affordable rental and home-ownership opportunities for community members who face discrimination and other barriers in the private market (QATSIHSC 2010; Pisarski et al. 2009).

In Townsville, Indigenous housing providers reported protracted negotiations with the state housing authority about the conditions under which they are prepared to bring their Commonwealth-funded housing under state regulation. Yumba Meta was initially positive about the move as they already had a funding and regulatory relationship with

¹¹ Public housing agencies in NSW and Queensland have introduced fixed-term tenancies (of two, five or ten-year duration) for new tenants. Renewal of tenancy at the end of the fixed term is subject to continuing eligibility.

the state government. However, they became concerned about the high cost quoted for building work to be funded by the state and undertaken by the public works department because the state would take out a mortgage to that value over their property. Another issue negotiated was to protect the security of tenure for existing tenants. While the organisation has resolved their major concerns, the Board remains concerned that the application of mainstream social housing policies constrains their ability to provide affordable housing for moderate-income community members who face discrimination in the private market. There is also a concern that targeting only high-needs tenants limits their ability to support tenants into home ownership, as was possible under ATSIC funding arrangements. Alternative funding options to maintain affordable housing and home-ownership programs are being investigated by the organisation to fill this service gap.

Furthermore, the transfer of the management of remote housing means that the Townsville public housing client service office is now managing the more than 300 houses on Palm Island. Staff identified some significant challenges in applying mainstream public housing policies and practices on Palm Island. These include the practical and administrative burden of maintaining accurate details of occupants and their incomes and of recalculating rents in an environment of high mobility of occupants between houses on Palm Island and in and out of the community. In some cases, tenants are reported to be simultaneously maintaining two households—one on Palm Island and one in Townsville. A positive aspect of integrating the tenancy management has been the opportunity to open up transfers from Palm Island to Townsville for tenants needing to relocate for employment, education or health reasons. However, this could also be achieved in a more diversified delivery environment operating with a shared registration system.

Finally, implementing the national policy goal of permanent solutions to homelessness in Townsville presents particular challenges in identifying appropriate housing and support options that are acceptable to the local community and sustainable for the Indigenous homeless population.

The extent and complexity of changes affecting both the Townsville and Dubbo areas stand out from the accounts above.

3.3 Dandenong (Victoria)

The city of Dandenong is located approximately 30 kilometres southeast of the Melbourne CBD. Dandenong is a socio-economically disadvantaged suburb, with a 2006 SEIFA score of 888 for Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage, placing it at the 12th percentile within Victoria.

Victoria has a mainly urbanised Indigenous population and Dandenong is typical of many suburban areas where there is a small dispersed Indigenous population that has moved there from many different areas across Victoria and interstate. The recorded resident Indigenous population in Greater Dandenong City (statistical subdivision) in 2006 was 448 people or 0.4 per cent of the total population of 125 520 (ABS 2007, Table B01). The population is young with 44.7 per cent of the Indigenous population of Dandenong under the age of nineteen, compared with 25.6 per cent of the total population (ABS 2007, Table I03). Approximately half of Indigenous households (52.5%) and all other households (48.0%) in the area are families with children (ABS 2007, Table I22). Dandenong is acknowledged as part of the Bunwurrung country, which also includes the Port Phillip Bay area and Wilsons Promontory. However, few of today's Indigenous residents have historic ties to the local area.

While the recorded resident Indigenous population is relatively small in Dandenong compared to the other case study locations, this area was chosen to facilitate a local assessment of the implementation of an Indigenous community governance model specifically designed to deliver social housing on a sustainable basis across the state, which is unique to Victoria. Dandenong is also the location of a local Indigenous organisation, the Bunurong Health Service—Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited (Bunurong Co-operative), which is a long-standing, traditional multi-purpose Indigenous agency that incorporates a small housing function. It is the only organisation of its kind in Melbourne, with other similar co-operatives in Victoria being located in rural and regional areas.

Dandenong is a service hub for Indigenous people from the Gippsland region to the east who come to Dandenong to use the services offered by the Bunurong Co-operative and other mainstream services.

3.3.1 Housing needs and issues

The tenure profile of Dandenong differs significantly from that of the rest of Victoria. Owner-occupation is relatively low, with 38.1 per cent of households owning or purchasing their home (compared with 61.3% for Victoria), while the proportions of private (28.3% for Dandenong compared with 12.2% for Victoria) and public renters (4.7% for Dandenong compared with 2.6% for Victoria) are higher. Within the Dandenong area, households with Indigenous person(s) are under-represented among home owners and private renters and are over-represented in public housing (see Table 4).

There were 1077 Indigenous applicants (2.6%) on DHS(V)'s waiting list in July 2010. Of these applications, Dandenong comprised only 1.2 per cent. The share of Indigenous applicants for general public housing stock is much less in metropolitan areas than in regional areas (e.g. 32.6% of all applications in Mildura are by Indigenous persons, DHS(V) internal data). AHV's wait list had over 800 applicants with confirmation of Aboriginality, many of whom are also listed for mainstream public housing (AHV 2010).

Providers in Dandenong reported strong pressure on their services and very limited capacity to respond to the levels of housing needs in their community. For example, Westernport Accommodation and Youth Support Services (WAYSS) (see below) reported having on average 100 people (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) come through the doors every day in need of housing (participant, group discussion).

Government was described as being funding-driven rather than service-proactive, so that when a need arises, such as for emergency housing, prompt action is not possible. Government follow-up was described as poor (participants, group discussion).

Specific data on homelessness numbers was not obtained for Dandenong but the need for emergency housing was cited as a main issue in local meetings, particularly since the closure of the local Aboriginal hostel. The example was cited of men recently released from jail who could not organise for social housing while incarcerated but with no access to accommodation of any kind on release, so they rely on sleeping on friends/relatives' couches or sleeping rough. The lack of suitable housing (such as a dedicated boarding house) for this client group is seen as a major barrier to addressing their wider health and employment needs (group discussion, Dandenong) and participants were frustrated that there were no apparent avenues to negotiate funding to address this need.

3.3.2 *The social housing service delivery system*

The primary provider of social housing to Indigenous clients in Dandenong is now AHV. Following the transfer of 1294 tenancies from the DHS(V) since 2007, AHV is the largest independent Indigenous housing provider nationally (AHV 2010). This move has nearly halved the concentration of Indigenous tenants in public housing in Victoria¹² and created a viable new Indigenous-governed tenancy and property service that operates state-wide.

AHV is an incorporated not-for-profit organisation founded in 2007 and was registered as a housing provider under the Victorian Housing Registrar in June 2009 (Housing Registrar 2010). It is a successor to the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (AHBV), an agency established in 1981 to act as a peak housing advocacy body on behalf of the Indigenous communities of Victoria. It also served as the advisory board to the DHS(V) on issues relating to Aboriginal housing management, such as arrears management, and had developed a small portfolio of properties. Its board members were elected representatives of different Aboriginal communities across Victoria.

The AHV succeeds the AHBV 'to develop and manage the provision of housing assistance to the Aboriginal communities' with the aim to deliver 'accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing that meets ... social, cultural and economic aspirations' of the Victorian Aboriginal communities (DHS(V) 2010). The move by the Victorian government of the time to support this model was a response to Aboriginal people's rights to self-determination (interview, senior government official).

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. There is potential for the AHV to establish partnerships with these smaller IHOs.

A growing number of Aboriginal tenancies are being provided by mainstream community housing agencies in Victoria: an increase of 71.1 per cent (from a low base) between 2007–08 and 2009–10 (AIHW 2009c, 2011c). This growth is partly attributable to a push by the Victorian government to expand the community housing sector along with targets that have been set under various national and state programs (such as NBESP) to house Indigenous clients.

Community Housing Victoria Limited (CHVL) is the main community housing provider in the Dandenong and Gippsland areas. It has been operating since 1994 and provides long-term, secure rental tenancies at up to 75 per cent of market rentals (CHVL 2011). CHVL manages and head leases 120 properties for two Aboriginal housing organisations in the Gippsland area that are under administration, and has committed funding obtained from the NBESP to build properties on Aboriginal Trust land at Lake Tyers (in Gippsland). CHVL has also relocated three former Melbourne Commonwealth Games houses to the Gippsland area for Aboriginal tenancies. Indigeneity is a designated priority under all applications CHVL makes for NBESP and NRAS funding. The organisation's general model is to provide two-thirds social housing and one-third affordable housing across its housing projects and to set targets for each special-needs group within that as a guide (interview, CHVL worker).

¹² At the end of June 2010, there were 1442 tenancies with identified Indigenous members in mainstream public housing in Victoria. A total of 131 households with Indigenous members were offered public housing during the year (SCRGSP 2011, Table 16A.1). By the end of 2009, only 146 Indigenous-specific properties remain under the management of DHS(V), all of which have since been transferred to the general stock list which may not necessarily house Indigenous tenants (DHS(V), internal data).

This is an example of a proactive strategy by a mainstream community housing provider which is seeking Indigenous clients. It is estimated that 12–15 per cent of CHVL's current tenancies have Indigenous members (interview, CVHL employee).

Other housing-related services for Aboriginal clients operating in the Dandenong area include:

- *WAYSS Ltd* (originally Westernport Accommodation and Youth Support Services). This is a diversified not-for-profit community organisation established in the late 1970s to provide support services to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the outer south-eastern region of Melbourne, including Dandenong. It is primarily funded through various transitional and supported housing programs and has many Indigenous clients. It also offers a referral service for clients in need of longer-term housing options. It is one of ten agencies in Victoria delivering the Indigenous Tenancy at Risk program (ITAR) (see below).
- *Bunurong Health Service-Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative Limited* (Bunurong Co-operative) is the only other Indigenous-run housing provider in Melbourne. It currently has 23 properties for rent acquired under the former Commonwealth CHIP. The co-operative runs on a membership basis and keeps a waiting list separate from those of the AHV and DHS(V). It charges a flat rent of \$130 per week, to cover maintenance and aims to assist tenants to accumulate savings and take steps toward home ownership.

The main housing services network identified during the research was the Victorian Indigenous State Wide Homelessness Network (VISHN). This peer support network started nine years ago as an initiative under the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, with a membership of around 15 Indigenous workers/organisations in the homelessness service system. Membership has now grown to nearly 50 workers (interview, DHS(V) staff). The network was a direct response to difficulties being experienced providing information to Indigenous organisations. It operates mainly by running regular forums (currently four per year) where workers in Indigenous service agencies can meet to obtain information about changes in the housing sector in accessible forms, identify their needs for support, air issues, hold group discussions, give and receive feedback, and develop cultural links to their associated Indigenous communities (VISHN 2009). Mainstream organisations are encouraged to attend the forum on an invitation basis to exchange information, receive feedback and debate issues. Protocols to guide professional conduct of the forum are being developed. Since 2007 the network has had a dedicated Indigenous Housing Network Coordinator who is employed at the Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative.¹³ The network coordinator also provides cultural training and mentoring services for Indigenous and mainstream organisations.

Specific concern was expressed that, following the tenancy transfers to AHV (see below), referral pathways for Indigenous clients across the social housing system were not clear. The proposed common waiting list is supposed to help deal with this problem but there is no information in the community at present about how this will operate. A related issue has been the change from an historic approach where community representatives made decisions about the local allocation of housing, to an administrative model of decision making. One AHV staff member noted that 'it will take time to build trust in the new model' (interview, AHV staff).

¹³ Ngwala Willumbong is a specialist provider of alcohol and drug residential rehabilitation and outreach support services to the Aboriginal communities of Victoria since 1975, which has gradually diversified its role.

An issue facing smaller housing organisations funded under previous Commonwealth programs is that they have very limited housing capacity and almost no potential to grow. For example, the Bunurong Co-operative in Dandenong has just 23 dwellings. In view of its limited housing capacity, Bunurong Co-operative faces a dilemma about whether to promote turnover by limiting the tenure of its properties, given that it has set rents so as to offer an incentive for members to save and move onto home ownership. However, pathways to home ownership are limited (participants, group discussion).

3.3.3 Policy context and initiatives

In this section we specifically detail the main innovation in Victoria, management of the staged approach to the transfer of Aboriginal-identified public housing properties to the AHV. This is followed by a brief description of two other recent initiatives that have been directed to Indigenous social tenants and to Indigenous housing workers, respectively: the ITAR and the Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) Certificate IV course in Indigenous Social Housing.

Indigenous social housing transfer program

The establishment and expansion of the AHV was planned to take place over four stages:

1. capacity building
2. tenancy management transfer
3. property management transfer
4. operational independence.

At the time of the writing of this Report, the first two stages are successfully completed, with the last two due to complete within the next 12–18 months.

A strategic plan for the AHV was first developed between DHS(V) and AHBV in 2000. By 2004, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) setting out the formal arrangements for staged achievements was signed. The initial implementation stage was centred on building the capacity of the AHV to deliver a social housing service. Staff with experience in policy development were seconded from DHS(V) to help the AHV to help develop the service model. During 2005, amendments to the *Housing Act 1983* to give regulatory powers to the Director of Housing (in the context of wider changes to the funding and delivery of social housing through not-for-profit agencies) provided an opportunity to strengthen the planned directions for AHV in keeping with the wider Victorian housing provider framework. The MOU was renegotiated to reflect the governance arrangements proposed for registered housing providers. This involved separating the Board and the Executive, moving to a skills-based Board and including independent (non-Indigenous) experts on the Board. As a consequence, AHV now has legal, financial and asset management expertise included in its skills-based Board. Cultural connectivity has been retained through the Representative Committee comprising members representing each of the eight AHV regions (AHV 2008).

The second stage (commencing in October 2007 and completing in December 2009) involved the transfer of tenancy agreements and tenancy management services from the DHS(V) to the AHV. Existing SOMIH tenants were given the choice to transfer their tenancies to the AHV during this period. At the completion of the period, 1294 properties had been transferred and 146 tenants had elected to remain in DHS(V). Of the tenancies transferred, 108 were located in Dandenong and a further 25 in the

reminder of the east metropolitan region. There were 170 tenancy transfers in Gippsland to the east of Dandenong (DHS(V), internal data; AHV 2010).

AHV operates a central office in Fitzroy in inner Melbourne. It is not offering tenancy services from separate area offices, preferring a flexible approach to service delivery (interview, AHV staff). Thus it offers home visits and outreach services to applicants and tenants, as well as having some staff colocated in DHS(V) regional offices. In the Dandenong area, a tenancy worker from the AHV provides an outreach service at the Bunurong Co-operative's health centre (a local meeting point for Indigenous people) on a fortnightly basis, assisted by the elected representative for the area on the AHV Board and WAYSS (see above).

At the end of the second stage, DHS(V) retained responsibility for the maintenance of the transferred properties. The third stage involves the transfer of property management from DHS(V) to the AHV. The AHV will continue to pay DHS(V) an asset management fee until the third stage is completed. This stage is happening later than originally planned as the AHV considers that it still needs to build up its capacity for property management (interview, AHV staff).

A final stage, targeted for achievement in 2011, will involve transfer of ownership of the properties under AHV management. In this stage AHV plans to apply to have its registration status changed from housing provider to housing association to enable it to finance and develop its own housing at scale and be able to achieve other objectives, such as Indigenous enterprise building (e.g. for maintenance services).

The AHV is 'still on its way to functional independence' (interview, DHS(V) staff). At the completion of the four stages, the intention is for the organisation to be fully independent of DHS(V) and be financially sustainable. Registration as a housing provider has enabled AHV to charge CRA-optimised rent but with the intention of not adversely affecting affordability for tenants (see further discussion below). As well as owning the transferred properties which are unencumbered, AHV has a small portfolio of properties acquired mainly with their own funds or under former Commonwealth programs and they have begun to embark on a program of dwelling acquisitions. Together these strategies aim to build the balance sheet and revenue of the organisation, and assist AHV to secure finance to support further growth (AHV 2008).

ITAR program

ITAR is a case work program with brokerage funds that was first trialled by the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) in early 2002 in metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria to support Indigenous tenants to sustain their tenancies where these were at risk from rental arrears, anti-social behaviour or deteriorating tenant health caused by drug and alcohol or mental health issues. It was established in response to a VHS report, which highlighted Indigenous tenants as being ten times as likely to require SAAP assistance. In 2006 it was expanded to include all Indigenous social housing tenants in Victoria as part of the Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP). All Indigenous clients of AHV and DHS(V) who are in arrears are offered access to an ITAR case worker who can assess their circumstances and organise financial counselling and direct debiting of rent, as well as offering brokerage funds. Referrals can also arise from anti-social behaviour, property condition issues and maintenance claims against the tenant. New clients are asked to sign that they agree to be referred to the program workers if in arrears; however, take-up is voluntary (for privacy reasons). Brokerage funds can be used for household expenses, counselling services, life skills development, recreation activities, education and training, material aid and medical uses. (They cannot be used for housing costs directly as this would overlap with other subsidy arrangements). The ITAR program

currently supports 11 positions in 10 agencies across Victoria. The program has established a preference to direct funding to Indigenous-specific agencies but has only been able to fund three (Interview, DHS(V) staff). Some mainstream agencies partner with Indigenous organisations to deliver the program. WAYSS is the local service provider in Dandenong (information supplied by DHS(V)).

Certificate IV in Indigenous Social Housing

A one-year Certificate IV accreditation in Indigenous Social Housing is offered specifically to build capacity of Indigenous housing workers in Victoria. This has been funded by the Australian and Victorian governments. The culturally adapted course (which is based on the standard Certificate IV for social housing management) was developed in conjunction with the training partner, Swinburne TAFE, which has offered the course in Victoria since 2009. It is the only accredited TAFE course in Australia which specialises in Indigenous social housing, although previously a similar course operated in NSW. The Indigenous trainers involved in the course also act as mentors to the enrolled students. The course is not open to the general public: all applicants must pass through selection criteria, with priorities going first to Indigenous people then to other workers in Indigenous organisations. Around 30 students had graduated by 2010, including several tenancy managers of the AHV (Information supplied by Swinburne TAFE).

A number of specific issues have emerged around policy changes associated with the transfer of housing management to the AHV. While some of these were temporary (associated with the changeover,¹⁴) others are likely to be ongoing. The most significant of these is a new rent-setting model. Transferring tenants on Centrelink benefits are now eligible for CRA, which under a new rent formula has to be transferred on to their landlord (AHV), along with a contribution from their other income (at a rate similar to the amount charged in public housing). This is intended to ensure additional revenue for AHV to support their business operations, while incurring no additional net cost for tenants. However, for tenants it means rent levels are higher than they were in public housing (where CRA is not paid), which can result in debts mounting more quickly when rent is unpaid or CRA is withdrawn. This situation is presenting AHV with significant challenges. Some AHV tenants have expressed an interest in returning to DHS(V) to mitigate this risk to them. While no arrears were passed onto the AHV when tenancies were transferred from the DHS(V), AHV tenants have accrued significant amounts in rent arrears (partly through rent strikes—see footnote 10) since the transfer (interview, AHV staff). Participants in our study were of the view that insufficient consideration had been given to the way that rents were set and rent subsidies applied under the new arrangements. Elsewhere, this rent-setting approach has been described as culturally inappropriate (Eastgate & Moore 2011). As an alternative approach for example, a payment equivalent to CRA could be made directly to the provider to reduce tenant risk in this regard. This experience offers lessons for policy setting for future transfers of this type that may proceed in other places.¹⁵

It is early days for the AHV. The agency is beginning to consider an engagement model with communities and the wider Aboriginal service system in Victoria on their strategic directions that is clearly separated from dealing with individual client matters. While AHV is committed to expanding and diversifying its housing services to the

¹⁴ Early on following the initial transfers AHV experienced a rent strike because tenants saw the AHV properties as community-owned rather than public properties. This situation has now been overcome through promoting rent payments as being partly a maintenance contribution as well as a means of ensuring AHV's growth.

¹⁵ For example, the AHO is presently implementing a similar rent reform in NSW.

Aboriginal community in the medium term, it is determined that this must be done on a sustainable and well-planned basis, learning from past mistakes of pursuing small-scale fragmented initiatives that have been typical in this sector:

We don't want to be everything to everybody (interview, AHV staff).

The efforts taken to build up the capacity of AHV have been substantial and this organisation has the potential to form a central part of what could become an integrated and culturally adapted social housing service system in Victoria. However, presently the new delivery arrangements have left DHS(V) without a service framework for its remaining Aboriginal housing clients. DHS(V) staff are now less exposed to Aboriginal clients and this may have impacted on corporate and individual awareness of culturally sensitive issues (interview, DHS(V) senior manager). Since the transfer, there are no identified Aboriginal staff or dedicated policies for Aboriginal tenants. Thus Aboriginal tenants in the mainstream system have become less visible, following the large transfer to AHV. This situation needs attention in the next stage of reforms.

3.4 Concluding comments

This chapter has provided an overview of the major housing needs and issues identified in each case study area, as well as a discussion of the social housing service delivery system and policy context and initiatives at each site. Many common issues have emerged across the case studies, as well as some issues that are unique to each area.

Housing needs and issues identified include:

- The difficulty faced by Indigenous households in entering the private rental market, not least because of discrimination.
- The increasing demand for public and community housing, which is not being met with a regular supply of additional housing.
- The overall shortage of affordable accommodation and limited capacity to respond to levels of housing need, reflected in homelessness rates and demand for emergency housing on the one end of the needs spectrum and in very low take-up of home ownership at the other end.
- The limited availability of appropriate housing (in regards to size and condition). In particular, the largely unmet need for larger dwellings and/or more flexible housing designs for Indigenous families.
- The disparity between offers of social housing, with some social housing being of a very high standard, and others of a low standard.

Issues within the service delivery system include:

- The importance of culturally sensitive service provision and of having Indigenous staff working in support roles within housing providers.
- The tensions that can occur when the support and compliance roles of staff overlap.
- The value and importance of strong and effective relationships and high levels of collaboration between public, community and Indigenous service providers, at the local level.
- The transition from community organisations making decisions about the local allocation of housing toward administrative models of allocation decision making,

especially as jurisdictions have, or are moving toward, streamlined allocations processes (e.g. the One Social Housing and Housing Pathways systems).

Issues in the policy arena include:

- Difficulties for service staff resulting from the complexity and frequency of policy changes within both the housing and wider human services systems.
- The slow penetration of top-down initiatives and the fact that Aboriginal services are often the last to be informed about, and brought into, new arrangements.
- Implementation of mainstream services are often driven by rigid timelines and targets, rather than quality outcomes, with monitoring inconsistent with values and principles of culturally appropriate service delivery.
- Indigenous organisations being wary about the application of mainstream rules and regulations that may not be adapted to their sector (such as OSHS in Queensland) or may diminish their potential role and influence (such as public housing management takeovers).
- Rent-setting.

The following two chapters will provide a thematic analysis of the issues and challenges identified across the three case studies in regards to policy and institutional settings (Chapter 4) and service delivery models and practices (Chapter 5).

4 EXAMINING POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

In this and the following chapter, we present an analysis of service provision to Indigenous households in social housing by applying the concepts advanced in Chapter 2 to evidence about how the system works, gathered primarily from case studies across three state jurisdictions. This chapter considers findings related to: policy and program frameworks; resource allocation and service and asset planning processes; institutional arrangements for Indigenous involvement across the service system; and accountability and regulation in service delivery. Chapter 5 focuses on service practice, workforce issues, service culture and connectivity across the service system. In each chapter, we discuss the main issues, challenges and ideas that we have identified under each of these areas. On the basis of the findings, we also consider possible ways forward to better address Indigenous needs.

The issues and ideas discussed in these two chapters are drawn specifically from the case studies that we undertook. They cover systemic issues (arising outside the case study locations), local policy and practice, and examples of positive action to address Indigenous needs in culturally appropriate ways at both state and local levels. Specific attention is given to activities in the intercultural space, that is, to the forms and levels of engagement that occur between Indigenous institutions and community members on the one hand, and housing policy processes and service agencies on the other.

While our analysis is grounded in the real service environment of three urban places, it cannot claim to be comprehensive or representative of the whole urban social housing service system. Nevertheless, these cases provide some strong and consistent evidence of systemic and practical issues facing local providers.

4.1 Policy and program frameworks

4.1.1 Major issues arising in the mainstream public housing system

The main issues that arose from our research about how mainstream policy settings and their applications impact on Indigenous clients, as seen through the eyes of actors in the service system and Indigenous community leaders in the case study locations, were:

- Rigidities in mainstream social housing policy settings.
- Contradictory policy objectives.
- Mismatch between the demand for, and supply of, social housing for Indigenous households.
- Impacts of policy and how it is administered on Indigenous clients.
- Concerns regarding housing allocations and rent-setting policies.

The mainstream public housing system operates within overarching policy settings that are highly prescriptive and provide limited scope for adaption and flexibility. These standard policy settings also usually apply to public housing that is earmarked for Indigenous households (state-owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)),¹⁶ in keeping with the equality principle discussed in Chapter 2. Key policy

¹⁶ In Queensland, the decision to integrate SOMIH housing and mainstream public housing has meant that even simple adaptive policy settings have been lost in a drive for standardisation. For example, the eligible age for seniors housing had previously been lower for Indigenous clients (in acknowledgement of shorter life expectancy) but this variation was abolished in the integration to the disappointment of local staff (interview, government employee).

rules include that eligibility for public (and SOMIH) housing is primarily determined by a universal means test of income and assets (not housing needs), allocations are arranged in order of housing need (as administratively determined) with those households in 'highest need' receiving priority, and rents are set and varied according to a complex formula that is based on a rate of assessed household income. Generic residential tenancy legislation applies to social tenants in most jurisdictions. However, provisions for social tenants and the roles of social landlords are increasingly being differentiated from those of private tenants and landlords, primarily to establish means to control 'anti-social' behaviour in social housing (Hulse et al. 2011). Additional administrative rules apply to the housing offer process, occupancy conditions (such as visitor sanctions, extended absences), maintenance services, tenant actions associated with home-making and allowable grounds for changing house within the sector. Thus overall, public housing tends to operate as an undifferentiated, tightly controlled housing service that is not responsive to individual needs or cultural differences.

While public housing applicants and tenants face many challenges in common when accessing and using this complex and rule-bound service system, many Indigenous clients in urban communities experience additional hurdles that relate to their values and culture, lifestyles or personal circumstances. A non-Indigenous perspective on the dilemma of assisting Indigenous clients was:

We cannot just stick to rigid policies—it isn't right for these people—the one size fits all approach. We talk about cultural appropriateness but I don't see much of it. Tenants can't just change the way they live. (interview, government manager¹⁷)

In the case study locations, some of the specific problems identified by Indigenous stakeholders included:

- The reasons for the existence of many housing policies are not clear.
- The housing service system is not responsive to cultural needs (such as long-stay visitors; extended absences for ceremonial or kinship reasons and succession of tenancy for family members¹⁸).
- Processes for applying for housing or for seeking rent variations can be bewildering and cumbersome.

For example, income-related rent-setting was identified as a core problem area for staff and Indigenous tenants alike, because this policy is more difficult to administer for group households and those who are highly mobile. Where there are frequent changes in household composition, Indigenous households are at risk of unintentional fraud (when visitors overstay) or rent arrears (when registered visitors leave) unless they immediately notify their housing provider. A consequential breach of tenancy notice for rent arrears or other breaches that are often linked to overcrowding (such as neighbour complaints of noise or disruptive behaviour) can lead to abandonment, because tenants are not aware of their rights or the dispute resolution process, and these are often not explained to them in person. Indeed, providing useful and appropriate information about policies is seen as a major shortcoming in mainstream services.

¹⁷ To safeguard the anonymity of participants, we have not included mention of locations, except where this is necessary to understand the comment made.

¹⁸ Long-term tenants in SOMIH housing (which was acquired with funds earmarked for the Indigenous community) feel particularly aggrieved that after paying rent all their lives their adult children cannot succeed their tenancy (interview, service provider).

The information that's being provided doesn't seem to be very accessible for Aboriginal people in many cases—and people always have to approach someone who knows (the policy) ... and to find out who this person is. A lot of people don't read, so fliers and letters aren't very effective. (workshop participant)¹⁹

No-one knows what's going on with housing. There's a lot of big sector reforms going on. (interview, Aboriginal leader)

Underlying these experiences and practical difficulties are deep feelings of distrust and alienation for many Indigenous people that stem from historical legacies and a clash of cultures.

There is a need not only for cultural awareness training, but also cultural respect. Some staff don't know how to talk to Aboriginal people and there is a communication breakdown. (workshop participant)

A lot of tenants don't like complaining because they think their tenancy will be at risk. (interview, Indigenous tenancy service worker)

Housing staff reported that administrative processes in the public housing system have become more complex as a result of major changes to policies and procedures (such as the introduction of common waiting lists, changes to residential tenancies legislation and the introduction of new computer systems). While these changes are intended to streamline processes and improve services, they often divert staff in the short term and can thus result in service levels suffering, as well as contributing to staff stress. The frequency of changes can also lead to staff being unable to keep up and front-line staff in Dubbo and Townsville in particular expressed a considerable degree of frustration about this. This situation is underlined by a lack of empowerment of client service staff and a service culture that is top-down (discussed further in Chapter 5).

Changes from on high occur often but we don't get the rationale (locally). Changes in policy are not kept up with or don't reach front-line staff (because of) staff turnover, too much to take in, lack of training ... Thus staff implement what they think or what applied before. Staff say I am not quite sure but if I do it this way no one is going to jump on me—better to say no than be creative and have someone jump on me. (interview, government manager)

Considering public housing policy settings in the light of broader government policy objectives also exposes significant contradictions for the Indigenous community. For example, participants in our study noted that while Indigenous policy goals are strongly oriented to promoting economic participation, public housing rent and tenure policies militate against this by presenting strong disincentives to work, and pathways to another tenure (such as home ownership) are undeveloped or blocked. In another public policy priority area—combating homelessness—it was noted that efforts to maintain neighbourhood harmony in highly disadvantaged housing estates sometimes led to terminations, which then manifest in homelessness and continuing instability for the community and individual families.

¹⁹ For this reason, the Western region of Housing NSW in response to a community suggestion is producing a DVD on signing a tenancy that is presented in plain language by Aboriginal people. It can be customised for a local community and includes the opportunity for a local elder to speak on it. It aims to promote consistency and clarity of information, such as about the respective roles and obligations of tenants and landlords.

Our corporate plan is around (reducing) homelessness, around capacity building, around building up the social wealth creation of our clients to be sustainable within their community and their own right. But yet our KPIs (key performance indicators) suggest no, well if they're rental ... you need to issue a notice of termination, which then conflicts with the homelessness (action plan). So there is no alignment between the KPIs and what you're constantly monitored and evaluated on. (Where are the) measures ... Is this area functioning? Is there community cohesion? Does the area look pleasing and inviting when you go there or does it look like a jungle? Like they do not align. (interview, government employee)

In the words of another interviewee:

Housing (departments) will always be about bricks and mortar, vacants and voids. (interview, Aboriginal government manager)

A severe limitation in the mainstream system's capacity to respond to Indigenous housing needs in our case study locations was the limited supply of public housing. Three major aspects of this mismatch between demand and supply were highlighted by various participants:

- The shortage of large housing suitable for large or extended Indigenous families.
- Vast differences in the quality of housing offered ranging from new well-located housing to older poor-quality stock often in fringe estates.
- Housing offers that were not well matched to the locational preferences (and community connections) of many Indigenous clients.

Flow-on effects from the serious shortfall in housing options, which can be very marked for Indigenous households who are already in highly disadvantaged situations, were also noted.

Because of the long waiting list, you have families living with other families, leading to overcrowding and neighbour complaints. (workshop participant)

While these types of problems stem from systemic causes in an inadequate and underfunded public housing system, inappropriate offers and lack of choice compound difficulties experienced by Indigenous households and they also signify the dangers of placing greater reliance on this already stretched service system. Local Indigenous stakeholders complained about the lack of flexibility of mainstream housing providers—for example, housing could be modified for larger families rather than families having to break the rules about how many people can live in a house. They also strongly objected to penalties for declining an offer of housing (such as going to the bottom of the waiting list) and pressures placed on Indigenous people to take poorer-quality properties.²⁰

In trying to weigh up the factors that are contributing to poor outcomes for Indigenous households in the mainstream housing sector, it is useful to reflect on some frank local assessments of the West Dubbo transformation strategy (see Chapter 3). In our interviews in Dubbo (conducted in November 2010, four years after the transformation strategy began) there was general endorsement for some of the outcomes of the strategy. In particular, several participants praised the way that housing services staff handled the relocation of tenants, by providing intensive support and assistance to displaced tenants over a considerable period and working closely with local leaders in

²⁰ It was acknowledged that independent adjudication of what constitutes a reasonable offer can be sought through a 'housing appeals' process. However, this is a long process and difficult for some clients to use without an advocate.

the Aboriginal community to manage relocations. They also noted that many of the tenants who were moved to new homes in socially mixed neighbourhoods appeared to have had greater tenancy stability than before. However, there was also general criticism shared among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders that the social problems and crime that led to the dramatic ministerial decision to abandon the West Dubbo estate (and pour resources into Dubbo) were a product of inappropriate mainstream housing policies and the normal lack of command over resources locally to enable proactive change. These factors had contributed to a large number of ill-considered allocations being made to this poorly performing and deteriorating estate over the few years prior to 2006, and to government's subsequent failure to act to prevent the deterioration of housing and local services and community relations.

At the time [early 2000s], the primary concern in [the government housing department] was with all of the vacant houses on the Gordon estate [West Dubbo]—a business concern rather than a concern around community building. (interview, former government employee)

When people present for housing with alcohol and drug issues, family problems et cetera and then you house them all together—this is a recipe for disaster. Also 11 or 12 different language groups were placed within the one estate. (interview, former government employee)

(The problem was) putting warring families in the same street together. It's important that there are more properties spread around the town, not all concentrated together. (interview, Aboriginal leader)

If government had been serious up front with a well-resourced planned response to emerging issues [in West Dubbo] there would never have needed to be this strategy. (interview, government manager)

Similar viewpoints about the impacts of 'high needs only' allocations policies in particular were also candidly expressed in Queensland by government and community-based workers.

We have a target to allocate 95 per cent (of lettings) to high needs [clients] and we are asked to justify not meeting that target. This is the dumbest policy I've ever heard of ... We really struggle with managing so many high-needs clients and also with cultural issues. (interview, government employee)

We concentrate too much on the lower end [of needs] and don't assist those who are trying to improve their situation. (interview, community provider Indigenous sector)

In making their comments about West Dubbo, this study's participants are drawing attention to an underlying system-wide tension—with adequate resourcing and strong, well-coordinated local effort, improvements in service outcomes can be achieved for Indigenous clients from the mainstream social housing system. Nevertheless, when systemic causes of the main problems have not been dealt with, they will recur. In the words of one former senior manager:

Short-sighted responses are a false economy. (interview, government manager)

The overall record of policy and service reform in recent years seems to be one of numerous and varied well-meaning attempts by SHAs across jurisdictions to recognise, and better accommodate, cultural differences by adapting specific public housing policies and procedures²¹ or through corporate cultural awareness training

²¹ Examples cited elsewhere include visitor policy and face-to-face delivery of arrears notices.

endeavours. Many of these initiatives can be characterised as fragmented, small-scale and time-limited, drawn from various funding sources to meet gaps and to try new things.

While such efforts must be acknowledged, the evidence from recent AHURI-funded research on Indigenous housing and other sources does not indicate that bandaid measures will combat the core problems experienced by many Indigenous clients in the social housing system (see e.g. Hansen & Roche 2003; Long et al. 2007).²² Too often it appears that positive policy or program changes are: short-lived (collapsing or receding once earmarked and targeted resources are withdrawn); get swept away by the constant wider changes to policies; or are weakened by regular turnover that occurs among knowledgeable and skilled staff, including Indigenous staff (see Chapter 5). As one small example, Yumba Meta used to be able to sell housing to their tenants because ATSIC made up the gap in funding that was required to be able to replace the properties sold with new housing. Following the abolition of ATSIC, this no longer occurs. A similar problem was raised in Victoria (see Chapter 3).

As discussed further in the next section, without adequate and well-directed resources for maintaining a vibrant mainstream housing system, this system will continue to fail many Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients. Indigenous applicants, tenants and service providers have difficulties understanding and keeping up with ‘the rules of the game’, connecting with resource allocation processes and influencing service responses. Beyond resourcing issues, the enormous difficulties that continue to be encountered in making a monolithic government service delivery system more adaptable is a key reason why we consider a more diverse service system that enables mixed approaches to service delivery and encourages different responses, while also being well connected, to be imperative. We examine the role and potential of the specialised Indigenous service system in housing in more detail in Section 4.3.

Future directions

State governments have accepted responsibility for funding and providing housing services to Indigenous households in urban and regional areas and a rapid increase in mainstream allocations to Indigenous tenants has been occurring in response to demand (Milligan et al. 2010, Table 8). It is therefore timely for all jurisdictions to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of their housing policies and service models for this client group. In Chapter 6 we suggest some principles that might guide such a fundamental policy and service review.

Our findings clearly signal that a key policy area where debate is urgently needed is housing allocations policy, with a view to finding a better balance between meeting high housing needs in a resource-constrained system and providing effective and appropriate responses to Indigenous clients (if costly brutal interventions in response to crises, such as occurred in West Dubbo, are to be prevented in future). However, it should be emphasised that part of the answer to the many dilemmas posed by this issue (such as having the wrong houses in the wrong places) will extend well beyond the policy arena and thus should not be disconnected from a wider review of all aspects of the service system—determining a joint future plan for the social housing assets that are earmarked for Indigenous households, deciding which providers are best placed to deliver housing services in particular locations and resourcing specialist support agencies and staff, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. We develop these ideas further throughout this and the following chapter.

²² Nationally, Indigenous satisfaction levels with the overall service provided by SHAs are 15 percentage points lower than the levels for non-Indigenous tenants (SCRGSP 2010, p.16, p.40).

When mainstream housing policy reviews do take place with the aim of being more responsive to Indigenous client needs and preferences, much greater effort must be made to engage with Indigenous advisors—especially to identify and negotiate what adaptations would be acceptable to, and effective in, Indigenous communities and to promote Indigenous understanding of the rationale for, and knowledge about, policy settings. According to our study participants, too often consultation with Indigenous peoples within government and in communities continues to be ad hoc or it occurs after a decision has been made—as happened, for example, following recent government requirements for IHOs to handover housing on 40-year leases to state and territory governments in return for future funding, which has aroused enormous resentment and damaged trust (again), thus setting back government–community relations in several jurisdictions (interviews and group discussions). We agree wholeheartedly with the view of one of our respondents that:

Indigenous perspectives should be a normal part of all policy activities.
(interview, Aboriginal government manager)

Section 4.3.1 considers some ways engagement in strategic policy setting has been pursued in our case studies and what can be demonstrated from these.

4.2 Resource allocation and service and asset planning

Two of the most glaring gaps in the housing service system as it effects Indigenous service providers and clients to emerge from the case study research are the:

1. Almost complete absence of regular and predictable sources of funds that are earmarked for meeting Indigenous housing needs in urban and regional settings since the latest COAG reforms.
2. Lack of transparent processes to establish how the assets and resources of the housing assistance system are to be deployed for this population group at both state and local levels in future.

These problems are discussed in turn below.

4.2.1 Funding and resource allocations for Indigenous housing

Since the reform of the national agreement for social housing administration and funding implemented in 2009 (via the National Affordable Housing Agreement, COAG 2008a), there are no ‘tied’ funds allocated for the provision of public or community-based social housing for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas. Further, the agreement does not make explicit that states are under any obligation to maintain previously earmarked housing (SOMIH) for the continuing use of this client group.²³ It appears that the Commonwealth government has no sanctions in this regard.

The national (COAG-endorsed) changes to funding Indigenous housing were made in the context of a shift to an outcomes-based program and service delivery model (see Milligan & Pinnegar 2010) and are premised on better access by Indigenous households to mainstream housing services, as well as on improving the operation and effectiveness of housing markets for renters and home buyers (COAG 2009). A key thrust is improving outcomes for two target groups: people facing homelessness and Indigenous Australians. This resulted in specific targets being set for allocations

²³ State government policy on the function of SOMIH varies across the jurisdictions as discussed in the Positioning Paper for this study (Milligan et al. 2010). In Queensland, SOMIH was mainstreamed years ago. In Victoria, the SOMIH stock is being transferred to AHV in a staged process and in NSW ownership of the SOMIH assets is vested in an Aboriginal-governed government department (the AHO) but they continue to be managed by the public housing authority under public housing policy settings.

to homeless people and Indigenous households under the recent one-off social housing supply programs: NBESP and the National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing (see Appendix 1). However, further targets and outcomes measures for the social housing system are still in the early stages of development (see Section 4.4). There are also COAG-driven plans to develop whole-of-government Indigenous service strategies for urban and regional areas at a state level as part of 'closing the gap' commitments and reform of intergovernmental roles and responsibilities in this area (COAG 2009). However, any progress in this work related to housing has not been reported, nor have there been community consultations about this work.

At the time of writing, determination of funding levels and asset planning for meeting Indigenous housing needs from regular programs is a process located within state governments that is subject to little, if any, transparency or scrutiny. In each of our case studies, it was quite apparent at the local level that there was little or no knowledge among service providers of how any additional resources are being allocated or how asset procurement and disposal decisions are made.

For instance, while all three locations had received some additional housing for Indigenous clients under the NBESP, no information on how this had been decided was provided locally and local staff felt powerless in negotiating for resources (several interviews and group discussions). Indeed in Victoria, our workshop was the first time that AHV staff and local Indigenous community workers discovered that additional houses (funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the NBESP) were being provided in Dandenong for Aboriginal tenants. In such a heavily resource-constrained system, this situation causes enormous frustration, not only because of the apparently arbitrary nature of decision making, but also because there had been no opportunity provided for local input about what is needed most in a community with large gaps in services.

4.2.2 *Planning for Indigenous housing*

Along with resource allocation decisions being closed, there was no comprehensive process for service planning operating across social housing administrative agencies and providers in any of the three locations we studied, although some specific strategies had been developed using joint planning processes. For example, the recently developed western region homelessness strategy in NSW had been the subject of a regional planning process involving government and non-government agencies that included Indigenous stakeholders. Also in Victoria, the transfer of SOMIH housing to the AHV had been managed through a dedicated and well-regarded collaborative process over many years (see Chapter 3 and Section 4.3.2).

In relation to the IHO sector in NSW, Regional Aboriginal Housing Committees (established under the *Aboriginal Housing Act, 1998*) were intended to provide a strategic forum for community engagement with policy, planning and resource allocation processes for each region but were reportedly no longer operating effectively:

... Certain regions got certain numbers of houses, but it's not clear how those decisions were made. It's all about sharing information, but nothing's filtering down to the RAHC members. (interview, Aboriginal leader)

Having a proper needs basis for service planning was also considered crucial.

There needs to be better needs-based planning and projection at the local level. This needs to take into account Indigenous-specific demographic factors, such as birth rate data, mobility patterns, and consideration of earlier home

leaving for Indigenous than non-Indigenous peoples. A lot of people fall between the gaps. (participant, group meeting)

The apparently weak engagement of Indigenous stakeholders in mainstream service planning processes at both strategic and operational levels of the housing system is inconsistent with a service system that values cultural identity and knowledge, and it militates against service integration and innovation. In practical day-to-day terms, it means Indigenous organisations often do not know when additional mainstream resources may become available (e.g. as evidenced by lack of applications from this sector for NRAS in its early years of operation). It prevents effective coordination and means they have no say in how best to use the limited resources that are on offer for both new housing and asset reconfiguration. It means that creative solutions to addressing needs, such as better housing designs, are not forthcoming. It also means that skills in planning and resource allocation and in negotiating trade-offs are not being developed among Indigenous stakeholders. More broadly, the lack of engagement reinforces a lack of trust between governments and Indigenous communities and a dependency culture (of things being done to you and for you). Finally, it perpetuates the powerful juggernaut nature of a mainstream service model that is largely unresponsive to different needs and new ideas.

Future directions

In the context of the extent of reliance that is being placed on mainstream housing service provision for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas, immediate priority should be given to establishing a resource allocation framework and culturally adapted planning process in the intercultural space defined earlier. These should operate at both state-wide and regional/local scales. Models and methods of mutual planning of resource allocations and decision making that have been developed in some remote communities (around mining leases or the management of national parks and cultural sites, for instance) and in other human service areas (such as health), as well as successful housing partnerships in remote areas, could be used as models to help inform and shape this process.

Resourcing these processes well and investing in building the capacity of Indigenous organisations and community members to participate effectively are essential components of this approach, as we discuss in Section 4.3. Indicators on planning and service delivery for Indigenous housing that are collected by the AIHW should be expanded to include mainstream agencies (as these only cover SOMIH and IHOs at present) and enhanced to measure the quality of participatory planning processes (see AIHW 2009b, Tables 2.41–2.43).

4.3 Institutional arrangements for Indigenous involvement across the service system

In this part, we consider the role of Indigenous institutions in the service system by examining the roles played by the key Indigenous organisations in each of the case study areas, how these organisations are supported, and the strengths and limitations demonstrated by how they have recently operated. The section concludes by discussing the core requirements for adapting the service system to empower Indigenous institutions and, at the same time, promote engagement with mainstream and cross-cultural service integration.

4.3.1 *Indigenous engagement with policy, strategic planning and decision making*

In the Positioning Paper for this study, drawing on relevant international experience and theoretical understandings of Indigenous engagement, we argued that Indigenous organisations and individual experts should have a strong voice in housing policy making (Milligan et al. 2010). This can be facilitated in a number of complementary ways, including through having identified positions for Indigenous policy-makers, utilising specialist Indigenous government agencies and through high-level joint consultative committees or other participatory processes that operate prior to decision making.

From our study, a good example of use of a specialised process was the deliberative consultation and planning for change that took place over many years prior to the set-up of AHV, and is ongoing. This process was founded on joint strategic planning and implementation management between senior representatives of the former Aboriginal Housing Victoria Board (and later the AHV) and the Office of Housing (DHS(V)) over nearly 10 years. The first phase (2000 to 2004) led to an MOU setting out the formal arrangements. This has been followed by an ongoing staged transition and implementation phase, as discussed in Chapter 3. Community forums were also set up in three regions prior to the DHS(V)–AHV transfer to build support for the change, disseminate information and provide face-to-face question time to address tenants' concerns—the latter as a direct acknowledgment of poorer results that have been associated with paper-based consultations (interviews, government employees).

Key lessons from the Victorian experience of building a robust Indigenous housing organisation through a stock transfer process included the need for a long-term commitment from the mainstream organisation and the need to resource extensive capacity building.

Extensive resources have been applied to help AHV build up capacity. DHS(V) has also funded consultants and staff secondments for AHV. However, there is the risk of AHV gradually becoming dependent on these external staff and if/when they leave, capacity retracts. (interview, government manager)

Another risk factor that was also identified from the Victorian example was that the mainstream agency had 'taken its eye off the ball' through the transfer process in relation to the continuing cultural appropriateness of its services to Indigenous tenants who were remaining in mainstream public housing.²⁴ However, this was beginning to be addressed through an organisation-wide human services cultural framework, which we described in the Positioning Paper (interview, government manager).

In NSW, unlike in Victoria and Queensland, there is a distinctive legislative and institutional framework for decision making on Aboriginal housing policy within state government. Under the *Aboriginal Housing Act, 1998* one function of the AHO is advising the Minister for Housing on Aboriginal housing policy (Part 3(8) 2d). The first three objectives of the Act are:

- a) to ensure that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have access to affordable and quality housing
- b) to ensure that such housing is appropriate having regard to the social and cultural requirements, living patterns and preferences of the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to whom the housing is to be provided

²⁴ For example, following the transfer of dedicated Aboriginal housing and staff to AHV, the Office of Housing did not retain any identified Aboriginal positions.

c) to enhance the role of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in determining, developing and delivering policies and programs related to Aboriginal housing. (*Aboriginal Housing Act 1998*, Part 1(3) a, b, c).

From an Indigenous perspective the importance of having this legislative framework was summed up by three senior managers in NSW in the following terms:

- Having ready access to Indigenous knowledge. For example, recently the AHO's perspective on how to combat Indigenous homelessness has been important in framing homelessness responses at a strategic level in NSW under the national priority for reducing homelessness. Similarly, NSW officials claimed to have achieved a more acceptable outcome for IHOs in relation to Commonwealth expectations of head leasing of Indigenous-owned housing than Queensland, attributed partly to having an Indigenous voice at the negotiating table.²⁵
- Contributing directly to intra-government debate and advocacy from an Indigenous perspective (within the confines of government decision making such as the cabinet process) without the political risks that are associated with external processes.

'Indigenous needs are at the heart of all the wicked problems that governments talk about—in this context having Indigenous thinking and influence at hand is ... invaluable to a government' (interview, Indigenous manager).

The use of a strategic Indigenous agency (AHO) to mobilise different solutions and options through engagement of local Indigenous networks and services was seen as important in this context.

AHO has an intermediary role in the system—leveraging community engagement and commitment, resources and opportunities. (interview, Indigenous manager)

Of course this is a delicate and fraught path for any agency to tread and the AHO has had a mixed reputation within government and in the Indigenous community over its 12 years of operation in NSW. Reasons for this cannot be examined in detail here. However, comments from participants in this research suggest some of the key factors influencing how such an Indigenous government agency model can be used to best advantage strategically. According to the managers cited above this will depend on:

- A mainstream agency knowing how to work effectively at a strategic level with an Indigenous-run agency.
- The Indigenous agency having the appropriate capacity and skills to engage in policy advice.
- Intra-government workings being culturally adapted (interview, Indigenous manager).

4.3.2 The role of Indigenous housing provider organisations

The structure, scale and function of Indigenous housing organisations in Australia was described in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010), drawing on previous research for AHURI and national survey data. In general terms, the sector has been characterised as being highly fragmented with poor financial viability and lack of

²⁵ In NSW head leases on housing owned by non-registered providers will be for a five-year duration (not 40 years) with an option for another five years and this housing will be managed by another registered Indigenous organisation where possible (DHS, n.d.b).

capacity in many (mostly) small organisations, with adverse effects on quality of service in many cases. Specific housing-related policy and financial drivers contributing to this situation include low operating subsidies, high service costs (especially in remote areas), low rent revenues, and a lack of professionally trained tenancy and property workers (Eringa et al. 2008; Hall & Berry 2006). Many of these problems stem from lack of adequate funding and government neglect.

Current service provision by Indigenous providers in the three case study locations is a mishmash that reflects the history and structure of the sector and manifests a combination of past policies and programs, recent reforms and new directions. Most of the following types of service organisations can be found in each of the areas visited:

- Very small housing corporations, which were formed under past programs (such as those run by ATSIC) that were not currently receiving funding.
- State-registered, community-controlled local housing providers or member-based organisations (some of which were disconnected from the mainstream system).
- Larger multifunctional Indigenous organisations that included housing services under an integrated human services model.
- Indigenous-run regional housing management agencies (servicing local Indigenous organisations).

These different types of housing providers often have complementary roles in their local area, such as offering an integrated housing service, providing housing for members, running a professional Indigenous housing business, or delivering coordinated human services for individual clients.

In two jurisdictions there is an unfolding plan for directing the future structure and function of the Indigenous housing services sub-sector that is based on strategies to support regulated Indigenous housing providers to establish more viable business models (especially through rent reform) and to enhance their scale and capacity. This can be seen as a positive development because it is a means of achieving a sustainable Indigenous-run housing service system in those jurisdictions, in contrast with the attrition of providers through lack of adequate funding and the take-over of Indigenous-run housing that has been occurring elsewhere and in the past.

Differences between the two jurisdictions indicate some of the choices and trade-offs that are being made in restructuring this sector. In NSW the aim is to retain a diversity of locally based or regional IHOs where these are viable under the Build and Grow strategy that was discussed in Chapter 3. Although it is too early to assess the outcomes in this regard, there is concern that without significant investment in capacity building there could be a decline in the sector due to the inability of many organisations to meet higher standards of service in the time frames allowed (Eastgate & Moore 2011). In Victoria, the model of having one large state-wide Indigenous housing agency that can be self-financing and generate its own growth has been adopted, making the future uncertain for smaller, locally based member-run organisations (many of which are found in non-metropolitan locations). This situation was an area of tension in Dandenong where the local members-based organisation did not want to lose its role and influence, but no longer received housing funds.

There is an important difference between the members-based model of Bunurong and the administrative model of AHV. Co-ops such as Bunurong provide services for their members and are locally controlled. AHV operates an administrative system to determine who is allocated housing across the whole state. (group discussion)

As AHV gets up and running as a fully fledged independent housing provider, it is envisaged that partnerships with local Indigenous co-operatives would offer one way of retaining diversity and local responsiveness in the Victorian sector (interview, AHV officer).

The AHV represents the most significant state-guided attempt to establish a large-scale viable IHO. Initially the AHV model was borne from a traditional concept of self-determination but intentions have changed along the way. For example, the final board structure and membership combines Indigenous knowledge and representation with the skills of non-Indigenous specialists and AHV is regulated under the same regime as mainstream community housing providers, as discussed in Section 4.3.

In the foreseeable future as it gains independence, a larger balance sheet and greater experience, AHV could be expected to develop a wider range of culturally adapted policies, programs and services, working in close co-operation with mainstream providers and other IHOs in Victoria. Thus, AHV has the potential to become an example in the housing domain as a transformative organisation operating at the interface of mainstream and culturally specific practice.

In Queensland there is no government-led plan to guide the future shape and growth of the sector following the transfer of Commonwealth responsibility to the state government and this has created uncertainty for IHOs (Milligan et al. 2010). Negotiations between the state and individual IHOs about how the incorporation of IHOs into Queensland's regulatory model and 'OSHS' policies, were continuing at the time of this study. While the policy parameters appear to be shifting to enable greater flexibility, the individualised nature of the agreements struck so far has contributed to high levels of uncertainty and mistrust (interviews, community and government workers).

Despite the absence of any clearly articulated government framework for development of IHOs in Queensland, the leading local Indigenous housing provider in Townsville, Yumba Meta (founded in 1974), demonstrates a strong self-directed mission and clear direction guiding its growth and development, as described in Chapter 3. Yumba Meta provides a positive example of an Indigenous housing provider retaining its cultural identity, while adapting to operate in the intercultural space and relating well to the mainstream housing services system. It is clear from discussions with the Board, management and staff that this was an intentional strategy by Yumba Meta in the 1990s to ensure its long-term viability through strong governance, embracing mainstream accountability standards, striving for high quality and culturally appropriate services for tenants and engaging in mainstream housing networks.

One key element of this strategy involved significant governance changes, including incorporation as a company under the *Incorporations Act* and constitutional change to allow 75 per cent of members, directors and clients to be non-Indigenous. The Board attributes its success to the strong leadership of the chairperson, a commitment to good governance, and employment of a suitably skilled CEO. Another contributing factor seems to be the existence, during the 1990s and early 2000s, of a strong and inclusive community housing network facilitated by a community-based community housing resource worker (CHRW), who also assisted individual providers. This network and the CHRW facilitated access to information about state policy directions and state funding opportunities. However, the decision to participate and take advantage of opportunities for growth was very much driven from within the organisation.

Yumba Meta and organisations like it help to demonstrate how strong Indigenous housing organisations can operate as an integral part of the social housing service

system and contribute to making all parts of that system more effective for Indigenous clients, as well as boosting the local Indigenous economy. This case also highlights the benefits of retaining geographically anchored organisations where feasible.

Indigenous organisations are the hub for Indigenous people and communities ... if they are working well you can add other services to create services and jobs. It is very important for the community that there is a strong local organisation. (interview, Indigenous leader)

4.3.3 Contributions of other Indigenous institutions

During our field visits it was quite apparent that many types of Indigenous agencies contribute in diverse ways to the housing service system. For example, we observed instances where Indigenous organisations outside the housing domain offered mentoring to Indigenous staff in housing agencies, provided cultural training for mainstream organisations and partnered with the mainstream agency to provide specialised tenancy support and/or neighbourhood services. Local networks of Indigenous service providers and representative community members also offered formal mechanisms for consultation and advice.

How extensively these opportunities for consultation, engagement and partnering are developed and used is one signal of the strength of intercultural relationships in a community and helps to reveal how well mainstream agencies understand and connect to the wider Indigenous community and its institutions. Similarly, it may reveal how Indigenous organisations are adapting to engagement with the dominant mainstream institutions (Martin 2003). However, in our case studies, much of the action in this intercultural space seems to have been ad hoc and, in some cases, crisis-driven. To make long-term differences, such spontaneous relationships need to be nurtured through guidance and leadership at a strategic level and be imbued in local practice. In the words of a research participant:

We need [mainstream and Indigenous] agencies to be talking all of the time, not just in the bad times. (interview, Indigenous community leader)

Future directions

In Chapter 2, we discussed ideas about a mixed model of culturally appropriate services and encouraging network governance approaches that facilitate greater engagement in the intercultural space between Indigenous and mainstream organisations (Hunt et al. 2008; Hickson & Smith 2005). In keeping with these ideas, our research findings about the roles and potential of Indigenous institutions suggest that policy, regulatory and funding reforms to the present social housing service system should be directed to four priority areas:

- Increasing housing choices, options and pathways for Indigenous clients. This may involve dwelling transfers to rebalance the size of mainstream and specialist providers (such as has occurred in Victoria), provision of new products (such as affordable rentals, shared equity and rent-to-buy products) that can provide the paths to greater individual self-determination, more service partnerships, and negotiated individual tenancy transfers to whichever service provider can improve tenant outcomes.
- Ensuring that Indigenous housing service organisations with the capability to provide effective services are viable and well supported in the services they offer. In some locations this may require supporting the entry of new Indigenous agencies to achieve this goal. This will also require a long-term plan to invest in building capacity in Indigenous institutions, to assist their capacity to run their own affairs and their capacity to engage cross-culturally (Martin 2003).

- Embedding engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions and actors in strategic policy, planning and decision-making frameworks and processes. Facilitating this may require new Indigenous networks, such as a peak body, council or assembly to enable participation at a state level, as occurs in other key Indigenous policy and service domains, such as health and education, where there are well-established advisory mechanisms.
- Empowering Indigenous organisations to operate at the interface between mainstream agencies and the local community, as appropriate, for example, by providing information and brokerage services for clients or by encouraging partnerships (such as via dedicated funding) that utilise the combined resources of the mainstream and specialist partners to generate additional housing and service options for Indigenous clients.

We also suggest that because of the large geographical differences in service needs, opportunities and the scale and viability of existing Indigenous institutions, the ways that broad goals for institutional and sector reform are applied must be locally driven. This could be achieved through the use of jointly developed local/regional approved five-year service plans that align with state-wide objectives but are adapted to local conditions. Having such a mechanism would enable a more customised, bottom-up approach to service delivery which we discuss in Chapter 5.

4.4 Accountability and regulation

Accountability, in various forms, underpins urban Indigenous housing service delivery as discussed in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010) and in Chapter 2 of this report. Issues canvassed previously include accountability of service providers to Indigenous communities as a key attribute of culturally appropriate service delivery (referred to as downward accountability by Moran & Elvin 2009), accountability by service providers to each other (horizontal accountability), and to funders and the wider public as a foundation for service integration (upward and outward accountabilities). Notions of accountability are also integral to governance issues, whether in relation to the governance of IHOs or the governance capacity of governments in addressing Indigenous disadvantage or regulating service provision.

Three dominant accountability themes emerging from our empirical study are discussed below. The first is concerned with the accountability of mainstream and Indigenous-specific social housing services for the quality of services they provide and outcomes that are achieved for Indigenous tenants. The other two themes concern the accountability of IHOs, specifically the regulation and governance of IHOs.

4.4.1 Accountability of mainstream services for Indigenous housing service standards and client outcomes

The increasing reliance on mainstream, especially public housing, responses to housing needs for Indigenous urban and regional dwellers necessitates close attention to the accountability of these services for both the quality and accessibility of the services they provide and the outcomes achieved. Currently standards, performance targets and reporting regarding service delivery for Indigenous people are fragmented and variable across the study jurisdictions and services. Indeed, in most cases, sufficient reliable data on service delivery for Indigenous people with which to hold housing providers to account is not collected. National social housing performance reporting for public and community housing provides some limited data on issues such as the numbers of new and total Indigenous tenancies and tenant satisfaction by Indigenous status on a consistent basis (see annual Productivity Commission Report of Government Services).

The COAG Reform Council is charged with developing the performance indicators and baseline performance information for the NAHA, taking an outcomes approach. It has adopted as its overarching outcome measure that 'Indigenous people have the same housing opportunities as other Australians' (COAG Reform Council, 2010: 79). In its initial report it presented the same indicators for Indigenous housing as for the whole population. This involved indicators of Indigenous status in relation to homelessness services, housing rental, housing purchase and access to housing through an efficient and responsive housing market.

The data provided in the first report confirms the degree of difference between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, indicated by comparatively high rates of homelessness, low rates of home ownership, poor affordability of market housing and lower standards of housing among Indigenous Australians (COAG Reform Council 2010, pp.79–103).

While these are important measures that provide baseline information about the degree of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians, they are not sufficiently attuned to the outcomes being achieved from the housing service system. In particular, they are not measuring whether better social, economic and health outcomes are actually resulting for Indigenous households from the services that are delivered and the ways they are delivered. For instance, increasing Indigenous allocations to public housing may decrease workforce participation under current mainstream policy settings that embed disincentives to work in rent-setting and eligibility for continuing occupancy. Appreciation of such issues will require the adoption of a larger and more broadly conceived set of outcome measures and a stronger evaluative framework than is being used currently.

Other mainstream accountability regimes such as community housing regulation and national community housing standards are also silent on issues such as the extent and effectiveness of culturally adapted service delivery for Indigenous clients (see e.g. Registrar of Community Housing 2010; JPX Consulting 2010). As illustrated earlier, internal accountability in SHAs is also seen by some staff to be unbalanced—relying more heavily on commercial performance than social outcomes.

Given that specific accountability measures in the form of targets or reporting requirements are either absent or under-developed, it is unsurprising that there is inconsistent and varying quality of public reporting on urban Indigenous housing service activities and outcomes. To achieve meaningful accountability, the focus of NAHA reporting on urban housing services for Indigenous households needs to be more directed to improving service transparency and developing culturally appropriate outcome measures. Regular formal evaluations of aspects of the service system should also be used to help drive accountability, policy adaptation and service improvement and innovation.

4.4.2 IHO regulation

Each of the three states we have covered is taking a different approach to funding and regulation of Indigenous housing organisations (see Chapter 3). As a consequence, the IHOs operating in the study sites were coming to terms with the implications of the dynamic funding and regulatory environments within which they operate in different ways. While it is too early in the reform process to assess the impacts of these different directions, our case studies provide some insight into emerging issues. The most significant of these concerns the application of mainstream regulatory models. One view was that:

IHOs can't manage under overly prescriptive policies and regulation. Regulate outcomes, not how we get there. (interview, government worker)

In NSW, the regulation of IHOs (the PARS system) is culturally adapted. It features a specialist regulatory framework for IHOs administered by the mainstream community housing regulator. This model provides a means for IHOs to operate within a customised regulatory system that is also aligned with mainstream practice. It could be expected that this may assist IHOs, especially smaller services, that choose to transition to the mainstream system over time. Importantly, IHOs also have the choice of registering under the mainstream system and eleven Aboriginal providers have been successful in this system in NSW to date (Registrar, Community Housing, e-mail, 30 March 2011).

In Victoria and Queensland the only path for IHOs is mainstream regulation. Mainstream regulation has brought larger or better-established IHOs (such as AHV and Yumba Meta, respectively) and the advantage of improving their competitiveness in accessing additional resources for growth. However, for smaller IHOs with less capacity, the stark choice is between attempting to engage with the mainstream regulatory system or remaining outside and risking isolation and stagnation. In the absence of dedicated support for these organisations to engage with the mainstream system, many are not seeking regulation. As a consequence they will not be eligible for government funding in future.

4.4.3 IHO governance

Our study occurred at a time of considerable debate about governance for Indigenous organisations that is challenging pre-existing concepts of self-determination and stereotyping of Indigenous governance (Limerick 2009; Hunt et al. 2008; Hunt & Smith 2007; Martin 2003). The implications of this development for the delivery of services to Indigenous people are likely to be far reaching. Some of the emerging new approaches to governance of Indigenous organisations are reflected in the findings of this study.

One strong theme through our case studies is the variety of governance models being adopted by IHOs. The incorporation of many IHOs as Indigenous Corporations, under legislation administered by the Office of the Register of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC), or in NSW, as LALCs reflects the past dominance of Indigenous-specific forms of incorporation that are founded on member-based, representative governance structures. However, it is notable that both the larger IHOs in this study, AHV and Yumba Meta, are incorporated as companies and also have capacity for expert and/or non-Indigenous directors to be appointed to their boards. Incorporation as a company under the mainstream *Corporations Act* requires higher standards of accountability and governance and there are more onerous penalties for non-compliance by both the corporation and individual directors. At the same time, corporations law offers wide flexibility in the design of governance structures and constitutions. A strong driver, for both AHV and Yumba Meta, in adopting a company structure, was pragmatic, in that housing regulation in Victoria and Queensland give privileged status to company structures as the vehicle for achieving not-for-profit growth provider status.

The board memberships of AHV and Yumba Meta also illustrate new approaches to board recruitment that indicate adaptation in how the concept of self-determination is operationalised and also how tensions between representative and skills-based appointments are played out. The AHV governance model aims to achieve a board that includes both regional community representation and expertise and it allows for appointment of non-Indigenous 'expert' directors to fill skills gaps. Under a different model, Yumba Meta has a constitution that allows for up to 25 per cent of clients, members and directors to be non-Indigenous. Its board is fully elected by members and while it does not make explicit skills-based appointments to the board, these can be achieved through the filling of casual vacancies.

Another strong theme from the study is the attention being given to governance processes, with respondents commenting on the importance given to board ethics, policy and procedure, director education and the management of conflicts of interest. This theme is illustrated in the following quote from an IHO board member:

Sometimes we didn't all agree but over time we got a good board and strong people who do the right thing. Members can be nominated at the AGM [annual general meeting]. We then have induction—it has evolved. I brought it up that I didn't know what was going on so they developed the induction. We have had a lot of training—the policies have got better and better. There is no conflict of interest. If there is an issue with a family member we leave—there is no problem. I think it's amazing what we are doing for the community. (participant, group discussion)

The attention given to IHO governance in this study was incidental to the main purpose of the research and care must be taken in extrapolating the findings discussed above. However, the situation of two significant IHOs does indicate that concepts of self-determination and what constitutes an 'Indigenous' organisation are fluid. The evolution and seeming convergence of Indigenous governance with mainstream models supports the proposition in Chapter 2 that IHOs operate in an intercultural space. Their new governance approaches represent an adaptation that seeks to accommodate accountability to their Indigenous constituency and also draws on recognised mainstream accountability and governance norms (Hunt et al. 2008). The former is essential to maintain credibility within the Indigenous community and the latter is essential in gaining public credibility and to enable access to the resources needed to address Indigenous housing needs.

Future directions

The findings about accountability discussed above are, to some extent, preliminary and impressionistic, due to the limited scope of this study. However, they point to areas of accountability that require further research and policy attention. Clearly, accountability is a crucial component of any robust service delivery system and, in the case of Indigenous housing, is critical in establishing expectations and reporting on performance of all service providers. The accountability issues, as discussed above, are different for IHOs and mainstream services. However, the need for transparency and scrutiny to ensure that the quality of services and the outcomes achieved meet community expectations is common to both.

Areas of accountability that warrant further research and policy consideration include:

- National targets and reporting under NAHA for urban Indigenous housing. This should include additional outcomes in key areas such as tenancy stability, housing standards and housing-related outcomes in health, education and employment.
- Having state and regional integrated service delivery plans and reports that address issues such as standards for culturally proficient practice, Indigenous workforce strategies, asset strategies and frameworks for enabling policy adaptation, community and tenant engagement strategies, service system design and IHO capacity and growth strategies.
- Considering culturally adapted regulatory systems in all jurisdictions in consultation with Indigenous providers/stakeholders. Lessons from the NSW regulatory approach for IHOs could inform views about how to adapt the mainstream community housing regulatory system.
- Dedicated resourcing for IHOs to support them to meet regulatory standards and to partner with more established IHOs and community housing providers.

- Research, information/education resources and peer-support networks and industry bodies to assist IHOs to make informed decisions about appropriate governance structures and to support boards to enhance their governance capacity.

4.5 Concluding comments

This chapter has examined how systemic policy and institutional settings impact on the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households by drawing on the perspectives of players currently working in three different urban locations or at a state level. Some of the overall findings are as follows.

- Mainstream housing policy settings in urban contexts are largely undifferentiated and not responsive to the needs and preferences of Indigenous clients. There is scope for much more adaptation of policies and local flexibility to allow for cultural values, preferences and lifestyles and to improve client outcomes.
- System-wide strategic service planning processes, resource allocation decision frameworks and asset plans that are directed to addressing Indigenous housing needs are weak or absent. There are no permanent dedicated funds and few specific targets for improving housing services to Indigenous clients in urban locations. A dedicated and well-resourced Indigenous service strategy for urban areas that is framed at a state level but can be locally adapted, is needed in order to overcome major limitations in the existing service system (especially investment to reconfigure inappropriate assets), to drive better performance across the system (e.g. reducing abandonment and sustaining a higher proportion of Indigenous tenancies), and to stimulate policy and service innovation.
- Indigenous organisations (both housing agencies and others) have made many positive and innovative contributions to the housing service system and this is recognised in mainstream agencies, especially at the local level where heavy demand and regular crises tend to provoke problem solving. However, much more could be done to systematically engage Indigenous agencies and networks in policy making and planning processes and to build capacity across the housing service system to enable them to play a more integrated role alongside mainstream organisations. This direction would be consistent with self-determination principles and could be expected to achieve better client outcomes across the whole service system. It will require long-term commitments and leadership to imbue mainstream agencies with greater capacity to work with Indigenous agencies, as well as resources dedicated to building appropriate capabilities in existing (or newly established) Indigenous institutions.
- Strengthening accountability frameworks for all mainstream providers specifically around outcomes for Indigenous clients is one priority area for attention. A second priority area is co-development in each jurisdiction of a culturally appropriate regulatory approach that can assist IHOs to be effective players, linked to a purpose-designed and resourced capacity-building strategy. This would parallel the strategy to support growth of the mainstream community housing sector that is already being implemented.

5 EXAMINING THE SERVICE DELIVERY ENVIRONMENT

This chapter complements the strategic focus of the previous chapter with an examination of how social housing services for Indigenous people are delivered in the case study sites. It focuses on experiences and interactions in the service delivery domain involving various Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders: service providers, housing workers, tenants and community members. Two dominant themes, service integration/relationships and culturally appropriate service delivery, are explored with reference to the concepts discussed in Chapter 2 and evidence from our empirical research in Dandenong, Dubbo and Townsville.

5.1 Service integration and relationships

This section draws particularly on the concept of service integration and intercultural space to explore formal and informal relationships between service providers in the delivery of social housing for Indigenous households. In the contemporary policy and service delivery context, the provision of accessible and successful social housing for urban Indigenous households entails operating collaboratively across multiple service dimensions (Phillips et al. 2009). The following discussion draws on the issues that emerged as particularly important from the case studies:

- Relationships between Indigenous-specific and mainstream housing providers.
- Linkages between social housing and other service sectors providing services for Indigenous clients.

5.1.1 *Relationships between housing service providers*

The nature of interagency relationships in the service delivery domain is influenced by the policy and institutional (top-down) settings in which they operate, as well as by local (bottom-up) factors. This is illustrated by the different experiences of service integration and interagency collaboration between housing providers across our study sites. Common to each site were significant efforts by Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and organisations to find ways to work together to meet local needs and overcome problems within constrained resource environments. The success of these efforts was to some extent mediated by the history, commitment and cross-cultural skills and relationships within those communities. However, the broader policy and institutional context within which local services operate was also significant.

In Victoria the AHV, as the state-wide Indigenous housing provider, relies on relationships at the local level with Indigenous agencies in local communities like Dandenong. For example, the Bunurong Co-operative provides a local outreach base for their housing workers and both this agency and mainstream services (such as WAYSS) facilitate linkages into the local community. While these relationships are institutionally based, their effectiveness often depends on the skills and experience of a few people or a single individual. This has been described in another Indigenous service context as person-dependent rather than system-dependent practice (Fisher et al. 2010, p.104). The dangers of relying on individuals are illustrated in the following quote from one group discussion:

There is currently a strong reliance on local 'champions' like [name from organisation] and [name from organisation] who have developed strong knowledge of the service system and the trust of the community, and who work long days and often out of hours, doing whatever it takes for the community, regardless of their respective job description. When they become

unavailable (such as [name] who is currently on maternity leave), remaining staff don't have the capacity and networks to maintain their level of service provision—we rely too much on champions; champions leave.

Participants in Dandenong reported confusion for Aboriginal clients and tensions between agencies that were created by the different access arrangements in place across social housing providers. A reported propensity for AHV to be viewed as having primary responsibility for housing Aboriginal people is a symptom of the structural policy and program silos within which public housing (DHS(V)), community housing (AHV) and small IHOs operate. There seems to be confusion arising from a perception that AHV is the only avenue for community organisations and co-operatives to refer to for Indigenous tenancies when DHS(V) and other community housing providers still manage Indigenous tenancies in the mainstream system. Concern was expressed that at present referral pathways for Indigenous clients across the social housing system were not clear. The proposed common waiting list is supposed to assist in dealing with this problem but there is no information in the community at present about how this will operate. This situation has contributed to some frustration and tension between Bunurong Co-operative and staff of AHV, who also have limited capacity. The local interagency tensions in this situation appear to be a result of both under-developed local networks and communication mechanisms between Indigenous and mainstream services and a lack of attention to integrative policy and program strategies.

Under very different policy and institutional settings in Townsville, the larger local public housing, community housing and Indigenous housing providers have well-established formal structures and informal processes that underpin their collaborative relationships and integrated approaches to service delivery. A specific initiative that illustrates the nature of the relationships is a collaborative approach to allocation decisions for applicants from a common social housing register. Unlike in other locations in Queensland, where allocations from the common register are impersonal and administratively determined, the providers in Townsville collaborate in attempts to match high-needs applicants with the housing provider best able to meet their needs, both in terms of the suitability of available housing and tenancy management approach.

Relationships with the public housing local office are very good. We take people from the waiting list and whenever there is an issue, we can advocate for community members. I don't know what it is but it works for us. (interview, Indigenous Housing Manager, Townsville)

Regular meetings, open communication, shared knowledge and respect for each other's capacity and strengths all contribute to robust relationships and a focus on client outcomes.

Housing only (service provider) meetings allow open discussion about operational issues in a trusting environment. (interview, government manager)

The situation is different again in Dubbo where relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous housing service providers appear somewhat fragmented and operate more through bilateral relationships or personal links rather than broader inclusive collaborative structures. As in Victoria, the nature of local relationships reflects the silos that are a result of past Indigenous housing policy and program arrangements. Overcoming this legacy requires intentional effort at the local level. One mainstream community housing provider reported working to develop relationships with the Indigenous community and is managing tenancies on behalf of

local IHOs. Relationships between IHOs and Housing NSW appear less developed in spite of Housing NSW managing Aboriginal tenancies on behalf of the AHO.

There is a Dubbo Housing Network operating through Housing NSW ... People ... are coming together and sharing information. The network is looking for other providers to try to include them in the network. At the moment Aboriginal providers aren't participating in the project. (interview, government employee)

The challenges involved, and the time and resources it takes to build and maintain effective networking and collaborative structures between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers, cannot be underestimated. As pointed out above, success often relies on the efforts of committed individuals and organisations skilled in network governance (Hunt et al. 2008). However, government actions to enable collaboration are also needed. This requires strategies to ensure that Indigenous organisations become active members of mainstream policy and service networks and are seen as a valued part of the broader social housing sector. Such intentional policies can help Indigenous organisations see themselves as mainstream players and help develop their capacity.

It is important to take a long-term view when considering how to help develop strong relationships between housing service providers. For example, informants pointed out that the strong relationships in place in Townsville developed over more than a decade. These can be traced back to Queensland community housing strategies in the mid-1990s that opened up opportunities (that Yumba Meta took up) to secure mainstream state community housing funding and participate in regional community housing networking structures facilitated by Regional CHRWs. As a result of inclusive state policies and networks at the time, organisations such as Yumba Meta were able to participate and build relationships within both Indigenous-specific and mainstream housing sectors. One participant described this process in the following terms:

Ten to 12 years ago IHOs kept to themselves. We had a big funding round in 1996 that opened up opportunities for IHOs. Previously, they weren't eligible if they could get funding from elsewhere such as ATSIC. Yumba Meta were successful in getting state funding that year. Also another IHO in Ayr. This resulted in more contact between mainstream and IHOs. The CHRW in the Townsville region provided networking opportunities and later these were formalised through Regional Community Housing Councils. Yumba Meta has become one of the key community housing providers in north Queensland. They have changed their constitution to assist non-Indigenous people and have grown (interview, Indigenous government worker).

The value and importance of these intercultural networks and their facilitators was identified by several study participants:

... when she [the CHRW for the region] was running it she kept everyone informed and invited IHOs to be involved in the regular meetings. I attended and other IHOs were regular participants. It was great because we knew what was happening as we were funded by ATSIC ... [it was] important to be linked and know what is going on (interview, manager, Indigenous housing organisation, Townsville).

The importance of such networks was also emphasised during a group discussion by an Aboriginal housing worker in Dubbo:

Networks with other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff in other organisations are very important for doing day-to-day work.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the AHO in NSW, through its state and regional structures, has a role in mediating and leveraging opportunities for intercultural engagement. However, this has not always been recognised within government. Although AHO is a government agency, there has been a tendency for other departments to approach Housing NSW to 'represent' the housing viewpoint in cross-agency discussions. Closer relationships at management level, written protocols and staff briefings on cross-agency working have been developed recently by AHO to help address these issues. As discussed in 4.3.1, a better understanding of the roles and interests of all agencies in the service system needs to be promoted, not only at a strategic level, but also locally.

In managing relationships with mainstream agencies, Indigenous housing organisations face particular challenges. These include ensuring other services do not abrogate responsibility for Indigenous housing problems, and managing dual roles as service providers and advocates for clients in their dealings with other agencies.

Public housing always call us because they know we will respond (interview, manager, IHO).

This points to the potential of Indigenous organisations to exercise agency in mediating relationships with mainstream services. Positive perceptions of other providers about the quality of participation and service delivery by Indigenous services contribute to their inclusion in networks and integrated service responses.

The study also illustrates the importance of networking between Indigenous organisations for clients, workers and the mutual benefit of the organisations. This is the challenge in developing an intercultural space—there needs to be room for both strong Indigenous networks between Indigenous services and workers (such as Ngwala Willumbong Indigenous Advocacy Group in Victoria) and for active engagement in mainstream systems:

The Koori network provides an advocacy service and steers people in the right direction of who to go to and gives Housing NSW and anyone else who will listen advice (interview, Indigenous housing worker).

[Indigenous organisation] is also mentoring and buddying other IHOs to get registered. It is positive for the Indigenous community to have an Indigenous organisation that is recognised (interview, Indigenous government worker).

Future directions

Service integration is an explicit policy objective in national and state policies and strategies aimed at improving Indigenous housing outcomes. While the specific nature of service integration is rarely articulated clearly, there is increasing consensus that effective linkages between public, community and Indigenous housing services are critical to improving access to, and sustainability of, social housing tenancies.

Our findings indicate that front-line workers and service managers can see the practical benefits of strong local intercultural networks. However, the nature of relationships and the strength of integrative mechanisms at the local level are variable. Where such relationships are effective, it is often as a result of partnership efforts by local workers and organisations and is based on mutual respect and collective capacity for intercultural engagement. Where linkages are absent or problematic, the causes are often historical and structural, including the result of entrenched 'silos' or the unintended consequences of other reform processes. In the words of one informant:

What is needed is better layering of the capacity to address issues for Indigenous people and to demonstrate an integrated approach (interview, government employee).

There is a clear necessity to understand and address the barriers to more effective integration and to institute intentional strategies to build inter-sectoral and intercultural relationships. Such strategies are most effective if embedded in policy, program design and service delivery practices, where leadership responsibility is clearly allocated and where capacity building is supported for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers and service providers.

5.1.2 Linkages with other service sectors

Indigenous housing sits at the intersection of several other service domains. As discussed in Chapter 4, homelessness services and home ownership are two areas identified by participants as crucial linkages. Relationships with other mainstream and Indigenous community services are also seen as important for supporting tenants with special needs, sustaining 'at-risk' tenancies, facilitating access to private rental and home ownership and brokering access to social services and economic participation opportunities for tenants.

The pivotal role of IHOs in broader intercultural engagement processes was highlighted by regional Indigenous affairs officers in Townsville in reporting on processes in neighbouring towns to bring various Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies together to address local issues.

In [two regional towns] [Indigenous affairs agency] specifically partnered with IHOs as key players. Both had other services but also had current income from housing that provided continuity. They have representative and strong boards. They are engaged in the community and with broader community networks. It is obvious that they have a tenant base to engage with the community and provide services. They provide a base for other [non-housing] services—primary/preventative health, family support et cetera (interview, government worker).

According to this informant, this approach is based on an articulated policy position about the value of Indigenous organisations and their relationships with mainstream organisations. They reported learning from initiative that:

It is not about mainstream service opening up access but also can be about Indigenous organisations taking over service delivery (interview, government worker).

The importance of building local relationships across sectors to attract support for tenants facing difficulties in sustaining their tenancies was emphasised by both public housing and Indigenous providers.

Public housing has built up relationships because we were desperate for supports. Now organisations contact us to let us know when there are problems (group discussion, public housing worker).

Informal relationships are often important and we need to negotiate—we are working with human beings after all (interview, manager, IHO).

One issue of particular significance that was raised during discussions with case study informants was the importance of housing providers navigating relationships with homelessness services. This reflects high levels of Indigenous homelessness and the limited capacity of the homelessness service system.

SAAP services keep changing the goalposts. Some services have strict guidelines. Never have been able to refer anyone to them, it's very frustrating. Lots of services but little accommodation: a four-week wait for early intervention referral (interview, Indigenous housing provider).

Participants pointed to the limitations of homelessness service provider networks, especially where the membership is large and transient, which has implications for building trust and effective working relationships.

We participate in a housing and homelessness network. Includes all housing and support providers. 'Kinda' good and not. Good to have all players around the table. Not so good because more issues can be discussed in smaller groups where there is more trust (interview, public housing manager).

Housing and homelessness network ... Doesn't work because some people won't discuss issues. Dominated by some players. No continuity—lots of change in staff (interview, worker, Indigenous housing provider).

Others took a pragmatic approach and suggested:

We should all sit at table and discuss what do we do—what clients and criteria. Then we all know, so we don't give clients the run around (interview, manager, IHO).

Future directions

The policies and institutions of the social housing system have the potential to significantly influence outcomes for Indigenous people in diverse ways, such as helping to prevent or overcome homelessness, supporting aspirations for, and the transition to, home ownership, and contributing to social wellbeing and economic participation goals. This potential is far from being reached, in part because of increasing pre-occupation with rigid and standardised policy settings and narrow outcomes as discussed in Chapter 4. If broader policy objectives are to be pursued, then social housing policy and institutional settings need to facilitate the engagement of social housing providers in a broader set of activities and connections across the spectrum of Indigenous affairs.

Our findings suggest that priorities in such an approach would include more effective linkages between social housing and homelessness responses for Indigenous people, greater attention to facilitating pathways to private rental and home ownership and new ways of engaging with related services that are utilised by disadvantaged Indigenous households. The ideas and innovations canvassed in our research show that Indigenous organisations have much to contribute to this agenda.

5.2 Intercultural practice

In this section we examine three aspects of intercultural practice that emerged as recurring themes from the case studies. The first relates to workforce issues, including the roles and recruitment of Indigenous staff and the capacity of non-Indigenous staff to work appropriately and effectively with Indigenous clients. The issues surrounding the service delivery modes and settings are then discussed in order to identify the barriers and opportunities they create in working with Indigenous clients and communities. Finally, approaches to tenant and community engagement issues are canvassed.

5.2.1 Housing workforce issues

Staffing in human services is widely recognised as an important element of cultural appropriateness in service delivery, including recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff

and cultural proficiency of non-Indigenous staff (Foster et al. 2010; Milligan et al. 2010). The case studies provide some insight into the complexity and intractability of achieving either of these outcomes in practice.

The Indigenous workforce in housing providers across the case studies was small and variable, with the highest shares of Indigenous workers found in Indigenous-specific organisations. Mainstream government and community housing agencies generally had low levels and, in some cases, no Indigenous housing staff. Indigenous workers in management positions were especially rare, particularly in mainstream organisations. Many participants confirmed the preference of many Indigenous clients to deal with Indigenous staff with whom they can communicate and feel safe. They expressed concern about the dearth of Indigenous housing staff:

Aboriginal clients can become frustrated because they think everything's mainstreamed and they would prefer to discuss with one Aboriginal person face-to-face. There aren't a lot of Aboriginal people working in the mainstream services, which makes this difficult. (group discussion, Aboriginal worker)

We need more Indigenous staff in the public housing office, but we need the right ones. Need to make more effort. Seven years ago we had the separate (Aboriginal housing) program. It was predominantly Indigenous staff and had great relationships with community and tenants. Over time those staff left after amalgamating and we haven't recruited more. Culture of the organisation is important [to attracting and retaining staff]. (interview, government worker)

Managers in mainstream public and community housing organisations struggled with the problem of recruiting Indigenous staff and while some had views about the causes of this situation and suggestions for solutions, others were more pessimistic about the potential to attract Indigenous workers to social housing jobs.

We market in the Koori Mail but the process of responding through recruitment processes, specific formats, are too hard. We have almost no applications. (interview, government manager)

We used to have an annual trainee and have had Indigenous trainees—one went to [another government agency] and one transferred to [capital city]—two others struggled to perform and finally left. It felt like a huge failure. (interview, government manager)

Recognition of the difficulties of attracting Indigenous workers to social housing jobs had led to different strategies for recruitment, besides print-based advertisements. For example, Housing NSW has planned a recruitment drive for western NSW that will rely more heavily on word-of-mouth:

Before the recruitment drive, we intend to go out to the communities and contact all of the Aboriginal networks to let people know that [government agency] will be looking to employ Aboriginal people and we will ask people who they think would be a good person for the job. (interview, government manager)

As discussed in Chapter 3, the recruitment strategy of Housing NSW in the Dubbo and western NSW areas also incorporates a specialist role for the Indigenous staff working at the client interface that does not include compliance work (such as issuing notices of tenancy breaches).

One barrier for Indigenous recruitment was identified as the specialist nature of skills required in social housing, which raises the issue of how do potential workers acquire and develop housing management skills and knowledge.

One good thing is Cert. IV [see Section 3.3.3]. It supports cross-sector training and development. (interview, government worker)

As well as facing difficulties in attracting staff, retention of Indigenous housing staff was identified as a particular problem for mainstream services:

There is a high rate of burnout for Aboriginal staff because they are working 24/7—people expect you to respond to their issues. (interview, Indigenous community member and government worker)

In Townsville and Dandenong, losses of Indigenous staff were associated with structural changes that altered the agencies' specific focus on Indigenous service delivery. In Victoria, following the transfer of SOMIH to the AHV, the DHS(V) no longer has any dedicated Indigenous housing staff positions and at the time of the site visit to Townsville, the local housing service centre had no Indigenous staff. An Indigenous community elder and tenant in Townsville bemoaned the loss of Indigenous staff following the integration of the identified SOMIH program with public housing and the subsequent loss of local Indigenous staff.

When the change happened it was very hard. Before you were listened to and there were Indigenous staff ... before you had people who were more understanding. Now only one [public housing staff member] is understanding. If I take clients up there ... they don't understand. It is very difficult. (participant, group discussion)

Some government interviewees also pointed to the loss of Indigenous staff to other government agencies in search of better conditions.

Staff can get better pay and conditions in other jobs and not work as hard. (interview, government worker)

Some participants highlighted the personal difficulties that can arise for Indigenous staff working in either Indigenous-specific and mainstream housing organisations because of the likelihood that they know or are related to their clients. This is a reflection of both the heavy reliance of Indigenous people on social housing and the close relationships within Indigenous communities.

It's difficult for Indigenous staff to work in housing—you are likely to have family or be a tenant. That creates problems when you are in the community and know people. Boundary issues must be hard. (interview, government manager)

It is difficult for Indigenous staff to avoid working outside their strict silo role. (interview, government worker)

Non-Indigenous staff working with Indigenous tenants also discussed the challenges they face, what culturally appropriate service delivery means to them and how they developed the skills, knowledge and relationships they need in their work. Experienced workers described the process of achieving cultural competency as a two-way interactive process that is as much about relationships and trust as it is about acquiring cultural awareness and adapting practice. A common theme was that generic cultural awareness training is insufficient.

Sometimes there is a fear by non-Indigenous staff that they may say something wrong or make a mistake. You have to take some risks. Just a little knowledge and once the trust is there others will come to me. I was inducted by a community member who told clients—you listen to this person—he is my uncle. (group discussion, non-Indigenous public housing worker)

We need better cultural awareness. We do the generic programs but it needs to be structurally incorporated. (group discussion, non-Indigenous community housing worker)

[It's] not enough to have a social justice perspective. I think you have to ... understand the impact of colonisation, dispossession et cetera. Some staff get so concerned that it becomes about them rather than how can we bend policies to make it work. (group discussion, public housing worker)

As well as the important roles played by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous client service officers, the role of senior managers was also identified as particularly important for positive intercultural practices within workplaces and service delivery practice. Senior managers were seen as having an important role in providing leadership for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and setting standards for culturally appropriate service:

Leadership is important and setting direction ... making sure new staff understand and receive training. (group discussion, government worker)

The CEO is not Indigenous but runs a flexible and culturally sensitive organisation. It takes time to build a culture. (interview, government worker)

Future directions

Providing culturally adapted and appropriate service responses for increasing numbers of Indigenous social housing applicants and tenants requires Indigenous staff across all levels within housing service organisations, as well as non-Indigenous staff with the necessary knowledge, skills, personal attributes and connections.

While there are indications that most housing agencies have some policy intent to provide culturally responsive services, as evidenced by formally documented Indigenous workforce strategies, service delivery strategies and reconciliation plans, these do not appear to be impacting on the front-line services provided to clients. In each of the study sites, there were a small number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous housing workers and agencies committed to improving services for Indigenous clients and demonstrating promising practice. However, much more needs to be done both to attract and retain Indigenous staff in housing client service roles and to improve the general level of cultural proficiency of non-Indigenous staff.

As highlighted by Foster et al. (2010) in their review of literature and documents concerning the Indigenous workforce in the human services field, the housing sector lags other sectors such as health, education and childcare in developing specific policies and strategies to achieve greater and more effective Indigenous workforce participation in all jurisdictions. Following the review, AHURI Ltd 'is initiating a program to increase the number, capacity and seniority of Indigenous people working across the Australian housing sector' (Foster et al. 2010, p.16).

The findings of our study point to some specific areas of good practice that could be more widely adopted in the social housing sub-sector. These include: leadership by managers in developing an inclusive culture; support for Indigenous staff to manage the tensions and pressures they face in their dual roles as employees and community members; locally driven recruitment strategies that take advantage of local opportunities; and providing development opportunities and mentoring for non-Indigenous staff to enhance their skills and confidence to engage with Indigenous tenants and in Indigenous settings.

5.2.2 *Service delivery modes*

Findings identified in the literature regarding the need for modes of service delivery to Indigenous people to take account of the communication styles, cultural norms, socio-economic conditions and lifestyles of Indigenous, clients are collaborated by evidence from the case studies (Lumby & Farelly 2009; Thomas 2002).

Across the three case study areas, informants told us that reliance on formal written communication can be problematic and there is a need for face-to-face communication with tenants.

... there are particular access issues for those who can't read and write and those who move around and lose contact with the Department. Links with [Indigenous housing provider] help them to stay connected. (group discussion, public housing worker)

We need flexibility in communicating with people rather than relying on mail which doesn't work. (group discussion, public housing worker)

The service delivery setting is also important, with Indigenous settings rather than government or mainstream offices preferred by many Indigenous social housing applicants and tenants. The access barriers faced by Indigenous people in accessing a public housing service centre in a large government office building were acknowledged by one informant:

... hard to come here. It's difficult to find the way. Many Indigenous clients won't come up in the lift. So we do a lot of business in foyer or through outreach. We also provide an outreach service, every fortnight, to an Indigenous health service and to a homelessness drop-in service. (interview, public housing manager)

For experienced housing workers in mainstream services, the need for flexibility to accommodate cultural norms is self-evident.

Cultural appropriateness—what does it mean? You just need to be open. You don't have to read the history [in books]—there are lots of stories about people's experiences. You need to work out how to meet your requirements but work with them. Indigenous clients are 10 times more likely to have applications cancelled. (group discussion, public housing worker)

... we look for ways around and choose to ignore some issues. Need to use discretion and apply policies flexibly. We operate outside of the policy to survive. (group discussion, public housing worker)

The government doesn't understand ... if you have visitors—well they are your family. (group discussion, Indigenous housing worker)

You can't use the same box of tricks for everyone. (group discussion, public housing worker)

The problems associated with overcrowding and visitors were a recurring theme in the interviews with housing workers. Various strategies are employed in an effort to work positively with tenants to address these issues within the constraints of kinship obligations and social housing policies.

Our systems are designed for households that don't change much, not designed for the fluidity and mobility of Indigenous community. It's so rigid. ... People visiting is always seen as a problem rather than in a positive light. (interview, government worker)

[Government department] has developed strategies to work with tenants such as arriving [at the house] with prior agreement from the tenant to 'grow' [at the visitors] or provide a breach notice so the tenant can use that to manage the situation. We also do work with tenants about house rules. We need to get the support services together to discuss these issues and encourage tenants to come and talk to us about issues. (group discussion, public housing worker)

Flexible local strategies for addressing the needs of Indigenous clients were seen by many participants as essential, although they acknowledge that some of the more intractable service delivery issues require programmatic or structural solutions as discussed in Chapter 4. Sustaining tenancies was identified as an ongoing issue across all sites and managing the problems associated with high concentrations of disadvantage in public housing estates was particularly an issue in locations within Townsville and Dubbo.

The Townsville public housing intensive tenancy management team, described in Chapter 3, is one example of a local response to the challenges of managing community relations and sustaining tenancies in environments characterised by prioritising applicants with the highest needs for allocation to unsuitable housing and where there is limited choice in housing type or location. Factors identified as contributing to the reported success of the intensive tenancy management team in Townsville include: active outreach and engagement with tenants in their preferred setting; the experience and commitment of staff; management support for flexibility and innovation; and active engagement with extended family, community elders, Indigenous workers in other agencies and a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous service agencies.

In both Dubbo and Townsville, a major challenge was identified as responding, within existing policy settings, to the needs of Indigenous people from remote areas and discrete communities relocating to major regional centres. This underlines the observations we made in the Positioning Paper and in Chapter 2 about the difficulty inherent in clearly distinguishing between remote and urban Indigenous housing issues. Practical challenges for Indigenous families moving from discrete communities to urban areas and the need for flexibility by their social housing providers are illustrated by issues faced when transferring Palm Islanders to mainstream social housing in Townsville.

The most significant problems are for people relocating from Palm Island. It takes time to make the transition and they don't move straight in. First they may not have furniture; or they may have furniture and have to have it barged. Or they might wait until the school term ends. They are often lonely—they want space but miss the supports. (interview, public housing worker)

Estate renewal is one strategic response adopted in both Townsville and Dubbo in recent years to address intractable problems in public housing estates with high concentrations of Indigenous tenants. The Dubbo example highlights systemic inadequacies in policy, portfolio management and engagement with Indigenous communities, as discussed in Chapter 4. In Townsville under previous community renewal²⁶ initiatives, significant improvements were achieved in estates, such as in the suburb of Garbutt, through community engagement and capacity-building strategies combined with upgrading and reconfiguration of public housing stock. In recognition of the lost momentum since community renewal ceased, proposed strategies to improve services in Townsville under the new state-wide Urban and

²⁶ Community Renewal was a program administered by the former Queensland Department of Housing commencing in mid-1990s and ending in the late 2000s.

Regional Indigenous Strategy, include initiatives styled on past successful community renewal projects and focusing on locations with concentrations of Indigenous public housing tenancies. In Dubbo there was a shared concern that resources for this kind of program were often too time-limited (three years in the case of East Dubbo) and that a return to 'business as usual' meant that valuable gains could be quickly eroded (interviews, government employees, community members).

Future directions

The evidence from our case studies supports previous research regarding the sorts of adaptive service delivery practices needed to provide appropriate and responsive services to Indigenous clients and to avoid systemic and indirect discrimination. These practices emphasise face-to-face and personalised communication, flexible interpretation of policy, investment in relationship building and understanding of local cultural norms and lifestyles. The challenge for mainstream public housing is that such adaptive practices run counter to contemporary service delivery trends that reflect de-personalised services, shifting responsibility to clients, reliance on electronic and written communication, standardisation, complexity in policy settings, reduced autonomy of front-line workers and increased surveillance of policy compliance (that is underpinned by stronger regulation of neighbourhood disputes and anti-social behaviour).

If the social housing system is to respond more successfully to the challenges of improving access, tenancy sustainability and wellbeing for Indigenous clients, then a comprehensive review of current service delivery modes will be required, informed by the sort of evidence gathered in this study.

Central to future success is shifting direction from 'one size fits all' approaches and embracing a diversity of service options and practices that can respond to the different needs and cultural values of Indigenous people and provide choices that empower Indigenous people and communities to be active agents in creating their housing futures. This means privileging the principle of diversity over that of equality and creating a genuinely intercultural space for the provision of social housing.

5.2.3 Engagement of tenants and community

While there is much rhetoric about the value of tenant and community engagement in the delivery of social housing, the evidence indicates a very mixed picture in practice. We identified widespread frustration of Indigenous tenants, workers and community members regarding the absence, inappropriateness and tokenism of opportunities for participation in service delivery and policy processes.

Part of the problem with the bureaucratic system is that we have non-Aboriginal people telling us what to do. Until they take note of what Aboriginal people have to say we're not going anywhere. (interview, Aboriginal community sector worker)

For Indigenous people who participated in the study, housing is an issue of utmost importance and they report high levels of interest and 'ownership' within their communities around Indigenous housing issues. The evident sense of ownership is associated with beliefs that Indigenous-specific housing was funded with 'Aboriginal' funds and/or is located on 'Aboriginal' land. While the specifics vary from place to place, persistent narratives run through Indigenous communities about housing, including, in Townsville, an often reported belief within the local community that SOMIH housing was funded from 'stolen wages'.

Long-term [Indigenous] tenants front up saying that we have been paying rent for 34 years and this housing was bought with Indigenous funds. This is a particular issue for succession of tenancies. (interview, public housing worker)

In addition, many in the Indigenous community worked hard to establish Indigenous housing organisations in past decades and have great pride and are attachment to them.

Elders have invested a lot in establishing Indigenous organisations and are proud that Yumba Meta is successful. (group discussion, Indigenous community member)

Given this context, it is understandable that Indigenous people report anger and frustration that their voice and influence over Indigenous housing matters is diminishing. We encountered widespread concern about recent trends that are seen from an Indigenous perspective as:

- SOMIH being absorbed into mainstream public housing provision in several jurisdictions.
- Opportunities for tenant and community participation evaporating.
- Uncertainty about the future of Indigenous housing organisations given challenges about their financial viability, future funding and the impacts of additional regulation.
- The demolition of formal structures for Indigenous involvement in decision making.

The case studies highlighted the vital role of Indigenous organisations in providing avenues for community engagement at strategic and operational levels. This occurs through a diversity of organisational forms that include local Indigenous service organisations, such as Yumba Meta and the Bunurong Co-operative, in regional assemblies such as Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (western NSW) and through state-wide government and non-government structures such as AHO and the AHV, respectively. There are also emergent stakeholder networks such as the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Coalition (QATSIHSC 2010) and the National Indigenous Housing Roundtable (National Shelter 2010) that have the potential (with appropriate support from government and from non-Indigenous community partners) to advocate for, and inform, the forward agenda at a strategic level from an Indigenous perspective.

We need to ensure that Aboriginal organisations are part of mainstream networks and are seen as part of broader community ... help them to see themselves as mainstream [big] players. (interview, government manager)

At a local level, mainstream housing agencies, especially public housing, reported the challenges of engaging effectively with tenants and Indigenous communities and recognised this as an area where they are at a disadvantage compared to Indigenous providers.

There is no structure to engage with the Indigenous community. We struggled to get an Indigenous tenant group up and it hasn't met for two years. Many Indigenous tenants [who are interested in the tenants group] work and they meet at night when we have no staff available to meet with them. They are not prepared to work with [mainstream] Regional Tenants Group and the policy wouldn't support two regional tenant groups. (interview, public housing worker)

Indigenous organisations are better connected to community and can engage better and be tougher than we can. We struggle with working with high-need

[previously homeless] tenants and all cultural issues. (group discussion, public housing provider)

This theme of IHOs' special relationships with tenants and the broader Indigenous community was repeated in all the study sites. It was often associated with explicit strategies by mainstream services to link with Indigenous organisations in order to use such partnerships to better engage with Indigenous communities and to create gateways to the broader service system.

What happens is that if you are a successful IHO then you are called on for everything, you are consulted and on committees and expected to represent Indigenous issues. (interview, government worker and Indigenous community member)

Indigenous organisations offer a lot of different networks so people can come in and get information or referral. (group discussion, Indigenous community member)

The embedded nature of Indigenous organisations was also reported to have some negative potential, such as where kinship obligations and other cultural norms create conflicts of interest or lead to nepotism, and make it difficult to enforce tenant or landlord obligations. However, the positive potential of close connections with their community are also considerable where IHOs enjoy community respect, an intimate knowledge of the community, understanding of the difficulties faced by tenants and the ability to leverage support networks.

[IHO] is so good at managing properties and tenancies. They have very little turnover and are hard on tenants. There is greater capacity for IHOs to be tough. (interview, public housing manager)

An Indigenous community member expanded on the way this works:

We stick to the rules and tell tenants what they have to do. Sometimes they get in difficulties—funerals and that. [CEO] goes and sees them and communicates face-to-face. We understand what goes on with Indigenous people. Once we know there's a problem, we go and talk to them and get them back on track. Tenants respect the organisation. Tenants are naughty but we will link them to [support service] or whoever and help them. (group discussion, Indigenous community member and IHO committee member)

The accessibility of IHOs and their ability to disseminate information about their services was a common theme:

The Murri grapevine operates so other services like [Indigenous health service] know and those services tell people to come here. (interview, Indigenous housing worker)

A broader perspective on the importance of Indigenous organisations was provided by an Aboriginal Affairs project officer who said:

Indigenous organisations are the hub for Indigenous communities. IHOs are operating across country towns. If they are working well you can add other services to create services and jobs. It is very important for the community that there is a strong local organisation ... people from [city] don't know what is going on, on the ground. (interview, government worker and community member)

Future directions

The ideas and practice of Indigenous self-determination and participation in decision making continue to be promoted both by policy-makers and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations. The findings of our study indicate that applying these concepts can be problematic. On the one hand, the case studies provide indications of a retreat in institutional support for the idea of self-determination and frustration by community members about the loss of opportunities for engagement in policy and service delivery decision-making fora. On the other hand we also identified some new approaches emerging that signify changes in thinking and ways of interacting within both Indigenous and mainstream domains.

The signals are mixed and there is much to do in order for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and communities to achieve a meaningful role and voice in influencing how social housing is provided. However, there are indications of new and effective voices emerging within the Indigenous housing sector with support from non-Indigenous advocates. The challenge is to provide the institutional arrangements and opportunities for tenants, Indigenous housing organisations and community leaders to participate in creating truly inclusive social housing services.

A starting point is to build on existing structures through more adequate resourcing and capacity building and by providing opportunities for genuine engagement. Time must be allowed for the maturation of new engagement structures and the development of capacity within both mainstream and Indigenous institutions if strong relationships and intercultural spaces are to flourish.

5.3 Concluding comments

This chapter reports on and discusses the case study findings regarding service delivery practices in the social housing system with a particular emphasis on issues of service integration and culturally proficient practice. The key findings are summarised below.

- While some progress is being made in creating linkages between Indigenous, public and community housing sectors and providers, more commitment and direction is required to improve integration. Top-down integrative initiatives, especially those that impose mainstream policies on Indigenous clients and housing providers, can be counter-productive to local integration unless they are supported by local implementation strategies that provide good information, build networks and relationships and empower front-line workers to apply policies flexibly.
- At the local level, there is a high level of recognition of the need for strong relationships with other service systems, especially in order to support tenants to sustain tenancies and provide pathways to alternative housing solutions. Program linkages, including between housing and homelessness and pathways to the private rental market and home ownership, were identified by local informants as priorities for improving the housing situation within Indigenous communities. This requires a more holistic policy approach and more flexible deployment of resources from governments that, while talked about, have not been forthcoming.
- There is a continuing need for better workforce strategies that address the recruitment, retention and development of Indigenous staff and the cultural proficiency of non-Indigenous staff. Such strategies need to embrace a wide range of issues, including attracting Indigenous staff to housing, workplace culture, training and mentoring for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, career progression opportunities for Indigenous staff and managing the inevitable and

inherent pressures and tensions between work and family/community obligations for Indigenous staff who are embedded in local Indigenous communities. Having Indigenous people in leadership roles and at all other levels of the mainstream service system should be key targets.

- The barriers faced by many Indigenous social housing clients in accessing services and the lack of flexibility in service delivery practices and options must be addressed. Initiatives that should be actively pursued include more Indigenous staff, culturally safe and welcoming service settings, greater use of outreach and partnering with well-connected Indigenous services. Such service modes will help to improve access, empower clients and sustain tenancies.
- Much greater attention needs to be given to establishing or nurturing opportunities for tenant and community engagement. This requires an understanding of Indigenous community structures and institutions, relationship building, time, resources and creation of spaces and processes that are conducive to meaningful engagement.

6 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents our broad conclusions from our research. In it, we:

- Summarise our findings in relation to the delivery of social housing services to Indigenous households in urban areas (research questions 1–5).
- Posit a set of principles and associated strategies that are intended to promote culturally appropriate housing policies, drive improvements in the social housing service delivery system for Indigenous households and ensure moves to service integration are influenced by an appropriate cultural framework (research questions 6 and 7).
- Reflect briefly on the conceptual underpinnings of our findings.

Currently, there is a COAG requirement for all state and territory governments to develop urban and regional Indigenous service strategies to contribute to goals and targets for ‘closing the gap’ in Indigenous disadvantage. This provides an opportunity for each jurisdiction to develop a new social housing service strategy, which we hope can be informed by the findings and principles outlined in this chapter.

6.1 Summary of findings

This section draws on the findings of the Positioning Paper for this study (Milligan et al. 2010) which sets out the initial framework and context for our empirical research, as well as a selection of additional concepts and changing ideas about service delivery to Indigenous peoples and communities that we identify in Chapter 2 of this report, and our analysis of the service system in three selected urban and regional locations in NSW, Queensland and Victoria, which we presented in Chapters 3–5.

Our broad findings can be grouped as follows.

1. Current patterns of Indigenous involvement in social housing.
2. The strategic framework for service delivery.
3. The institutional framework for service delivery.
4. Service practice and culture.

6.1.1 *Current patterns of Indigenous involvement in social housing*

Social housing is a very significant tenure for Indigenous households in Australia. Officially, around 30 per cent of this population group live in this tenure but the actual share is likely to be higher due to multiple households living together in overcrowded situations within social housing, under-reporting of Indigeneity and other factors. Demand for social housing from Indigenous applicants is also high due to population and household growth and lower average incomes in this group, significant numbers of homeless Indigenous people, and discriminatory barriers that many Indigenous households experience in accessing private rental and home ownership. Reliance on social housing among Indigenous people has been increasing in recent years and this situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future under current housing market conditions and policy settings, although governments aspire to bring tenure status for Australia’s first peoples more into line with those of other Australians.

Although we do not have recent data, it can be projected from the latest statistical sources that nearly 80 per cent of Indigenous households living in social housing (broadly defined) are located in urban and regional areas (i.e. non-remote locations) (Milligan et al. 2010, Table 5). This demonstrates how vital housing conditions in these areas are to considerations of how to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage

across Australia. Crucially, all governments have acknowledged that appropriate and healthy housing is a key building block for the 'closing the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage agenda in all geographic domains (COAG 2008b). Since 2008 state and territory governments have agreed to take primary responsibility for the provision of housing services to, and the housing outcomes of, Indigenous people living in non-remote areas.

At first glance the social housing service system for Indigenous households appears to be quite diversified, but much of this diversity is geographic, rather than offering real choice to individual clients, especially in urban areas. In metropolitan cities, provision is predominantly by government providers (93% of dwellings in 1996), whereas in remote areas it has been (until recently) mostly through community-based Indigenous providers (81% of dwellings in 1996).²⁷ In non-metropolitan urban areas there is a somewhat greater place for Indigenous providers than in metropolitan areas—about one-quarter of dwellings in 1996 in these locations was offered through community-based providers, predominantly IHOs. Services offered by mainstream community housing to this group have been almost negligible²⁸ but this is changing quite quickly. Over the last three years, the share of Indigenous tenancies in mainstream community housing increased five-fold, although from a low base (see Chapter 1). Given the growth of community housing that is occurring and planned (Australian Government 2010a), community housing is becoming an increasingly important option for addressing Indigenous housing need.

At the same time that mainstream (non-Indigenous) community housing has been growing in Australia (under strong government impetus), the Commonwealth government and several state and territory governments have been retracting support and funding for Indigenous community housing organisations, especially in rural and remote areas, where public housing management of community-owned dwellings is being imposed for the first time. This move represents another chapter in a long and complex story of government policy setting and attempted reform in this sector—alternatively engaging with Indigenous organisations and communities and promoting self-determination, and then retreating from that position and neglecting critical issues, such as maintenance funding (Slockee 2009). Unsurprisingly, there is a strong legacy of distrust and alienation felt among Indigenous stakeholders as a result of this. In two of the jurisdictions examined in detail in this study (NSW and Victoria), current state government policies and strategies support the development of stronger Indigenous community housing organisations, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3, but this position is subject to political change.

6.1.2 The strategic framework for service delivery

Our research shows that policies in the mainstream social housing system in urban areas are, by and large, not responsive to the needs and cultural values of Indigenous clients, except in a limited number of specific areas, such as recent interventions to better sustain Indigenous tenancies at risk. Social housing policies overall are increasingly geared to address only the most immediate and urgent housing needs and to optimise efficiency in the service system at the expense of, and sometimes in direct contradiction with, a broader set of goals that privileges building community capital, and getting the best outcomes for tenants not only in terms of having affordable and appropriate housing, but in influencing how this contributes to their wellbeing and rights to economic and social participation. This environment was widely acknowledged by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous local services staff in

²⁷ Figures calculated from Milligan et al. 2010, Table 5

²⁸ For possible explanations, see Milligan et al. 2010, 28

our case study areas as being detrimental to many Indigenous clients. However, local staff feel powerless to do much about it, except in some instances to operate outside the rules.

Policy changes in social housing are mostly imposed unilaterally from the centre, seem to occur frequently and hastily and are poorly explained to both front-line staff and clients. National and state-level policy discussions and policy thinking are not informed by Indigenous views and knowledge most of the time, because there is no framework to enable this. While the establishment of the strategic government agency, the AHO, in NSW was intended to help address this gap in that state, that agency's engagement in the strategic policy process has varied over time. Factors contributing to this situation have stemmed from both capacity issues in that small agency and from the embedded siloed culture of other government agencies. When culturally responsive policy changes do emerge in the social housing system, they tend to result from a response to a crisis, rather than being proactive or integrated into the culture of the institutions of the system. Place-based initiatives that are well intended (such as neighbourhood renewal programs) are often short-lived or under-resourced and thus fail to produce the long-term benefits hoped. Successful changes may also not be replicated in other areas with similar needs because of lack of resources.

Underpinning these major shortcomings are serious systemic problems in the social housing system that stem from its small and poorly configured dwelling portfolio (compared to needs) and a chronic lack of funding for investment in growing and renewing this portfolio. When new resources do become available for Indigenous clients and providers (such as occurred under the NBESP) they are generally not deployed according to a transparent process, and there appears to be little if any local stakeholder input into decisions about allocation of new resources.

Governments are increasingly calling for more pathways for Indigenous people into home ownership and the private rental market, both to take pressure off the social housing system and to equalise housing tenure opportunities (e.g. COAG 2009). However, this broad policy goal is highly ambitious²⁹ and the resources, strategies and mechanisms for achieving it are under-developed. Meanwhile, some previously effective pathways have collapsed or lost momentum with the demise of ATSIC and other cumulative policy changes. When new market-based program opportunities are announced (such as NRAS), Indigenous organisations are often the last to know. In the very demanding service environment that they face (see below), public housing authorities do not have the focus and capacity to give priority to these broader policy and program developments and to promote more integrated housing policy thinking. Dedicated policy effort informed by strong community input will be required to create more successful pathways to alternative housing tenures for urban Indigenous households. More fundamentally, the evidence about affordability and discrimination in many local housing markets shows this policy direction is not a panacea. Social housing will remain the mainstay for many urban Indigenous dwellers for the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, our findings show there is very little meaningful information and evaluation concerned with the appropriateness of social housing policies for Indigenous clients. Performance data related to social housing is skewed to business performance and efficiency measures, and so-called outcome measures mostly measure activity levels (such as the number of new Indigenous tenancies created) not

²⁹ To illustrate the challenge, Altman et al. (2008) calculated the number of years to achieve parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in rates of home ownership/purchasing to be greater than 100 years based on either long-run trends since 1971 or post-1996 trends.

service outcomes by Indigenous status (e.g. stability of Indigenous tenancies). Nor do the methods that are used capture local knowledge or direct impacts on clients. Even core indicators, such as a measure of crowding, are not informed by Indigenous perspectives (Memmott 2010). Systematic evaluations of mainstream services never take place and evaluations of new initiatives often occur well after the cycle of policy reform moves on, if at all. This means that the lessons arising from many positive initiatives, such as those found in our case studies, are often not fed back into policy making and thus do not become a catalyst for policy changes that respond to lessons from implementation.

6.1.3 *The institutional framework for service delivery*

The provision of social housing to Indigenous clients in urban areas is already heavily mainstreamed. In areas with larger Indigenous populations, such as Dubbo and Townsville, Indigenous people are one of the largest needs groups being assisted by the SHAs. While, SHAs in Australia remain under intense pressure to meet high needs, reconfigure their stock and support their tenants, their operating environment is centralised and bureaucratic. They are subject to significant political influence (such as occurred in West Dubbo), operations are in deficit because of rising service costs and falling rents per tenant³⁰ and there is a large administrative load and high staff turnover. Indigenous employment is also at low levels. In this context, public housing authorities simply cannot provide the level and quality of services and make the service connections with other agencies that are needed to assist many Indigenous clients effectively and appropriately. It therefore makes no sense to be placing even greater reliance on this part of the service system to respond to the needs of this group.

Instead, we argue that governments need to give much more serious consideration to developing additional options in the community and Indigenous-run community housing sectors. Having established that position, we have also found that the Indigenous-run component of the service delivery system is in a state of considerable flux and there are divergent trends across state and territory governments, some supporting constructive reform and others retreating from supporting this sector. At the same time, former ATSI-funded housing owned by Indigenous organisations is now subject to compliance with new Commonwealth and state government directives that have been imposed on Indigenous organisations creating more ill feeling and uncertainty about their future.

Victoria has led the way in developing a positive approach to the IHO sector by establishing a strong and viable Indigenous-controlled housing provider that has been methodically developed and nurtured through a long-standing collaboration between the state government and the Indigenous community (see Chapter 4). The keys to the viability of this new arrangement are to be found in economies of scale and potential to leverage future growth that have been created through the transfer of nearly 1200 dwellings (previously acquired with dedicated funding for Aboriginal housing) to a regulated not-for-profit corporation, AHV. AHV operates state-wide because of the small Indigenous population in that state. However, in other more populous jurisdictions, including NSW, Queensland and WA, regional or locally based services, which are desirable to facilitate local responsiveness and engagement, could operate at scale in locations with large Indigenous populations.

Through its AHO and reforms to the *Land Rights Act* (1983) related to social housing, the NSW government has been pursuing significant sector restructuring and specialist

³⁰ This deficit is offset by external funding under the NAHA (and previously the CSHA) that is intended for stock renewal and growth (Hall & Berry 2006).

regulation with a view to building the capacity of well-performed Indigenous-run housing services, as we discuss in Chapter 3. However, although a government commitment was made in 1998 to transfer SOMIH assets into this sector to build scale and choice, this has not occurred (Milligan et al. 2010).

In Queensland, SOMIH dwellings that were earmarked as Indigenous housing have been absorbed into the public housing mainstream portfolio (a direction that other jurisdictions may follow, in the absence of Commonwealth sanctions) and thus are no longer capable of being adapted for more specialised service provision or to leverage different housing service options. Queensland also does not have a policy and resource allocation framework for shaping the future directions of its fragmented and dispersed IHO sector. In our case study in Queensland, the value and potential of this sector to play a bigger part in the service system was clearly demonstrated, through the example of Yumba Meta in Townsville. This organisation is a successful and well-regarded Indigenous housing service provider, which has positioned itself as a key player by reforming its organisational governance, driving higher standards of service and service improvements and by seeking accreditation and building collaborative relations with the mainstream service system.

Government and stakeholder support for urban Indigenous housing organisations to become bigger mainstream players would emulate similar directions in the urban housing services system in Canada, which we discussed in the Positioning Paper (Milligan et al. 2010, Chapter 4). This would also be consistent with more widely observed moves to greater service system interdependencies and integration (discussed in Chapter 2), while also preserving self-determination principles and Indigenous values and knowledge.

There are also growing opportunities for increasing the housing service options for Indigenous clients through utilising mainstream community housing providers. In all three case study areas, we found community housing organisations that were actively engaging in serving Indigenous clients, often in close partnership with local Indigenous organisations. Greater collaboration between these two sub-sectors, which have a shared broad social ethos, is likely to be mutually beneficial, especially as service growth is being directed toward community housing.³¹

6.1.4 Service practice and culture

A major deficiency in the service system identified consistently in each jurisdiction by participants, was communication to Indigenous clients and stakeholders (such as local information gatekeepers) about the policies and rules of the social housing service system and about client rights and responsibilities (e.g. related to income declarations, housing maintenance and the operations of administrative appeals and tenancy dispute resolution processes). This had a number of dimensions, including unfathomable policies and changeable rules, poor-quality information from undertrained staff and lack of personal communication with tenants.

Despite the enormously difficult environment in which social housing practitioners operate, there were several positive and encouraging signs of agencies and individuals in the service system tackling issues and responding well to specific needs at the local level. These included the recruitment and retention strategy for western NSW; the well-regarded informal dialogue that operates across the social housing sub-sectors in Townsville (focused on client issues); and specific collaborations between mainstream community housing and Indigenous housing organisations in

³¹ Housing ministers have set targets for up to 35 per cent of social housing to be managed by non-government providers by 2014 (Housing Ministers Council 2009). However, there is no specific target for involvement of IHOs.

Dandenong and Dubbo. Another affirmative example has been the way that the sudden and controversial decision to abandon the West Dubbo housing estate was handled and implemented through local endeavour, particularly involving government housing officials, Indigenous bodies within government, central government agencies and the Indigenous community working together more effectively.

In all three case study areas we also found promising examples of emerging networks of Indigenous agencies and staff that have good potential to collaborate and positively influence governments and the wider community. Such networks need to be resourced and utilised on a regular and more systematic basis, as highlighted in Section 6.2.

What has been instructive from the case studies is the potential at the local level to improve services through fostering close working relationships between Indigenous agencies and networks and the mainstream service system, (i.e. to develop a culturally appropriate approach to service integration). Nevertheless, while much good will and skill were evident at local sites, the dominant power of government agencies /agents and the extent of top-down decision making was constraining what could, and in our view should, be greater capacity for local flexibility and adaptation of policy goals and principles. Achieving local effectiveness in the social housing system will also require better mechanisms for local input into strategic policy making, program planning and resource allocations and a better balance between accountability for client outcomes and service efficiencies, and between quantitative and qualitative measures of service performance.

In terms of the staff–client interface, our research endorses previous studies of mainstream human service systems that have argued that Indigenous people strongly prefer to deal with their own people in applying for services or negotiating their service options (e.g. Baldry et al. 2006; Lumby & Farelly 2009). While mainstream housing agencies do have Indigenous employment strategies, in the past these have often not resulted in strong Indigenous employment outcomes. Barriers to Indigenous recruitment and retention in our case study areas have led to the development of more comprehensive and nuanced employment strategies for Indigenous staff. This includes moves to formalise a position of an Indigenous intermediary who works at the interface between the client service staff and clients in the southern and western operating region of Housing NSW. Another initiative has been the development of specialised housing services training for Indigenous staff in Victoria. There is scope for extending these and similar workforce initiatives more broadly across the social housing system. Having Indigenous leaders in high places in the organisation will also help directly (e.g. through mentoring schemes) and indirectly (e.g. through establishing role models) to provide encouragement and support for Indigenous staff and imbue Indigenous thinking in policy making.

Our findings about service quality and service challenges for Indigenous clients in social housing broadly resemble situations that have been documented in other human service delivery areas in the Indigenous field in urban contexts (see Milligan et al. 2010). In this respect much could be learnt from recent reforms in areas such as juvenile justice, health and education. The moves to integration of human services agencies in most Australian jurisdictions also provide opportunities to promote cross-sectoral learning in relation to Indigenous issues, from which the housing domain could particularly benefit at this time.

6.2 Principles and strategies

The final two research questions to be addressed in this report are as follows.

- What strategies have the most potential to improve the delivery of housing to Indigenous households?
- 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 are challenging questions and we do not claim to have all the answers. Nevertheless, there is presently very little strategic guidance provided to policy-makers and service providers in social housing on how their policies and services to Indigenous clients could be strengthened. Below we outline a principles-based approach to reform of the social housing system that is intended to benefit the Indigenous community living or applying for social housing in urban and regional areas. While some of the principles have specific applicability to the social housing service delivery system, many have wider applicability across the human service delivery domain. The principles have been developed within the current urban context but may also apply to non-urban situations. The principles address overlapping themes and are mutually re-enforcing and therefore, should be considered and acted upon as a package rather than individually. Key strategies to support the application of the principles and priority areas for attention are also nominated.

Some principles were developed initially through the workshop with Indigenous stakeholders held early in the study (see Milligan et al. 2010) and these have been expanded by the research team as the research has progressed, informed by evidence from our study and other research that we have reviewed on what contributes to successful outcomes in Indigenous service provision. A draft list of principles was subject to further consultation with Indigenous participants in the initial workshop and with policy-makers who were members of the 'User Group' for the research prior to finalisation of this Report. The final list of principles given below reflects feedback from both those sources.

Principle 1: Respect for first peoples and recognition of their urban disadvantage

Social housing policies and service delivery practices should recognise and respect the special status of Australian Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders as 'first peoples' and acknowledge the extent of Indigenous housing disadvantage in urban areas.

This overarching principle acknowledges the effects of colonisation, dislocation and the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous urban dwellers. It recognises their legitimate aspirations for decent housing and to exercise agency in housing and home-making. This implies an obligation for the social housing service system to embed respect for cultural values, promote meaningful participation by Indigenous people, offer housing choices and to allocate resources in proportion to need. All other principles and strategies reflect this obligation.

Principle 2: Indigenous participation and institutional capacity building

Governments should invest in the development of Indigenous housing institutions and networks and ensure opportunities for their meaningful participation in policy making, resource planning, service improvement and performance monitoring and evaluation.

This principle follows directly from the first principle by advocating institutional capacity building, opportunities for meaningful engagement by Indigenous stakeholders in decision making and development of a genuinely intercultural domain, within which relevant social housing policy and practice are determined and accountable. It recognises the vital contribution of Indigenous perspectives and

knowledge toward meeting shared responsibilities for addressing Indigenous housing disadvantage.

While forms of Indigenous housing institutions and networks (such as statutory boards, housing provider trade bodies, tenant representative bodies, regional planning committees, policy advisory committees, specialised working groups and advocates) may differ across jurisdictions, formal structures should operate at national, state and regional/local levels. Engagement should be fostered by supporting stronger Indigenous governance, attracting participants with good knowledge of housing needs and policies, and fostering close community connections. Specialist facilitators skilled in cross-cultural engagement could be dedicated to engender the learning processes that will support achievement of this principle.

Strategies to build the capacity of mainstream institutions and non-Indigenous players to manage and support these intercultural processes are also essential.

Principle 3: Increasing housing choices

The social housing service delivery system should be diversified to offer Indigenous households in urban areas greater choice of service provider and to promote a greater variety of housing options that are responsive to Indigenous housing needs and aspirations.

Diversity and choice are the key themes of this principle, which recognises the cultural norms and values and the variety of needs and situations that exist within Indigenous communities in all geographic areas.

Priority should be given to planning for an intercultural housing service system that encourages a mix of Indigenous and generic housing providers and facilitates intercultural networks operating across housing and related service sectors.

Additional social housing opportunities and effective pathways to other forms of affordable rental housing and home-ownership that are appropriate for Indigenous households should be developed just as vigorously in urban areas as in remote areas. Giving control of public housing that is identified for Indigenous people (SOMIH) to well-performed and regulated Indigenous organisations (whether existing agencies or new entities) presents a critical opportunity to contribute to this goal, with the model developed in Victoria offering one approach. Expanding and adapting the role of the mainstream community housing sector will also be required, as its share of social housing grows.

Principle 4: Inclusion of Indigenous housing organisations

Indigenous housing organisations should have access to all mainstream housing funding programs and other resources and activities through processes that are inclusive and easy to navigate.

This principle addresses the need to facilitate an integrated approach at both strategic and service delivery levels to Indigenous-specific and mainstream housing services. Intentional strategies to support this principle should be aimed at: improving knowledge and access by Indigenous organisations to all housing funding and program initiatives; building interagency relationships through strong local provider networks, partnering and joint initiatives; and encouraging resource-sharing and knowledge and skills transfers. Potential outcomes could include, for example: Indigenous organisations providing mainstream services in some locations; partnering with mainstream community housing providers; taking on provision of specialised tenancy services; and contributing to Indigenous enterprise and employment goals across the social housing sector.

Principle 5: Increased capital investment

Increased capital investment should be directed to improving the adequacy and appropriateness of housing responses to current and future demand by Indigenous households in urban areas.

This principle recognises that Indigenous households represent a high and growing proportion of social housing applicants and tenants, and that the existing housing portfolio does not provide enough housing in appropriate forms, especially with respect to size, design and location.

Growth targets for Indigenous housing should be established as a component of an overall growth strategy for the social housing system. High priority should be given to allocating additional resources to enable more expeditious reconfiguration of social housing to address service gaps, severe shortages and chronic overcrowding in locations of high Indigenous demand in urban areas (see AIHW 2009a for measures of levels of need).

Principle 6: Transparent planning and resource allocation

There should be improved transparency and accountability for resource allocation, service performance and outcomes of social housing provision to urban Indigenous households.

This principle is a response to the lack of national and state policy, planning and evaluation frameworks for Indigenous housing in urban areas. An Indigenous resource allocation and service planning framework should be established in each state and territory. This should be based on a co-planning model that ensures strong engagement from Indigenous institutions and networks (Principle 2) at appropriate geographical scales. There should be regular public reporting against geographic targets and reviews of activity, performance and outcomes.

Regular reporting against national targets (by the COAG Reform Council, AIHW, FaHCSIA and the Productivity Commission) should be broken down by geographic area (especially to redress the current indefensible dichotomy in government thinking about remote and non-remote Indigenous needs and strategies). There is also a need for ongoing programs of research and independent evaluation that incorporate Indigenous perspectives.

Principle 7: Cultural appropriateness in mainstream policies and services

Mainstream public and community housing policy settings and service delivery should reflect recognised best practice in cultural appropriateness

While culturally appropriate service is contextual, this principle recognises that there is considerable evidence about areas of policy and practice that ought to be culturally adapted and what constitutes leading practice.

From our research findings, five areas of mainstream social housing policy and practice that warrant particular attention are:

- Flexible and locally responsive policy settings (e.g. local allocation rules).
- Housing design and construction standards.
- Cross-cultural skills of non-Indigenous front-line staff.
- Culturally appropriate and accessible service delivery modes (e.g. outreach services).
- Specialised applicant and tenant information and communication strategies for Indigenous clients.

We propose that specific urban Indigenous housing service delivery strategies with a clear enunciation of both state-wide directions and local/regional action plans should be developed to drive these and other negotiated service improvements.

Principle 8: Increased Indigenous employment across the social housing system

Priority should be given to employing Indigenous people in leadership roles and to ensuring Indigenous clients have opportunities for access to Indigenous staff across the social housing system.

This principle recognises the indispensable and crucial role that Indigenous knowledge and community relationships play within the service system. Strategies to promote Indigenous employment at all levels of the social housing service system (from executive managers, policy-makers and asset planners/managers to client-service staff) should be developed by mainstream agencies. Indigenous front-line workers should be available to Indigenous clients, wherever feasible, especially to provide information in culturally appropriate forms and to help broker appropriate service responses.

Specific attention should be given to professional development and career progression, promoting culturally safe workplaces, developing Indigenous worker networks, and providing opportunities for Indigenous staff to contribute to policy and service delivery decision-making processes.

Further research should be undertaken to better understand the factors associated with success in Indigenous recruitment and retention.

6.3 Concluding reflections

This study has helped to demonstrate the value, utility and relevance of analysing social housing policy with reference to the influence of the divergent policy principles of equality and diversity, discussed in Chapter 2. The study points to the predominance within the urban social housing policy and service delivery system of the 'equality' principle at the expense of 'diversity'. In framing principles and strategies that aim to improve housing service delivery to Indigenous households in urban settings, we are advocating re-balancing the social housing service system in favour of greater diversification of policies, modes of service delivery and service providers, and to ensuring that Indigenous institutions, service organisations, tenants and staff have central roles. Our position is driven both by a pragmatic assessment of 'what works' as well as our beliefs in respecting differing cultural values and promoting greater self-determination and choice.

We consider that social housing for Indigenous households will work best if policy and service delivery settings promote intercultural spaces within which service providers, workers, tenants and the wider Indigenous community live and/or work. Improving the wellbeing and life chances of current and future Indigenous tenants will require Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions and individuals showing respect and sharing knowledge, and being willing and able to work collaboratively, collectively and flexibly to grapple with the 'wicked problems' associated with providing housing to one of the most disadvantaged groups in our cities and towns. Intercultural approaches require strong and robust institutions that can support Indigenous participation at different levels of decision making, and help to adapt and implement new service responses for different local contexts. Additional resources, medium and long-term time horizons, and sustained and consistent effort from governments will be essential to advance these goals.

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APPENDIX 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>	\$6.2bn over five years from 2009–10	<p>Architecture for an integrated service delivery model for all needs groups with provision for additional payments to states under national partnership programs (NPAs) 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 & Berry 2006).</p>
National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Social Housing	<p>Increase the supply of social housing through new construction</p> <p>A proportion of allocations under the agreement are intended to improve capacity for homeless clients to exit temporary accommodation into long-term housing.</p>	\$400m capital funding over two years	<p>Indigenous households are a key target group for homelessness reduction.</p> <p>Small-scale program (up to 2,100 dwellings) expiring in 2009/10 well below estimated level of need for additional dwellings (see e.g. Australian Government 2010b; AIHW 2009a).</p>

<p>National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing</p>	<p>Improve the living standards of Indigenous people in defined remote and very remote areas.</p>	<p>\$5.5bn capital funding over 10 years for new housing (up to 4,200 dwellings) and major repairs to 4,800 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 severe housing shortages in selected remote communities.</p> <p>Small components may be spent in non-remote areas (e.g. NSW 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 forty-year leases to government) have raised Indigenous community concerns.</p>
<p>Nation Building and Jobs Plan (NBJP) Social Housing Initiative</p>	<p>Aims to stimulate building and construction industry and help retain jobs in the residential sector through building additional social housing and some refurbishment.</p>	<p>\$5.65bn for construction of 19,300 new social housing dwellings plus refurbishment, from 2008/09 to 2011/12.</p>	<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 (e.g. 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>

<p>National Indigenous Reform Agreement</p> <p>National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery</p> <p>Closing the Gap National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy for Indigenous Australians</p>	<p>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> <p>Distinct service strategies for urban/regional and remote areas.</p>		<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> <p>Attempting to drive integrated strategies to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.</p> <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 three-year review is planned for 2012.</p>
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Sources: Reproduced from Milligan et al. (2010, pp.18–19) and updated; for original sources see Positioning Paper

APPENDIX 2: URBAN INDIGENOUS HOUSING SERVICE DELIVERY: AN ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

<i>Service delivery domain</i>	<i>Research questions</i>
Housing provider organisations promote cultural respect and awareness	<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>
Staff demonstrate cultural competence	<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>
The physical environment and service delivery responses respect cultural diversity	<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>
Service delivery is informed by Indigenous clients, staff and communities	<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 and 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>
Strong service networks exist, especially between Indigenous and mainstream services	<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>
Housing providers are accountable for	<p>Are services continually monitored, reviewed and adapted?</p> <p>Does evaluation emphasise feedback from Indigenous tenants,</p>

practice and outcomes	staff, services and communities? Are there efforts to improve data collection and analysis?
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Source: Milligan et al. 2010:, pp.80–81

APPENDIX 3: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS IN CASE STUDY SITES

Housing service models for Indigenous people in urban and regional areas

Context

Position, responsibilities and professional experience of interviewee

Knowledge of current issues and challenges in local social housing delivery to Indigenous clients

Culturally appropriate service delivery

How are policies and services for Indigenous clients developed and negotiated?

What examples can you give of tenancy management policies and practices that your agency has adopted to meet the needs of Indigenous clients (e.g. allocations, offers policy and transfers; tenant induction programs; sustaining at-risk Indigenous tenancies; rent collection, arrears and evictions management; occupancy levels and visitors policy; special forms of assistance or services)

What housing maintenance issues affect Indigenous clients and can you give examples of how these are being/have been dealt with?

Organisational management practices

Can we discuss how knowledge of and respect for Indigenous culture is addressed? What written information is there on this (vision and values statements, code of conduct; fact sheets etc.)?

Where does the leadership on developing cultural competency and culturally responsive services come from in this organisation? What forms does it take?

What cultural development and cultural training programs do staff participate in—probe: scope, currency, coverage, effects?

What resources are allocated to support training in cultural proficiency?

Is cultural competency addressed in staff performance systems? How is this measured?

What is the current nature and level of Indigenous employment in both identified and non-identified positions? Are there targets and strategies for increasing the level of Indigenous employment? How are Indigenous staff supported and mentored? How are joint accountabilities to their organisation and community recognised and managed?

Relationships/joint initiatives/networking

How do agencies that are providing housing services to Indigenous clients in this region work together—examples of meetings, formal or informal networks, joint projects, MOUs, joint events, joint working parties, shared information/services, liaison functions, case conferences, etc. In your view what are the strengths and limitations of these relationships in this region? How robust are they (e.g. how long have they operated, are meetings well attended, are activities regular, are there formal feedback and follow-up processes)? What could be done to strengthen these relationships?

Can we discuss specific examples of partnerships/joint initiatives between mainstream and specialist Indigenous housing providers? What have been their outcomes? What factors influenced the success (or breakdown/cessation) of these initiatives?

What about examples of any partnerships/joint initiatives between housing providers and other Indigenous organisations (e.g. support services or welfare, health, education, legal services)? What have been their outcomes and why?

How does this agency go about building its connections and relationships with its Indigenous clients and with the broader local Indigenous community? What forms does this interaction take? What specific information or advice is sought? What issues have been raised by the Indigenous community through these processes? How are these being addressed?

Who in your view should be responsible for creating and sustaining relationships between mainstream agencies and Indigenous agencies and the wider Indigenous community?

Building capacity for responding to housing needs

What analysis and service planning for Indigenous needs is undertaken—probe: scope, focus (housing design, maintenance services, housing management policies, housing products, service quality, support needs)?

Give examples of service/project/administrative/policy innovations that have been directed at Indigenous communities/clients

What is known about local private rental market experiences of Indigenous people and what strategies does the organisation have to address any issues—e.g. brokerage, anti-discrimination strategies, financial assistance, advocacy, referrals, outreach?

What is known about the experiences of Indigenous people accessing home ownership in this region and is the organisation active in providing any forms of assistance for Indigenous households—home loans, information, training, sale of dwellings to tenants, shared equity?

What are the Indigenous homelessness issues and what strategies are being used to address these?

Accountability

Concerning the nature and level of monitoring and review of activities related to indigenous households:

How are services to Indigenous households monitored and reviewed? Can you give examples of where this process has resulted in a service/policy adaptation or other change in your organisation?

How is feedback from Indigenous tenants, staff, services and communities obtained?

Are there efforts to improve data collection and analysis, research, monitoring and evaluation of services to Indigenous clients, specifically or as part of broader service improvement strategies? What is the current focus of these (housing design, maintenance services, housing management policies, housing products, service quality, other)?

APPENDIX 4: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN CASE STUDY SITES

Housing service models for Indigenous people in urban and regional areas

Context

Roles and experience of participants

History of housing service delivery for Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander peoples (as appropriate) in the local area

Current mix of social housing services and appropriateness in meeting needs

Recent innovative service delivery strategies and/or positive previous strategies

Current issues and challenges in local social housing delivery to Indigenous clients

Culturally appropriate service delivery

Discussion of examples of culturally adapted activities in the social housing service system

Do service planning processes, housing products and housing management policies recognise and respond to the diversity of local Indigenous cultural values, lifestyles and housing needs?

Are there examples of where housing designs and housing services and products have been adapted to better meet Indigenous needs?

Do housing staff exhibit language and communication styles that are appropriate to Indigenous clients?

How is information about services and policies (and changes in these) provided to Indigenous people? Is this appropriate?

Is the physical environment of housing services welcoming and does it present positive representations of local Indigenous culture?

Do Indigenous clients perceive housing services as safe and accessible?

Is service delivery practice (tools, information etc.) culturally appropriate?

Relationships/joint initiatives/networking between mainstream agencies and Indigenous service agencies

Discussion of examples of coordination/networks/co-operation within social housing between mainstream organisations/personnel and Indigenous housing service providers and/or other Indigenous organisations.

From the viewpoint of participants, how do they work? The following aspects will be discussed.

What is the nature of any partnerships between mainstream and specialist providers (probe: extent of coordination/connection, areas of collaboration, level of trust, where power lies)?

What evidence is there of commitment to Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander participation, to seeking Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander knowledge and to establishing effective partnerships?

How robust are the local networks/initiatives that involve Indigenous and non-Indigenous housing services? (Consider how long have they operated, are meetings well attended, are they regular, are there formal feedback and follow-up processes?) What could be done to strengthen these relationships?

Is the status and expertise of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander organisations recognised by mainstream services? Is their advice on policy, training, client cases and so forth sought by mainstream organisations?

Is there evidence of shared responsibility for creating and sustaining relationships and working together?

Building capacity for responding to housing needs

Discussion of examples of community building/strengthening strategies and links to housing service providers, resources.

Do service responses build on community strengths (know the community, know what works)?

Do consumers and communities effectively participate in designing, monitoring and implementing housing programs? Give examples.

Accountability

Examples of accountability processes including feedback from Indigenous communities and clients about social housing

Do housing organisations seek active engagement with Indigenous consumers and Indigenous communities? Do these promote reciprocal relationships?

To what extent are services monitored, reviewed and adapted in consultation with Indigenous communities, organisations and clients?

Are there formal processes for feedback from Indigenous tenants, staff, services and communities?

Are there efforts to improve data collection and analysis related to Indigenous needs, and service planning—probe: scope, focus (housing design, maintenance services, housing management policies, housing products, service quality)?

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