



Family &
Community Services
Housing NSW

Housing NSW

Commitment to Improving Service
Delivery to Aboriginal People



March 2010

Our Commitment

Housing NSW is committed to:

- treating Aboriginal people with dignity and respect
- understanding the diversity of Aboriginal culture
- respecting Aboriginal families, communities and responsibilities
- giving Aboriginal people a say in decisions
- working with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Aboriginal clients can expect from Housing NSW:

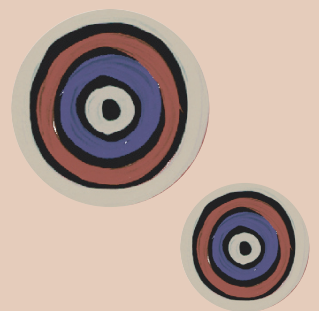
- the same housing opportunities as other Australians
- housing that meets your needs and helps achieve your goals
- a healthy and secure living environment
- a prompt, professional and unbiased response from skilled, helpful staff
- support for sustaining your tenancy
- reduced homelessness, overcrowding and housing stress.

Aboriginal employees can expect from Housing NSW:

- a supportive, culturally aware and flexible work environment
- your contribution and community understanding is valued and supported, and given a voice in decision making
- rewards for excellence and promotion on the basis of merit
- employee diversity that reflects the profile of our client base.

Housing NSW services will be:

- fair and accessible to all
- prompt and efficient
- accurate and honest
- private and confidential
- appropriate for your needs.



Foreword

Housing NSW plays an important part in NSW's efforts to improve the lives of Aboriginal people, by improving their housing circumstances. Housing NSW is the single largest provider of housing products and services to Aboriginal people in the state. We work in partnership with other housing providers, including the Aboriginal Housing Office, which plans and administers targeted Aboriginal housing programs.

Housing NSW's main purpose is to help build a stronger community by providing housing solutions for people in need. We aim to ensure that this access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing helps contribute to better social and economic participation for our clients.

Aboriginal people represent a high proportion of people who use social housing services and therefore it is important that the services we provide are responsive, accessible, and culturally appropriate.

The Housing NSW *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* sets out what we are doing to improve service outcomes and our priorities for Aboriginal clients and communities over the next five years.

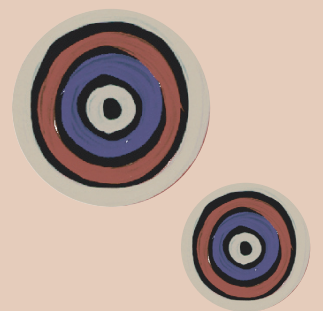
The action plan that supports our Commitment is the result of extensive consultation with Housing NSW staff and our external stakeholders. We will keep on listening to the people who use our services and use their feedback to refine future plans.

One of the best ways for us to continue improving access and sustainable housing outcomes for Aboriginal people is by building trusting relationships between mainstream social housing providers and the Aboriginal community sector. Community engagement helps us to develop sensitive, place-based housing solutions and to work constructively together.

This Commitment renews our determination to listen and learn from Aboriginal people, to recognise the important contribution they make to NSW, and to offer first-rate service that addresses the diversity of individual Aboriginal people and their communities.

Mike Allen

Chief Executive
Housing NSW



Closing the gap

Facts from 2006 Census

The life expectancy of Aboriginal Australians is almost 20 years less than that of the total Australian population.

According to the 2006 Census, Aboriginal people in the labour force are three times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be unemployed.

In 2006, the mean average gross household income for Aboriginal people was \$460 per week, compared with \$740 for non-Indigenous people.

Nationally, Aboriginal adults are in prison at 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous people.¹

Aboriginal Australians² face significant disadvantage in comparison to non-Aboriginal Australians. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* Report (2009) states that wide gaps remain in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians across a number of key indicators, including employment, education, health, housing, access to services and infrastructure, and incarceration and adverse contact with the justice system.

The NSW Government is committed to addressing the disadvantage that Aboriginal people face today. However, these gaps are evidence of considerable need for further improvement by government agencies in delivering services to Aboriginal people. Safe and affordable housing provides a stable basis for social and economic participation that will help close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

- **Higher rates of homelessness** – Aboriginal people in NSW experience homelessness at a rate of 110 per 10,000 people, compared to 40 per 10,000 people in the non-Aboriginal population.³
- **Overcrowded housing** – Aboriginal households in urban NSW experience overcrowding at over double the rate of non-Aboriginal households. Aboriginal households in remote NSW experience overcrowding at seven times the rate of non-Aboriginal households.⁴
- **High incidence of affordability stress** – As with low-income households in the general population, there is plenty of housing affordability stress⁵ among low-income Aboriginal households. In NSW, 64 percent of low-income Aboriginal households in private rental housing are in affordability stress.
- **Lower rates of home ownership** – Around 36 percent of NSW's Aboriginal households are either buying or own their home, compared to 67 percent of the total NSW population.⁶
- **Greater reliance on social housing** – Nearly one-third of NSW's Aboriginal households live in social housing, compared to six percent of non-Aboriginal households.

NSW currently has the largest number (153,454) and proportion (29%) of Aboriginal people in Australia, mostly living in urban and regional areas. NSW has a different policy and service delivery challenge than other states delivering services in remote areas.

1 ABS Census 2006 data

2 The term 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal people and people from the Torres Strait Islands in this document.

3 ABS (2001) *Counting the Homeless*.

4 ABS Census 2006 data. Almost 5,000 Aboriginal households in urban NSW experience overcrowding and just fewer than 300 Aboriginal households in remote NSW experience overcrowding.

5 'Housing affordability stress': defined as low-income households (with equivalised household incomes less than 80 percent of the median) spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing payments.

6 ABS Census 2006 data.

Can housing help?

Housing plays a fundamental role in overcoming disadvantage, as a cornerstone to a safe and secure lifestyle.

- **Health and education** – Housing is a determinant of Aboriginal health and wellbeing. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report recognises that reducing overcrowding can improve school performance. Research shows that access to public housing can have a positive impact on the educational outcomes of children and young people.⁷
- **Community safety** – Research indicates that the provision of stable housing and appropriate support services can reduce the risk of re-offending.
- **Family violence** – Addressing family violence requires a holistic response. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report also recognises that reducing overcrowding can help reduce substance abuse and family violence.

What role does Housing NSW play?

Housing NSW provides public housing to almost 10,000 Aboriginal households in NSW. In addition, Housing NSW manages over 4,000 properties tenanted by Aboriginal households on behalf of the Aboriginal Housing Office. We also fund and regulate the mainstream community housing sector, which currently houses almost 1,000 Aboriginal households.

- **We make a difference** – We are committed to making a sustainable difference to social outcomes. We are committed to achieving this with fairness and integrity. We aim to make our actions socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.
- **We help** – We are committed to helping people in need. We try to understand and respond compassionately to our client's circumstances. We empower people to make informed decisions.
- **We work together** – We are committed to treating everyone with respect – each other, our clients, our partners and the broader community. We work as a team, while remembering that we are individually accountable. We work towards finding practical and affordable solutions.
- **We are part of the community** – We are committed to serving and strengthening the community. We aim to work with our partners.

Our service delivery

We reflect these values in delivering services and housing to Aboriginal people by:

- acknowledging Aboriginal people's unique position as Australia's first peoples, and the unique contribution that Aboriginal people make within Australia
- recognising and valuing Aboriginal people as a key community group, and also as individuals, to whom we deliver and provide services
- working together with Aboriginal communities and organisations to ensure that Aboriginal people's needs and aspirations and the key considerations that affect Aboriginal people are addressed
- recognising that Aboriginal people are a significant priority client population, and aiming to provide quality housing services to them.

⁷ SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision), *Report on Government Services 2007*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

Aboriginal clients can expect that Housing NSW will offer:

- sensitivity, awareness and understanding of their family and community structure and other factors that impact housing needs and services
- appropriate service and engagement by staff, and to be treated with dignity and respect by all staff at all times.

Our commitment

Housing NSW's *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* is a five-year program to ensure that Aboriginal people in NSW:

- have access to housing products that meet their needs and aspirations
- are supported with appropriate integrated housing responses
- have the help of skilled and competent Housing NSW staff
- prefer Housing NSW as an employer
- participate in decision-making and housing solutions development
- sustain their tenancies and enjoy a healthy living environment
- experience less homelessness, overcrowding, and housing affordability stress.

The Commitment has been created from ideas raised at the Housing NSW Aboriginal Staff Gathering and extensive consultation has been undertaken in its drafting. Housing NSW's client service housing management policies were reviewed for their cultural appropriateness for Aboriginal people, and we have also considered the comments and recommendations made in that review.

This statement of our *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* is intended to acknowledge that Housing NSW has an important role to play in addressing the past and current disadvantage of Aboriginal people by improving their access to sustainable housing. The Commitment reflects our desire to ensure that a culturally appropriate service is offered, the strength of culture is recognised and that Aboriginal people, whether they are clients or employees, are always treated with respect and dignity by Housing NSW.

The Commitment and its related action plans will also show how Housing NSW priorities and resources will be directed in relation to supporting Aboriginal people within the social housing system over the five years to 2014.

Action plans put our Commitment to work

An action plan has been developed for the first year of the Commitment (2010). This plan will be reviewed in 2011; some actions will continue and some new actions will be developed each year, for a total of five years. Each action plan will spell out Housing NSW's strategies for improving service delivery to Aboriginal clients, emphasising one or more of our client-focused outcomes outlined above to ensure that we continue to meet the Commitment.

Reviewing and reporting on the Commitment

Housing NSW's *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* will be put into practice through action plans that emphasise client-focused outcomes.

The development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the action plans will be overseen by a Housing NSW monitoring group that meets regularly.

Housing NSW will review its *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* and the 2010 action plan to inform the way we develop actions in future years. Housing NSW is currently developing an evaluation framework that will be used to assess the annual action plans' effectiveness in delivering results for clients.

Progress reporting will be integrated into business planning and reporting processes to establish baseline data in key outcome areas. This baseline data can be used to set future targets and inform action planning beyond 2010, and inform future evaluation and investments.

Housing NSW will also report publicly on the action plans in its Annual Report.

If you would like to offer feedback, find out more or discuss Housing issues, visit your local Housing NSW office, contact the Aboriginal Service Improvement Unit by phone on 8753 8829 or visit www.housing.nsw.gov.au.

Other Aboriginal housing initiatives

The NSW Government is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal Australians, as outlined in the *State Plan* and *Two Ways Together*.

Two Ways Together is a 10-year plan (2003-2012) to develop partnerships between Aboriginal Australians and Government to improve the social, economic, cultural and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Housing NSW is an active partner in meeting the state's objectives.

The *National Affordable Housing Agreement* (between the Commonwealth and state governments) includes improved access by Aboriginal people to mainstream housing as a priority, and aims to achieve the following specific outcomes for Aboriginal people:

- the same housing opportunities as other Australians, in relation to homelessness services, housing rental, housing purchase, and access to housing through an efficient and responsive housing market
- improved housing amenity and reduced overcrowding, particularly in remote areas and discrete communities.

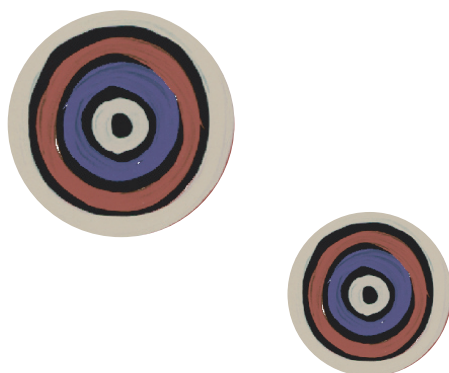
The *National Partnership on Homelessness* recognises that a reduction in homelessness requires targeting key groups, including Aboriginal Australians.

The *Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership* provides funding for housing for Indigenous people to address overcrowding, poor housing condition and severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities.

Housing NSW plans and policies

Other policies and initiatives that support better results for Housing NSW's Aboriginal clients include:

- *Planning for the Future: Community Housing 2007/08 to 2012/13*, which aims to increase the community housing sector's contribution to meeting Aboriginal housing needs.
- *Aboriginal Access Strategy*, which was developed in partnership with the Aboriginal Housing Office, aims to increase Aboriginal access to mainstream community housing.
- *New Direction in Building Stronger Communities 2008–11*, which improves homes, public spaces and access to services, training and employment for social housing tenants in seven priority locations; three of these have significant Aboriginal populations (Mt Druitt, Dubbo, Bathurst)
- *Housing NSW Aboriginal Employment Strategy*, which improves workforce outcomes for Aboriginal people; sets a target of seven percent Aboriginal employment across the organisation (reflecting the profile of our client base)
- *Housing NSW Aboriginal Reference Group* – Aboriginal staff members advise on strategies to improve service delivery to Aboriginal clients; organise an annual Aboriginal Staff Gathering to stimulate discussion and identify ways to improve Aboriginal service delivery
- *Housing NSW Aboriginal Service Improvement Unit* – improves housing outcomes for Aboriginal people by providing dedicated Aboriginal analysis and contributing to housing policy, operations and services
- *Social Housing Tenants Advisory Committee* – a state-wide group that enables active consultation with clients; three designated Aboriginal positions
- *Memorandum of Understanding between Housing NSW and the Aboriginal Housing Office* – a framework for coordinating mainstream and Aboriginal-specific housing service planning, policy and program development, and asset management.



Action plan 2010

Each annual action plan prepared under the *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* will address one or two outcome areas at a time, ensuring that Housing NSW is concentrating our attention and resources to deliver significant and measurable results for Aboriginal clients and employees.

The first annual action plan (2010) focuses on prevention and early intervention approaches to sustaining tenancies, and on strategies to improve the cultural appropriateness of Housing NSW's service delivery.

Strategies for sustaining tenancies	Strategies for improving service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine Aboriginal tenancies to identify risk factors or key points in the system that trigger an exit from housing. • Research successful jurisdictional strategies that support and sustain tenancies and determine appropriate use for Aboriginal tenants. • Identify locations with high turnover of Aboriginal tenancies to determine reasons for Aboriginal people exiting Housing NSW services so it can inform the development of strategies to better sustain their tenancies. • Identify locations where partnership projects (involving Aboriginal people and organisations) should be developed, focusing on early intervention. These projects should be based on experiences of current relevant shared access trials and other partnership projects. • Develop initiatives and project partnerships that target Aboriginal people with complex needs to help sustain tenancies. Initiatives will be based on evidence from existing partner projects. • Review and renew the <i>Memorandum of Understanding between Housing NSW and the Aboriginal Housing Office</i> to improve service delivery. • Work in partnership with the Homelessness Unit to identify effective responses to Aboriginal homelessness caused by overcrowding, researching the issue in remote locations and across tenure types. • Work in partnership with the Homelessness Unit to develop multi-agency service delivery discharge plans for Aboriginal people leaving custody or health facilities, including exits into social housing and provision of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise review of Corporate Aboriginal Employment Strategy. • Find new ways to encourage Aboriginal people to work in Housing NSW. • Review current strategies used to assist Aboriginal staff meet their career aspirations and how the identified and targeted positions or other barriers approach assist/impede this process. • Develop and implement improvement plans for all client service staff to recognise, affirm and foster organisational competence in improving service to Aboriginal Australians. • Implement (Stage 1) Healthy Boundaries project that will help Aboriginal staff meet their work responsibilities, particularly where they are employed in locations within their own communities. • Develop Aboriginal employment recruitment and retention commitments and action plans for each of Housing NSW's divisional areas.

Aboriginal Service Delivery Action Plan 2010

Vision	Aboriginal people in NSW have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to their social and economic participation					
Domains	ACCESS SUSTAINABILITY					
Outcomes	1. Aboriginal people supported to sustain tenancies and maintain a healthy living environment	2. Aboriginal people supported by skilled, competent Housing NSW staff, and prefer Housing NSW as an employer	3. Aboriginal people participate in decision making and help develop effective housing solutions	4. Aboriginal people are supported with appropriate integrated responses	5. Aboriginal people experience reduced homelessness, overcrowding, and housing affordability stress	6. Aboriginal people have access to housing products that meet their needs and aspirations
Action plan strategies	2010 Identify triggers for housing exits	2010 Review Aboriginal Employment Strategy	The remaining outcomes will be targeted by actions plans for 2011–2014			
	Research successful strategies to support and sustain tenancies	Encourage Aboriginal people to work in Housing NSW				
	Identify location-specific reasons for housing exits	Review strategies helping Aboriginal staff meet aspirations				
	Partnership projects focused on early intervention	Improvement plans for client service staff				
	Sustain tenancies of Aboriginal people with complex needs	Employment recruitment and retention commitments/actions				
	Renew MOU between Housing NSW and AHO	Healthy Boundaries project				
	Responses to homelessness					
	Multi-agency discharge plans for people leaving custody or health facilities					

Notes



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