

# Healthy Homes

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders face significant disadvantage in terms of the quality and availability of housing and basic facilities. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons live in houses that are overcrowded or in need of repairs, and relatively more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons are homeless than non-Indigenous persons. Further, few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons own or are purchasing their own homes. The health and safety of people living in poor housing conditions is also of concern.

## Overview

Addressing the problem of overcrowding in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households and providing environmental health infrastructure and other essential services are priorities for the Queensland Government. These are critical to the successful achievement of health and other targets endorsed by the Queensland Government.

Below is an outline of Queensland's commitment under the COAG Indigenous reform agenda, as well as the measures which will be used to monitor progress, and the programs and services which have been delivered by the Queensland Government (in 2008/09) to address the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in relation to housing.

### Queensland's commitment under COAG

The Australian Government has allocated \$1.2 billion to Queensland over five years (2008/09 to 2012/13), with funding of \$96.9 million in 2008/09, under the **National Affordable Housing Agreement**. The agreement aims to ensure that all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation. This Agreement is supported by National Partnership Agreements.

Under the Healthy Homes COAG building block, the Australian Government has committed to improving the living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This is being progressed by the Queensland Government through:

- construction of 1,141 new dwellings and upgrading a further 1,216 properties under the **National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing** from 2008/09

to 2017/18, with implementation funding of \$1.156 billion over the next 10 years. Upgrade work has commenced in the four priority communities of Doomadgee, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Mornington Island, as well as the communities of Lockhart River, Napranum, Palm Island, Wujul Wujul, Coen and Mossman Gorge. This agreement will also see:

- › the supply of safe and adequate housing that will contribute to improved living standards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in remote communities
- › a program of ongoing maintenance and repairs that progressively increases the lifecycle of remote Indigenous housing from seven years to a social housing-like lifecycle of up to 30 years
- › construction of new houses and ongoing repair and maintenance of houses in remote Indigenous communities
- › progressive resolution of land tenure issues on remote community-titled land in order to secure government and commercial investment, economic development opportunities and home ownership possibilities in economically sustainable communities.
- increasing the number of services and the delivery of support services to homeless people as well as improving the homelessness service system. The implementation of the **National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness** 2008/09 to 2012/13 in Queensland assists people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. Under this agreement, the Australian Government has provided \$99.39 million to which the Queensland Government has

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contributed an additional \$102.965 million. Some of the intended outputs include:

- › street to home initiatives for chronically homeless people (rough sleepers)
  - › support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, through tenancy support, advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services
  - › assistance for people leaving child protection services and correctional and health facilities, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing
  - › services to assist homeless people with substance abuse issues to secure or maintain stable accommodation
  - › services to assist homeless people with mental health issues to secure or maintain stable accommodation
  - › support to assist young people aged 12-18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to re-engage with their families where it is safe to do so, maintain sustainable accommodation and engage with education and employment
  - › support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to stay in their present housing where it is safe to do so.
- an additional component of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness is the **A Place to Call Home Initiative** which will support the provision of 143 new homes for homeless people (not specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) over the next five years (2008/09 to 2012/13)
  - providing benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the allocation of \$81 million over two years (2008/09 to 2009/10) for the construction of new social housing under the **National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing**. In 2008/09, funding of \$5 million was provided under this agreement
  - constructing up to 4,000 new social housing dwellings

at a cost of \$1.2 billion through the National Partnership Agreement on **National Building and Jobs Plan, Social Housing Initiative** (2008/09 to 2011/12). In addition, skill development, employment and business opportunities will be promoted through the awarding of a minimum of 20 per cent of total labour hours for building and construction work to Indigenous community members.

## The evidence<sup>91</sup>

### Access to housing

#### Overcrowded households

Overcrowding places increased stress on kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities as well as on sewerage systems such as septic tanks. With this, overcrowding increases the risk of the spread of infectious diseases such as meningococcal disease, rheumatic fever, tuberculosis, skin infections and respiratory infections.<sup>92</sup>

In 2006:<sup>93</sup>

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders were at least five times more likely to be living in an overcrowded household than were non-Indigenous Queenslanders – 27.0 per cent compared to 4.8 per cent<sup>94</sup>
- the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders living in overcrowded households increased with remoteness, ranging from 15.4 per cent in major cities to more than twice that in remote areas (45.2 per cent).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey<sup>95</sup> reported that between 2002 and 2008 there was little change in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders who lived in houses requiring one or

91 Please note that there are currently no NIRA performance measures under this building block.

92 Howden-Chapman, P., and Wilson N., 2000, 'Housing and health'. In: Howden-Chapman P and Tobias M (eds). *Social inequalities in health: New Zealand 1999*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

93 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing, 2006*.

94 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing, 2006*.

95 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008*, cat no. 4714.0, ABS, Canberra.



more bedrooms to reduce overcrowding (26.2 per cent in 2002 and 25.9 per cent in 2008).

### State-owned and community housing

In 2007/08, there were 6,231 Indigenous community housing dwellings (owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Shire Councils) and 3,051 state-owned and managed housing specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.<sup>96</sup>

About 11 per cent of the state-owned and managed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and 37 per cent of Indigenous community housing in Queensland has been identified as overcrowded.<sup>97</sup> To address this overcrowding, an additional three bedrooms on average would be required in state-owned housing and 2.4 additional bedrooms on average in Indigenous community housing.<sup>98</sup>

### Housing condition

In 2008, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey<sup>99</sup> found that 25.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons surveyed lived in dwellings that they considered to have major structural problems. This was a decrease from what was reported in 2002, where the equivalent proportion was 34.2 per cent.

### Homelessness

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders are more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous Queenslanders. In 2006, the rate of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders was 159 per 10,000 persons, much higher than the rate of 65 per 10,000 persons for non-Indigenous Queenslanders.<sup>100</sup>

In 2007/08, 23.2 per cent of homeless people living in transitional or emergency accommodation under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>101</sup>

## Key Queensland Government actions to close the gap

### Housing outcomes

**Social housing** is provided by the Queensland Government for people who are unable to access or retain affordable or appropriate housing in the private housing market. In 2008/09, the Queensland Government assisted 13,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households (from a total of 78,600 Queensland households) with social housing.

Eighty one **Indigenous Community-managed Housing Organisations** (ICHOs) across Queensland have, until 2008, received funding from the Australian Government to purchase and maintain approximately 2,000 residential properties and 100 vacant blocks of land. From January 2009, Australian Government-funded ICHOs began transitioning to the Queensland Government. At 30 June 2009, 15 ICHOs had voluntarily agreed to operate within one social housing system, with some as registered providers. Funding of \$1.145 million was provided for these transitioning providers to refurbish and repair properties, and for governance and service delivery training for the newly registered providers.

The Queensland Government's **Housing Improvement Program** increased the supply and improved the standard of housing owned by 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Shire Councils (34 Indigenous communities), and improved

96 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, *Indigenous housing indicators 2007–08*, Australian Government, Canberra.

97 *Queensland Public Housing Bedroom Entitlement Standards, Property Condition and Tenants Survey 2006–07*, Department of Housing, Queensland.

98 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, *Indigenous housing indicators 2007–08*, Australian Government, Canberra.

99 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008*, cat no. 4714.0, ABS, Canberra.

100 Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. 2009, *Counting the Homeless 2006*, Queensland, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, p. 79.

101 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2009, *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2007–08 Australia*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, p. 28.

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housing asset and tenancy management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living on remote Indigenous communities. In 2008/09, under this program, \$61.7 million was spent on:

- constructing 54 dwellings, including 12 factory-built homes
- replacing 22 dwellings
- upgrading 254 existing dwellings
- purchasing 15 dwellings outside Indigenous communities to provide eligible families with the opportunity to relocate off an Indigenous community
- maintaining 4,096 dwellings.

As part of the Housing Improvement Program, the Queensland Government continued to offer tenancy management assistance to Lockhart River, Wujal Wujal and Napranum Aboriginal Shire Councils and the former Kubin Community Council. Rent collection rates in these communities continue to improve.

In 2008/09, the Queensland Government commenced tenancy management responsibilities on behalf of the Hope Vale and Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Councils. Tenancy management services are expected to commence in 2009/10 for approximately 850 rental units in Aurukun, Palm Island and Yarrabah (with funding from the Australian Government).

As part of the ongoing **Off-Communities Investment Project**, the Queensland Government purchased 15 dwellings to provide social housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients who wished to relocate to access employment, education or health opportunities. Centrecare supported the Off-Communities Investment Project through **Participate in Prosperity** by assisting 84 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons from remote communities relocating to social housing in Cairns and Townsville during 2008/09.

In addition, under the **Rural and Remote Indigenous Housing Program**, the Queensland Government spent \$3.6 million to construct five new community-owned houses at Kowanyama in 2008/09.

Under the **Healthy Indigenous Housing Initiative**, funded by the Australian Government to improve the performance of Indigenous community housing providers, the Queensland Government spent \$0.271 million on projects including increasing tenants' awareness of maintenance issues, improving tenancy and property management by councils, and supporting the implementation of the tenancy management model for the Torres Strait Island and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Councils.

Finally, amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* introduced in 2008 enable eligible persons to become **homeowners** on Indigenous communal land by acquiring a private residential lease. These leases are for 99 years and are renewable.

## Essential infrastructure and environmental health initiatives

The Queensland Government continues to provide essential environmental health infrastructure, as well as improving existing housing and infrastructure. During 2008/09:

- \$30.5 million was spent under the **Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure Program** to address environmental health infrastructure issues including improving water supplies, sewerage schemes, waste systems and development of capacity and expertise of the Indigenous workforce in managing sustainability
- funding of \$2.32 million was made available to 34 Indigenous communities under the **Indigenous Environmental Health Worker Program** to employ environmental health workers
- under the **Fixing Houses for Better Health Program** (funded by the Australian Government) health and safety repairs were undertaken on 266 dwellings in Kowanyama, Hammond Island and Boigu Island, at a cost of \$0.587 million.



The Queensland Government has agreed to make available \$67 million over three years for priority environmental health projects in Doomadgee, Aurukun, Mornington Island and Hope Vale, with \$10 million held for emergent works which support the delivery of the Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership Agreement in other communities.

Over the past three years, in excess of \$65 million dollars has been invested in 15 remote mainland Indigenous communities with a similar amount allocated to the Torres Strait over the past two years. A further \$56 million will be provided to continue work in the Torres Strait in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

In July 2009, the **Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office** was established in Cairns to remove impediments to housing investment and development opportunities within Indigenous communities. At present, the Program Office is conducting site inspections in a number of discrete communities to determine immediate housing and infrastructure needs. A work program will be developed for each community based on their individual circumstances.

The Office, along with other Australian and Queensland government agencies, is negotiating with remote communities to establish 40 year leases, part of the requirement under the **Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership Agreement**, which will see \$1.156 billion (by 2018) spent on social housing in remote communities.

Site inspections in communities are also being undertaken, to develop survey and land use plans. These will enable Indigenous councils to meet their expanded legislative obligations as local governments.

Finally, the Queensland Government has completed infrastructure improvements on Palm Island airport, and a 30 seat plus DASH 8 aircraft has been introduced, with regular services on the Townsville to Palm Island route.