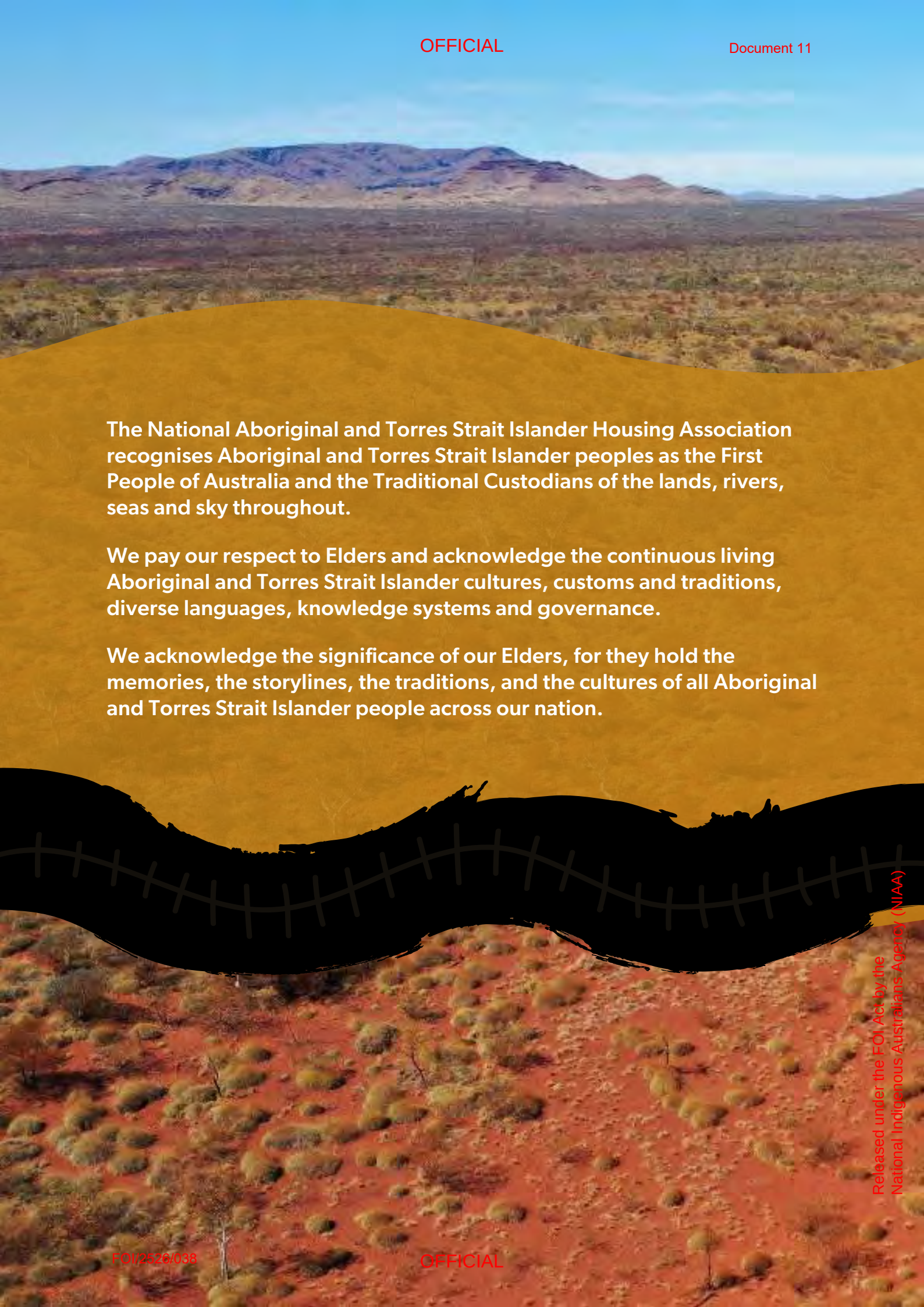




Improving Housing and
Empowering Local Communities

A Case for Indigenous-Led Housing Design Standards



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First People of Australia and the Traditional Custodians of the lands, rivers, seas and sky throughout.

We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge the continuous living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, customs and traditions, diverse languages, knowledge systems and governance.

We acknowledge the significance of our Elders, for they hold the memories, the storylines, the traditions, and the cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across our nation.

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Executive Summary

This framework provides guidance for organisations and bodies wishing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to strengthen housing policy, planning, and service delivery through genuine partnership.

Grounded in extensive Indigenous-led consultations, it outlines a roadmap for embedding culturally responsive, community-driven approaches into housing initiatives.

At its core, the framework recognises housing as a culturally grounded human right, not just a physical asset, but a foundation for wellbeing, identity, and connection to Country. It calls for housing solutions that reflect the cultural values, family structures, and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The framework is structured around key themes and actionable recommendations that support:



Indigenous-led decision-making

through formal governance structures



Culturally appropriate design standards

tailored to regional and community contexts



Safe and sustainable housing

that meets both cultural and environmental needs



Local economic participation

to strengthen community capacity and self-determination



Rights-based implementation

to ensure accountability and alignment with human rights principles

It also supports the operationalisation of the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, particularly:

Priority Reform One

Establishing shared decision-making structures with First Nations representatives.

Priority Reform Two

Investing in and partnering with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing sector.

Together, these elements form a comprehensive, culturally informed approach to housing that honours Indigenous leadership and delivers meaningful, lasting outcomes.

02

Context

Released under the FOI Act by the
National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

Improving Housing and Empowering Local Communities: A Case for Indigenous-Led Housing Design Standards is grounded in direct feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across urban, regional, and remote Australia.

Through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Minimum Housing Standards engagement process, communities spoke with clarity, strength, and solutions.

What emerged was not only a clear picture of the challenges but a powerful, community-led vision for housing systems grounded in cultural authority, shaped by local knowledge, and aligned with the ways families live and care for one another.

Across the country, communities consistently emphasised that housing must be understood as more than a physical infrastructure. It is a platform for community wellbeing, cultural continuity, and intergenerational strength and wealth. They described housing that reflects cultural values, supports kinship networks, withstands local conditions, and contributes to better outcomes in health, education, employment and community cohesion.

Communities also spoke to the harm caused by systems that continue to design and deliver housing without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, systems that often fail to meet needs, lack durability, and reinforce dependence.

The insights shared affirm that self-determination is not just a principle, it is a precondition for better outcomes. Communities want to lead the planning, design, and delivery of housing that works for them in their own places. They are calling for standards that reflect who they are, where they are, and what they need, not standards imposed from outside. They want investment that delivers lasting value, not only through buildings, but through local jobs, stronger organisations, and connected, healthy communities.



"We've been living on this Country for over 60,000 years. We know how to create living environments that work with our climate, our social structures, and our cultural practices. Listen to us."

Community Elder, Broome session

This document is not a prescriptive set of design specifications. It offers a framework to support organisations and agencies to work alongside communities, ask the right questions, and build the right relationships. It identifies the areas of design, delivery, and governance that matter most, and where shifts are needed to achieve long-term, community-driven change.

The recommendations are intended to support the operationalisation of the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, particularly:

Priority Reform One

Establishing shared decision-making structures with First Nations representatives.

Priority Reform Two

Investing in and partnering with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing sector.

Communities have been clear: the solutions already exist. What is needed now is a genuine commitment to walk alongside, shift power, and invest in the systems that enable their knowledge, organisations, and leadership to flourish.

"Housing is more than walls and a roof—it's about creating spaces where our culture can thrive, our children can grow strong, and our connection to Country can deepen."

Community Elder, Broome session

The Improving Housing and Empowering Local Communities: A Case for Indigenous-Led Housing Design Standards was developed in collaboration with the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).



03

Recognising housing as a culturally ground human right

Released under the FOI Act by the
National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

Housing must be recognised and treated as a culturally grounded human right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, not merely as a physical asset or welfare measure.

Across all regions, communities consistently emphasised that safe, appropriate housing is inseparable from cultural identity, connection to Country, and the right to live well in accordance with cultural values.

"Housing is more than walls and a roof—it's about creating spaces where our culture can thrive, our children can grow strong, and our connection to Country can deepen."

This principle is affirmed by the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, adopted in 2007:

Article 21 | Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their housing and social conditions.

Article 23 | Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop housing programs and, as far as possible, to administer them through their own institutions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a unique and enduring relationship with Country. In First Nations worldviews, people and Country are not separate, Country encompasses land, seas, skies, seasons, and spirit. This relationship is central to wellbeing, identity, and community strength. Housing that supports this connection is not a preference - it is a fundamental right.

"Our family structures are different, our activities are different, our cultural needs are different. Our housing needs to reflect that."

"Our houses need to accommodate the way we actually live - not how others think we should live."

To uphold housing as a human right, governments and housing agencies must embed cultural requirements into every stage of housing policy and delivery.

This includes:

- Designing for kinship, cultural obligations, and mobility
- Locating and constructing housing to maintain or restore connection to Country
- Ensuring community-defined cultural criteria are central to housing standards
- Treating cultural safety and appropriateness as essential, not optional

Cultural rights in housing are not abstract ideals—they are practical, lived requirements for building strong, healthy, and resilient communities. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lead housing design and delivery, homes become places of safety, cultural practice, and intergenerational wellbeing.

Recognising housing as a culturally grounded human right is a necessary shift. One that places culture, community, and Country at the centre of housing systems.

04

Approach to engagement

HOUSING STANDARDS ADVISORY PANEL

NATSIHA formed a Strategic Advisory Panel to guide this work, drawing together people with a breadth of lived, cultural, technical, and policy expertise.

Each member brings a unique perspective, shaped by years of working alongside communities and across systems. Their combined insight has helped ensure that the standards are grounded, culturally informed, and relevant across jurisdictions.

Uncle Ivan Simon

brings over 30 years of experience in Aboriginal housing and community development. He was instrumental in establishing the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office and has held senior executive roles at the AHO, Aboriginal Hostels Limited, and various NSW government agencies.

Garry Oliver

is an experienced leader in First Nations engagement and strategic development. He leads work on culturally responsive legal support and community partnerships. His background includes criminal investigations, change management, and organisational strategy.

Patrick Cooke

is a proud Kalkadoon/Gungalida man with expertise in Indigenous engagement, policy, and strategic planning. He specialises in participatory frameworks and cultural integrity, with a strong focus on monitoring, evaluation, and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property principles.

Gillian Barlow

has extensive experience in housing and health infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Her work spans the disability and ageing sectors, with a focus on inclusive, culturally appropriate housing.

Jeff Standen

has worked in Aboriginal Environmental Health for over 35 years. He played a key role in the Housing for Health and the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage Program, and chaired the National Expert Reference Panel on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health.

NATSIHA wanted to ensure that the consultation conversations were shaped by more than policy or regulatory expertise. This included what questions were asked, how discussions were framed, and how community priorities were drawn out. The panel brought together experience across community controlled housing, design, health, disability, environmental health, cultural leadership and systems reform. This breadth of knowledge supported deeper and more grounded conversations from the beginning.

NATSIHA's role has been to bring this group together, support their input, and ensure the engagement process is sector-led, grounded, and ready for national rollout.

This work is grounded in an Indigenous-led process that honours Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the rightful leaders in defining what safe, culturally appropriate, and community-driven housing looks like.

The methodology was designed not just to consult, but to uphold self-determination, center cultural authority, and reflect the voices and aspirations of communities across the country. Every aspect of this project, from its structure to its recommendations, has been shaped by this approach.

Rather than offering one-size-fits-all solutions, the findings are rooted in place-based insights, cultural integrity, and regional diversity.

This process stands as a model for genuine partnership, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised not as stakeholders, but as decision-makers, knowledge holders, and custodians of solutions for their own futures.

WORKSHOP ENGAGEMENT

Implementation

Recognising the diversity of community contexts and experiences, the engagement approach was tailored by region. A one-size-fits-all methodology would have failed to capture the breadth of lived experience across the continent.

Face-to-Face Engagement Sessions

Three major sessions were held across different settings, urban, regional, and remote to create the time and space for deep, culturally grounded conversations:

12-13 February 2025

Gold Coast

 two-day session

 41 participants
(across 23 organisations)

Structured around yarning circles and small group discussions, the session focused on urban and regional housing challenges and aspirations. Sessions were built on six key themes and designed to foster honest dialogue in a safe, respectful space.

5-6 March 2025

Wollongong

 two-day session

 38 participants
(across 20 Organisations)

Day one involved group discussions around shared issues, while day two moved into yarning circles, allowing for deeper exploration of key topics. The session integrated trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches.

25-26 March 2025

Broome

 two-day session

 30 participants
(across 16 organisations)

Held on Country, this session included cultural activities, Welcome to Country, and deep exploration of housing issues specific to remote contexts. The extended format allowed for a relaxed but purposeful pace, reflecting cultural protocols and the complexity of issues.

04

INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT

Individual Consultations

In regions where large sessions weren't feasible, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory, these engagements were conducted through one-on-one and small group formats and included phone calls, guided surveys, and interviews with housing providers and community members. Participants were given time to reflect, respond, and verify findings to ensure accuracy.

Supplementary Data Collection

To broaden representation and deepen understanding, additional methods were employed:

- Online surveys** reached communities unable to attend in-person sessions.
- Existing research and reports** were reviewed to build on prior work.
- Case studies** of community-led housing models identified transferable practices.
- Informal yarning** sessions allowed participants to share stories in their own time and voice.

Current housing condition data was analysed to provide contextual grounding and inform baseline insights.

Data Analysis

Analysis was led by First Nations researchers using Indigenous methodologies that prioritised cultural interpretation and community meaning-making. Thematic analysis identified key messages across regions while respecting local and cultural differences. Direct quotes and language were preserved to maintain authenticity.

Quantitative survey data was integrated with qualitative insights to create a holistic picture, balancing statistical trends with lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and aspirations.

Community verification ensured findings accurately reflected participants' perspectives.

Ethical Foundations

The engagement was guided by principles that extended beyond standard research protocols:

- Indigenous data sovereignty**
Communities retained ownership of their knowledge and its use.
- Cultural safety**
Regional protocols were observed and adapted to respect local customs.
- Informed consent**
Participants understood how their input would be used, with clear boundaries around public and community-only information.
- Reciprocity and respect**
The process aimed to benefit communities directly, rather than extract data for external purposes.

This approach ensured the work was methodologically sound, culturally respectful, and rooted in self-determination.

05

Key recommendations

05

The following recommendations offer a flexible approach to national housing design standards, reflecting the diverse needs and priorities of communities across the country. These recommendations emphasise that a one-size-fits-all solution is not effective.

These recommendations offer a guiding framework for governments, housing agencies, and delivery partners to support best practice in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They highlight the key design areas that matter when building housing and infrastructure in partnership with community.

ACTIONS

Establish Indigenous-led decision-making frameworks

Co-develop regionally tailored housing design standards
with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Prioritise safety through culturally appropriate design

Embed sustainability requirements

Support local economic participation

These recommendations are grounded in what was heard through national engagement. They reflect how housing can better respond to the cultural, climatic, social, and economic contexts of different regions.

They also support the operationalisation of the **Closing the Gap Priority Reforms**, particularly:

Priority Reform One | Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

Priority Reform Two | Strengthening the community-controlled sector

INTENDED USE

This framework is designed to guide action when:



Planning and funding housing programs



Engaging communities in design processes



Commissioning infrastructure or housing developments



Developing regional design responses and governance arrangements



Embedding cultural authority and local leadership in housing projects

These recommendations should inform immediate actions across existing programs and new investments, while also supporting long-term shifts toward culturally grounded, community-led housing systems that work in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS | Guiding framework for culturally grounded housing design



Establish Indigenous-led decision-making frameworks



Place-Based Design



Embedding Safety



Designing for Sustainability and Affordability



Support local economic participation



Rights based implementation framework

Released under the FOI Act by the
National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)



Establish Indigenous-led decision-making frameworks

Throughout national consultations, one message was clear and consistent: housing initiatives must be led by the communities who live in and are impacted by them.

Indigenous-led decision making is not just a principle, it is a practical necessity. It ensures housing reflects how First Nations people live, connect, and care for each other and for Country.

This approach moves beyond tokenistic consultation. It recognises the deep expertise embedded within communities and places authority where it belongs with Elders, families, and local leaders. Indigenous-led

housing design integrates cultural, environmental, and social knowledge from the outset, resulting in homes that are safe, sustainable, and culturally grounded.

To achieve this, formal frameworks for Indigenous-led decision making must be embedded across all levels of housing policy, planning, design, delivery, and evaluation.

KEY ACTIONS

1. Establish Community Governance Structures with Real Authority

Create governance bodies within communities that hold decision-making power, not just advisory roles.

Ensure representation from Elders, women, young people, and people with disabilities.

4. Invest in Capacity Building for Indigenous Governance

Support technical training where needed, without undermining existing community authority.

Strengthen local leadership in housing design and delivery.

2. Begin Design Processes with Cultural Priorities

Housing design must start with cultural needs and local priorities, not technical specifications.

Traditional knowledge must be recognised and integrated from the outset.

5. Reform Funding and Regulatory Models

Create flexible, long-term funding arrangements that support community control.

Enable communities to set and deliver on their own housing priorities.

3. Implement Community Verification and Sign-Off

Require formal community endorsement at key stages of housing development.

Ensure accountability to community, not just external agencies.



Place-Based Design

Co-Led Regional Standards for Safe and Culturally Appropriate Housing

Safe and effective housing must be grounded in the realities of place. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this means recognising that housing is not just about shelter — it is about connection to Country, cultural identity, and community wellbeing.

When housing design fails to reflect local knowledge, cultural practices, and environmental conditions, it risks becoming unsuitable, unsustainable, and even harmful.

Too often, externally imposed standards have led to poor durability, cultural disconnection, and a loss of trust in housing systems.

To address these failures, housing must be co-designed with communities, ensuring that regional standards are shaped by those who live there. This approach respects the diversity of First Nations peoples and places, and ensures that housing supports not only physical safety but also cultural integrity, social cohesion, and long-term sustainability.

Place-based design is not a complication—it is a solution. It is the foundation for housing that works.

Community insights

"When our community controls housing decisions, we ensure designs that support our cultural practices, meet our environmental needs, and strengthen our connections to each other and to Country."

KEY ACTIONS

1. Embed Local Knowledge in Housing Standards

Organisations made it clear that housing standards must be shaped by local knowledge, cultural practices, and environmental conditions.

Regionally tailored design standards are essential to ensure housing is safe, culturally appropriate, and fit for purpose.

Designs must reflect variations in climate, geography, and infrastructure, as well as the diversity of family structures, cultural obligations, and living arrangements.

Homes should support mobility, large and multigenerational families, and seasonal or ceremonial use.

3. Integrate Traditional and Contemporary Design Knowledge

Traditional design knowledge should be incorporated alongside contemporary standards, recognising the value of Indigenous architectural and spatial traditions that have evolved over thousands of years.

Indigenous design principles offer proven, place-based solutions that enhance sustainability, liveability, and cultural continuity.

Design must not be copied from other contexts or determined solely by external frameworks.

5. Establish Minimum Cultural Design Requirements

Minimum requirements for cultural appropriateness must be established for all designs regardless of location or housing type.

This ensures a consistent baseline of respect and relevance across all housing developments.

It also prevents the recurrence of past failures and builds community trust.

7. Strengthen Identity and Aspirations Through Housing

Regionally tailored standards are a critical step toward ensuring housing reflects and strengthens the identities, responsibilities, and aspirations of First Nations peoples in each place.

2. Elevate Cultural Appropriateness in Compliance

Compliance mechanisms should be created that measure cultural appropriateness alongside technical standards, elevating cultural considerations to the same importance as structural integrity, fire safety, and other conventional building requirements.

Cultural impact assessments should be required for all housing projects.

These assessments must evaluate proposed designs against community-determined cultural criteria before approval.

4. Develop Context-Specific Guidelines

Specific guidelines should be developed for urban, regional and remote contexts, acknowledging the distinct challenges and opportunities in different geographical settings.

Regionally tailored standards must be co-developed and verified by local communities.

Communities must have the authority to define what safety, sustainability, and cultural appropriateness mean in their own context.

6. Enable Community Leadership in Design

Governments and housing agencies must create the conditions for community leadership by:

Embedding flexibility in procurement and funding

Resourcing community-led design processes

Ensuring housing is planned for the long term

Regional tailoring is not about adding complexity; it is about delivering housing that works.

Why This Matters

Indigenous-led decision making ensures housing is not only technically sound but also culturally safe, appropriate, and sustainable. It is a rights-based approach rooted in self-determination—and it must sit at the centre of any housing reform.



Embedding Safety

Safety is a foundational requirement for housing—but its meaning goes far beyond physical infrastructure.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, safety encompasses cultural, environmental, and relational dimensions. It includes secure structures, but also the ability to feel protected, connected, and respected within one's home and community.

Across all engagement sessions, community members emphasised that housing must be safe for everyone - especially women, children, and Elders. Safety was described not only in terms of locks and lighting, but

also in terms of cultural healing, visibility, and the ability to care for one another. In remote areas, safety also means protection from environmental harm, reliable access to utilities, and healthy living conditions.

To achieve this, housing design must be regionally tailored and co-led by communities. It must reflect local realities, cultural practices, and social dynamics. Safety cannot be standardised from afar, it must be defined and verified by the people who live in each place.

Community insights

"Our homes need to be safe sanctuaries, especially for our women and kids. That means strong security features, proper lighting, safe outdoor spaces, and designs that enable natural surveillance."

"Safety isn't just about locks and screens. It's about creating housing that supports community connection and cultural healing, which are our traditional protective factors."

"In remote communities, safety includes protection from extreme weather, reliable power and water, and homes that don't make us sick with mould or poor ventilation."

"It's about designing with community in mind - good sight lines to watch kids playing, spaces where families support each other, proper distance between houses for privacy but connection for safety."

KEY ACTIONS

1. Establish Place-Based Housing Governance Mechanisms

Create local governance structures to lead the co-design of safety standards.

Ensure representation from across the community, including Elders, women, and young people.

3. Integrate Local Realities into Design Standards

Incorporate climate, infrastructure access, kinship structures, and cultural practices into core housing requirements.

Ensure designs support natural surveillance, safe outdoor spaces, and community connection.

2. Ensure Flexibility in Funding and Procurement

Reform funding and policy frameworks to support regionally tailored implementation.

Enable communities to define and deliver housing that meets their own safety needs.

4. Formalise Community Verification Processes

Require community sign-off at key stages of housing development.

Ensure homes meet safety standards defined by the people who will live in them.

"Start with the local people, what they know and what they need."

Why This Matters

Safety is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It must be defined by communities and embedded in every aspect of housing, from design and construction to maintenance and tenancy management. Regionally tailored standards will ensure housing is not only technically sound, but culturally safe, locally appropriate, and built to last.



Designing for Sustainability and Affordability

Housing That Lasts and Supports Community Wellbeing

Sustainability is not just about environmental performance, it is about creating homes that endure, support wellbeing, and are affordable to live in and maintain.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, sustainability means homes that are built to last, suited to local climates, and designed to reduce financial strain on families.

Across all engagement sessions, communities emphasised that long-term sustainability must be embedded in both the design and operation of housing. This includes using durable materials, ensuring energy efficiency,

and enabling local maintenance. It also means recognising the economic realities of extended families and the pressures of high utility costs.

Sustainable housing must reflect the wisdom of traditional knowledge and the practicality of modern technologies. It must be climate-responsive, culturally grounded, and economically viable—supporting families not just today, but for generations to come.

Community insights

"Energy costs are crippling our communities. We need houses designed for our climate with good insulation, alternative energy sources, and efficient systems that reduce running costs."

Broome engagement session

"True sustainability means houses that last, that can be maintained locally, that don't cost a fortune to live in, and that respect our responsibility to care for Country."

Gold Coast engagement session

"The power bills are killing us... In winter, we're choosing between heating and eating. Our houses leak heat like sieves, and we can't afford to run heaters all day."

Wollongong engagement session

"Our traditional knowledge contains sophisticated understanding of sustainable living with Country. Housing should incorporate this wisdom alongside modern technologies like solar power and water conservation systems."

Gold Coast engagement session

KEY ACTIONS

1. Mandate Passive Design Principles

Require orientation, ventilation, insulation, and shading to improve comfort and reduce energy use.

Embed these principles as core design elements, not optional upgrades.

2. Invest in Energy Efficiency and Alternative Systems

Support solar power, rainwater collection, and water-saving fixtures tailored to regional conditions.

Reduce household costs and environmental impact through smart, place-based technologies.

3. Ensure Durability and Climate Suitability

Use robust materials suited to local environmental conditions, especially in remote areas.

Minimise reliance on features prone to breakdown or expensive maintenance.

4. Support Local Maintenance Capability

Design homes that can be serviced by local trades and housing staff.

Reduce dependence on external contractors and build local employment pathways.

5. Define Affordability Broadly

Consider rent, utilities, transport, maintenance, and serviceability for extended families.

Ensure housing does not place undue financial strain on households.

"Housing must not just be affordable to build - it must be affordable to live in and care for across its life cycle."

Why This Matters

Designing for sustainability and affordability ensures homes support long-term wellbeing, economic stability, and cultural continuity. It responds directly to community calls for housing that is fit for place, built to last, and respectful of both people and Country.



Support local economic participation

When housing is designed and delivered by community-controlled organisations, it becomes a vehicle for lasting change.

It creates jobs, strengthens local economies, and embeds cultural values into everyday life.

Housing must be planned not only to provide shelter, but to deliver long-term social and economic benefits that reflect community priorities and aspirations.

Community insights

"Housing projects should create training and employment for our people—in design, construction, maintenance, and management. This builds skills, creates jobs, and ensures the work is done properly."

Gold Coast engagement session

"Every housing dollar should do triple duty. It should provide shelter, create jobs for our mob, and strengthen our culture and community. That's what happens when we control our own housing organisations."

Gold Coast engagement session

"When our housing organisations control housing, they do more than manage properties—they provide wrap-around services, support cultural programs, and reinvest in our communities."

Gold Coast engagement session

"Housing that supports small-scale enterprises, cultural activities, and community gatherings creates economic opportunities and strengthens our communities. It's about more than just a roof."

Broome engagement session

KEY ACTIONS

1. Embed Local Employment and Training Pathways

Integrate career pathways across design, construction, maintenance, and tenancy management.

Move beyond short-term jobs to build long-term professional and leadership opportunities.

2. Empower Community-Controlled Housing Organisations

Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations lead housing delivery.

Recognise their role in providing wrap-around services and reinvesting in local priorities.

3. Incorporate Spaces for Economic and Cultural Activity

Include workshops, enterprise hubs, and gathering places in housing developments.

Support local livelihoods and cultural continuity through multifunctional design.

4. Mandate Local Procurement and Supply Chain Development

Prioritise Indigenous businesses in construction, maintenance, landscaping, and cleaning.

Ensure housing investment stays in community and supports long-term economic growth.

5. Invest in Skills Transfer and Knowledge Sharing

Use external expertise to build sustainable local capability—not dependency.

Promote models that empower communities to lead future housing initiatives.

“Housing becomes infrastructure for community strength, cultural identity, and economic participation—laying the foundation for self-determination and intergenerational wellbeing.”

Why This Matters

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lead housing projects, the impact extends far beyond the home. Housing becomes a platform for community development - supporting employment, cultural revitalisation, and social wellbeing. Governments and housing agencies must ensure that every housing investment delivers multiple, long-term benefits for communities.



Rights based implementation framework

Housing is not a privilege—it is a right. Throughout the national engagement process, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities called for a fundamental shift in how housing is understood and delivered.

The current system, often reactive and externally imposed, must evolve into one that is grounded in rights, respect, and responsibility.

Communities made it clear: housing must no longer be viewed through a welfare lens. Instead, it must be recognised as a human right—central to wellbeing, cultural continuity, and self-determination. This means embedding long-term commitments, shared authority, and culturally integrated accountability into every aspect of housing policy and practice.

Community insights

"We're not asking for charity. Housing is our right—our mob have lived here forever and we deserve homes that reflect who we are and how we live."

Broome engagement session

"It's not just four walls. It's the base for our safety, our language, our culture, our families."

Gold Coast engagement session

"We want to see it. Not in a press release—real data, in language we understand."

Broome engagement session

"When we control housing, it does three things: it provides homes, creates jobs, and keeps culture strong."

Broome engagement session

"Take the time to get it right. We've waited this long, just don't rush through and miss what we've said."

Wollongong engagement session

"A house can meet the building code and still be wrong for us."

Wollongong engagement session

"It's not just about complaining—it's about having someone actually fix it."

Gold Coast engagement session

"Don't come in with another short program. We want long-term work with us—not for us."

Broome engagement session

"Take your time, but listen properly. Once you get this right, it'll stand for generations."

Wollongong engagement session

KEY ACTIONS

1. Establish a Rights-Based Implementation Framework

Align housing policy with international obligations, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Recognise housing as a non-negotiable obligation, not a discretionary service.

Embed cultural, social, and environmental realities into housing standards.

3. Ensure Transparent, Accessible, and Useful Reporting

Provide public reporting that includes cultural indicators and lived experience.

Use plain language, visuals, and region-specific summaries.

Create mechanisms for community feedback, verification, and course correction.

5. Commit to Progressive Realisation and Long-Term Investment

Move beyond short-term programs to multi-decade funding commitments.

Set clear, staged targets for cultural and structural adequacy.

Reform procurement to support local control and community-led timelines.

2. Integrate Cultural and Technical Accountability

Co-develop minimum cultural standards with communities.

Implement dual assessment models for cultural suitability and structural integrity.

Establish Indigenous-led evaluation panels to verify designs against community values.

4. Create Culturally Safe Complaint and Redress Mechanisms

Develop locally relevant, culturally safe complaint pathways.

Define clear timeframes, escalation procedures, and community oversight.

Resource independent bodies or trusted Aboriginal organisations to manage complaints.

6. Embed Self-Determination in Housing Governance

Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing organisations.

Create structural roles for Indigenous decision-making at all levels.

Support regional and local authority to define design, delivery, and evaluation standards.

"Housing is not just a service—it's a form of governance."

Why This Matters

Embedding a rights-based framework ensures that housing systems are accountable, culturally safe, and community-led. It shifts power to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, enabling homes that reflect identity, support wellbeing, and strengthen self-determination. When done right, this transformation will stand for generations.

06

Design considerations

Released under the FOI Act by the
National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

06

Design is not a secondary concern—it is central to whether housing succeeds or fails.

Across all regions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities emphasised that housing design must reflect cultural values, support intergenerational living, and respond to the realities of place.

Poor design leads not only to premature building failure but also to cultural disconnection, safety risks, and diminished wellbeing.

Design must begin with community priorities, not external templates. It must reflect how people live, care, and connect, not how others assume they should.

"It's not just about materials—it's about where you build, how you build, and who it's for."

Broome engagement session

KEY DESIGN THEMES

1. Support for Cultural and Intergenerational Living

Housing must accommodate extended families and flexible household compositions.

Designs should include:

Large common areas for gathering and yarning

Separate sleeping zones for different age groups

External spaces for ceremony, teaching, and cultural practice

Connected but autonomous living quarters for Elders, young people, and visitors



"Designs need to reflect who we are and where we are."

Gold Coast engagement session

"You can't expect us to live like small nuclear families—that's not how we are."

Wollongong engagement session

"We need houses that let us care for our old people and raise our grandkids at the same time."

Broome engagement session

KEY DESIGN THEMES

2. Transitional and Flexible Occupancy

Homes must support transitional living patterns, including:

Seasonal movement

Ceremony-related travel

Temporary care arrangements

Re-entry after incarceration or hospitalisation

Design features should include:

Flexible room use

Additional bedding spaces

Infrastructure to support increased water and power usage



"It's not always permanent—sometimes it's just for a season. But that doesn't mean it should be unsafe or feel like a prison."

Broome engagement session

"Sometimes people need to come home for a while. The house has to be ready for that—not overcrowded, not unsafe."

Gold Coast engagement session

3. Fit for Place and Purpose

Design must reflect:

Local climate and environmental conditions

Availability of services and infrastructure

Cultural protocols of the Nation on whose land the homes are built

Standardised builds often fail when imported from unrelated contexts.

Success depends on:

Co-designing with communities from the start

Incorporating local knowledge and traditional design practices



"You need to look at different types of housing in different environments"

Wollongong engagement session

"Don't come in here with some model that worked somewhere else."

Broome engagement session

07

Operationalise the 'Closing the Gap' priority reforms

How the Minimum Housing Standards Advance Structural Change

The Minimum Housing Standards are not just a set of technical guidelines—they are a tool to deliver structural reform. Each recommendation has been shaped to reflect and advance the four Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This section explains how the recommendations bring those reforms into practice, offering a clear line of sight between national policy commitments and on-the-ground housing outcomes.

PRIORITY REFORM

Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making

The Standards embed the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have a central role in decisions about housing that affects them.

Key recommendations include:

Co-design at every stage: From initial scoping to final design, the Standards call for structured and ongoing co-design processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Cultural governance: Projects are expected to establish culturally appropriate governance mechanisms, ensuring decisions are shared, not imposed.

Localised engagement: The recommendations emphasise the importance of regional and local partnerships that reflect place-based cultural authority, not just national or state-level input.

These elements make shared decision-making a requirement of implementation—not an optional add-on.

Priority Reform 2: Building the Community-Controlled Sector

The Standards recognise that strong housing outcomes depend on strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations.

Key recommendations include:

Setting implementation expectations that align with ATSI CCHO capability:

Standards are designed to be achievable by community-controlled organisations, not just by government or mainstream providers.

Supporting procurement pathways:

Recommendations call for governments to prioritise community-controlled organisations in the delivery of housing programs.

Embedding cultural models of housing:

The Standards shift the definition of quality and suitability to include cultural connection, community use, and long-term sustainability—reflecting the way ATSI CCHOs already operate.

This creates an environment where ATSI CCHOs can lead, scale, and be resourced accordingly.

How the Minimum Housing Standards Advance Structural Change

PRIORITY REFORMS

Priority Reform 3: Transforming Government Organisations

The Standards set expectations not only for housing providers, but also for governments.

Recommendations include:

Alignment with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led standards:

Governments are expected to recognise and apply the Minimum Housing Standards in planning, funding, and regulatory frameworks.

Adapted systems and processes:

Procurement, reporting, and compliance systems must be flexible enough to accommodate culturally appropriate approaches recommended in the Standards.

Clear lines of accountability:

The Standards outline responsibilities across all stakeholders, requiring governments to work in ways that are transparent, responsive, and collaborative.

These recommendations support a shift away from transactional government practices toward enabling roles that strengthen community-led work.

Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data and Information

The Standards emphasise the importance of data that is owned by, and shared with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendations include:

Community-led definitions of what data matters:

Data collection and evaluation are framed around outcomes that matter to community—such as wellbeing, connection, and cultural safety—not just tenancy metrics.

Accessible reporting: The Standards call for clear, regular, and shared reporting between government, providers, and communities.

This supports long-term change in how information is used—not just by governments, but by communities themselves.

08

Appendix

Released under the FOI Act by the
National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | GOLD COAST

12-13 February 2025



two-day session

41 participants
(across 23 organisations)

The Gold Coast consultation emphasised several critical components of authentic engagement with First Nations communities.

Participants identified that meaningful consultation must involve community members at every stage of housing projects, including contracts, tenders, and final sign-off.

This involvement should not be tokenistic but represent genuine decision-making power. The engagement process must utilise culturally respectful practices that honour traditional protocols specific to each community, including appropriate acknowledgment of Elders and respect for local customs.

Transparency and honesty throughout all processes were consistently highlighted as non-negotiable aspects of engagement.

This includes clear communication about project limitations, timeframes, and potential challenges. Participants stressed the importance of empowering community-driven decision-making through formal advisory structures that have real influence

over outcomes rather than rubber-stamping predetermined plans. The value of conducting meetings on Country whenever possible was emphasised as essential for maintaining cultural connection and providing context for housing discussions.

Rather than project-based engagement that ends when construction is complete, participants advocated for establishing long-term relationships between housing providers and communities.

Successful engagement examples identified by participants included frameworks that position community members as co-designers from the beginning, workshops that incorporate traditional ceremonies, transparent funding models that give communities oversight of resource allocation, tenant support programs designed by community members, and sustained partnerships with Indigenous organisations that have established community trust.

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | GOLDCOAST

Safety During Cultural Gatherings

The consultation specifically addressed engagement around safety during periods of cultural significance. *“Housing projects should create training and employment for our people—in design, construction, maintenance, and management. This builds skills, creates jobs, and ensures the work is done properly”*, conversations reflected.

This perspective positions housing development as an opportunity for economic participation and capacity building, with benefits that extend beyond the physical housing stock. *“When our housing organisations control housing, they do more than manage properties—they provide wrap-around services, support cultural programs, and reinvest in our communities,”* conversations reflected.

This insight highlights the value of Indigenous-controlled housing organisations as community development engines that generate social and cultural benefits beyond basic property management.

“Housing that supports small-scale enterprises, cultural activities, and community gatherings creates economic opportunities and strengthens our communities. It’s about more than just a roof”, conversations reflected.

This statement emphasises the potential for housing design to facilitate economic activities and cultural practices, creating spaces that support livelihoods as well as shelter.

“Every housing dollar should do triple duty”, conversations reflected. *“It should provide shelter, create jobs for our mob, and strengthen our culture and community. That’s what happens when we control our own housing organisations.”*

This powerful formulation emphasises the efficiency and effectiveness of Indigenous-led approaches that integrate multiple community development goals into housing provision, maximising the impact of investment.

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | WOLLONGONG

5-6 March 2025

 two-day session

 38 participants
(across 20 Organisations)

The Wollongong engagement sessions demonstrated the power of authentic Indigenous-led engagement based on cultural protocols, strength-based conversations, and trauma-informed practices.

Throughout both days, the unequivocal message from participants was that genuine community-led decision-making must be the foundation of all housing initiatives.

Housing as a Place of Connection and Belonging

The Wollongong community strongly emphasised that housing represents far more than physical shelter—it is the beating heart of cultural continuity and community wellbeing. Participants articulated a vision of housing as community centres where families gather, share and heal, reinforcing social bonds and providing spaces for collective experiences.

They highlighted the need for dedicated spaces for cultural practices, healing and storytelling, recognising these as essential elements of housing functionality rather than optional additions.

Housing that reflects deep connection to Country and cultural heritage was consistently identified as a priority, with design elements that acknowledge traditional custodianship and relationship to place.

Participants emphasised housing's role in supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer, with spaces that facilitate Elders teaching young people cultural practices and stories. The importance of providing safe environments for children's educational needs was highlighted, recognising that learning occurs within homes as well as formal educational settings.

The community expressed strong views that *"Indigenous-led design does NOT mean you come with a plan and ask us to approve it, it means we start from the start together."* This principle must underpin all housing initiatives, challenging conventional consultation approaches that seek feedback on predetermined designs rather than starting with community priorities and cultural requirements.

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | WOLLONGONG

Community-Led Decision Making

The consultation reinforced that First Nations communities must have complete control and significant influence over housing decisions from initial concept through to implementation and management. Participants emphasised that Elders must guide every stage of housing development, bringing their cultural authority and wisdom to the process.

They stressed that all community members—from Elders to young people—deserve equal opportunity for input, recognising diverse perspectives within communities and the importance of intergenerational input.

Grassroots organisation was identified as essential for ensuring decisions reflect authentic community needs rather than external assumptions or one-size-fits-all approaches. Participants highlighted that housing designs must directly mirror cultural

practices and daily life, requiring deep understanding of how communities actually live rather than imposing standardised models. Quality and safety standards must be community-determined, recognising that communities are best positioned to identify what constitutes appropriate housing in their context. Final sign-off authority must rest with the community, ensuring accountability to those who will live in and use the housing.

The community explicitly connected this approach to international human rights frameworks, noting that *“our housing projects are developed with full respect for our rights as Indigenous peoples”* and align with *“the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ensuring justice and equity in housing.”* This rights-based framing positions community control not as a preference but as an inherent right to self-determination in housing provision.

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | BROOME

25-26 March 2025

 two-day session

 30 participants
(across 16 organisations)
Housing Design Requirements

Our communities identified specific design requirements across different geographical settings, reflecting the unique needs and circumstances of each context.

The consultation found that urban housing requirements include open plan living spaces that accommodate cultural practices of gathering, allowing for flexible use of space for family activities and cultural events.

Larger kitchens to support family meals and community events were consistently identified as essential, recognising the central role of food preparation and sharing in maintaining cultural connections. Additional bathrooms to accommodate extended family living were highlighted as necessary to support larger household sizes and visiting family members.

Participants emphasised the need for soundproof walls to ensure privacy and reduce neighbourhood disturbances, particularly important in closer urban settings where houses may be in close proximity.

Quality air conditioning systems appropriate to local climate conditions were identified as essential for comfort and health, especially in areas experiencing extreme temperatures. Strong security features including reinforced doors and security screens were highlighted as particularly important in urban environments to maintain safety while allowing for ventilation.

Dedicated outdoor spaces for children were consistently identified as crucial design elements, providing safe areas for play and

cultural learning.

Secure fencing that provides safety without creating institutional environments was noted as important for balancing security needs with visual connection to community. Adequate storage solutions that reflect living patterns were emphasised, acknowledging the need for storing cultural items, tools, and materials for cultural practices.

Regional housing needs included extra bathrooms and larger houses to accommodate kinship responsibilities that frequently involve extended family members staying for various periods. Full verandas to create outdoor living spaces appropriate to regional lifestyles were identified as essential, providing shade and gathering areas suitable for the climate.

Outdoor kitchens and fire pits for cultural cooking practices were highlighted as important cultural facilities, allowing for traditional food preparation methods.

Outdoor grilling areas that support community gatherings were emphasised as important social spaces that facilitate sharing and connection. Sound insulation that respects privacy within busy households was identified as necessary given the typically larger household sizes in regional areas.

Air conditioning systems designed specifically for regional climate conditions were noted as essential, recognising the extreme temperature variations experienced in many regions.

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | BROOME

Safety and Security for Women and Children

Our discussions emphasised the critical importance of housing design and management that prioritises safety for women and children, recognising their particular vulnerability in some housing contexts.

Stronger doors and security screens on windows were identified as standard features necessary for physical security, particularly in contexts where domestic violence may be a concern. Appropriate fencing and security gates were highlighted as especially important in urban environments where proximity to public spaces may create safety concerns.

Integration with 'safer communities' initiatives and wrap-around services was emphasised as essential to address the broader social context of safety beyond physical housing features.

Strategic lighting around houses and streets was identified as essential safety infrastructure, preventing dark areas that may pose risks particularly to women and children. Secure outdoor spaces where children can play safely were highlighted as necessary design features, allowing for appropriate supervision while maintaining connection to outdoors.

The use of crime data in planning housing locations and security features was recommended to ensure evidence-based approaches to safety, with particular attention to women's safety when determining housing locations.

Design features that provide safe spaces within homes for vulnerable family members were emphasised, including consideration of bedroom positioning and escape routes.

Consideration of escape routes and safety zones within housing designs was highlighted as important for emergency situations, whether related to domestic violence or other safety concerns.

Participants recognised that safety extends beyond physical features to include community cohesion, cultural healing, and access to appropriate services.

This holistic understanding acknowledges that physical design features alone cannot ensure safety without addressing the social, cultural, and service contexts in which housing exists.

FACE TO FACE WORKSHOPS | BROOME

Housing as a Human Right

Our communities firmly assert that adequate housing is a fundamental human right that must be respected and protected, not a privilege or welfare consideration. We emphasised the need for standards that go beyond bare minimum requirements to support thriving communities, recognising that merely providing basic shelter is insufficient for wellbeing and cultural continuity.

Recognition that culturally appropriate housing is essential for wellbeing and cultural continuity was consistently highlighted, positioning cultural appropriateness as a non-negotiable aspect of housing adequacy rather than an optional enhancement.

Acknowledgement of the interconnection between housing and outcomes in health, education, and economic participation was emphasised, recognising housing as a foundational social determinant that affects all aspects of life.

Housing policies that address historical disadvantage and ongoing structural barriers were identified as necessary for equity, recognising that current disparities result from historical policies and practices that must be actively addressed.

Clear accountability mechanisms to ensure this right is respected by governments and service providers were emphasised as essential for transparency and effectiveness in housing provision.

Recognition of our right to live on Country and maintain connection to traditional lands was highlighted as a fundamental aspect of housing rights for First Nations peoples, acknowledging the spiritual and cultural significance of place.

We demand housing policy and provision that acknowledges this right and works to progressively realise it for all our people, with particular attention to those currently experiencing the greatest housing disadvantage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Indigenous Housing Guide

The National Indigenous Housing Guide (2006) serves as a pivotal resource aimed at enhancing the living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.

It is rooted in a recognition of the historical and ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous communities regarding housing and health, drawing on the findings from the Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku (UPK) environmental health review.

This guide represented an important step forward in recognising the relationship between housing conditions and health outcomes for First Nations communities, providing practical guidance for housing design and maintenance.

A central tenet of the guide is the concept of health hardware, which refers to essential infrastructure necessary for maintaining health. This includes fundamental elements such as plumbing, sanitation, and cooking facilities that directly impact daily living practices.

The guide identifies nine Healthy Living Practices that are crucial for promoting health and preventing disease. These include the ability to wash people (particularly children), the ability to wash clothes and bedding, safe removal of waste, improved nutrition through proper food storage and preparation facilities, reduction of overcrowding, minimising contact with pests and vermin, dust control, temperature regulation, and injury prevention.

Each practice is supported by technical recommendations designed to ensure housing can facilitate these health-promoting behaviours.

While the guide provided valuable direction and continues to inform aspects of Indigenous housing design, our current work seeks to move beyond its predominantly technical focus toward a more holistic approach. Contemporary standards development recognises that Indigenous leadership and cultural requirements must be positioned as foundational rather than supplementary considerations in housing design and management.

This shift reflects the evolution in Indigenous housing research from technically-focused approaches toward models that centre self-determination, cultural continuity, and community control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participatory Methods and Indigenous Voice

Previous methodologies like ‘The House Game’ developed by Farley, Birdsall-Jones, and Datta demonstrate the limitations of conventional research approaches in housing studies.

This visual method was designed to facilitate culturally responsive housing design by engaging community members in a participatory research process, responding to critiques of traditional methods such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires which often fail to capture the complexities of Aboriginal social structures and cultural practices.

While ‘The House Game’ and similar participatory approaches represented improvements over purely externally-driven research methods, they still positioned Indigenous community members primarily as informants rather than decision-makers.

Our approach builds upon these insights by moving beyond participation toward Indigenous leadership, recognising that even well-intentioned participatory methods can reinforce power imbalances if ultimate decision-making authority remains with non-Indigenous researchers or policymakers.

This shift from co-design to Indigenous-led processes represents a significant evolution in housing research methodology. It acknowledges that meaningful improvement in Indigenous housing outcomes requires not just better consultation techniques but fundamental changes in who controls the research agenda, methodology, analysis, and implementation.

By positioning First Nations communities as leaders rather than participants, we address the structural power imbalances that have historically undermined housing initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Gaps and Future Directions

The literature reveals several critical gaps that our Indigenous-led approach seeks to address. There is a pressing need for long-term evaluation frameworks that capture cultural and social outcomes beyond physical housing metrics, recognising that conventional evaluation timeframes and methods often fail to document important cultural and community impacts of housing interventions.

Economic analyses of preventive maintenance approaches and lifecycle costing that incorporate cultural values are also lacking, as standard economic evaluations typically employ timeframes and metrics that undervalue preventative approaches and community capacity development.

Climate adaptation strategies for Indigenous housing that integrate traditional ecological knowledge represent another significant gap, as climate change disproportionately affects many Indigenous communities.

Traditional knowledge often contains sophisticated understanding of environmental adaptation relevant to housing design yet remains underutilised in mainstream approaches.

Additionally, innovative financing mechanisms for Indigenous-led housing developments are needed to address the structural barriers created by conventional housing finance systems that limit community control and aspiration.

Intergenerational approaches to addressing housing needs across the lifecycle are insufficiently developed in current literature.

Conventional housing research often employs static analyses that fail to capture how housing needs evolve across generations and life stages, missing opportunities to support cultural continuity and intergenerational wellbeing through appropriate housing design and management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous Housing in Australia

The body of literature examining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing in Australia represents a complex intellectual terrain shaped by shifting paradigms in research methodology, policy frameworks, and conceptual understandings of Indigenous rights.

There is extensive literature on Indigenous housing in Australia. It was not the intent of this report to do a full literature review but to highlight relevant material to provide context for, and inform the Community Consultations. The following sets out the key results of this review.

Literature examining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing in Australia represents a complex intellectual terrain shaped by shifting paradigms in research methodology, policy frameworks, and conceptual understandings of Indigenous rights.

Early research approaches often reflected colonial perspectives, positioning Indigenous housing primarily as a welfare concern requiring technical intervention from external experts. These approaches frequently failed to acknowledge the cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions of housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A transformative shift began to emerge in the early 2000s, as Indigenous scholars and allies challenged these reductionist approaches. This epistemological reorientation gained momentum throughout the 2010-2024 period, with research increasingly adopting decolonising methodologies that centre Indigenous knowledge systems and sovereignty (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

This evolution reflects broader movements toward recognising Indigenous rights in research practice, emphasising self-determination rather than paternalistic welfare approaches that dominated earlier decades (Cornell & Kalt, 2007).

The establishment of NATSIHA in 2020 represents a culmination of this evolution—the creation of a national Indigenous-led housing peak body capable of influencing research agendas, methodological approaches, and knowledge translation. NATSIHA's emergence has accelerated the shift toward research that explicitly recognises housing not merely as physical infrastructure but as a manifestation of cultural identity, kinship obligations, connection to Country, and collective wellbeing.

This reconceptualisation challenges conventional housing metrics focused solely on quantitative measures like overcrowding or structural adequacy, moving toward more holistic frameworks that incorporate cultural appropriateness, spiritual connection, and community wellbeing as essential dimensions of housing adequacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key Themes

Research Theme	Key References	Major Findings	Implications for Standards
Health & Housing	Bailie et al. (2010); Melody et al. (2016); Walker et al. (2019)	Established causal links between housing improvements and reduced infectious disease rates; Quantitative relationships between housing characteristics and respiratory health outcomes; Interaction between housing security, cultural connection, and mental health	Housing standards must prioritise health outcomes through structural design, ventilation systems, and facilities that support hygiene practices
Cultural Design	Go-Sam (2008); Fien et al. (2011); Davidson et al. (2012)	Culturally-informed designs achieve superior functional and cultural outcomes; Standard housing designs conflict with Indigenous lifestyles causing "cultural stress"; Best practices for community engagement in housing design	Standards must incorporate cultural values in spatial design, accommodate extended family structures, and respect cultural protocols in layout
Indigenous Governance	Milligan et al. (2011); Habibis et al. (2016); Crabtree et al. (2015)	Indigenous-controlled organisations achieve superior outcomes in tenancy stability and cultural appropriateness; Culturally-grounded governance models show better capacity development; Different regulatory environments enable or constrain self-determination	Standards must support Indigenous-led governance structures, acknowledge cultural authority, and reduce administrative barriers to Indigenous control
Remote Housing	Lea & Pholeros (2010); Fien & Charlesworth (2012); Moran et al. (2016)	Conventional maintenance approaches fail in remote contexts due to misaligned assumptions; Alternative construction technologies can improve quality while supporting local economies; Housing programs can generate substantial economic multipliers	Standards for remote housing must consider supply chains, maintenance systems, and opportunities for local employment and economic development
Urban Housing	Andersen et al. (2018); Solonec (2015); Spinney et al. (2016)	Housing disparities persist despite proximity to mainstream markets; Systemic discrimination in private rental markets; Conventional homelessness definitions fail to capture Indigenous experiences	Standards must address urban-specific challenges including discrimination in mainstream housing systems and cultural homelessness
Climate Adaptation	Green et al. (2018); Alexander et al. (2011); Standen et al. (2022) Memmott et al. (2024) HEAL (2025); Talukder (2025)	Aboriginal populations disproportionately affected by extreme climate events; Traditional ecological knowledge offers sophisticated climate adaptation strategies; Housing design must incorporate both traditional knowledge and contemporary climate science.	Standards must integrate traditional environmental knowledge with contemporary climate adaptation, address extreme weather resilience, and support culturally appropriate responses to environmental change.

Recent research demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face disproportionate impacts from climate change, with extreme weather events affecting remote communities particularly severely (Green et al., 2018). Traditional ecological knowledge systems contain sophisticated understanding of environmental adaptation that can inform contemporary housing design (Berkes, 2012). The Aboriginal-led "Healing Country" research project conducted by the Healing Environments and Lives (HEAL) Network across Bundjalung country (Northern NSW), Warumungu country (Tennant Creek), and Whadjuk country (Perth) is investigating how traditional knowledge can inform climate adaptation strategies for housing and community infrastructure (HEAL 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Analysis of Design Guidelines and Implementation Gaps

Since the 1970s, numerous Indigenous housing design guidelines have been developed across Australia, each representing significant investment in research, community consultation, and technical expertise. However, analysis of these guidelines reveals a persistent pattern: technically sound documents that failed to achieve widespread implementation due to systemic barriers such as lack of mandatory compliance requirements, procurement frameworks that favor mainstream providers, insufficient Indigenous organisational control over delivery and maintenance planning gaps that undermine long-term sustainability.

A National framework for the design, construction and maintenance of Indigenous housing

In 1999, a Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers' Working Group on Indigenous Housing prepared a National framework for the design, construction and maintenance of Indigenous housing (Healthhabitat for the Commonwealth State and Territory Housing Ministers' Working Group on Indigenous Housing, 1999).

The framework was subsequently updated to include three editions of the National Indigenous Housing Guide (Department of Family and Community Services, 2007) which serves as a pivotal resource aimed at enhancing the living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. It is rooted in a recognition of the historical and ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous communities regarding housing and health, drawing on the findings from the landmark Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku (UPK) environmental health review (Nganampa Health Council Inc, 1987).

This guide represented an important step forward in recognising the relationship between housing conditions and health outcomes for First Nations communities, providing practical guidance for housing design specification, quality control and maintenance of essential safety and "health hardware".

A central tenet of the guide is the concept of health hardware, which refers to essential infrastructure necessary for maintaining health. This includes fundamental elements such as plumbing, sanitation, and cooking facilities that directly impact daily living practices.

The guide identifies nine Healthy Living Practices that are crucial for promoting health and preventing disease. These include the ability to wash people (particularly children), the ability to wash clothes and bedding, safe removal of waste, improved nutrition through proper food storage and preparation facilities, reduction of overcrowding, minimising contact with pests and vermin, dust control, temperature regulation, and injury prevention. Each practice is supported by technical recommendations designed to ensure housing can facilitate these health-promoting behaviours.

These technical recommendations are informed by Housing for Health project data, collected through a community-controlled participatory approach where Aboriginal communities first provided their acceptance to participate in the program, then actively engaged in both initial and follow-up housing condition surveys, and participated directly in the repair and maintenance processes where appropriate (Healthhabitat, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aboriginal community teams led the surveying and repair work, ensuring that technical interventions were grounded in local knowledge and community priorities. In the absence of any further updated editions, Healthhabitat - who authored the first 3 versions for the Commonwealth government - has been updating a similar guide called Housing for Health: the Guide as an open-source on-line resource (Healthhabitat, 2025).

While the guide provided valuable direction and continues to inform aspects of Indigenous housing design, our current work seeks to move beyond its predominantly technical focus toward a more holistic approach. Contemporary standards development recognises that Indigenous leadership and cultural requirements must be positioned as foundational rather than supplementary considerations in housing design and management. This shift reflects the evolution in Indigenous housing research from technically-focused approaches toward models that centre self-determination, cultural continuity, and community control.

Participatory Methods and Indigenous Voice

Previous methodologies like “The House Game” developed by Farley, Birdsall-Jones, and Datta (2019) demonstrate the limitations of conventional research approaches in housing studies. This visual method was designed to facilitate culturally responsive housing design by engaging community members in a participatory research process, responding to critiques of traditional methods such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires which often fail to capture the complexities of Aboriginal social structures and cultural practices.

While “The House Game” and similar participatory approaches represented

improvements over purely externally-driven research methods, they still positioned Indigenous community members primarily as informants rather than decision-makers. Our approach builds upon these insights by moving beyond participation toward Indigenous leadership, recognising that even well-intentioned participatory methods can reinforce power imbalances if ultimate decision-making authority remains with non-Indigenous researchers or policymakers.

This shift from co-design to Indigenous-led processes represents a significant evolution in housing research methodology. It acknowledges that meaningful improvement in Indigenous housing outcomes requires not just better consultation techniques but fundamental changes in who controls the research agenda, methodology, analysis, and implementation. By positioning First Nations communities as leaders rather than participants, we address the structural power imbalances that have historically undermined housing initiatives.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

The literature reveals several critical gaps that our Indigenous-led approach seeks to address. There is a pressing need for long-term evaluation frameworks that capture cultural and social outcomes beyond physical housing metrics, recognising that conventional evaluation timeframes and methods often fail to document important cultural and community impacts of housing interventions. Economic analyses of preventive maintenance approaches and lifecycle costing that incorporate cultural values are also lacking, as standard economic evaluations typically employ timeframes and metrics that undervalue preventative approaches and community capacity development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Climate adaptation strategies for Indigenous housing that integrate traditional ecological knowledge represent another significant gap, as climate change disproportionately affects many Indigenous communities. Traditional knowledge often contains sophisticated understanding of environmental adaptation relevant to housing design yet remains underutilised in mainstream approaches. Additionally, innovative financing mechanisms for Indigenous-led housing developments are needed to address the structural barriers created by conventional housing finance systems that limit community control and aspiration.

Finally, intergenerational approaches to addressing housing needs across the lifecycle are insufficiently developed in current literature. Conventional housing research often employs static analyses that fail to capture how housing needs evolve across generations and life stages, missing opportunities to support cultural continuity and intergenerational wellbeing through appropriate housing design and management.

Proposed Framework for Minimum Standards

Based on our community consultations, literature review and experience, we acknowledge process is as important as the product in developing minimum standards and their implementation. We propose a comprehensive framework that extends beyond technical building standards to encompass the full range of requirements for culturally appropriate, sustainable Indigenous housing. The minimum standards need to be more than just a housing design guide and should incorporate:

1. Governance and Sovereignty

- Community decision-making authority: Formal mechanisms ensuring Indigenous communities control all stages of housing development.
- Cultural authority recognition: Acknowledgment of traditional governance structures and cultural protocols.
- Self-determination frameworks: Systems supporting community-controlled housing organisations and Indigenous-led service delivery.
- Accountability mechanisms: Transparent reporting and complaint processes accessible to communities.

2. Culturally Appropriate Design

- Spatial arrangements: Design requirements supporting extended family living, cultural practices, and kinship obligations.
- Cultural facilities: Mandatory provision of spaces for ceremony, storytelling, and cultural activities.
- Connection to Country: Design features maintaining visual, physical, and spiritual connection to landscape.
- Gender-appropriate spaces: Consideration of cultural protocols around men's and women's spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

3. Planning and Location

- Cultural landscape integration: Housing location and orientation respecting cultural sites and traditional land use.
- Community infrastructure: Access to culturally appropriate services, schools, and health facilities.
- Economic opportunities: Proximity to employment, training, and economic development opportunities.
- Climate resilience: Location planning considering current and projected climate impacts.

4. Technical Design

- Climate-appropriate construction: Building design suited to local environmental conditions.
- Accessibility requirements: Universal design principles ensuring access for people with disabilities and Elders.
- Safety and security: Appropriate security features balanced with community connection needs.
- Sustainability features: Energy efficiency, water conservation, and renewable energy systems.

5. Quality Assurance

- Cultural compliance assessment: Evaluation processes measuring cultural appropriateness alongside technical compliance.
- Community verification: Community sign-off requirements at key project milestones.
- Independent monitoring: Third-party assessment of housing quality and cultural appropriateness.
- Continuous improvement: Regular review and updating of standards based on community feedback.

6. Specification and Maintenance

- Lifecycle planning: Long-term maintenance schedules and component replacement strategies.
- Local capacity building: Training and employment of local maintenance teams.
- Sustainable materials: Specification of durable, locally maintainable materials and systems.
- Responsive maintenance: Systems enabling rapid response to maintenance needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Next Steps

The engagement process to develop the Improving Housing and Empowering Local Communities document has revealed both the depth of current housing challenges and the wealth of community-led solutions waiting to be implemented. Through extensive consultations across urban, regional, and remote Australia, we have heard consistent calls for housing systems that respect our cultural values, respond to our climate needs, and recognise our right to self-determination.

Our mob has articulated a clear vision for housing that goes beyond mere shelter to support our cultural practices, strengthen our communities, and contribute to our wellbeing across generations. This vision isn't complicated—it's about homes that actually work for our families, our cultures, and our Country. It's about designing spaces that accommodate extended family structures, enable cultural practices like ceremony and gathering, and respond to our unique relationships with the natural environment.

What we've heard consistently across every community is that genuine change requires shifting decision-making power to First Nations peoples. When we control our housing—from planning through construction and management—we create homes that truly meet our needs. When others design our housing without understanding our cultural values, family structures, and connection to Country, they invariably get it wrong. This pattern has repeated itself for decades, resulting in millions of dollars in wasted investment and ongoing housing stress for our communities.

The challenges we face are significant and vary across different contexts. In remote communities, extreme overcrowding affects many families living in houses designed for much smaller household sizes. Poor construction quality, inadequate maintenance

systems, and designs that ignore local climate conditions create homes that deteriorate rapidly and become unhealthy to live in. In regional areas, our people struggle with maintenance backlogs, culturally inappropriate designs, and climate-inappropriate homes that fail to respond to local environmental conditions or cultural needs. In urban centres, our mob faces discrimination in the rental market, disconnection from community, and ongoing barriers to housing security, often forced into housing that provides shelter but not the cultural connections essential for wellbeing.

Despite these challenges, our consultations revealed remarkable resilience, innovation, and determination across First Nations communities. We heard about community housing co-ops creating culturally appropriate developments that prioritise extended family connections and cultural practices. We learned about Indigenous maintenance teams solving longtime repair issues through local knowledge and community-controlled approaches. We discovered examples of culturally grounded tenancy management creating stable communities where people want to stay and contribute to their neighbourhood's wellbeing.

The path forward is clear, but it requires fundamental changes to how housing systems operate. We need housing standards that start with our cultural values and community needs as foundational principles, not afterthoughts. We need funding models that support community control rather than impose external priorities driven by bureaucratic convenience or political cycles. We need procurement systems that value cultural appropriateness alongside technical specifications. We need maintenance approaches that build local capacity rather than create ongoing dependency on external contractors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Next Steps

Most importantly, we need systems that recognise housing as a fundamental human right—not just a matter of charity or welfare. This rights-based approach creates accountability mechanisms and ensures that housing provision becomes a non-negotiable government obligation rather than a discretionary service subject to political whims.

Central to all of this is the need for genuine partnerships where our knowledge and leadership are respected. As one Elder put it: “We’ve been living on this Country for over 60,000 years. We know how to create living environments that work with our climate, our social structures, and our cultural practices. Listen to us.” This wisdom, combined with contemporary technical knowledge and resources, offers the pathway to housing solutions that actually work.

Before developing new frameworks, we must acknowledge that considerable work has already been undertaken across jurisdictions. Existing guidelines contain valuable information developed through years of research and community consultation. Documents like the National Indigenous Housing Guide, various state-based design standards, and community-developed protocols represent significant investments in understanding what constitutes appropriate Indigenous housing.

However, a critical gap exists in understanding the implementation, usage, and uptake of these guidelines. Despite the technical quality of many existing documents, implementation rates remain disappointingly low, suggesting that barriers exist beyond the quality of the guidance itself. We need to comprehensively review how widely and

effectively these guidelines have been used to inform new and existing housing, identifying both the facilitators and barriers to their implementation.

This implementation review should examine procurement systems, professional capacity, regulatory frameworks, funding mechanisms, and governance structures that either enable or constrain the uptake of culturally appropriate design principles. Understanding why good guidelines fail to translate into good housing is essential for ensuring that future efforts achieve better outcomes.

This implementation review should be prioritised as the essential next step before developing new frameworks. Rather than adding another document to an already crowded field, we should focus on understanding how to make existing knowledge more effective. One strategic option would involve reviewing and updating the National Framework for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Indigenous Housing to incorporate the framework elements described throughout this report, while acknowledging the urgent need to address climate adaptation requirements and evolving community priorities.

Several immediate actions can begin transforming housing outcomes while longer-term framework development proceeds. These include establishing Indigenous leadership in all housing decision-making processes, implementing community-controlled quality assurance mechanisms, and developing professional capacity programs that build cultural competency alongside technical skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Next Steps

Funding models need urgent reform to support community control rather than external delivery. This means moving beyond competitive grant processes toward sustained funding agreements that recognise community organisations as equal partners in housing delivery. It also requires developing accountability measures that assess cultural appropriateness alongside conventional quality indicators.

This report represents more than just words on paper. It embodies the voices of hundreds of First Nations people who shared their experiences, challenges, and solutions over months of consultations across the continent. From urban centres to remote outstations, from tropical north to temperate south, the message has been consistent: we need housing systems that respect our knowledge, support our self-determination, and enable our communities to thrive.

The document provides a roadmap for transforming how housing is designed, delivered, and managed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Implementation requires sustained commitment, adequate resources, and genuine partnership between First Nations communities and government agencies.

Together, we can create housing systems that truly serve our communities, respect our cultural values, and support our self-determination. The knowledge exists within our communities. The technical solutions are available. What we need now is the political will to make fundamental changes to systems that have failed our people for too long.

Our communities have the solutions. We just need the authority and resources to implement them. The time for incremental change has passed. Our housing crisis

demands transformational action, and our communities are ready to lead that transformation.

"Housing is more than walls and a roof—it's about creating spaces where our culture can thrive, our children can grow strong, and our connection to Country can deepen. When we build houses for our mob, we're building the foundations for our future." -
Community Elder, Broome session.

EXISTING GUIDELINES

Since the 1970s, Australia has developed numerous Indigenous housing design guidelines across national, state, territory, and regional levels. This review examines 15 major guidelines, analysing their development context, key features, implementation outcomes, and lessons learned. The analysis reveals consistent patterns of technical adequacy undermined by systemic implementation barriers.

Detailed Guideline Analysis

The following analysis examines fourteen major Indigenous housing design guidelines developed across Australia from 2006 to 2024. Each guideline represents significant investment in research and community consultation, yet implementation rates vary dramatically from less than 20% to over 70%. The analysis reveals that implementation success correlates with Indigenous organisational control rather than technical quality, with community-controlled initiatives achieving implementation rates that are consistently two to three times higher than government-developed guidelines. This pattern holds across all jurisdictions and guideline types, suggesting that governance arrangements are more critical to success than technical specifications.

Guide Line	Year	Lead Agency	Development Context	Key Features
National Guidelines				
National Indigenous Housing Guide	2007	Department of Family and Community Services	Post-UPK environmental health review	Health hardware focus, 9 Healthy Living Practices, technical specifications for design, specification, quality control and maintenance
Remote Area Housing Policy Framework	2010	Dept. Families, Housing, Community Services	National Partnership Agreement response	Whole-of-government approach, maintenance focus, engagement principles
Housing Sector Strengthening Plan	2022	NATSIHA & Closing the Gap Joint Council	Closing the Gap Priority Reform implementation	Transformative actions, Indigenous-led sector development, capacity building focus
National Construction Code (NCC) Parts 1, 2 & 3, the ABCB Housing Provisions, NCC 2019, Amendment and Liveable Housing Design	2022 - 2024	Australian Building Codes Board	Mandatory accessibility requirements for new housing	Performance standards, accessibility compliance, climate-responsive design, cultural adaptability provisions.
Regional/Community Guidelines				
Kimberley Housing Design Guidelines	2014	Kimberley Land Council	Community-controlled response to inappropriate housing	Traditional knowledge integration, local materials, cultural protocols
Central Australian Housing Design Principles	2016	Centre for Appropriate Technology	Technical innovation for extreme climate	Climate adaptation, passive cooling, maintenance simplification
Cape York Housing Standards	2017	Cape York Partnership	Welfare reform and community development integration	Economic development integration, local employment, skills development
NATSIHA Strategic Framework	2024	NATSIHA	First National Indigenous-led housing strategy	Data sovereignty, sector strengthening, advocacy framework, community control principles

EXISTING GUIDELINES

Guide Line	Year	Lead Agency	Development Context	Key Features
State and Territory Guidelines				
WA Indigenous Housing Design Guidelines	2008	Department of Housing WA	Cultural inappropriateness recognition	Cultural design principles, extended family accommodation, climate construction
NT Design Guidelines for Indigenous Communities	2012	Territory Housing NT	Remote infrastructure and cultural challenges	Remote construction, maintenance considerations, cultural space allocation
QLD Indigenous Housing Design Standards	2015	QLD Housing and Public Works	Remote infrastructure and cultural challenges	Remote construction, maintenance considerations, cultural space allocation
QLD Modern Homes Standards	2023 - 2024	QLD Department of Housing and Public Works	Implementation of NCC 2022 with transitional measures	Energy efficiency, livable housing design, grading requirements, exemption processes
Original Housing Strategy Design Principles	2018	SA Housing Authority	Housing strategy renewal with engagement	Urban-rural differentiation, accessibility focus, sustainability requirements
AHO Design Guidelines	2020	NSW Aboriginal Housing Office	Cultural sustainability principles	Design excellence benchmarks, climate-responsive thermal performance, extended family accommodation

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Document 11



NATSIHA
National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Housing Association

Contact: Benjamin Thompson
s47F [REDACTED] @natsiha.org.au

Website: www.natsiha.org.au

FOI/2526/038

OFFICIAL

Released under the FOI Act by the
National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

From: Benjamin Thompson [s47F]@natsiha.org.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 20 August 2025 9:49 AM
To: [s47F]; GMU Canberra
Subject: National Indigenous Employment Strategy
Attachments: s_A National Indigenous Employment Strategy for Housing.zip

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Good Morning [s47F] and Team,

Please see the recent changes to the National Indigenous Employment Strategy

Additionally, NATSIHA has taken the opportunity to provide a response

NIAA Comments:

National Indigenous Housing Employment Strategy

- In its current form, this document does not meet the requirements of the grant agreement
- The deliverable is to develop an employment strategy, and how it currently stands it focuses on the need for funding and the lack of data.
- While I don't want to dictate what NATSIHA considers a National Indigenous Housing Employment Strategy should include, you might want to consider the following:
 - o How organisations can attract, recruit, develop and retain a skilled workforce
 - o How can organisations increase employment outcomes

NATSIHA Response:

Thank you for your thoughtful comments and for allowing us to provide further clarity on this important matter.

Under the existing grant agreement, Project Objective 2.5(h) requires NATSIHA to develop a National Indigenous Housing Employment Strategy that is applicable across all jurisdictions.

In undertaking this work, NATSIHA has worked in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations across the country. Through this process, we have been able to identify the key priorities, gaps, and opportunities that will allow our sector to strengthen employment outcomes in housing and related services.

A consistent message from communities is that there is no shortage of capable, committed, and skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ready to work in housing. The real challenge lies in ensuring that organisations have the resources, structures, and supports needed to attract, employ, train, and retain them. Many providers are currently under-resourced, which restricts their ability to invest in professional development, create career pathways, or expand their workforce to meet growing demand.

To address these challenges, the Strategy sets out a series of practical and community-driven solutions:

- Building organisational capacity – Securing long-term, reliable investment so housing providers can operate sustainably, strengthen their governance, and dedicate resources to workforce development.
- Developing training and career pathways – Establishing structured programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enter the housing workforce, gain recognised qualifications, and progress into leadership roles.

- Supporting staff retention – Embedding initiatives such as mentoring, on-the-job training, professional development, and flexible workplace arrangements to create culturally safe and rewarding employment environments.
- Ensuring equitable access to funding – Designing mechanisms so that both small and large organisations, including those in remote and regional areas, have fair opportunities to access resources that build and sustain their workforce.
- Promoting partnerships and collaboration – Encouraging stronger links between housing providers, training institutions, and government to align workforce initiatives and maximise outcomes for communities.

By focusing on these solutions, the Strategy provides a clear and achievable pathway to improving recruitment, retention, and long-term employment outcomes across the Indigenous housing sector. Importantly, it is designed to be flexible, enabling each community to tailor approaches that reflect their unique circumstances, while working within a nationally consistent framework.

In this way, the Strategy not only responds directly to the challenges raised by communities but also lays the foundations for a stronger, more capable, and self-determined Indigenous housing workforce into the future.

We hope the recent changes align with the grant's objectives

Kind regards, Ben



Benjamin (BJ) Thompson
Executive Director
Housing Sector Strengthening
NATSIHA – National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Housing Association
Suite 3.01, L3, 24 Montgomery Street, Kogarah NSW 2217
M **s47F** | E **s47F** [@natsiha.org.au](mailto:s47F@natsiha.org.au)



A National Indigenous Employment Strategy for Housing

Recognising the capability
of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander communities
and growing a workforce to
lead housing solutions.



Recognition

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First People of Australia and the Traditional Custodians of the lands, rivers, seas and sky throughout.

We pay our respect to Elders, and acknowledge the continuous living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, diverse languages, customs and traditions, knowledge systems and governance.

We acknowledge the significance of our Elders, for they hold the memories, the storylines, the traditions, and the cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across our nation.

Executive Summary

This document lays the groundwork for a nationally coordinated, long-term approach to strengthening employment in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. It envisions a culturally grounded, respected, and capable employment base that leads housing solutions for First Nations communities across Australia.

- **Vision:** A strong and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce, recognised for its deep knowledge, skill, and cultural leadership, driving housing solutions and strengthening the sector now and into the future.
- **Purpose:** To strengthen and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce by recognising existing expertise, supporting long-term career and education pathways, and ensuring the sector is resourced to meet current and future housing needs.

Strategic Foundations

- **Fair and Sustained Funding for Community Controlled Housing:** Long-term, fit-for-purpose investment is needed to strengthen and sustain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing organisations.
- **Housing Transfers that Empower Not Burden:** Housing transfers must strengthen, not strain, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations. Responsibility must be matched with resources, ensuring communities are set up to lead tenancy, assets, development, and services without being overburdened.
- **Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce:** A strong housing sector depends on a well-supported workforce grounded in culture, community knowledge, and pathways to training and career development.
- **Data Infrastructure:** Strong, community-controlled data is essential to a thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. Sector-led platforms will provide the evidence base needed to drive investment, track progress, support service delivery, and strengthen planning and accountability across employment, housing need, and organisational capability.
- **National Consistency with Local Flexibility:** Aligns with state and territory initiatives while enabling place-based planning. It reinforces the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly Clause 45 on building community-controlled sectors.

Alignment with the Priority Reforms

A long-term, coordinated employment strategy is essential to grow and sustain the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. This strategy must be led by community, backed by government, and grounded in the Priority Reforms.

Enable formal partnerships and shared decision-making

by ensuring governance structures are co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Build the community-controlled sector

through investment in career pathways, wage parity, and capacity development, as set out in Clause 45.

Support transformation of government systems

by aligning funding and policy levers to better resource Aboriginal-led employment pathways in housing.

Secure shared access to data and information

to support workforce planning, visibility, and future growth, ensuring community-led organisations have the evidence they need to lead.

Executive Summary

Opportunities for Employment Growth

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector faces a unique set of employment challenges that hinder its ability to grow and sustain a culturally strong and capable workforce. These challenges are deeply interconnected with systemic issues and require a coordinated, reform-aligned response.

1 Competition for skilled Workers

The sector competes with high-paying industries such as mining, government and construction, making it difficult to attract and retain skilled professionals. This is especially critical in remote and regional areas where housing needs are most acute.

2 Funding Instability

Short-term and fragmented funding arrangements create job insecurity, limit long-term planning, and contribute to high staff turnover. This undermines the stability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Housing Organisations.

3 Cultural Burnout

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff carry dual responsibilities—professional roles and cultural obligations within their communities. This can lead to burnout, especially in under-resourced environments.

4 Barriers to Entry and Career Progression

There are limited education and training pathways into housing careers for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Additionally, a lack of structured career development opportunities restricts progression within the sector.

5 Systemic Inequities in Funding and Policy

ATSICCHOs often face complex and inequitable application processes for federal housing initiatives. These processes tend to favour larger, mainstream providers, limiting access to critical resources and support.

Strategic Funding Commitments

A targeted, long-term funding approach is central to delivering workforce and housing outcomes:

Proportional Allocation: Move to multi-year, indexed agreements to support planning and growth.

Workforce Development: Funding training, leadership, and career pathways.

Support for Housing Transfers: Provide resources to enable smooth and sustainable asset transitions.

Digital and Service Innovation: Invest in data systems, technology, and culturally appropriate housing solutions.

Place-based Planning: Ensure community voices guide funding decisions and service design.

01	Context - Snapshot - Strategic Foundations	page 03
02	Vision and purpose of a long-term employment strategy The right people in the right roles now and in future	page 10
03	Consultation process to date	page 12
04	Workforce Challenges Through our consultation organisations highlighted key challenges that they face in regards to developing and retaining their workforce	page 19
05	Overview of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector	page 26
06	National data landscape - The data challenge for our sector - A data platform for our sector	page 29
07	Core functions and capabilities of the sector - Core Functions of the sector - Approach to the development of the critical capabilities - Critical Capabilities – the need for specific knowledge and skills	page 34
08	Development Pathways - Education pathways and opportunities - Strategic Partnership opportunities	page 49
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01

Context

01 Employment Strategy Snapshot

VISION

A strong and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce, recognised for its deep knowledge, skill, and cultural leadership—driving housing solutions and strengthening the sector now and into the future.

Core Roles Identified in the Sector



Tenancy & Community Housing Services

Working directly with renters to sustain tenancies and provide culturally safe support

Asset Management & Repairs Coordination

Ensuring homes are maintained, safe and fit for purpose

Property Development & Capital Projects

Leading new builds and upgrades that reflect local priorities and values

Strategic leadership & Corporate Services

Overseeing governance, operations, workforce development and long-term planning

Funding as a Critical Success Factor

- **Multi-year, indexed funding**
is essential to workforce stability and growth
- **Fully resourced housing transfers**
are vital, funding must follow responsibility, supporting people, systems & infrastructure
- **Workforce-specific investment**
must include training, leadership development, and mentoring.
- **Place-based flexibility**
ensures solutions are grounded in local needs and community design. Without these investments, the workforce will remain under-resourced and stretched, risking the sector's ability to meet demand and sustain culturally safe housing outcomes.

PURPOSE

To strengthen and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce by recognising existing expertise, supporting long-term career and education pathways, and ensuring the sector is resourced to meet current and future housing needs.

Key capabilities across all roles

Strategic Nour & Influencing

Deep understanding of kinship, Country and local priorities.

Relationship Building & Collaboration

Trusted connectors within community and across systems.

Governance & Organisational Awareness

Navigating both community and regulatory systems.

Culture and Community Focus

Deep understanding of kinship, Country and local priorities.

Leadership & Enduring Outcomes

Future-focused, adaptable and values-driven leadership.



Challenge

Lack of National Workforce Data

There is currently no consistent, national data on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce.

- Without knowing who works where, in what roles, or under what employment conditions, it is difficult to plan for workforce growth, training needs, or career pathways.
- This data gap undermines sector advocacy and leads to missed opportunities for investment, resourcing, and long-term workforce development.

Context

This document marks the first phase of a long term National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Employment Strategy, an initial scoping and foundation-setting piece that begins the journey toward a nationally coordinated and community-informed approach to workforce development across the sector.

Initiated through the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan, this work responds to long-standing calls for a strategic focus on building and sustaining a strong, culturally grounded workforce to deliver housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This initial phase focused on building a clearer national picture of the current workforce landscape. It aimed to identify the types of roles that exist across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Organisations, and to define the core capabilities that underpin those roles. These include technical, operational, and service delivery skills, as well as the cultural knowledge, community connection, and advocacy work that are foundational to how the sector operates.

Rather than prescribing detailed workforce solutions, this phase sets the groundwork for what comes next. It provides a starting point for deeper engagement and collaboration to identify workforce gaps, barriers, and opportunities. Phase Two will focus on shaping the education, training, and employment pathways needed to grow and sustain a workforce that is ready to meet the sector's future.

The National Indigenous Employment Strategy for Housing was developed in collaboration with the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).



Understanding the Data Landscape

This work focused on exposing the significant gaps in workforce data for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. The absence of accurate, accessible, and meaningful national data continues to limit effective employment and workforce planning, most acutely in housing. AHURI's Lay of the Land report confirms fragmented and inconsistent data remains a barrier to workforce development.¹ Earlier research also points to the lack of visibility of community-controlled roles in national datasets.²³ Without a coordinated, sector-led approach to data infrastructure, efforts to grow and sustain the workforce will remain constrained.

To begin addressing this, the work has focused on identifying what workforce data is currently available, where the gaps are, and what kind of data infrastructure will be needed to support longer-term workforce development. This work is ongoing and will remain a central stream of the strategy moving forward.

Building a reliable picture of the workforce including who is employed, in what roles, and under what conditions, is critical to supporting growth, attracting investment, and ensuring that policy responses reflect the realities of the sector. Future work will continue to strengthen this evidence base, including the integration of community-led insights and lived experience alongside quantitative data.

National Alignment

This work is designed to complement rather than duplicate state and territory workforce planning efforts. As jurisdictions progress their own strategies, the national framework provides a shared foundation that can be adapted to local contexts while supporting a unified, coordinated approach across the country.

The first phase has laid the groundwork. It has identified the core functions and capabilities of the sector and begun to build a clearer picture of the workforce itself. The next phase will deepen this understanding through place-based consultation, focused on workforce needs, lived experience, and the development of culturally strong education and employment pathways that will support the sector to grow and thrive.

Funding as a Foundation for Employment Growth

This Strategy begins by mapping roles and capabilities, it also brings into focus the conditions needed for the workforce to grow. Chief among these is funding. Without sustained investment, even the clearest workforce picture cannot translate into long-term outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations are expected to deliver complex services, often under short-term or insecure funding arrangements. This undermines job stability, limits career development, and places pressure on already stretched staff. As responsibility for housing delivery grows, particularly through stock transfers, organisations must be equipped not only with housing assets, but with the resources to support the people and systems that sustain them.

Funding reform is essential. The workforce needs multi-year, indexed agreements that enable planning, reduce turnover, and support culturally grounded career pathways. Investment must extend beyond service delivery to include mentoring, training, leadership development, and succession planning, ensuring organisations can attract, grow and retain the workforce they need.

1. AHURI (2025). Indigenous Housing Support in Australia: The Lay of the Land, Final Report 434.

2. Memmott, P. et al. (2008). Scoping the Capacity of Indigenous Community Housing Organisations, AHURI Final Report 125.

3. AHURI (2022). What Works to Sustain Indigenous Tenancies in Australia, Final Report 374.

01 Current housing context

Led by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association, this work forms part of the broader Sector Strengthening Plan a national effort to build a strong, sustainable, and community-led housing system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NATSIHA has existed as the national peak body since 2022. Until then, there had been no coordinated national effort to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector or to understand and invest in its workforce. Workforce strategy for the mainstream community housing sector identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Workforce as a priority area, but significant action is yet to be undertaken.¹ The development of this strategy marks a significant step forward — bringing national attention and coordination to a workforce that has long been under-recognised despite its critical role in delivering housing and wellbeing outcomes in community.

This initial phase focuses on mapping the core capabilities of the existing workforce within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector.

It identifies the roles, skills, structures and strengths that currently support the delivery of culturally safe, community-controlled housing across the country. The findings establish a baseline to inform the next phases of strategy development, ensuring future workforce planning is led by the sector and grounded in the realities of service delivery.

The Sector Strengthening Plan recognises that a strong workforce is essential to a strong sector. As demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing grows and policy shifts toward greater community control, so too must the capability, size and sustainability of the workforce. A long-term workforce strategy will ensure the sector is supported to grow on its own terms, with a focus on self-determination, cultural integrity, and long-term investment in people.

This phase builds a strong foundation for the future. It captures the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing providers and sets the foundation for a national, coordinated approach to workforce development that reflects the needs and aspirations of our communities.

“The need for a national workforce strategy is critical — we have the capability and the commitment. What we’ve lacked is the recognition and the resourcing to build a workforce that can meet the scale of the housing challenge ahead.”

Ivan Simon, Strategic advisor NATSIHA

1. Vic Community Housing Workforce Strategy 2023-2025
<https://chiavic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Victorian-Community-Housing-Workforce-Strategy-2023-2025-FINAL.pdf>

01 Strategic Foundations

A thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing system depends on more than bricks and mortar, it relies on community control, long-term investment, and a strong, culturally grounded workforce.

This Strategy sets out a path for all levels of government to work in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector, strengthening housing outcomes through sustained funding, well supported housing transfers, and meaningful employment opportunities.

This is not only a call for investment, it's an invitation to back community leadership and create lasting change in the housing landscape.

Fair and Sustained Funding for Community-Controlled Housing

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to shape and lead their own housing solutions, governments must commit to allocating a meaningful and proportionate share of housing-related funding directly to ATSICCHOs.

This includes:

- Capital works and housing supply
- Operational funding
- Workforce development and leadership pathways

This support must be sustained over time to allow for strategic growth, strong governance, and culturally safe service delivery.

Housing Transfers That Empower, Not Burden

When housing assets are transferred to ATSICCHOs, the resources must follow. Transfers must be fully funded—not just for the buildings themselves, but for the systems, people, and structures that support them.

This includes:

- Property and tenancy management capacity
- Ongoing maintenance and asset planning
- Legal, administrative, and governance support
- Community engagement and local decision-making

Properly resourced transfers set the foundation for success and ensure community control is backed by the tools to deliver.

Housing transfers that empower, not burden

01 Strategic Foundations

Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Workforce

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector is built on deep strength, expertise, and leadership. The focus now is on expanding the scale and reach of a workforce that is skilled, well-supported, and grounded in community priorities. This includes building clear career and education pathways that attract, retain, and grow talent, ensuring organisations are equipped to lead housing solutions at the local level and across the country.

This includes:

- Creating jobs across tenancy, asset management, housing design, development, and tenant advocacy
- Embedding employment targets and career pathways into funding agreements
- Supporting culturally safe workplaces and recognising the cultural responsibilities carried by many First Nations staff
- Investing in training, apprenticeships, mentoring, and leadership development

This approach ensures employment isn't an add-on—it's central to building a resilient housing sector.

Long-Term Investment and Structural Change

The sector can't grow on 12-month contracts. Governments must move toward multi-year, indexed funding agreements that give ATSICCHOs the stability to plan, innovate, and retain skilled staff.

This shift aligns with Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: building strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors.

The Opportunity Ahead

With the right commitment, this integrated approach to funding, housing transfers, and employment can:

- Strengthen the capacity, sustainability, and leadership of ATSICCHOs
- Create long-term, meaningful jobs and careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Deliver housing services that are culturally safe, responsive, and place-based
- Advance the right to self-determination and support a stronger, fairer housing system

This is how we move from fragmented programs to a unified, community-led vision, one where housing is not just delivered to communities, but by them.

02

Vision and purpose of a long-term employment strategy

02 Vision and Purpose of a long-term Housing Sector Employment Strategy

VISION

A strong and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce, recognised for its deep knowledge, skill, and cultural leadership—driving housing solutions and strengthening the sector now and into the future.

PURPOSE

To strengthen and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce by recognising existing expertise, supporting long-term career and education pathways, and ensuring the sector is resourced to meet current and future housing needs.

A long-term strategy will provide a national framework to:

Elevate and invest in the skills, knowledge, and cultural leadership already present across the sector.

Expand pathways into employment, training, and leadership roles across the housing system.

Support housing organisations, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Housing Organisations, to attract, retain, and develop their workforce.

Align efforts across government, industry, and education to drive sustainable workforce outcomes.

Embed cultural capability as foundational to a strong and responsive housing workforce.

03

Consultation process to date

03 Consultation process to date

The co-design process affirmed that the core capabilities identified in the initial scan were largely representative of the skills and attributes required across the sector.

However, communities were clear that the language used to describe these capabilities needed refinement. Many of the terms reflected mainstream workforce language and didn't always align with the way work is understood and carried out in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing contexts.

In response, the capability descriptions were adapted to reflect culturally grounded practice and the values that underpin community-led housing service delivery.

One of the key insights shared across all jurisdictions was the need to distinguish between cultural knowledge and cultural understanding as separate and equally important skill sets. **Cultural knowledge** refers to lived experience, deep community connection, and an understanding of kinship systems, protocols and Country.

Cultural understanding, on the other hand, refers to the learned skill of engaging respectfully and appropriately in community contexts—something that non-Indigenous workers in particular need to build through ongoing learning, humility and local relationships. These distinctions are critical to getting the workforce settings right, particularly in environments where housing workers are supporting communities with complex needs while also navigating their own cultural responsibilities.

Another recurring theme was the way workers in community-controlled housing organisations view their roles. Many do not see themselves as 'employees of an organisation' but as people working for their community. This framing significantly shapes how work is approached, prioritised and sustained. It also impacts workforce planning and support needs, as standard workforce language around performance management, supervision and role clarity does not always translate in community-controlled settings.



There were also strong discussions around the challenges of navigating government systems, particularly where access to critical information and data is gate kept or restricted. Knowing how to advocate for clients within these systems, and understanding how to push through bureaucratic blockages to get outcomes for tenants, was consistently raised as a vital skill not currently reflected in workforce planning frameworks. This knowledge - how to work in the system without being of the system, was highlighted as a distinct capability that needs to be recognised and valued.

Communities pointed to a significant gap in the workforce: the absence of dedicated tenant advocacy roles and services within many organisations. The importance of supporting tenants to understand their rights, engage with housing processes, and resolve disputes in culturally appropriate ways was raised across all consultation sites. There is strong interest in building a workforce stream focused on tenant advocacy that is community-based, accessible, and designed to empower renters within the housing system.

These insights have shaped a clearer picture of what the sector needs to move forward. The first phase has clarified the 'what', the core capabilities, contextual nuances and pressures within the system. The next phase will focus on the 'how' deepening engagement to understand community experience, identify workforce gaps, and co-design clear, locally informed pathways into and through housing roles.



Building the evidence base and shaping sector capabilities

The development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing employment strategy must be grounded in the lived experience, expertise, and leadership of the sector itself.

Phase one has focused on building a shared picture of the workforce, while also testing and refining the core capabilities that underpin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing work across jurisdictions.

This work has been iterative, built through relationships and direct engagement with housing organisations across Australia. The process has involved early surveys, roundtables, structured consultation sessions, and the development of tools that support ongoing sector-defined data collection and insight.

Early Sector Mapping and Capability Testing

In 2022, an initial workforce survey was conducted with 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations across all jurisdictions.

This survey sought to understand:

1. The types of roles that exist within ATSICCHOs delivering housing
2. The key pressures and capability gaps being experienced
3. How the workforce is recruited, retained, and supported

This foundational data provided a starting point for understanding the scope and shape of the sector's workforce and informed the first draft of the core capability areas. These capabilities went beyond traditional housing or community service skills to include cultural leadership, systemic navigation, and community advocacy.

Consultation with Organisations: NSW, WA, NT and QLD Deep Dives

As the work progressed, targeted consultation sessions were held in New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland, where organisations requested dedicated, face-to-face engagement to test and shape the capability framework.

These sessions:

1. Validated the importance of cultural knowledge as a standalone capability
2. Identified distinctions between cultural knowledge (lived) and cultural understanding (learned)
3. Confirmed the need for a workforce development strategy that reflects how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations actually function—often blending tenancy, advocacy, healing, and cultural roles into one

Feedback also highlighted the need for more accessible training, tools for workforce planning, and investment in pathways that support cultural authority and community leadership, not just technical qualifications.

A Growing Data Platform for Sector-Led Insight

The SPOKEN platform has since become a key mechanism for capturing sector insights. As of 2025, 31 organisations across 7 jurisdictions have participated in the SPOKEN survey, contributing to a clearer, more detailed national view of:

1. Workforce size and structure
2. Organisational functions and role types
3. Training and capability development needs
4. Cultural responsibilities and workforce pressures

SPOKEN represents a turning point: data is being collected by the sector, for the sector, and shaped by the realities of community-led housing delivery. It will continue to evolve through Phase Two of the strategy, with expanded survey questions focused specifically on workforce demographics, training access, and future capability needs.

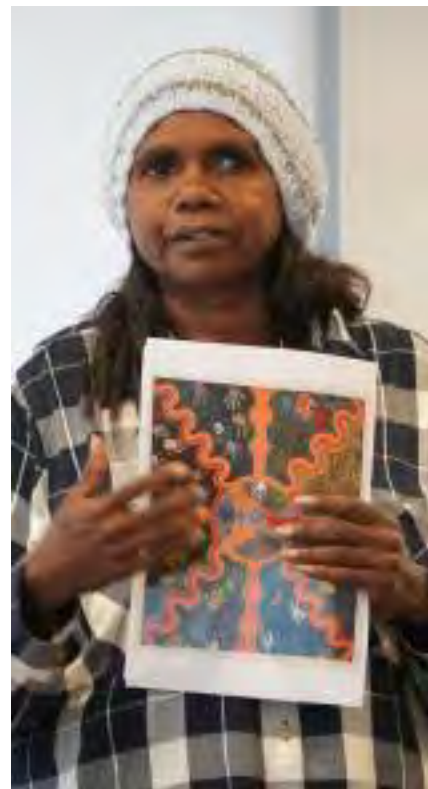
What We Learned Through Consultation

- There is strong support for a sector-specific capability framework that reflects both cultural knowledge and technical skill
- Workforce development strategies must be community-led and place-based, not centrally imposed
- The sector is ready for deeper investment in leadership pathways, training infrastructure, and recruitment support, but these must be designed in ways that honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control
- Sector specific data tools are essential to supporting continuous insight and accountability.

This consultation process has done more than test early concepts—it has established the foundation for sector-led implementation.

It has clarified core workforce capabilities, strengthened engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations, and initiated a fit-for-purpose data infrastructure.

Phase Two will build on this momentum, focusing on co-design with organisations, increasing jurisdictional reach, and applying workforce insights to shape funding, education, and recruitment systems that reflect and strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector.



03

Who and how we have consulted during this first phase



Extensive consultation done in scoping the Housing sector strengthening plan

41

Organisations consulted in workshops **across 4 states and Territories**

31

Organisations identified workforce numbers from all states and Territories (except Tas and ACT)

16

Organisations surveyed on workforce Nationally in early consultations

04

Workforce Challenges

Strengthening the Sector: Clause 45 and Priority Reform Alignment

Clause 45 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap outlines the agreed elements of a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector.

It commits all governments to enabling community-controlled organisations to grow and thrive, with the necessary resourcing, workforce, and infrastructure to deliver high-quality, culturally safe services. This page has been included to anchor the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Workforce Strategy within that shared national framework, demonstrating how the work underway contributes to building a stronger, more sustainable housing sector in line with those commitments.

Clause 45 of the National Agreement outlines the strong community-controlled sector elements

1. The Parties agree that elements of a strong sector are where:

- a. there is sustained capacity building and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations which deliver certain services and address issues through a set of clearly defined standards or requirements, such as an agreed model of care.
- b. there is a dedicated and identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce (that complements a range of other professions and expertise) and where people working in community-controlled sectors have wage parity based on workforce modelling commensurate with need.
- c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations which deliver common services are supported by a Peak Body, governed by a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board, which has strong governance and policy development and influencing capacity
- d. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations which deliver common services have a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities, responsive to the needs of those receiving the services, and is developed in consultation with the relevant Peak body.

The development of the Employment Strategy also directly aligns with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement:

Priority Reform 1

Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making: The strategy is being developed with the sector, not for it. It is shaped through shared decision-making and ongoing engagement with housing organisations, ensuring community control and leadership in determining what the workforce should look like.

Priority Reform 2

Building the Community-Controlled Sector: This strategy is a key action under the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan and is designed to grow and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing workforce. By identifying core capabilities, clarifying roles, and supporting future education and employment pathways, it strengthens the long-term viability of the sector.

Priority Reform 3

Transforming Government Organisations: This work highlights the capabilities required to navigate government systems, address gate keeping, and advocate for tenants, shining a light on the cultural and structural competencies that need to be recognised and supported. In doing so, it informs how governments can better understand and work alongside the sector.

Priority Reform 4

Shared Access to Data and Information at the Regional Level: The first phase of the strategy has already begun the critical work of understanding what data exists about the housing workforce and where the gaps are. Strengthening the data environment is essential to enabling place-based responses, track progress, and support organisations to make informed workforce decisions.

04 The changing role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector is poised for significant growth. With new investments through the Housing Australia Future Fund and increasing momentum around stock transfers, the demand on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing providers is set to rise.

These investments represent long-overdue recognition of the need for culturally safe, community-led housing solutions and they create a pressing need to ensure the sector is workforce-ready.

The expected expansion of housing portfolios will not only require more homes, but also a skilled and supported workforce to deliver and sustain them. As more housing comes under the stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, (particularly through state-based transfer programs) organisations will need to grow in size, strengthen their internal capabilities, and meet increasingly complex regulatory and service delivery expectations.

This moment presents an opportunity to build a long-term, strategic workforce plan that matches the scale of the sector's ambition and ensures future growth is sustainable. Workforce development must sit at the heart of any sector strengthening agenda — not just to meet demand, but to uphold the cultural integrity and community connection that defines the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector.

The Unique Role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector plays a unique and vital role in delivering culturally safe, community-led housing solutions that respond to the specific needs, aspirations, and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It connects housing with health, social, and economic outcomes, grounded in cultural authority, place-based knowledge, and deep community trust. The sector is not just a service provider, it is a driver of self-determination, economic participation, and intergenerational change.

Workforce under pressure: understanding the pressures on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce

Despite the clear promise of growth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations face a range of unique and ongoing workforce pressures.

These issues are shaped not only by general labour market conditions but also by cultural responsibilities, structural inequities, and persistent policy gaps that have left the sector under-supported and often invisible in broader workforce planning efforts.

One of the most immediate challenges is competition for skilled workers. ATSICCHOs must compete with the mining industry and state government agencies and large developers for talent—sectors that can offer higher salaries, more stable employment conditions, and well-established career pathways¹. This competition is occurring in the context of growing national demand for care and support workers, which will continue to strain the labour market over the coming decades¹.

Insecure funding and workforce instability

A major contributor to workforce instability is the short-term nature of funding contracts. Many housing roles are tied to 12-month or project-based agreements, which limit job security and make it difficult for organisations to retain skilled staff or invest in long-term professional development^{2 3}.

This leads to high turnover, reduced continuity of service, and a constant administrative burden on already stretched organisations.

Cultural burnout and uncompensated expectations

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff carry both professional and cultural responsibilities. Often living in the same communities they serve, they provide care well beyond the scope of their formal role. This includes informal support, community liaison, and culturally specific guidance that is essential but rarely funded or formally recognised. These dual responsibilities contribute to cultural burnout, especially in environments where resources are limited and expectations are high.

Mainstream services frequently draw on Aboriginal staff and organisations for cultural advice, engagement support, and system navigation - yet these services are generally unpaid and occur alongside core housing responsibilities³.

Under-recognition of existing workforce capability

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce possesses deep cultural knowledge, expertise, and community-led practice. However, these capabilities are often under-recognised in mainstream policy and workforce planning frameworks.

As a result, the sector is largely absent from national workforce investment strategies and lacks visibility in critical decision-making forums³.

This under-recognition contributes to a lack of targeted investment in professional development, succession planning, and sector leadership. The cultural competencies and place-based knowledge held by the workforce, essential for delivering safe and effective housing responses are rarely factored into how workforce capability is assessed or funded.

Fragmented education and career pathways

There are few coordinated pathways into housing careers. Roles in tenancy management, maintenance, asset management, housing policy, and governance are often learned informally on the job rather than through structured training or education¹. Where training is available, it is frequently not culturally safe or accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, particularly in regional and remote communities³.

For young people, there are limited entry points into the sector, and housing is not widely promoted as a meaningful long-term career. Without structured mentoring, accredited training, and leadership development, the sector risks losing the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing professionals.

Following references from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI):

An Overview of the Indigenous Housing System in Australia (Report No. 434), 2024. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-02/RS-434-An-overview-of-the-Indigenous-housing%20system-in-Australia.pdf>;

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

2. Pathways Through Housing, 2024. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-papers/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-pathways-through-housing>;

3. National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Housing Sector Strengthening Plan, 2022. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/housing-sector-strengthening-plan.pdf>;

Barriers to Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting and retaining staff remains a core challenge, especially in remote areas. Contributing factors include a lack of affordable housing for workers, uncompetitive salary structures, limited peer support, and few training opportunities that are relevant to the work being done on the ground.

These challenges not only reduce workforce stability but also limit the ability of organisations to grow and respond to increasing demand.

Rising workforce demand without investment

National reforms such as those under Closing the Gap and state-based housing strategies have led to increased demand on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. However, this has not been matched with proportional investment in workforce growth, training, or structural support.

The risk is that housing organisations will be expected to deliver more services, at greater scale, without the workforce infrastructure needed to support it.

Lack of National Coordination and Workforce Intelligence

There is no national framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce development. While there are promising local and regional initiatives, the absence of national coordination limits the sector's ability to align training, funding, and policy efforts across jurisdictions¹. This also weakens the sector's capacity to advocate for resources, build partnerships, and measure impact.

Compounding this is the lack of reliable, community-owned workforce data. We do not currently have a clear picture of who works in the sector, in what roles, or under what conditions. This data gap restricts the ability to track workforce trends, plan for future needs, or demonstrate the value of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce³.

Final Report No. 434, 2024. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/434>; Parliament of Australia. Joint Committee on Northern Australia – Workforce Development Report, 2023. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Northern_Australia/WorkforceDevelopment/First_Report/Chapter_4

Housing Australia Future Fund & Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing providers

Housing Australia Future Fund and the National Housing Accord are federal initiatives aimed at enhancing housing outcomes for Australians.

Housing Australia collectively aim to deliver 20,000 new social homes and 20,000 new affordable homes across Australia over five years. The Housing Australia Future Fund Facility (HAFFF) and National Housing Accord Facility (NHAF) programs that support these initiatives are delivered by Housing Australia.

The HAFF is achieving the stated goal of increasing the supply of affordable housing in Australia, and creating housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of the priorities for the Federal Government. In 2025, 91 round one projects have reached contract close under round one of the HAFFF and NHAF, with round two applicants being notified in March 2025, delivering an additional 5,001 social dwellings.

Housing Australia notes the prioritisation of housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people below:

The housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be a priority in evaluating Applications. Applicants are required to demonstrate how the proposed project benefits specific cohorts. Information is also collected through the online application form on the number of dwellings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Additionally, Housing Australia has 'Portfolio Considerations' which will be considered in determining the mix of projects to be funded to support an equitable distribution of funding across Australia. One of these Portfolio Considerations is ensuring that over time an equitable number of homes are created for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Application Process Challenges:

There is significant challenge in the application process for ATSICCHO's in terms of eligibility and resource required to fulfill application requirements. It is challenging for ATSICCHO's to obtain/maintain registration as a registered community housing provider, or to partner with an eligible Community Housing Provider. Although the application process for these facilities requires applicants to demonstrate how the proposed project benefits specific cohorts including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the number of dwellings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, it is open to mainstream Community Housing Providers who provide this housing and have the size and scope of operations to participate successfully in the application process. The funding rounds completed to date have not produced sufficiently positive housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

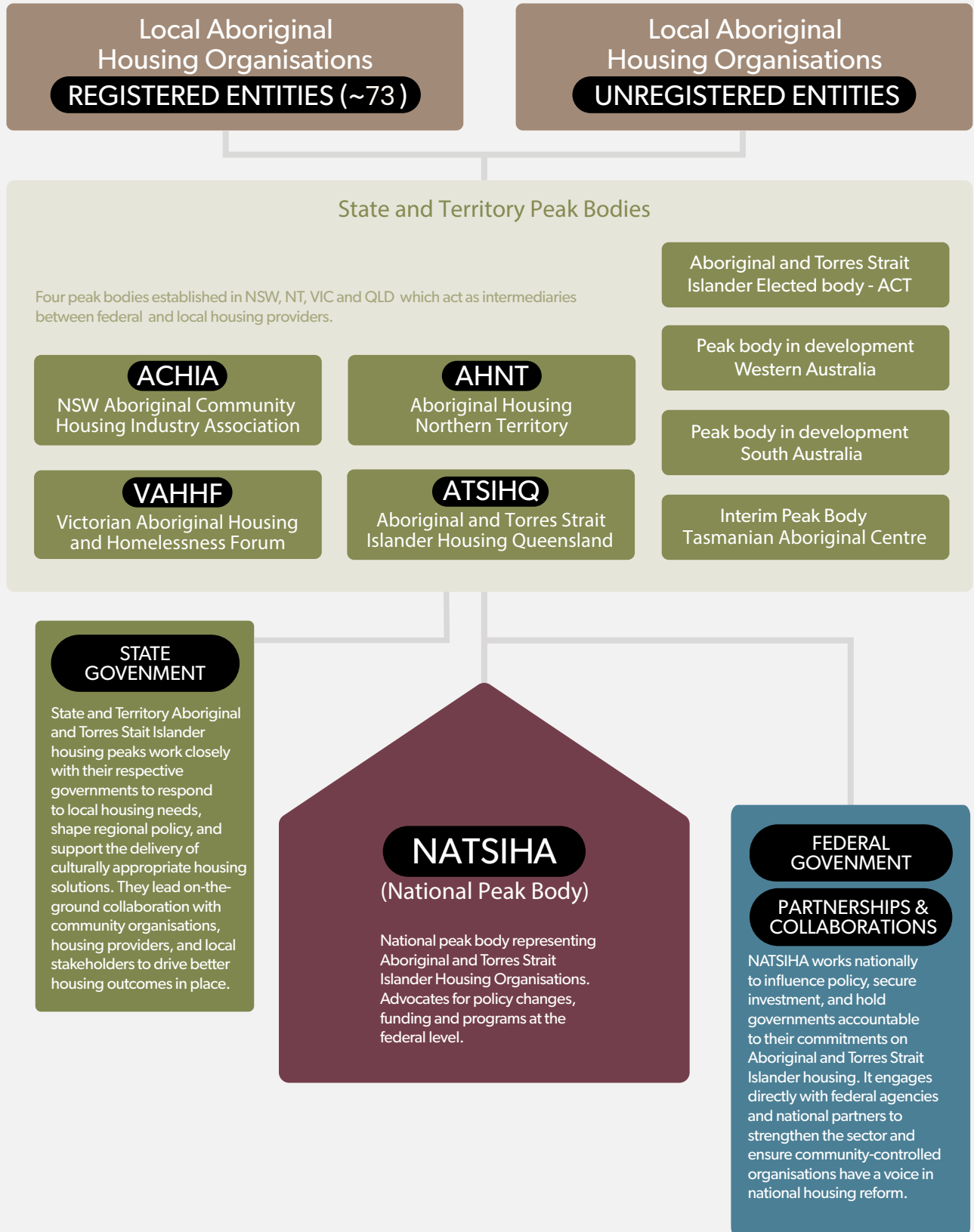
Source: <https://www.housingaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-01/HAFF%20NHAF%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Housing%20Providers.pdf>

05

Overview of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector

Current sector overview

There are numerous local Aboriginal housing associations and community housing providers, under state and territory bodies. They are responsible for day-to-day management services including tenant management, property maintenance and culturally appropriate housing services.



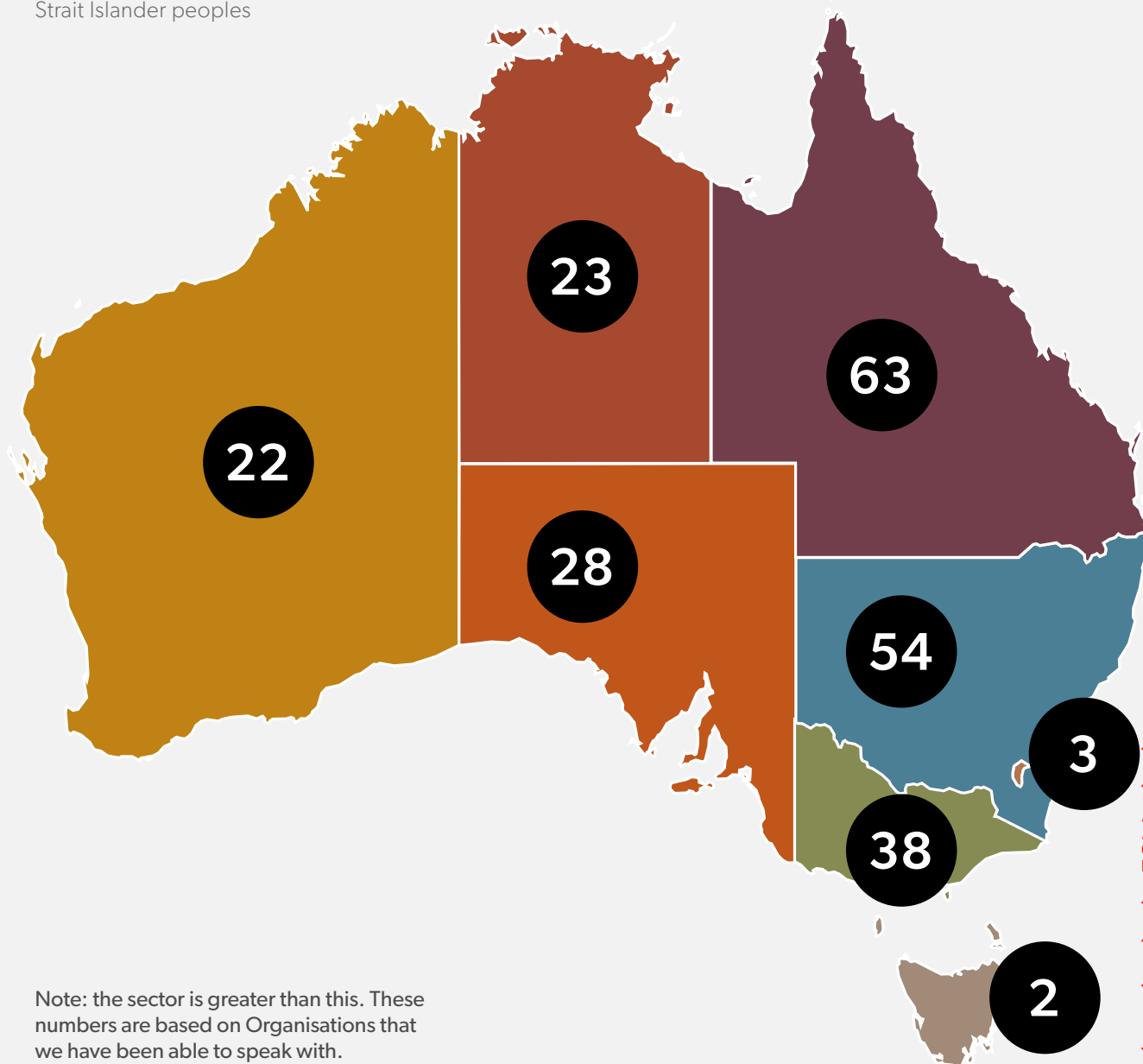
ATSICCHO distribution by state

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Sector

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and homelessness sector is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations that provide housing and homelessness services to First Nations individuals, families, and communities. This includes Community Controlled Housing Organisations, Aboriginal Land Councils that manage housing, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses or organisations where housing and homelessness support is a key part of their work.

These organisations operate in many different ways—across cities, towns, and remote communities—but are all connected by a shared commitment to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to safe, secure, and culturally connected housing. Services may include tenancy support, crisis accommodation, transitional housing, homelessness responses, and other supports grounded in local knowledge and relationships.

At its heart, the sector is about community strength, cultural safety, and self-determination. It plays a vital role not only in providing homes but in building pathways to stability, healing, and opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



06

National data landscape

Data sovereignty and sector intelligence will strengthen housing workforce decision-making

A key challenge identified is the limited availability of meaningful, disaggregated workforce data that reflects the unique structure, strengths and service models of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Organisations.

Strengthening data collection, led and owned by the sector is critical to improving decisions around recruitment, retention, capability-building and succession planning.

Through the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Employment Strategy, there is an opportunity to embed data sovereignty principles and generate sector-led insights that reflect lived experience, cultural knowledge, and place-based practice. These insights will support stronger, evidence-informed workforce development and highlight overlaps and synergies between housing, health, support services and community-led care models.

This approach builds on the work already underway through initiatives like SPOKEN, which aims to provide ATSICCHOs with direct access to data they can use to advocate, plan and grow. Embedding this as a core capability across the sector ensures that decisions are grounded in community-defined priorities and will ultimately support better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander renters and communities.

"There has been limited attention to evaluating the effectiveness of Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisations. Data to support planning and accountability is patchy and inconsistent."¹

¹ Australian Indigenous housing policy: a review of Indigenous housing programs 2018 pg.47
<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320>

Generating sector-led insights through SPOKEN

The SPOKEN data platform is a key enabler of workforce development under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Employment Strategy.

Developed by and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector, SPOKEN embeds data sovereignty principles and ensures that insights about the sector come directly from those working within it. It reflects a long-term commitment to sector-led evidence, accountability, and advocacy.

The initial phase of SPOKEN has focused on high-level organisational data, designed to be accessible, easy to engage with, and respectful of the varying capacities across the sector. This deliberate first step was about building trust, encouraging participation, and developing a baseline picture of the scale, scope and capability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations. By lowering the barrier to entry, the first wave of SPOKEN data is helping to normalise sector-owned data practices and lay the groundwork for deeper engagement.

In 2026, SPOKEN will evolve into its next phase, expanding to include more nuanced and targeted questions informed by what the sector itself identifies as important. These deeper insights will focus on workforce pressures, training and capability needs, community-based workforce models, and the ways housing organisations are adapting to deliver culturally grounded services. This next phase will directly support the implementation of national-level initiatives by providing a clearer, community-informed view of what's needed to grow and strengthen the sector.

Over the next five years, SPOKEN will be used to:

- Track and visualise changes in workforce capability and composition over time;
- Support place-based planning and investment, including through regional workforce mapping;
- Inform the design of targeted training, education and succession strategies;
- Highlight the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations to broader systems of care and support;
- Provide national-level projects with accurate, sector-led insights that reflect lived experience and cultural priorities.

SPOKEN is not just a data collection exercise it is a platform for empowerment.

It ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations can define what matters, shape how success is measured, and use evidence to drive the future of their workforce and services.



Sector snapshot

35

organisations
represented

22

organisations
NRSCH registered

8

organisations
actively seeking
registration



Housing Portfolios

5,000+

Total housing
assets managed (est.)

MOST
COMMON

Social
housing

60%

Affordable
housing

25%

Crisis/transitional
housing

FEW

Market-rate
housing

660

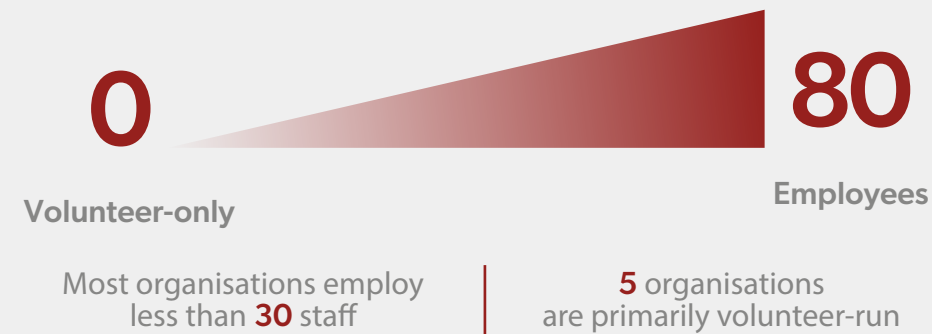
Largest portfolio
(Many Rivers Regional Housing)

<10

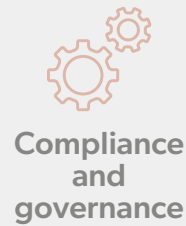
Smallest portfolio
(volunteer-run)

Workforce Composition

Staffing range



Key roles needed



Growth & Demand

95% organisations want to increase housing supply

Waitlists

100+ households on waitlist of some of the providers

 Some providers use external state allocation systems

Barriers to growth

 Funding and financing

 Access to land

 Staff capacity

 Infrastructure and admin systems

07

Core functions and capabilities

07 Organisations differ wildly according to their size and type but deliver core functions

These represent the broad role types that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations carry out to effectively deliver housing services.

It is key to note that in some instances, housing services have evolved out of community need, where an organisation may have originally been established to deliver health or social services and, over time, expanded to include housing as a critical part of supporting community wellbeing.

In these cases, the housing roles identified reflect the housing-specific responsibilities that now sit within a broader service context.

The size and resourcing of each organisation will influence how these functions are structured, smaller organisations may have individuals performing multiple functions across these areas, while larger organisations may have specialised teams or deliver extended services.

Each of these functions is underpinned by a set of capabilities that are distinctive to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector. These capabilities ensure service delivery is grounded in culture, community connection and long-term leadership.

1. Tenancy Management



Frontline roles responsible for housing allocations, tenancy sustainment, rent management, and client engagement and community outreach.

Key capabilities expressed

Culture and Community Focus

Relationship Building and Collaboration

Governance and Organisational Awareness

3. Asset Management



Managing repairs, maintenance, compliance and upgrades to housing stock, ensuring safe, quality, and culturally appropriate homes.

Key capabilities expressed

Governance and Organisational Awareness

Culture and Community Focus

Leadership for Enduring Outcomes

2. Property Development



Strategic planning, design and delivery of new housing projects, often in partnership with government, industry or financiers.

Key capabilities expressed

Strategic Nous and Influencing

Leadership for Enduring Outcomes

Governance and Organisational Awareness

4. Corporate Services



Supports the governance, finance, human resources, compliance, communications and operational management of organisations.

Key capabilities expressed

Governance and Organisational Awareness

Strategic Nous and Influencing

Leadership for Enduring Outcomes

Each organisation expresses these functions differently depending on its scale, community setting, and funding base. However, what unites them is a shared capability base — one grounded in culture, accountability to community, and the long-term ambition to lead change. These capabilities are already active in the sector and must now be recognised, strengthened, and supported with investment.

This first phase begins to map the relationship between function and capability, setting a foundation for tailored workforce planning that aligns roles, skills and development pathways with the sector's growth.

Tenancy and Community Housing Services roles



Role Description

This role delivers tenancy management with a strong focus on relationships, cultural safety, and community wellbeing. Staff in these roles provide front-line support to renters, ensuring that tenancies are stable, respectful, and responsive to the individual and collective needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It combines technical housing knowledge with deep trust-building, often acting as the first point of connection between renters and the housing organisation.

Core Responsibilities

Managing rental agreements, inspections, arrears, and vacancies
 Building strong relationships with tenants and families
 Responding to complaints and concerns with empathy and accountability
 Coordinating referrals to health, legal, and community services
 Promoting wellbeing, stability, and pride in place
 Participating in local events, community meetings, and feedback loops

Mapped Capabilities



Strategic Focus and Influencing – Advocates for tenant needs within the organisation and external systems



Relationship Building and Collaboration – Builds deep trust with renters, families, and support services



Governance and Organisational Awareness – Ensures compliance with tenancy law and internal policy



Culture and Community Focus – Operates with cultural sensitivity and local knowledge



Leadership for Enduring Outcomes – Sustains tenancies and promotes long-term wellbeing for families and communities

Asset Management and Repairs Co-ordination



Role Description

Asset management ensures homes are safe, functional, and maintained to a standard that respects the dignity and aspirations of renters. Staff in this area coordinate both urgent repairs and long-term asset planning, often liaising between technical contractors, tenants, and community leadership. The role also requires working across broader frameworks like Healthy Homes to improve health, energy efficiency, and sustainability.

Core Responsibilities

Coordinating and delivering responsive and planned maintenance programs that keep homes safe, functional, and appropriate

Supporting upgrades and retrofits that align with health, energy efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability outcomes

Working across frameworks such as Healthy Homes to ensure asset investment contributes to positive health and wellbeing

Partnering with local Aboriginal businesses and trades to strengthen local economies and cultural engagement

Managing condition assessments, compliance inspections, asset registers, and lifecycle planning processes

Ensuring repairs and improvements meet both technical standards and community expectations

Working closely with tenancy teams to identify asset-related risks, respond to renter feedback, and maintain safe environments

Supporting the design and delivery of new builds or refurbishments that reflect community priorities and cultural values

Mapped Capabilities



Strategic Nous and Influencing – Aligns asset investments with long-term health, safety, and climate strategies



Relationship Building and Collaboration
Coordinates with tenants, contractors, and sector partners



Governance and Organisational Awareness – Ensures compliance with housing standards and budget processes

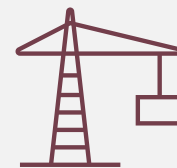


Culture and Community Focus – Makes culturally informed decisions on maintenance and improvement



Leadership for Enduring Outcomes
– Maintains housing stock that supports community stability and pride

Property Development and Capital Projects Roles



Role Description

This role leads the growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing through culturally informed design and delivery of new housing projects. It requires a unique blend of commercial acumen, policy knowledge, and cultural understanding to ensure that new developments are not only financially viable but also grounded in community needs and aspirations.

Accelerated by the increasing demands on the housing sector — including large-scale government investment programs such as the Victorian Big Housing Build — there is a growing need for property development staff to bring a commercialised skillset into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. These are not skillsets the sector has previously required to the same extent, but they are increasingly critical.

Staff in these roles need a strong understanding of the unique models of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and must be capable in areas such as tendering, financial modelling, grant writing, and navigating legislative and policy frameworks. In addition to technical expertise, stakeholder consultation has reinforced the vital role that property developers play in outreach and engagement. They often act as the public face of new developments, responsible for engaging with renters, communities, and local leaders to explain how projects will be designed, delivered, and maintained on Country.

Core Responsibilities

Planning and delivering new housing developments that reflect cultural values and community aspirations

Coordinating project design, procurement, and delivery with architects, builders, and consultants

Engaging with community stakeholders, including Elders and Traditional Owners, to ensure developments align with local expectations

Drafting tender and grant applications, preparing business cases and financial models

Navigating planning systems, approvals, and compliance

Educating the community on how developments will support long-term outcomes and be maintained sustainably

Mapped Capabilities



Strategic Nous and Influencing – Aligns housing investment with long-term strategic priorities and policy change



Relationship Building and Collaboration – Engages with funders, developers, Traditional Owners and the wider community



Governance and Organisational Awareness
Understands project compliance, risk, financial reporting, and procurement processes



Culture and Community Focus
Embeds cultural authority, identity, and local knowledge into project design and delivery



Leadership for Enduring Outcomes
Drives projects that deliver lasting community benefit and strengthen the sector's future

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Roles



Role Description

This role leads the growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing through This role ensures the organisation is sustainable, governed with integrity, and aligned to its cultural purpose. It includes executive leadership, human resources, finance, IT, communications, and sector engagement. Leaders in this space drive the vision and growth of the organisation, represent the sector in broader systems, and ensure that internal systems support cultural integrity and long-term impact.

Core Responsibilities

- Setting strategic direction and organisational vision
- Financial oversight, HR, and operational governance
- Supporting Boards and cultural governance structures
- Building relationships with governments, peaks, and funders
- Shaping organisational culture and workforce development
- Advocating for sector reform and investment

Mapped Capabilities



Strategic Nous and Influencing –

Leads the organisation and contributes to policy, strategy, and systems change



Relationship Building and Collaboration

Builds partnerships and alliances across government and sector



Governance and Organisational Awareness

Ensures strong internal systems and compliance



Culture and Community Focus

Upholds cultural authority, accountability, and purpose in all operations



Leadership for Enduring Outcomes

Sustains and grows the sector for future generations

07 Approach to develop the employment core capabilities

Data collection and limitations

The development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Employment Strategy begins at a critical moment for the sector.

The core capabilities have been shaped through a foundational process that sought to understand what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce needs to thrive, now and into the future. This work has been grounded in the experience of community-controlled housing organisations and informed by early workforce mapping, sector feedback, and an understanding of roles across a variety of contexts.

Rather than starting with predefined assumptions, the approach focused on identifying the skills, knowledge, and values that underpin effective housing delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes practical capabilities across tenancy, property, and asset management, finance, governance, and construction—as well as cultural capability, community leadership, and responsiveness to local priorities.

These capabilities are intended to provide a shared reference point for workforce development, supporting the design of training programs, career pathways, and tools that reflect the sector's needs. While this marks an important first step, the capabilities will continue to be refined as more data is gathered and as the sector's workforce matures and expands.

Sector | Capability Framework

Five critical capabilities

Capability	Description	Behavioural indicators
 Strategic Nouns and Influencing	Speak the language of Government to influence and drive systems change through navigating political environments and layers of legislation	- I translate key data and stories from a range of communities to create a community-led narrative that reflects and embodies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector - I influence negotiations through narrative building and awareness of the current political landscape, and how this shapes and impacts the sector - I leverage policy frameworks to communicate our organisation's vision and influence outcomes - I liaise with external and internal stakeholders within my network to influence and drive change
 Relationship Building and Collaboration	Build enduring cross-sector relationships and work together to deliver community-led outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	- I create strong, interpersonal and strategic partnerships with organisations, companies and external agencies - I engage with a diverse range of peoples and communities, and am aware of intersectional nuances when working with different communities - I listen to, collaborate and engage with, different communities to understand the range of challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when accessing housing services - I practice intercultural effectiveness by adjusting my approach to work with, and build, thriving connections and enduring cross-sector relationships
 Governance and Organisational Awareness	Adhere to relevant regulatory requirements and best practice standards to deliver outcomes that foster trust and transparency	- I practice robust data governance in alignment with industry best practices and standards - I protect and advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty - I take time to document processes and policies safely and securely, for record keeping - I actively build my awareness of, and take actionable steps to mitigate organisational and sector-specific operational risk, to manage a sustainable organisation and workforce - I navigate complex cultural and mainstream governance systems to meet community needs and organisational governance requirements
 Culture and Community Focus	Embrace the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to unite others in achieving First Nations prosperity	- I draw from my cultural understanding and knowledge, as well as lived and learnt experiences, to provide culturally specific services to different groups and communities - I apply industry specific and people-centric, trauma-informed support to workers and community members - I maintain a strong connection and role within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to design and deliver on people-led strategies - I listen to and amplify the voices of communities, and am attuned and adaptable to their needs
 Leadership for Enduring Outcomes	Advocate for innovative housing solutions to support positive, sustainable change for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	- I embrace innovation and lead structural and systemic reform to create enduring outcomes that align to community needs - I deliver on my operational commitments to drive value across NATSIHA while ensuring I support and uphold our health, safety and wellbeing policies and commitments - I create spaces that are supportive and nourishing, enabling people in my team to thrive with clear leadership pathways - I navigate complex structures and systems with agility to deliver on organisational strategy

Sector | Capability Framework

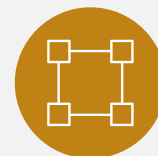
Strategic Nous and Influencing



Speak the language of Government to influence and drive systems change through navigating political environments and layers of legislation

Behavioural indicators	Level 1 FOUNDATIONAL	Level 2 ADVANCED	Level 3 EXPERT
I translate key data and stories from a range of communities to create a community-led narrative that reflects and embodies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector	I analyse and use data and information to help create community-led narratives which ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island perspectives are included in negotiations	I use data and storytelling to lead negotiations with a variety of stakeholders	I use data, storytelling and community narratives to lead complex negotiations and effectively navigate political landscapes to achieve key housing outcomes
I influence negotiations through narrative building and awareness of the current political landscape, and how this shapes and impacts the sector	I demonstrate understanding of the current political landscape and leverage my knowledge to influence my decision making	I understand the political landscape and its implications on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector and leverage my insights to deliver effective housing outcomes	I possess a deep understanding of the political landscape and the implications across all areas of service delivery in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector
I leverage policy frameworks to communicate our organisation's vision and influence outcomes	I can apply policy frameworks within the context of tasks and activities related to working within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector	I translate policy frameworks into tasks and activities for myself and my direct reports	I possess expertise in translating policy frameworks into strategy and operational delivery within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector
I liaise with external and internal stakeholders within my network to influence and drive change	I collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to deliver key tasks and activities within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector	I navigate political networks internally and externally to develop and deliver key outcomes within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector	I engage in high level diplomacy, and leverage my influence to successfully navigate political networks, frameworks and issues and advocate for positive change within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector

Sector | Capability Framework

Relationship Building and Collaboration

Build enduring cross-sector relationships and work together to deliver community-led outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Behavioural indicators	Level 1 FOUNDATIONAL	Level 2 ADVANCED	Level 3 EXPERT
I create strong, interpersonal and strategic partnerships with organisations, companies and external agencies	I develop and maintain relationships across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector	I develop and maintain stakeholder networks, relationships and partnerships across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector	I develop and maintain strategic relationships with government and non-government stakeholders and work collaboratively to plan and deliver strategic outcomes within the the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing sector
I engage with a diverse range of peoples and communities, and am aware of intersectional nuances when working with different communities	I communicate with diverse communities to understand housing requirements and deliver outcomes	I engage diverse communities to understand housing requirements and contribute to strategy development	I engage diverse communities to understand housing requirements and define key priorities and my organisations strategy
I listen to, collaborate and engage with, different communities to understand the range of challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when accessing housing services	I understand the specific and nuanced challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face when accessing housing services	I have demonstrated experience and knowledge working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and I understand the challenges and complexities people face when accessing First Nations housing services	I support my team in navigating the housing sector , while also leveraging my networks and creating collaborative opportunities for my team
I practice intercultural effectiveness by adjusting my approach to work with, and build, thriving connections and enduring cross-sector relationships	I am able to work with diverse communities and groups , within the housing landscape and broader NFP sector, to support in delivering fit for purpose solutions	I use my knowledge and experience of working with diverse groups to design fit for purpose solutions	I connect with diverse groups and communities , and I provide opportunities for my team to learn about making fit for purpose solutions

Sector | Capability Framework

Governance and Organisational Awareness

Adhere to relevant regulatory requirements and best practice standards to deliver outcomes that foster trust and transparency

Behavioural indicators	Level 1 FOUNDATIONAL	Level 2 ADVANCED	Level 3 EXPERT
I practice robust data governance in alignment with industry best practices and standards	I assist the implementation of data governance policies and procedures	I contribute to the development of data governance policies and procedures	I lead the design and implementation of data governance initiatives
I protect and advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty	I support initiatives that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty, and contribute to relevant research in this field	I contribute to the development of policies and frameworks that support and champion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty	I influence the strategic development of policies and frameworks to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty through advocacy
I take time to document processes and policies safely and securely, for record keeping	I identify, report and document breaches of my organisations policies, procedures and standards	I provide advice and support to team members to assist with identifying and reporting breaches of my organisations policies, procedures and standards	I establish policy and procedure frameworks to assist with record keeping and ensure that these tools align with my organisations strategic vision and input from communities
I actively build my awareness of, and take actionable steps to mitigate organisational and sector-specific operational risk, to manage a sustainable organisation and workforce	I can apply legal, regulatory and policy frameworks to manage organisational and sector-specific operational risks	I translate legal, regulatory and policy frameworks into tasks and activities for myself and my direct reports to support the management of organisational and sector-specific operational risks	I possess expertise in translating legal, regulatory and policy frameworks into strategy and operational delivery to manage organisational and sector-specific operational risk
I navigate complex cultural and mainstream governance systems to meet community needs and organisational governance requirements	I navigate and support governance culture both internally and externally	I provide advice and support to build governance culture and practices, drawing upon my knowledge of community needs and organisational requirements	I influence governance culture and practices internally and externally through advocacy and review governance structures periodically to align with external environment changes, including new government regulations

Sector | Capability Framework

Culture and Community Focus



Embrace the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to unite others in achieving First Nations prosperity

Behavioural indicators	Level 1 FOUNDATIONAL	Level 2 ADVANCED	Level 3 EXPERT
I draw on my cultural knowledge—as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person with lived experience, deep community connection, and an understanding of kinship systems, protocols, and Country—to provide culturally grounded services that reflect the communities I am part of	I demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures	I apply my knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to support the development of housing solutions that are integrated with essential services using a systems thinking approach	I apply evidence-based approaches to anticipate future growth and challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, planning for the long-term sustainability and adaptability of housing solutions
I demonstrate cultural understanding through ongoing learning, humility, and respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. I acknowledge my position, listen deeply, and work in ways that uphold community leadership and cultural authority	I ensure that all communications and initiatives regarding housing plans and policies are clear and respectful and take a people-centric, trauma-informed approach	I effectively apply a people-centric, trauma-informed approach to support my team members and build housing plans and policies that are tailored to the unique needs of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	I champion and embrace community-led narratives to deliver industry specific, people-centric, trauma-informed care, internally and externally
I apply industry specific and people-centric, trauma-informed support to workers and community members	I work within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and embrace lived experiences, cultural values, knowledge, stories and practices to influence my day-to-day work and activities	I share and embrace lived experiences, cultural values, knowledge, stories and practices to develop people-led strategies	I foster an environment of understanding other cultures and embrace lived experiences, cultural values, knowledge, stories and practices to influence my organisations strategic vision, communications and initiatives
I maintain a strong connection and role within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to design and deliver on people-led strategies	I establish trust and regularly build strong, respectful relationships with community leaders, members, and other stakeholders	I establish trust and build strong, respectful relationships with community leaders, members, and other stakeholders and leverage these connections and knowledge to influence effective decision making	I regularly consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to ensure their voices are heard, respected and incorporated into decision making processes
I listen to and amplify the voices of communities, and am attuned and adaptable to their needs			

Sector | Capability Framework

Leadership for Enduring Outcomes



Advocate for innovative housing solutions to support positive, sustainable change for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Behavioural indicators	Level 1 FOUNDATIONAL	Level 2 ADVANCED	Level 3 EXPERT
I embrace innovation and lead structural and systemic reform to create enduring outcomes that align to community needs	I look for ways to harness and leverage innovative technology and approaches where possible, in alignment with my position and role expectations	I provide support and access to my team members to feel empowered in harnessing innovation, and I apply my knowledge to drive new ways of thinking	I apply evidence based approaches to look for, drive and enable new approaches and ways of thinking
I deliver on my operational commitments to drive value across my organisation while ensuring I support and uphold our health, safety and wellbeing policies and commitments	I monitor the health, safety and wellbeing of myself and my colleagues	I help ensure that work health and safety and wellbeing requirements are being adhered to	I hold a deep understanding of the current barriers to entry and any innovative solutions, and I provide my team with opportunities to learn and understand these challenges through capability development and relevant experience
I create spaces that are supportive and nourishing, enabling people in my team to thrive with clear leadership pathways	I manage my individual performance using relevant and applicable performance frameworks to guide my development	I manage individual and team performance using relevant and applicable performance frameworks to guide development, while ensuring my team have visibility of leadership pathways	I look for ways to work inside and outside current systems and barriers, and I empower my team to challenge the status quo, while cultivating a values aligned workforce where health and safety is prioritised
I navigate complex structures and systems with agility to deliver on organisational strategy	I am able to work in an agile way, while supporting my team in approaching organisational challenges	I help my team navigate organisational challenges, while encouraging and embodying agile ways of working	I have strong understanding and experience in navigating the specific nuances of working in the Indigenous housing services industry

Proficiency levels across NATSIHA's current role

Future state capability profiles were mapped against the 5 capabilities to provide clear distinction in proficiency levels

NATSIHA-wide view

Level 1 | FOUNDATIONAL

Basic level of capability and knowledge with a broad grasp of core concepts.

Level 2 | ADVANCED

Broad and fundamental knowledge. Demonstrated capability in areas of responsibility.

Level 3 | EXPERT

Demonstrated capability in complex situations with breakthrough results. Independently recognised expert, teaches/trains others.

 Strategic Nous and Influencing	5 7 8 9 10	2 4 6	1 3
 Relationship Building and Collaboration	9	4 7 8 10	1 2 3 5 6
 Governance and Organisational Awareness	8 9	5 6 7 10	1 2 3 4
 Culture and Community Focus	9	4 7 8 10	1 2 3 5 6
 Leadership for Enduring Outcomes	7 8 9 10	2 3 5 6	1 4

LEGEND

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1 CEO | 5 Senior Project Officer | 9 Administration Officer |
| 2 COO | 6 Senior Communications Stakeholder Relations | 10 Maintenance Officer |
| 3 ED First Nations Housing Policy | 7 Housing Support Worker | |
| 4 Senior Finance Officer | 8 Tenancy Manager | |

08

Development Pathways

08 Education, Recognition & Investment

Access to education and training remains a major challenge across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. While the workforce delivers essential services across housing and homelessness, formal pathways to build skills, gain qualifications, and progress in a career are often limited, unclear, or difficult to access.

This is a sector built on strength, staff bring deep cultural knowledge, local expertise, and strong community commitment. Yet the training system often fails to reflect what the sector actually needs. Courses may not align with day-to-day roles, delivery is frequently inaccessible to regional and remote staff, and there is little recognition of the skills gained on the job. For many, progressing through education and training means starting over, regardless of years of experience.

In the corporate sector, recognition of prior learning (RPL) is common. Executive short courses, professional development programs, and workplace leadership experience are routinely credited toward formal qualifications, cutting down study time, workload, and cost. But for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals in housing, those same opportunities are rarely available. Despite managing programs, leading organisations, and working across complex systems, their knowledge is often unrecognised by education and training providers.

Cost, travel, and study load remain major barriers, especially for those balancing work, family, and community responsibilities. For organisations, the need to meet compliance requirements and build capability only heightens the demand for training that is practical, accessible, and responsive to community needs.

There is a clear need for professional development pathways that are culturally safe, flexible, and co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations. This includes entry-level induction, role-specific training, and access to qualifications that support meaningful career progression whether in tenancy management, property and asset services, support roles, or governance.

Strengthening professional development in the sector is not just about building workforce supply. It's about valuing existing capability, easing the burden on overstretched staff, and supporting long-term growth across the community-controlled housing system.

Targeted investment will be critical

Targeted investment is needed to design and deliver fit-for-purpose training, embed recognition of prior learning, reduce cost barriers, and make ongoing, on-the-job learning a standard.

08 Education pathways distinctive features and opportunities

The education and training landscape for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector is fundamentally different from that of the mainstream community housing system.

These differences reflect the unique histories, responsibilities, and ways of working that define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations.

1. Community-Driven Entry Points

In mainstream contexts, workforce entry is typically through structured training and recruitment pathways. However, in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations, people enter the workforce through community connection, lived experience, and cultural responsibility rather than formal qualifications. **This approach values trust and place-based knowledge over paper credentials.**

"I don't work for an organisation, I work for my community."

Wollongong session participant

2. Cultural Knowledge as a Core Capability

Cultural capability in mainstream systems is often treated as a module or compliance requirement. In contrast, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations, **cultural knowledge is a core capability—distinct from cultural understanding.** Cultural knowledge includes connection to Country, understanding kinship systems, local protocols, and the lived experience of community; it can only be held by people from that community. Cultural understanding, in contrast, is something non-Indigenous workers must learn through humility, deep listening, and respectful engagement.

"Cultural knowledge is not just a skill; it's the foundation of our work."

Wollongong session participant

3. Multifaceted and Blended Roles

In the mainstream, roles tend to be narrow and function-specific (e.g., tenancy manager, support worker, compliance officer). **In ATSICCHOs, housing staff often wear multiple hats—**providing tenancy support, community outreach, wellbeing advocacy, and cultural leadership—reflecting the holistic nature of community-led service delivery.

"You don't clock off from housing work—it's your aunty, your cousin, your neighbour. It's a whole-of-life thing."

Perth Sector Strengthening Summit participant

4. Limited Access to Culturally Relevant and Local Training

While mainstream organisations often have access to a wide range of training providers and professional development options, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations—particularly in regional and remote areas—face limited, inaccessible, or culturally unsafe training options. **Existing qualifications often lack relevance to the way work is done in community-controlled settings.**

"If people are going to come and work in our communities they need training that speaks to our realities, not just generic stuff."

NSW session participant

Summary of findings

Area	Mainstream Sector	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sector
Entry Pathways	Formal qualifications and recruitment	Community trust, lived experience, connection
Role Design	Narrow/specialised roles	Blended, holistic, multi-functional roles
Cultural Capability	Optional competency	Core capability
Training Access	Broad, readily available	Limited, often inaccessible or culturally unsafe
Career Progression	Structured pathways	Flat structures, limited investment

Opportunities for Development

To address these barriers and build a culturally capable housing workforce, communities have identified several opportunities.

Co-designed qualifications and training content

Training should reflect the lived realities of community-controlled housing services.

Co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is essential to ensure cultural integrity and relevance.

Recognition of Cultural Capability

Cultural knowledge and lived experience must be formally recognised and embedded in qualifications and career pathways.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms can play a key role in this¹.

Partnerships with RTOs and universities

Expanding partnerships to co-develop micro-credentials, leadership pathways, and community-delivered content, with delivery options that don't require relocation or disengagement from cultural obligations.

Community-based training delivery

Supporting local delivery of training through ATSICCHOs or trusted local providers would increase participation, build workforce stability, and ensure training remains connected to Country and community.

Sector-Focused Employment Programs

Programs like the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP)² and state-based traineeships³ could be expanded and tailored to include housing-specific pathways, especially in frontline service delivery and governance roles.

Learning form other successful models

NACCHO's Approach to Education Pathways

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) has implemented a comprehensive strategy to build and sustain a culturally competent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce¹.

Key elements of this approach include:

Community-Controlled Training | NACCHO collaborates with Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTOs) to deliver culturally safe and relevant training programs. This ensures that education is grounded in community needs and cultural practices².

First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program (FNHWTP) | Launched in March 2024, this program aims to train up to 500 Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) and Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHPs) through accredited Certificate III and IV courses. The program emphasizes on-the-job training within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), providing practical experience alongside formal education³.

Holistic Support Framework | NACCHO has developed a traineeship framework that includes mentorship, supervision, and wraparound services to support trainees throughout their educational journey⁴.

Capacity Building for Trainers | Recognizing the need for qualified trainers, NACCHO has initiated projects to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Vocational Education and Training (VET) trainers and assessors, particularly in areas like social and emotional wellbeing, counselling, and community services⁵.



1. <https://nacchocommunique.com/2025/03/>

2. https://www.naccho.org.au/resources/?e-filter-b592216-resource_cat=workforce-training#archive-section

3. <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/first-nations-health-worker-traineeship-program>

4. <https://www.naccho.org.au/fnhwtp/>

5. <https://www.naccho.org.au/media-release-fnhwtp-launched/>

Applying NACCHO's Model to the Housing Sector

Drawing inspiration from NACCHO's successful approach, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector can develop a parallel framework to strengthen its workforce.

Community-Controlled Training Providers | Establish partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTOs) to deliver housing-specific training programs that are culturally appropriate and tailored to community needs.

Housing Workforce Traineeship Program | Develop a traineeship program aimed at training Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals in various housing roles, such as tenancy management, property maintenance, and housing advocacy. This program would combine accredited training with practical experience within Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations (ACCHOs).

Supportive Learning Environment | Implement a framework that provides mentorship, supervision, and additional support services to trainees, ensuring they are well-equipped to succeed in their roles and contribute effectively to their communities.

Trainer and Assessor Development | Invest in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainers and assessors in the housing sector to ensure sustainability and cultural relevance in training delivery.

By adopting a model similar to NACCHO's, the housing sector can build a robust, culturally competent workforce that meets the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Strategic Partnership Opportunities

University of Adelaide | Centre of Excellence Opportunity

The University of Adelaide has signalled a strong and ongoing commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce development and has already partnered with the sector to deliver the Governance Training microcredential.

This microcredential is now formally recognised through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing leaders to receive credit towards tertiary qualifications, including Bachelor's and Master's level business programs such as MBAs.

This recognition affirms the value of cultural governance, lived experience, and community leadership as core components of executive capability—and begins to carve a new pathway for sector leaders into formal higher education, without needing to repeat or re-learn what is already practised every day in community.

Building on this foundation, The University is looking at other areas of experience that could be formally recognised as part of an MBA.

Such a partnership could serve as a national model for how universities can walk alongside community-controlled sectors to co-design education that is grounded in culture, driven by purpose, and recognised across systems.

Registered Training Organisations and Sector-based RTOs

Partnering with Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTOs) and culturally capable national RTOs offers an immediate avenue to expand access to training that is fit for purpose. These partnerships can support the co-design of qualifications, flexible delivery models, and local implementation.

First Nations Industry Organisations – e.g. Indigenous Defence and Infrastructure Consortium (IDIC)

Organisations like the IDIC bring deep experience in building First Nations procurement pipelines, training pathways and commercial partnerships.

A collaboration between the housing sector and First Nations-led industry networks can unlock shared workforce development strategies across construction, asset management, and housing support services—supporting mobility and shared investment.

Vocational and Higher Education Sector Partnerships

The next phase provides an opportunity to engage nationally with vocational and higher education institutions to reshape the training system to better reflect the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workers. This includes the co-design of accredited pathways, recognition of cultural knowledge, and access to research-informed practice development.

Employment, Skills and Jobs Reform Stakeholders

With national reforms underway across employment services and vocational training, there is an opportunity to position the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector as a key contributor to future jobs policy. National partnership with government and skills councils can help ensure housing is recognised as a growth industry and that the needs of ATSICCHOs are embedded into broader employment and workforce strategies.

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Moving forward

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Phase Two Development

Phase One of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Employment Strategy has laid a strong foundation for future development that is grounded in community leadership, cultural integrity, and sector-led solutions.

It has mapped out the roles, pressures, and capabilities that currently shape the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce, and has begun to identify the system shifts required to sustain and grow a culturally strong and skilled workforce across the Country.

Importantly, this phase has also surfaced where key industry and academic partners are willing to walk alongside the sector. This opens the door to meaningful co-investment and the development of culturally relevant pathways into, and through, housing roles.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the strategy will deepen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector, support practical workforce development initiatives, and set the direction for long-term change. This work will be shaped by the values and realities of the sector and driven by a commitment to self-determination and shared responsibility.



Phase Two Work Priorities

Insights from the consultations have shaped a clear picture of what the sector needs to move forward.

1. Data Collection

Develop a clear, coordinated picture of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector.



- Map the current workforce across roles, locations, and capabilities to identify gaps and emerging needs.
- Strengthen data sharing arrangements with governments and institutions to improve access to workforce data and enable coordinated planning.

2. Accountability

Create clearer distinction between roles and accountabilities



- Push for increased clarity around role accountabilities in the ATSICCHO context
- Enable and advocate for robust support for less mature state and territory bodies, such as recruitment efforts and leveraging the sector-wide structure to tailor interactions
- Foster an environment built on best practice standards, as outlined in the 'Governance and Organisational Awareness' capability

3. Workforce capacity

Identify opportunities to address resourcing gaps and priority areas



- Leverage capability descriptors to guide talent acquisition, and help fill existing workforce gaps
- Maximise knowledge and skills through secondment of experienced hires where long-term, permanent positions are not available
- Use future state role capability profiles to inform critical capabilities underpinning talent acquisition
- Explore related sectors, including the Health and broader Housing sectors, to accelerate talent identification and address upskilling requirements, while supporting Cultural Security

4. Development Pathways

Identify career development pathways and leverage and map education entry points to the sector



- Strengthen access to culturally relevant training and upskilling
- Define the career pathway in the ATSICCHO Housing landscape
- Develop a learning and development pipeline for ATSICCHOs
- Build on national relationships to set look at what wrap around support looks like for the sector

5. Alternative Sourcing

Leverage alternative sourcing opportunities to address workforce and capability needs



- Conduct an activity analysis to determine if team member's current activities fit within their expected role requirements and accountabilities
- Explore alternative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resourcing options, to address workforce priorities and capability gaps
- Develop a shared service model that can assist First Nations organisations with outsourced functions, such as HR and Finance, to relieve operations burden



Workforce Composition



FOI/2526/038

Performance and Development

09 Integrating with jurisdictional employment strategies

The development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing employment strategy must align with, complement, and strengthen existing and emerging jurisdictional workforce strategies.

This includes recognising regional nuances, responding to state-specific commitments, and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations are not left behind in broader systems reform.

Jurisdictions such as Victoria have begun developing dedicated workforce strategies that acknowledge the need to address systemic workforce challenges, including underrepresentation, cultural safety, and access to professional development—particularly for Aboriginal workers and those in regional and remote areas.

Victorian Context | Opportunity for Alignment

Victoria's Community Housing Workforce Strategy (2023–2025) and the Mana-na woom-tyeen maar-takoort – Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home framework provide a clear commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians through workforce development.

Aboriginal workforce representation | Aboriginal Victorians are significantly overrepresented in the homelessness system, presenting to specialist homelessness services at a rate of 17.69% in 2021–22—the highest per capita rate in Australia¹. Yet Aboriginal people remain underrepresented in the community housing workforce. The Victorian Strategy recognises this gap and proposes targeted action to address it.

Cultural safety in service delivery | Both the Community Housing Workforce Strategy and the Aboriginal Homelessness and Housing Framework emphasise the importance of culturally competent service systems, including cultural awareness training for the non-Indigenous workforce and increased employment of Aboriginal staff across all roles.

Embedding cultural safety into capability frameworks | The updated Community Housing Capability Framework in Victoria includes cultural safety and awareness as core competencies, aligning with national capability areas such as Culture and Community Focus and Leadership for Enduring Outcomes.

Commitment to self-determination | Respect for Aboriginal self-determination is embedded throughout the Victorian strategies and aligns strongly with national workforce development principles. There is a clear opportunity to share tools, data, and evaluation approaches between national and state-level initiatives.

Regional Workforce Considerations

Regional housing organisations across Victoria face amplified challenges due to geography, resourcing, and access to training.

The Victorian strategy notes that:

Recruitment is highly constrained in regional areas, with smaller talent pools and difficulty attracting skilled staff.

Access to training and professional development is limited by geographic distance, travel costs, and a lack of local providers.

These regional realities affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations acutely, particularly those seeking to deliver culturally grounded, wrap around housing support.

A Pathway to Integration

As the national strategy progresses into its next phase, NATSIHA will work with jurisdictions to:

Align workforce capability frameworks and career pathways

Share data and insights through industry designed and built data tools

Identify shared priorities around cultural safety, regional development, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce leadership

Leverage co-investment opportunities in training, leadership development, and service innovation

Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations to lead within state and national workforce initiatives

This approach ensures that workforce development is not siloed, but instead coordinated across levels of government and led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector.

09 The Opportunity Ahead

The sector is ready, and we are building a clearer picture of what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing workforce looks like today.

As this picture comes into focus, we are also beginning to define what the workforce needs to look like over the next 5, 10, and 20 years to meet housing demand and support community-led growth.

National partnerships, when grounded in respect, cultural authority, and shared accountability, can help accelerate the development of career pathways and education systems that reflect the values and realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This is more than a workforce investment. It is an opportunity to support long-term leadership, cultural integrity, and the future strength of a sector critical to Closing the Gap.

What National partners can expect

A clear capability framework grounded in community-led priorities

Deep sector reach across jurisdictions and housing types

A collaborative and solutions-focused national peak body in NATSIHA

Opportunities to co-invest in innovation, training and employment models

A culturally safe, high-impact workforce development environment



Contacts

Benjamin Thompson

s47F @natsiha.org.au

www.natsiha.org.au