

Attachment D - Grow Aboriginal-led solutions for culturally safe and appropriate services

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples¹ are the world's oldest living culture, it is a source of pride, and strength, with 60,000 years of history and culture. Australia is a colonised country and this has a deep impact on Aboriginal people. It is widely known and evidenced that there are persistent and harsh disparities that continue to exist as a result of colonisation, dispossession and displacement from ancestral lands, as well as ongoing racism and intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal people. This is fundamentally linked with the extent of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal peoples today.

Aboriginal people are over-represented in the homelessness population, as well as users presenting to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). Even then, exact figures are difficult to ascertain, but it is likely higher than reported and recorded rates. Of many reasons NACCHO reports this may include those such as some Aboriginal peoples may not perceive themselves to be homeless if they are on Country, regardless of how and where they are sleeping.¹ Aboriginal specific definitions, drivers and impacts of homelessness are important to understand because they also help to unpack how and why some services might be better placed or have better outcomes than others.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience significantly higher rates of homelessness, overcrowded housing, and insecure housing tenure. Despite comprising just 3.1% of the population,² Aboriginal peoples represent 31% of clients in NSW³, above the national average. And again, for major cities, this increases once again, where Aboriginal peoples comprise 36% of those seeking services.⁴ This is supported by the advice and information given to Homelessness NSW from services, who estimate Aboriginal peoples represent between 30-40% of inner city clientele. It should be noted that anecdotal evidence from services also indicate that the inner city is amid an influx of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, largely due to the scarcity of appropriate services in regional NSW. Services continue to experience high demand, above and beyond their capacity to meet it.

Key findings from the 2020-21 report on Specialist Homelessness Services show the extent of the disparity:

- In NSW there was a 5% increase in Aboriginal clients from 2019-20 to 2020-21
- Aboriginal clients continue to increase by an average of 5.9% per year over the last ten years, three times faster than non-Aboriginal clients
- Aboriginal people are 10 times more likely to use SHS than non-indigenous people, a rate that is increasing each year.
- It is impacting heavily upon children and young people. Over half (52%) of clients are under the age of 25
- Aboriginal children aged 0 – 14 are 8 times more likely to access SHSs than non-indigenous children.⁵

When compared with other states and territories:

¹ Homelessness NSW uses 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' first, and 'Aboriginal people' thereafter in an attempt to both recognise the distinct and diverse nations, clans and tribes within Australia and the Torres Strait, and be pragmatic. We do not use 'Indigenous' but where it is a direct representation of other publications and data sets.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples housing and homelessness

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT
Overcrowded Indigenous households	7823	1802	7593	1221	3013	663	4087	174
Number experiencing homelessness	2278	783	4450	936	2618	130	12131	95
SHS Indigenous clients	19914	9428	13887	4741	9580	925	7485	671

(Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness. Cat. no. HOU 301. Canberra: AIHW)

It is important to note that the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal peoples includes causes such as ‘...policies and services that conflict with Indigenous values and culture.’⁶ As such lasting and durable solutions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of homelessness can be found within the community itself. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are well placed to deliver them.

Despite 31% of clients accessing SHS’s identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, just 6% of contracts delivering specialist homelessness services involve Aboriginal providers, meaning there are less than 10 specialist funded organisations in NSW.⁷

In the most part, no matter where you are in NSW there is likely no Aboriginal-led service for Aboriginal people to work with and the levels of Aboriginal staff across the sector doesn’t reflect the scope of demand. As of early 2019, 9 out of 15 DCJ district had no Aboriginal homelessness service provider.⁸ The Cox Inall Ridgeway report found that “...Aboriginal staff comprise 9% of the workforce delivering specialist homelessness services in NSW across both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homelessness service providers. This is significantly above the percentage of the NSW Aboriginal population (3.5%), and the percentage of Aboriginal people in the public service workforce (3.2%), but significantly below the percentage of clients who access specialist homelessness services in NSW (28.9%).”⁹

Increasing recurrent funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations will mean there are more culturally safe services. Without ACCOs, the NSW Government is providing essential crisis services to only some people, while Aboriginal communities go without. NSW can and should be a place where Aboriginal peoples can be part of a community where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Invest approximately \$108 million over 3 years to increase the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to ensure delivery of safe and appropriate services for Aboriginal people and meet current demand, through:

- **An increase in recurrent funding for existing ACCO (estimated at \$10 million over 3 years, in addition to current funding)**¹⁰
- **Directly contracting currently subcontracted ACCOs and increased recurrent funding, (totalling 15.6 million over 3 years)**¹¹
- **Increasing the total number of ACCOs to meet the demand (through a minimum investment of approximately \$82 million)**¹²

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21’ (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Australian Demographic Statistics', ABS Cat. no. 3101.0. (Canberra: ABS, March 2019).

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services 2020-21: New South Wales. Fact Sheet' (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW_factsheet.pdf.aspx.

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2018–19', Cat No. HOU 318 (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2019), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/summary> and <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/client-groups-of-interest/indigenous-clients>.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Australia's Children' (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2019), <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children>>.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: A Focus Report on Housing and Homelessness', Cat. no. HOU 301 (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2019).

⁷ Cox Inall Ridgeway, 'Consultation Report and Strategic Advice for Improving the Provision of Specialist Homelessness Services for Aboriginal People in NSW', Report prepared for the Department of Communities and Justice (NSW Department of Communities and Justice, February 2020), p. 1, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=790682>.

⁸ Ibid., p. 34

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Based on topping up existing funding to \$1.3 million per year over 3 years for 10 ACCOs, assuming current funding around 300,000 per annum

¹¹ Based on \$1.3 million per year for 3 years, for 4 contracts.

¹² There is currently an average of 2.3 ACCOs across 6 Districts. Based on 2.3 ACCOs to be funded for the remaining 9 districts at \$1.3 million per annum for 3 years. Homelessness NSW would recommend a more thorough Aboriginal-led needs assessment in collaboration with ACCOs and Aboriginal communities for future adjustments. Total future amounts and contracts would vary based on need, context, and varying service models including delivery in regional, rural and remote places.