

# MANA-NA WOORN-TYEEN MAAR-TAKOORT: EVERY ABORIGINAL PERSON HAS A HOME

## The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

### Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum

#### Submission

January 11<sup>th</sup> 2023

#### 1. Background

The purpose of this submission is to provide a response to the Housing Legislative package, including two new Bills to establish the Housing Australia Future Fund and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and an Amendment Bill to support the new legislation. <sup>1</sup> We understand that the Future Fund and the Council will enable two of the Labor Government's key election commitments in relation to housing:

- The establishment of the 10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund.
- The establishment of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council via legislation.

The contemporary housing experience of Aboriginal <sup>2</sup> people cannot be decoupled from the historical experience of Aboriginal dispossession and dislocation. Deprived of our land, excluded from the fruits of the economy and our traditional authority, lore and customs undermined, Aboriginal people have been homeless in our own land for the past two centuries. Our sustained economic exclusion has left a lasting legacy of housing poverty and deprivation.

We welcome this opportunity to provide our views on this significant step towards an Australia where every Aboriginal person has a home.



<sup>1</sup> <https://treasury.gov.au/consultation/c2022-343652>

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this document the term "Aboriginal" is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

## 2. Who we are – Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (VAHMF)

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum is unique in Australia. It's where every Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) who provide housing and homelessness services come together on a regular basis to progress the strategic work of the *Mana - Na Woorn -Tyeen Maar -Takoort* (Every Aboriginal Person has a home) Framework.<sup>3</sup>

The *Mana-Na Woorn -Tyeen Maar-Takoort* Framework<sup>4</sup> has been designed with the aim of meeting the diverse and particular needs of distinct groups of Aboriginal people. It has been developed by the community for the community. This is self-determination in action and its strength. Government partners have participated in the process, provided guidance and direction, but have recognised the power that has come from a community led response. Its implementation builds on the momentum that we have created, it will require all of our good will, application and innovation, and with the right resources we are sure that we can end Aboriginal homelessness and housing exclusion in Victoria.

In no other portfolio is the moral imperative to restore rights more compelling for First Australians than in housing. Despite the hardships and injustice endured, the Aboriginal people have more than survived, we are growing rapidly as a population. Demographic projections commissioned for the Framework have demonstrated that the number of Aboriginal households in Victoria will grow from around 23,000 (in 2016) to more than 50,000 by 2036. This means we need to find a further 27,000 homes over the next 20 years to 2036.

We therefore warmly welcome the commitment by the Federal Labor Government to establishing the Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Supply and Affordability Council.

## 3. National Leadership and national targets

For decades, housing and homelessness have not been priority areas for governments at either state or federal levels. For too long, housing has been seen as a “commodity” rather than essential infrastructure; a foundational basis that provides safety, promotes participation and sustains connections to community.

Decades of under investment in social housing by Governments has seen social housing stocks dwindle and the safety net erode. Having a home is as vital as safe roads, hospitals and schools. Yet if you are Aboriginal, you are ten times more likely to experience homelessness, as compared to any other population group. This is a national source of shame. It is time to turn around decades of under investment in social and affordable housing.

Victoria has the highest rate of Aboriginal people seeking specialist homelessness services in Australia. Establishing an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system that responds to the Aboriginal homelessness crisis, is trauma informed and built on the principles of self-determination, is a key goal of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home*. The objective is a redesigned Aboriginal homelessness service system that:

- Is accessible to Aboriginal people;
- Provides pathways through homelessness; and
- Improves long term sustainable post homelessness housing outcomes.

After extensive consultation with the community, and under the guidance of a Steering Committee of Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum members, Homes Victoria, and the Council to Homeless Persons, the Final Report: *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific Homelessness System in Victoria*<sup>5</sup> (the Blueprint) was launched at the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit 2022.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 for a full list of member agencies

<sup>4</sup> <https://vahmf.org.au/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ahvic.org.au/cms/uploads/docs/aboriginal-housing-vic-4.pdf>

The Blueprint provides a design of an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system and a plan to practically implement each of the system building blocks for a future focussed, connected and culturally safe Aboriginal homelessness system.

**Recommendation 1:** We ask the Federal Government to commit to a 10 per cent funding target for Aboriginal people, through the Housing Australia Future Fund - 1 billion dollars (consistent with the Victorian Government’s target to commit 10 per cent of all new social housing created through the Big Housing Build to meet the needs of Aboriginal Victorians <sup>6</sup>). We recommend that this commitment is linked to a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement schedule for housing and homelessness responses for Aboriginal communities.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that two seats on the Council are designated for two Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people who have extensive experience and understanding of Aboriginal housing and homelessness issues, (we recommend a gender balance) on an ongoing basis in recognition of Aboriginal people’s chronic overrepresentation in experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion and to further embed the Government’s commitment to self-determination and the Voice to Parliament.

**Recommendation 3:** That a specific Aboriginal schedule of works is developed so the impacts and outcomes of investments via the Housing Future Fund can be tracked, monitored and evaluated. We also recommend that a schedule of works is developed for the Council to ensure that contemporary experiences of Aboriginal housing and homelessness are adequately researched and consulted upon.

#### 4. National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and Closing the Gap

Whilst the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is the driving investment platform for all housing and homelessness services nationally, there are other national agreements such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) that have a housing focus. Our position is that the CTG Agreement should **not replace** the overall responsibilities of the NHHA given its very narrow focus. Currently the sole CTG housing target is as follows:

*“By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent.” <sup>7</sup>*

Whilst we recognise the need for work on addressing the pressing issue of overcrowding, we urge the Federal Labor Government to commit to measures that reflect a broader understanding of contemporary housing and homelessness issues for Aboriginal Australians. Overcrowding is in many ways, just the tip of the iceberg.

In 2007, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing visited Australia, Dr Kothari noted:

*“While the Special Rapporteur is satisfied that the Government is envisaging to enhance the funds for rural and remote communities indigenous housing and recognizing the urgency of it, this should not be done at the expense of indigenous Australians who live in urban areas, who also suffer inadequate housing and living conditions.”*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/all-victorians-have-stable-affordable-and-appropriate-housing>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area9>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up around 3.2% of the Australian population yet they made up over one-quarter or 28% of the clients (an estimated 72,900 clients) assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2021–22.<sup>8</sup>

There is a significant lack of dedicated services for Aboriginal Australians experiencing homelessness in urban areas, despite the acute over-representation. This combines with other systemic barriers to explain the acute overrepresentation of Aboriginal people accessing specialist homelessness services every day in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

To effectively meet the targeted outcomes of a new NHHA, appropriate resourcing is required and a move away from population based funding to a Fair Share approach. The new NHHA should devote a share of all mainstream social and affordable housing for Aboriginal projects equal to the proportion of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

These resources should include social housing investments, land concessions, inclusionary zoning allocations, shared equity programs, tax concessions and all other housing related commitments. Where mainstream social housing funding can be readily adapted to Aboriginal needs and where there is capacity for take up, the Aboriginal share should be equivalent to the proportion of Aboriginal people seeking homelessness assistance compared to all homelessness clients, for Victoria this equates to 10%.

A new NHHA should include a cultural statement underpinned by cultural principles. (See Appendix 2) Cultural performance indicators should also be applied. The cultural statement should recognise self-determination and the Victorian Treaty process. CHIA Victoria in partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria has developed the Community Housing Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework, supported by ten principles which could be applied to the new NHHA thereby embedding culturally appropriate systematic reform and practice. The framework can be found here:

<https://chiavic.com.au/resources/aboriginal-cultural-safety-framework/>

**Recommendation 4:** We recommend that a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is developed that reflects the diverse range of Aboriginal housing experiences – high rates of rough sleeping; inability to access social housing due to lengthy waiting lists and lack of available stock; lack of culturally safe tenancy support; and being locked out of private rental and home ownership. Furthermore we recommend future NHHA resourcing is allocated using a Fair Share approach.

**Recommendation 5:** The narrow scope of the current CTG housing target needs urgent review. It is itself an impediment to addressing the much broader issues of Aboriginal homelessness and housing exclusion.

**Recommendation 6:** We recommend that the Council commits to biannual consultation sessions in all States and Territories to ensure the Council is fully briefed on the full, current and contemporary extent of the housing and homelessness needs of Aboriginal communities. This will also ensure that the Council's annual report is truly reflective of the housing needs of the Aboriginal communities across Australia.

## 5. Aboriginal renters want Aboriginal landlords and culturally safe support

The Victorian Aboriginal community housing sector's vision is for a unified, strong, financially viable, self-determining Aboriginal housing sector that, over the next 20 years, is a significant contributor to

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview>

<sup>9</sup> Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/38>

ensuring every Aboriginal Victorian has a home. This will be achieved through providing community housing as a pathway out of homelessness and housing exclusion.

Management transfers, which give Aboriginal renters the choice to be housed by an Aboriginal provider, can accelerate creation of scale and operational efficiencies in the Aboriginal Community Housing Sector, while also providing an Aboriginal rental housing provider for Aboriginal renters.

In 2016, the Director of Housing in Victoria signed an Asset Conversion Deed transferring ownership of all the departmental social housing properties that Aboriginal Housing Victoria had been managing. This paved the way for over 1500 properties to come under the direct management of Victoria's first registered Aboriginal Housing provider.

The Aboriginal population is the most disadvantaged in Victoria and the most disadvantaged 20% of the Victorian Aboriginal population live in social housing. It can be very difficult for Aboriginal renters in mainstream social housing to access culturally safe support when they are having difficulties that may put their tenancy at risk.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria has a strengths based, fully evaluated, outreach program called - More than a Landlord<sup>10</sup>. In this program, renters are supported to set life aspirations and achieve goals with an aim of becoming more independent and self-reliant. The program is flexible, holistic and can scale up and down depending on needs. When help is needed, renters have a trusted, culturally safe professional to call on. Program staff help renters identify needs and then actively link in the supports and services that can meet those needs. We believe all Aboriginal renters in social housing across Australia should have access to this program if and when they need it. (Note: Expanding this program so it can respond to all Aboriginal households in Victoria would require an investment of approximately \$7.7 million per year).

**Recommendation 7:** We recommend that the Housing Fund commits to prioritising investment in capacity building for Aboriginal organisations who want to become housing providers, and identifies opportunities across Australia for stock transfers as well as building new stock for Aboriginal housing providers to own, manage and leverage.

**Recommendation 8:** We recommend that the Housing Fund commits to investing in culturally safe tenancy support programs like *More Than a Landlord* in all States and Territories with sufficient scale to meet demand.

## 6. Conclusion

The Housing Australia Future Fund and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council have the ability to significantly contribute to addressing Aboriginal housing and homelessness. We strongly recommend that its work should be underpinned by cultural principles and include an Aboriginal schedule that raises awareness and establishes priorities, actions, indicators and targets. Data sovereignty is an essential element to achieve the Aboriginal housing and homelessness targeted outcomes and requires the establishment of a new Aboriginal-led oversight committee. Resource allocations need to change to a Fair Share approach equal to the Aboriginal homelessness client rate of 10% across the whole housing and homelessness spectrum, if we genuinely want to see the reduction in Aboriginal homelessness.

Ultimately, a national Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework needs to be developed and *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort* provides an excellent starting point.

We look forward to working with the Federal Government on this important step forward.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://ahvic.org.au/about/more-than-a-landlord>



## **Appendix One – Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (Victoria) Member Organisations:**

- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative Limited
- Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative
- Taungurung Land and Waters Council
- Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation
- Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation
- Ngwala Willumbong
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative
- Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-Operative Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-Operative
- Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- VACCHO
- Aboriginal Housing Victoria
- Aboriginal Community Elders Service
- Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative Limited
- Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative
- Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative
- Mallee District Aboriginal Services
- Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc
- Njernda Aboriginal Corporation
- Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Co-operative
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Corporation
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
- VACSAL
- Margaret Tucker Hostel
- Aborigines Advancement League
- Djirra
- First People of the Millewa Mallee
- Elizabeth Morgan House
- Njernda Co -operative

## Appendix Two: Cultural Principles

- Aboriginal self-determination – mainstream community housing responses are designed and delivered with Aboriginal people and communities. Aboriginal people are the arbiters of good practice.
- Rights based – Aboriginal people have the right to adequate housing.
- Housing First – the housing and homelessness safety net provides Aboriginal clients with dignity, respect and quality of life.
- Outcome driven – the critical mass of Aboriginal people shift from marginal housing to home ownership.
- Transparency and accountability - the housing and homelessness system is accountable to the Aboriginal community through transparent, disaggregated public reporting of outcomes for Aboriginal people who seek assistance and are living in community housing.
- Cultural safety and access – Aboriginal people can access a system which is responsive to their housing needs and understands their connection to land, culture and family networks.
- Strengths based and people centred - housing is a platform for other services, building on individuals' community strengths to deliver people-centred outcomes that break the cycle of disadvantage.
- Opportunities are taken to build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations – to upskill, create critical mass for development and engage in productive partnerships with the mainstream.
- Economic opportunity and innovation – opportunities to develop local Aboriginal enterprises associated with land and culture; build commercial opportunities; and, deliver greater wealth to the community.
- Culturally safe tenancy management – housing and tenancy policies support and enable Aboriginal approaches to caring for family. (A culturally safe landlord is a key principle).