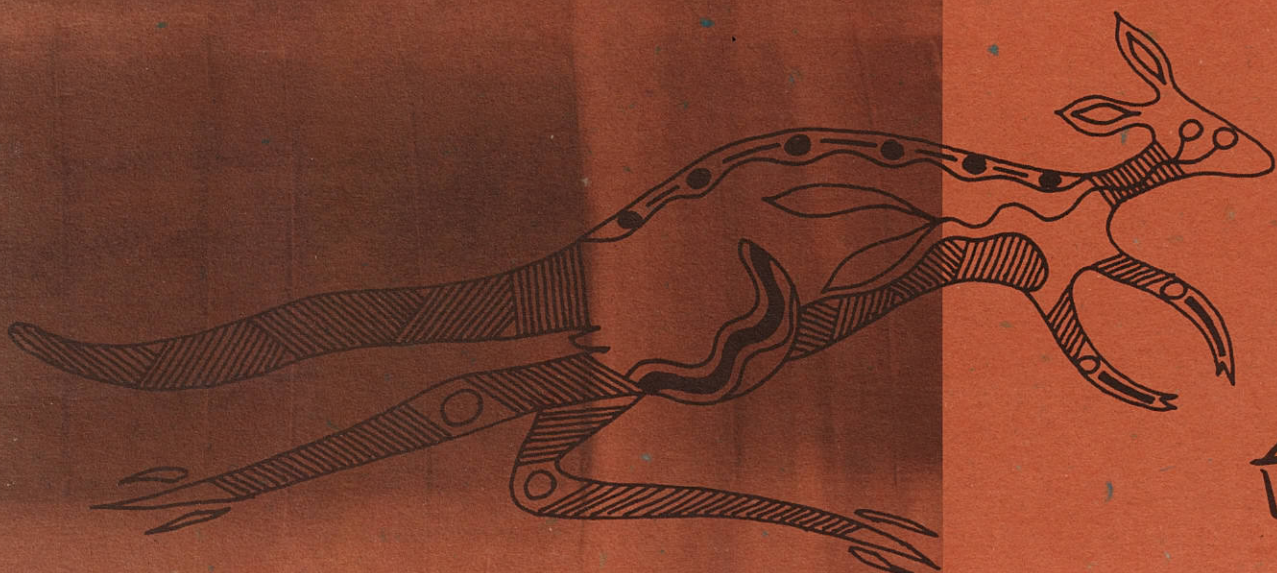


Australian
Housing
Ministers'
Ten Year
Statement
Of New
Directions
For Indigenous
Housing

**Building
a Better
Future:**

**Indigenous
Housing
to 2010**



Housing Ministers' Conference May 2001

Communiqué

At today's meeting, Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers adopted a new policy of "safe, healthy and sustainable housing for Indigenous Australians". Implementation of the new policy, and the strategies outlined in the ten year statement, will provide better housing and housing-related infrastructure, which will lead to improved environmental health outcomes for Indigenous people.

Ministers recognised that Indigenous housing is a major, national issue and called on all governments to adopt this as a priority until the problem is solved.

Ministers also noted the alarming levels of Indigenous homelessness. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work together on appropriate responses that link housing with essential community supports and encourage Indigenous involvement in shaping solutions.

State and Territory Ministers present formally apologised for any past policies and practices that caused or supported the inappropriate removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

The Northern Territory Minister abstained from commenting on this matter, stating that past policies predate self-government.

The Commonwealth Minister expressed deep and sincere regret that Indigenous Australians suffered injustices under the practices of past generations, and for the hurt and trauma that many Indigenous people continue to feel as a consequence of those practices.

Ministers agreed that considerable progress has been made since they last met on Indigenous housing issues in 1997, but acknowledged that further effort is required. This was reinforced by the Ministers' visit to the Ntaria community, where there is a need for more houses and repairs, and upgrades to existing houses. The visit informed the Ministers' decision to commit to a ten-year statement of new directions for Indigenous housing.

Ministers agreed to focus efforts on helping Indigenous community housing organisations improve their housing management and maintenance capacity.

Environmental health remains a major concern, with life expectancy for Indigenous people 14 to 19 years below that of other Australians. Indigenous people experience much higher prevalence of infectious diseases.

Ministers noted the effectiveness of the cooperative and coordinated efforts of recent years, and the widespread consultation with Indigenous people and community groups which occurred during development of the new policy and directions for Indigenous housing.

Today, Ministers agreed to continue the joint and consultative approach to improving Indigenous housing, and endorsed the establishment of a new Indigenous housing committee, with representative from the Commonwealth and all State and Territory housing agencies, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

Ministers present at the meeting included the Hon. Dr Richard Lim (NT), the Hon. Peter Adamson (NT), the Hon. Amanda Vanstone (Cwth), the Hon. Philip Ruddock (Cwth), the Hon. Dr Andrew Refshauge (NSW), the Hon Bronwyn Pike (Vic), the Hon. Tom Stephens (WA), the Hon. Judy Jackson (Tas) and the Hon. Tariana Turia (NZ). In his absence, the Australian Capital Territory Minister's support for the formal apology was also noted. On other matters Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory were represented by their officials.

The Vision

A VISION FOR BETTER INDIGENOUS HOUSING

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Australia will have:*
 - *access to affordable and appropriate housing which contributes to their health and well being; and*
 - *access to housing which is safe, well-designed and appropriately maintained.*
- *There will be a vigorous and sustainable Indigenous community housing sector, operating in partnership with the Commonwealth and State, Territory and Local Governments.*
- *Indigenous housing policies and programs will be developed and administered in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous communities and with respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.*



The Challenge

As the new century begins, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still typically endure much lower standards of housing than other Australians. Redressing this unacceptable situation will be one of the important challenges for public policy over the next decade. It will require a sustained and concerted effort by governments in close partnership with Indigenous people.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers, together with the Commonwealth Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, affirm their commitment to a national effort to make a real difference in housing and environmental health outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

This document outlines the new directions for improving Indigenous housing over the next ten years.

Indigenous community housing organisations have played an important role in providing housing in all parts of Australia, and under the new directions their rôle will be further strengthened. Indigenous control and management of housing enables communities to make or influence decisions about their future. It also facilitates community ownership of housing resources, contributing to the economic independence of communities.

Desired outcomes

The new directions for Indigenous housing aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- **better housing:** housing that meets agreed standards, is appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and contributes to their health and well being;
- **better housing services:** services that are well managed and sustainable;
- **more housing:** growth in the number of houses to address both the backlog of Indigenous housing need and emerging needs of a growing Indigenous population;
- **improved partnerships:** ensuring that Indigenous people are fully involved in the planning, decision making and delivery of services by governments;
- **greater effectiveness and efficiency:** ensuring that assistance is properly directed to meeting objectives, and that resources are being used to best advantage;
- **improved performance linked to accountability:** program performance reporting based on national data collection systems and good information management; and
- **coordination of services:** a 'whole of government' approach that ensures greater coordination of housing and housing-related services linked to improved health and well being outcomes.



Building a Better Future

This part sets out the principles, objectives and implementation strategies for achieving substantial and enduring improvement in Indigenous housing outcomes over the next decade.

Principles

The guiding principles for achieving the vision for better Indigenous housing are:

1. Governments and the Indigenous community will work collaboratively in policy development, planning, service delivery and evaluation.
2. The Indigenous community housing sector is recognised as a vital partner in Indigenous housing provision and will be involved in all aspects of service planning and delivery.
3. Best practice will be encouraged in service coordination, housing provision and asset management.
4. Adequate resources will be provided to support the vision.
5. Policy will promote an environment that builds and strengthens community capacity and involvement and is responsive to local needs and initiatives.
6. Self-management and socio-economic independence will be advanced through employment, training and enterprise development opportunities for Indigenous people in housing and infrastructure construction, maintenance and management.
7. Responsibility for achieving sustainable housing will be shared by those who provide housing and those who use housing.
8. All stakeholders will be accountable for outcomes and for the proper use of public funds.

Objectives and Strategies

The Governments of Australia in developing the new directions are committed to achieving the following objectives through the implementation strategies outlined.

Objectives

There are four objectives for achieving the vision for Indigenous housing:

1. Identify and address unmet housing needs of Indigenous people.
2. Improve the capacity of Indigenous community housing organisations and involve Indigenous people in planning and service delivery.
3. Achieve safe, healthy and sustainable housing.
4. Coordinate program administration.

Each objective has a number of implementation strategies.

Implementation strategies

1. Identify and address unmet housing needs of Indigenous people

- 1.1 Develop and use a multi-measure approach to quantifying Indigenous housing need, and to assist in informing resource allocation at national, State, Territory and regional levels.
- 1.2 Develop an effective balance between new housing provision, upgrading and maintenance, and housing management.

- 1.3 Ensure policies, plans and service provision take account of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people and communities with regard to:
 - the mix of housing type, tenure and location;
 - the desire for home ownership;
 - cultural, social and environmental factors; and
 - people's life stages and special needs.
- 1.4 Continue to improve Indigenous access to mainstream public and community housing programs.
- 1.5 Implement the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information, including data collection to support national performance indicators, a national minimum data set and reporting systems that will facilitate performance appraisal at the national, State, Territory, regional and local levels.
- 1.6 Maintain a national Indigenous housing research program and clearing-house.
- 1.7 Encourage development of improved technologies for housing and infrastructure in remote areas, and dissemination of information on developments.
- 2. Improve the capacity of Indigenous community housing organisations and involve Indigenous people in planning and service delivery.**
 - 2.1 Implement the National Skills Development Strategy for Indigenous Community Housing Management.
 - 2.2 Link training opportunities with the Indigenous community housing sector's need for skilled employees in housing and project management and administration.
 - 2.3 Maximise opportunities for Indigenous people to be involved in housing construction and maintenance, including:
 - investigating a tender preference system and building incentives into the tender process; and
 - voluntary registers of Indigenous companies and tradespeople, and companies that employ Indigenous people.
 - 2.4 Develop principles and standards for service delivery by Indigenous community housing organisations, and ensure Indigenous people are fully consulted about, and involved in, planning and delivery of housing and related services.
 - 2.5 Encourage streamlining of the sector and provide incentives to organisations to achieve effective and efficient management practices.
 - 2.6 Support organisations to develop housing management plans containing:
 - objectives for housing assistance delivery;
 - an asset management plan, including a cyclical maintenance program;
 - a tenancy management plan, including client consultation and feedback mechanisms, and appropriate information and training for tenants to ensure tenants' responsibilities are understood and their rights protected;
 - rent collection policies and systems; and
 - financial practices and reporting systems that link resources to outcomes.
 - 2.7 Outsource tenancy management and support services, where practicable, to Indigenous organisations to foster enterprise development and employment opportunities.
 - 2.8 Foster the capacity of the Indigenous housing sector to represent and advocate its own interests.

- 2.9 Investigate recurrent funding options for Indigenous community housing organisations that are linked to effective asset management and recognise regional differences.

3. Achieve safe, healthy and sustainable housing

- 3.1 Target resources to reduce the backlog of maintenance and upgrades in order to improve health and safety.
- 3.2 Implement the National Framework for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Indigenous Housing.
- 3.3 Implement the National Strategic Asset Management Best Practice Principles.

4. Coordinate program administration

- 4.1 Finalise and implement Indigenous housing agreements between the Commonwealth, State/Territory housing agencies, ATSIC and the Torres Strait Regional Authority (where appropriate).
- 4.2 Maximise outcomes by coordinating planning and delivery across governments, ATSIC, the Torres Strait Regional Authority (where appropriate) and communities with respect to:
- infrastructure programs;
 - primary and environmental health programs;
 - mainstream public and community housing;
 - the income support system;
 - community services programs;
 - Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP);
 - education, training and employment programs; and
 - communication technology.
- 4.3 Establish Indigenous employment policies in State, Territory and Commonwealth housing agencies.

Evaluation and Review

In order to monitor the progress of the implementation of the new directions and make appropriate program delivery decisions, it is agreed that:

- All jurisdictions will work to improve availability of good quality data through the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information.
- All jurisdictions will develop and implement reporting systems that will facilitate performance appraisal at the national, State/Territory, regional and local levels.
- All jurisdictions will implement a regular program of evaluations of all aspects of the strategy that will assist in ensuring that problems are promptly addressed, assistance is properly directed and resources are used efficiently.
- All jurisdictions will report annually to Housing Ministers and the Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs against the desired outcomes defined in this strategy, and make recommendations for action to address any shortfalls in performance.
- Ministers will ensure that a full-scale review of the new directions is undertaken in 2005. The review process will provide for consultation with key stakeholders, including the Indigenous community.

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