

Understanding Mobility as a Key Driver of Overcrowding and Other Housing Issues: Research Report

A report prepared by Inside Policy for the NSW
Department of Communities and Justice

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Introduction

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Housing, Disability, District Services and Disaster Welfare (HDDSDW) engaged Inside Policy to design and implement mixed method research, consultation and analysis to understand mobility as a key driver of overcrowding and other housing issues for Aboriginal people in NSW. The project was also partly funded by the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), DCJ Community Housing Branch and Housing, Homelessness and Disability. The project also sought to understand the interactions between mobility and the NSW social housing sector and make evidence-based recommendations for how housing providers can better support mobility.

The project was driven by two top level Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- The National Agreement on Closing the Gap Target 9a: increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent by 2031.
- The DCJ Doing What Matters initiative: Reduce overcrowding in social housing by 15% by 2024.

Aboriginal mobility as a policy issue can be mapped to Closing the Gap Socio-Economic Outcome 9: 'Aboriginal People secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.' Under Key Action Area 3 of The NSW Closing the Gap 2022-24 Implementation Plan, the NSW Government recognises the need for 'a range of flexible housing responses to support cultural and seasonal mobility and ensure housing is culturally responsive'.

The aim of this project is to increase positive housing outcomes for Aboriginal people by better supporting mobility. Evidence-based recommendations will inform policy, practice and partnership change; and recognise the need for flexible asset responses and appropriate housing supply.

While this project relates to the social housing system, DCJ only has jurisdiction over DCJ managed functions and tenancies. Other social housing providers may use the findings and recommendations in this report to better support mobility for their clients. Inside Policy partnered with The Fulcrum Agency to apply their skills in the built environment to the research project.

Acknowledgments

Inside Policy acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands on which we live and work, as well as the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands on which this evaluation was held. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present of these Nations. We thank them for their ongoing custodianship of land, waters, air, and all aspects of Country and remind ourselves that it always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

Inside Policy acknowledges the contribution of the staff of the Department of Communities and Justice, the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) and the Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs) and Community Housing Providers (CHPs). Without their assistance and guidance, this research could not have taken place.

We also acknowledge and thank the tenants and community members who took time out of their busy lives to take part in the research process, and for sharing their knowledge, experiences, and expertise with us. Without them, work such as this cannot happen. We are grateful for their rich and diverse contributions.

The project would like to thank the nine communities and representatives from organisations participating in consultations for welcoming researchers and providing so much valuable insight towards the research.

Finally, Inside Policy acknowledges and thanks the Mobility Project Reference Group (MRG) members for their invaluable knowledge, expertise and co-design which has shaped this project.

The MRG brought together key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and representatives from relevant NSW Government and non-government agencies and organisations to co-design and help guide the project. Where possible the preference was for MRG members to be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and/or to have relevant expertise in Aboriginal Service Delivery.

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Definitions, terminology and acronyms

Definitions

Elder	An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge, lore and who has community permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. Can also mean an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person above a certain age.
Health hardware	Home equipment required to support good health such as toilets, showers, sinks, kitchen cupboards and cooking facilities.
Homelessness	A person is considered homeless if their current living arrangement: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• is in a dwelling that is inadequate;• has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or• does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.¹
Housing stress	People who participated in consultations defined housing stress as a 'cycle of rejection' involving elements of financial, employment, safety and family pressures all impacting negatively on health and wellbeing.
Inter-agency	A meeting where two or more representatives of different agencies, departments, or organisations meet to discuss or disclose information pertinent to the purpose of coordinating services relevant to their work for shared Aboriginal clients.
Kinship	The complex and dynamic system of culturally defined relationships between individuals who are commonly thought of as having family connections.
Mobility	Mobility is defined as being away from a usual place of residence for short or medium period of time. For a complete definition see page 16.
Public housing	Public housing is secure and affordable rental housing managed by DCJ Housing for people on low incomes with housing needs.
Regional	All areas beyond the major cities and includes Inner Regional (Central Coast, Hunter New England, Wollongong and Illawarra) and Outer Regional (major centres located outside urban Sydney).
Remote	Areas with very small populations with relatively poor access to services (i.e., relatively long distances to certain services).
Rural	Non-metropolitan or regional areas, including large or small rural centres.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), *Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*.

Social housing	Social housing is secure and affordable rental housing for people on low incomes with a housing need. It includes public housing, community housing, and Aboriginal housing. ²
Songlines	Integral to Aboriginal spirituality, Songlines are the way Aboriginal people trace the oral history and journeys of ancestral spirits as they created the land, animals, and lore of Australia, as well as contemporary stories. They are an Indigenous memory code to the keeping of cultural heritage and knowledge. ³
Temporary Accommodation	As per DCJ Housing policy, Temporary Accommodation “supplements Specialist Homelessness Services by providing accommodation in low-cost motels or caravan parks for clients who are homeless. The intention of Temporary Accommodation is to provide a bridge to give clients a chance to secure alternative accommodation, whether crisis accommodation or private rental. It is a short-term temporary measure rather than a longer-term response”. ⁴
Urban	Urban refers to major cities of Australia; otherwise known as metropolitan. The term urban encompasses the entirety of Greater Sydney.

² NSW Government, Communities and Justice (2019) *Social Housing*, (online content) DCJ.

³ Lynne Malcolm and Olivia Willis (2022) *Songlines: the Indigenous memory code* (online content) ABC.

⁴ NSW Government, Communities and Justice (2023). Rentstart Assistance Policy. Available at:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/policies/rentstart-assistance-policy#ta>

Terminology used

Aboriginal	Where used it refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Aboriginal Community Housing Provider	An Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) which owns or is responsible for managing community housing.
Allocation zone	A group of areas or towns where social housing is available. There are 245 allocation zones across NSW.
Community housing	Secure and affordable rental housing for people on very low to moderate incomes with housing needs managed by non-government organisations.
Community Housing Provider	Non-government organisations that own or are responsible for managing community housing owned by government or rented through private owners with government funding.
DCJ District	The top-level grouping of a number of Districts aligned with Local Health Districts.
Local Government Area	An administrative division of an area that a local government is responsible for.
Negative exits	Negative exits refer to households where the tenancy ended due to a breach of the tenancy agreement which may include the abandonment of a property with no notice.

Acronyms used

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACHIA	Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association NSW
ACHP	Aboriginal Community Housing Provider
AHO	Aboriginal Housing Office
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CAPO	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
CHIA	Community Housing Industry Association NSW
CHP	Community Housing Provider
CPTED principles	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles
CNOS	Canadian National Occupancy Standards
DCJ	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
DFV	Domestic and Family Violence
DPE	The Department of Planning and Environment
HDDSDW	Housing, Disability and District Services and Disaster Welfare within DCJ
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LAHC	Land and Housing Corporation
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
MRG	Mobility Project Reference Group
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NSWALC	NSW Aboriginal Land Council
OOHC	Out of Home Care
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
TA	Temporary Accommodation

Methodology

This section provides an overview of the research methodology including its purpose, design, key research questions, data collection methods and limitations.

Research purpose

The primary objective of this research is to understand Aboriginal mobility practices and their impact on overcrowding. The research aims to identify ways to support Aboriginal people, DCJ Housing and social housing provider staff and clients, so that they can support mobility and improve the housing experience of Aboriginal households in NSW, with a focus on reducing negative overcrowding. The research will produce targeted and locally informed recommendations to DCJ Housing, including the Community Housing Branch and Housing Homelessness and Disability teams, other social housing providers and allied organisations and agencies such as the AHO.

This research is focused on understanding the housing experience of Aboriginal people as they move between communities. This report is a starting point for government in NSW – providing an evidentiary basis for future consideration and progress by DCJ and the social housing sector more broadly. While many of the recommendations are broad, this report still aims to provide practical and specific recommendations where identified.

Research design

The research is a mixed-method examination of the context of Aboriginal communities' understanding of mobility, the positive and negative impacts associated with Aboriginal mobility and housing stress, and what policy, practice and partnership solutions are available to government.

Inside Policy undertook primary and secondary research as follows:

Primary research

1. Community and stakeholder engagement via qualitative data collection (e.g., individual and small group interviews both face-to-face and online, focus groups, yarning circles and observations)

Secondary research

1. Review of relevant government data sets (e.g., Human Services Data Set, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/human-services-dataset-hsds>)
2. Literature review and bibliography, establishing the policy environment, including:
 - National policy settings (e.g., *Closing the Gap* – Outcome and Target 9). International policy (e.g., *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*).
 - State policy, including:
 - DCJ Housing policies, a sample of CHP housing policies and AHO Housing Services Guidelines Policy
 - Documentation around relevant programs
 - Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) policies (repairs and maintenance, design and development)
 - Aboriginal Housing Office (advocacy, home ownership)
 - homelessness policies, and
 - DCJ corrections program information
 - Housing affordability (rent, utilities).
 - Location and amenity (access to services, recreation, transportation).
 - Existing environmental health programs and partnerships.
 - Current research on housing density and crowding in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- Current research on the relationship of mobility and housing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Mapping cross-jurisdictional and inter-agency initiatives that support mobility (including Koori interagency networks).

Research scope

Consultations were held across nine urban, regional and rural/remote areas in NSW with higher-than-average Aboriginal populations and existing mobility loops as advised by service providers. The nine areas are:

- Blacktown
- Bourke
- Brewarrina
- Dubbo
- Lake Macquarie / Central Coast⁵
- Orange
- Redfern
- Walgett
- Wollongong.

The Mobility Project Reference (MRG) Group recommended the broad range of Aboriginal, Government and non-Government stakeholders and organisations that were invited to engage with the research. Community members were made aware of this research and ability to participate through various channels. Consultations with community were also promoted by these stakeholders and organisations.

Consultations were not undertaken in Northern NSW due to flooding and subsequent flood recovery efforts impacting the region.

In November 2022, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC) granted ethics approval for the research. From that point to April 2023, Inside Policy and the Fulcrum Agency conducted interviews, workshops and yarning circles with Aboriginal tenants and communities, Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs), Community Housing Providers (CHPs), Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) – some of whom operate as ACHPs.

The range of ACHPs, CHPs and other service providers consulted included:

- Bungree Aboriginal Corporation
- Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation
- Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation
- Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Dreamtime Housing
- Housing Plus
- Bridge Housing
- Orana Community Centre, and

⁵ The original targeted community for this project was Lake Macquarie. When planning consultations Inside Policy had difficulty in engaging the limited Lake Macquarie Aboriginal services and as such expanded to include Central Coast and Newcastle based services. Inside Policy notes that these are distinct communities and findings from Central Coast and Newcastle services are not used to inform Lake Macquarie specific findings unless Lake Macquarie was explicitly mentioned.

- Wandiyali Aboriginal community and children's service.

NSW Government agencies consulted for the research included relevant DCJ teams, the AHO, Aboriginal Affairs NSW regional office teams, Community Corrections, Transport for NSW and the LAHC.

Non-government services and peaks engaged with included specialist homelessness services (SHS), NSW Aboriginal Land Councils, Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) and community support services such as Mission Australia, Aboriginal Medical Services and services in multiple interagency and community working party meetings.

A full list of stakeholders invited to participate in the research is included at Appendix F.

A Mobility Research Project Reference Group (MRG) was also established to oversee the project and provide input and subject matter expertise. The MRG included NSW Aboriginal peak organisations and key Aboriginal stakeholders from across the state and from relevant sectors. The MRG shaped the consultation plan, tested key findings and provided advice and assistance throughout the project. A full list of the MRG membership is included at Appendix B.

Key research questions

The research considered three key questions:

1. Is mobility a driver of crowding and housing stress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW?⁶
2. What is the relationship between housing stress and negative housing experiences?
3. How can DCJ develop policy that supports mobility and enables positive housing experiences?

The research will also seek to respond to the following sub-set of questions:

- What are the patterns and drivers of mobility, and how do these impact on overcrowding?
- How do Aboriginal households define and experience overcrowding and any perceived effects on their health, safety and well-being?
- What does the concept of 'mobility' mean to local populations - and how do these meanings relate to current, official definitions?
- What are the mobility requirements of Aboriginal people and households? Are there differing mobility requirements for each nation?
- Are there differing mobility requirements between regions (metro/inner regional/outer regional/remote/very remote)?
- Are there any benefits of what is perceived as overcrowding or density in housing, such as improved kinship, cultural connection and returning to country?
- What are community/tenant led engagement preferences and how would they prefer to collaborate?

Data collection methods

The research project used the following mix of data collection methods:

- semi-structured in-depth interviews
- workshops with service providers and professional stakeholders
- yarning circles with Aboriginal tenants and community members

⁶ Question one was rephrased from the original question 'Is mobility in NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities a driver of overcrowding and housing stress?' to align with language preferences.

- attendance at existing forums across the nine sites to reduce over-consultation (such as tenant groups, inter-agency forums etc.)
- informal community events, such as morning teas, BBQs
- site observations
- desktop research
- a policy, regulation and literature review exploring the current literature, policy and regulatory arrangements regarding the identified domains, and
- high level analysis of relevant data provided by DCJ.

Consultation took place from December 2022 to April 2023.

Each of these methods is described below:

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In total, 28 semi-structured interviews were completed with 23 professional stakeholders and 25 community participants. Interview guides were based on the research questions allowing participants an opportunity to share their thoughts on mobility, its impact on housing and overcrowding. Interviews were conducted in face-to-face and virtual formats.

Workshops

Four workshops were held in total with 48 professional stakeholders present.

Yarning circles

Six yarning circles were completed with 48 community participants and eight professional stakeholders present.

Yarning circles were used to provide a safe place where all participants could come as equals to share experience and build understanding. Rather than using a formal agenda, posters and other materials were used to guide the discussion through the research questions.

A set of the interview and discussion guides is included at Appendix C.

Attendance at existing forums

Inside Policy attended a number of existing forums as part of the site visits. These forums allowed for Inside Policy to connect with community and service providers. The forums were used to recruit for further interviews or workshops and provide input on the project. Using existing forums aimed to reduce over-consultation.

Informal community events

Inside Policy attended some informal community events. These were used to recruit for further interviews, observe community spaces and provide informal input into the research questions all in a safe and comfortable space.

Site observations

Inside Policy undertook site observations of the built environment guided by community and professional stakeholders. Fulcrum Agency assisted in these observations at two sites with further analysis of built environment being undertaken virtually.

Literature review

A literature review was undertaken to better understand Aboriginal mobility, overcrowding and approaches to social housing solutions to meet Aboriginal community needs, both domestic and international in comparative context. See Appendix D for the key findings from this literature review.

Limitations

The findings of the research should be interpreted in light of the limitations listed below.

Data gaps and challenges

Data from DCJ, AHO, LAHC, CHPs and ACHPs was challenging to access and analyse. Processes related to privacy laws and guidelines impacted timeframes for data to be accessed. Many of the data questions could not be answered due to the scope and short timeframes. Some datasets captured did not align with the data requested. Further, there is lack of alignment between agency and housing provider data, as CHPs and ACHPs store tenancy data in their own IT systems.

To manage this, housing providers who took part in the qualitative data collection were asked the formulated data questions during interviews and workshops. As such, an answer to all of the data questions has been provided on a limited scale. Some data insights have been included that will reinforce the findings from the quantitative data collected from Aboriginal tenants, communities, ACCOs and housing providers.

Recommendations

It should be noted that some recommendations have not yet considered financial, implementation, or other risks. As such, recommendations detailed throughout this report may change after further modelling and risk assessment work has been completed.

Lack of capacity for engagement for professional stakeholders

It is acknowledged that many of the professional stakeholders invited to take part in the research are operating with heavy workloads and competing priorities, making time to take part in consultation difficult. While this project is a Closing the Gap initiative, the research is not linked to a specific funding, policy or program imperative, meaning there were some challenges in securing the commitment of organisations to engage. In some locations, this resulted in limited engagement of professional stakeholders. The limited engagement in some sites from professional stakeholders also limited recruitment pathways for tenants and community members. Despite this, what was heard had strong continuity across the urban, regional and rural/remote communities who participated in data collection activities.

For a full list of organisations engaged with and contacted at each site, see Appendix F.

The housing and cost of living crisis limited the scope of discussion

The impacts of the current housing shortage in NSW and the cost-of-living crisis have combined to create a precarious living situation for many Aboriginal people and families across the state. During data collection, many participants shared insights through the lens of a cost of living crisis. The stress of which had the effect of limiting discussion and observations relating to positive mobility.

Defining mobility

For the purpose of this project, mobility is defined as being away from a usual place of residence for short or medium period of time. In general, mobility is difficult to define in a finite sense and this was evident across the literature and from stakeholder consultations. While we can provide insight into common and general types of mobility, interactions with social housing and specific insights heard in consultations, research cannot be generalised to apply to the individual experiences of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility. As such, any specific recommendations or definitions of mobility found in this report should not be taken as an exhaustive definition of the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research must recognise and reflect the diversity of Indigenous peoples, as well as their shared experiences and worldviews [...] Generalisation or extrapolation of findings that masks diversity can do harm and such risks should be considered in the analysis of data.”⁷

Complexity of the NSW social housing system and limits to DCJ’s jurisdiction

The entirety of the NSW social housing system is complex, with different funding mechanisms, legislative instruments and regulatory bodies. It includes but is not limited to homelessness services, crisis and refuge accommodation, private rental assistance, mainstream public, community and Aboriginal housing, transitional housing, housing for seniors and people with disability. For the purpose of this research, social housing includes homelessness, public, community and Aboriginal housing.

Complexity is exacerbated by the overarching responsibility of providing housing assistance for the most vulnerable citizens in NSW – those who must rely on government and non-government organisations for their housing. Responsibility for design, portfolio planning, property development, repairs, maintenance and home modifications is also complex and depends on which entity owns and/or manages a property. For public housing managed by DCJ Housing, this is the responsibility of the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) and the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), which sit in the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE).

The scope of this research has not been able to fully explore the complex layers of policy, procedure and practice involved in the NSW social housing system. The report has relied on triangulation of multiple sources of evidence including DCJ, service providers and Aboriginal community due to gaps in policy and program knowledge from all sources individually. DCJ provided program knowledge, documentation and overview of policy levers where knowledge gaps existed to assist in the creation of practical recommendations.

Refer to Appendix F for a full list of stakeholders invited to participate in the research.

⁷ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), [Code of Ethics](#), AIATSIS, 2020, p 13.

Community Pages

We would like to acknowledge the strength, resilience and spirit of the nine communities who participated in this research.

These next pages provide context for the report, a snapshot of mobility, and celebrate each community's landscape, history and strength.

We would also like to acknowledge the young Aboriginal artists from Awabakal Country and Wiradjuri Country who submitted artwork for this report in a competition. The winning entries are featured in the community pages and relate to the travels, journeys and housing of Aboriginal people in these communities.



The artwork of Saretta Fielding has been used on the community pages where DCJ Housing did not receive entries for the artwork competition. These designs were created for Housing Statewide Services (HSS) by Saretta. 'Woneyn Mariyang' shares the story of HSS, which led this report for DCJ Housing. It acknowledges the Traditional Custodians across their NSW footprint on country and celebrating commitment to leading a network of housing providers, who serve people and communities beyond providing a service.

Central to the design a large gathering circle is reflective of HSS, while outward flowing pathways from the gathering stretch across the canvas, representative of connection to community and the intricate HSS networks, working together across the State, to support clients towards having a home, comfort and holistic wellbeing.

The information in this report will be relayed back to the nine communities who participated in the research in a Closing the Loop Report.

Community Consultation

Location	Venue	Date
Lake Macquarie	Garden Suburb – Yamuloong and Barang	5/12/22 & 12/12/22
Illawarra	Warilla – Illawarra Aboriginal Community Based Working Group (IACBWG)	7/12/22
Illawarra	Wollongong – Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service (IAMS) and Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation (IAC)	8/12/22-9/12/22
Bourke	Maranguka; Bourke Tribal Council	24/1/23 – 28/1/23
Walgett	Mission Australia; Café 64 Community Hub	30/1/23 – 2/2/23
Brewarrina	Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC)	20/2/23 – 24/2/23
Orange	Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) ; DCJ Office	23/3/23
Dubbo	Aboriginal Housing Office, Housing Plus, Orana Support; Aboriginal Affairs	24/3/23
Sydney / Blacktown	Bridge Housing	5/4/23



DARUG COUNTRY - BLACKTOWN

The city of Blacktown is a diverse and prosperous urban area in the heart of Western Sydney, located on Darug (or Dharug) Country. Darug people have been living in this area for many thousands of years and their story is one of adaptation, survival and resilience. Their lands extend from the Blue Mountains to the coast.¹ Children are allocated totem animals to respect and protect, such as the Warali Wali (possum).²

In Darug country, the creator being is *Gurangatty*, a rainbow serpent who created the rivers and landscapes, including *Dyarubbin* (the Hawkesbury River). Gurangatty rests in the watering holes in the bends of the river and the Darug have a songline about the ongoing battles between Gurangatty and *Mirrigan* (a large quoll).³ Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the



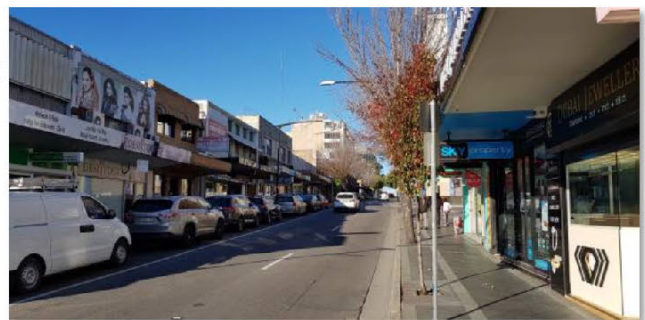
View of Lake Woodcraft at Sunset. Image: © Bing Bao (iStock).

Darug people practiced seasonal land management by only harvesting food when needed and allowing land to fully recover before returning to live and hunt.⁴ Tubers were a staple and other foods such as fruits and other plants would also have been collected. Darug people that lived in the region (that is now Blacktown) are thought to have relied on hunting animals such as kangaroos and wallabies.⁵

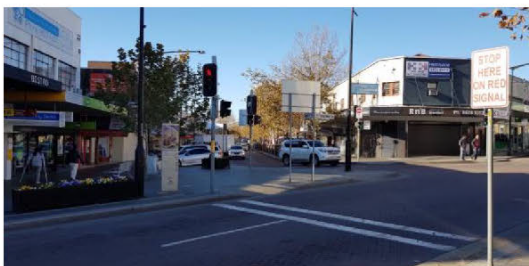
One of Blacktown's successful Aboriginal athletes is Kyah Simon, who plays professional soccer in England for the FA Women's Super League. In 2011 Kyah was the first Aboriginal player to score a goal at a FIFA World Cup and she was named in the squad for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia.^{6,7}

Visitors to the Blacktown area enjoy attending baseball matches at the Blacktown International Sports Park⁸, visiting Sydney Zoo and the Featherdale Sydney Wildlife Park⁹, and watching live events at the Sydney Coliseum Theatre.¹⁰

Three percent of the almost 400,000 people living in the Blacktown Local Government Area are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, making it the largest urban Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander population in Australia.^{11,12}



Northern end of Flushcombe Road Blacktown. Image: © Andy Tychon (iStock).



Junction of Main Street and Flushcombe Road Blacktown.

Image: © Andy Tychon (iStock).

Many people travel to Blacktown for their medical needs: Blacktown hospital and its associated practices service thousands of residents from the surrounding suburbs. People travel to Blacktown to go to TAFE or work, for entertainment, shopping, and recreation.

People also travel to and from Blacktown to connect with family and Country or for Sorry Business.

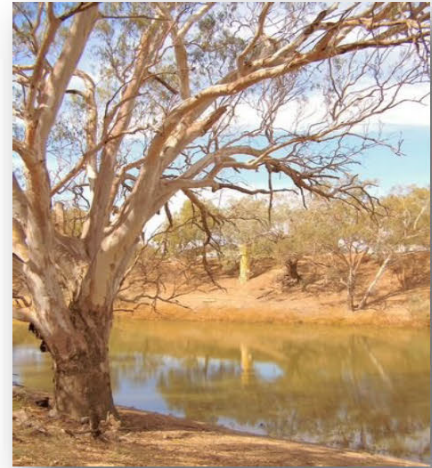
NGEMBA COUNTRY - BOURKE



Bourke is located on the traditional lands of four major nations: the Ngemba (Ngiyaampa), the Baakindji (Barkandji), the Murrawarri and the Kunya peoples. The Ngemba are the traditional custodians of the land on which the Bourke township is now located. The Ngemba are known as 'stone country people' and care for some of the most significant sites in the region.¹³

The local Aboriginal people of Bourke hand down the stories of Baiame, a sky god who created rivers, mountains and forests and gave Aboriginal people laws, traditions and culture.¹⁴

Mount Gundabooka and Mount Oxley are local national parks and boast significant cave art sites and other evidence of Aboriginal cultural heritage.¹⁵ The Ngemba people were using engineering, physics, water ecology and animal migration knowledge thousands of years ago. The significance of these early Aboriginal technologies demonstrate the sophisticated understanding by early Aboriginal people of the land and its natural resources.¹⁶



A river red gum tree on the banks of the Darling River, near Bourke. Image: © A. Lazarus (Megapixel).

Visitors to Bourke enjoy walking the Old Bourke Trail, riding the paddle vessel 'Jandra' along the Darling River¹⁷, or taking the Mulgowan (Yappa) Aboriginal Art Site walking track in the Gundabooka National Park to see ancient Aboriginal rock art.¹⁸

One of Bourke's famous local's is Percy Hobson, who was a successful athlete. At the Commonwealth Games of 1962, Hobson won the gold medal for high jump with a leap of 6 feet, 11 inches (211 centimetres). Aged just 20, the Ngemba man was the first Aboriginal athlete to win a Commonwealth Games gold medal.

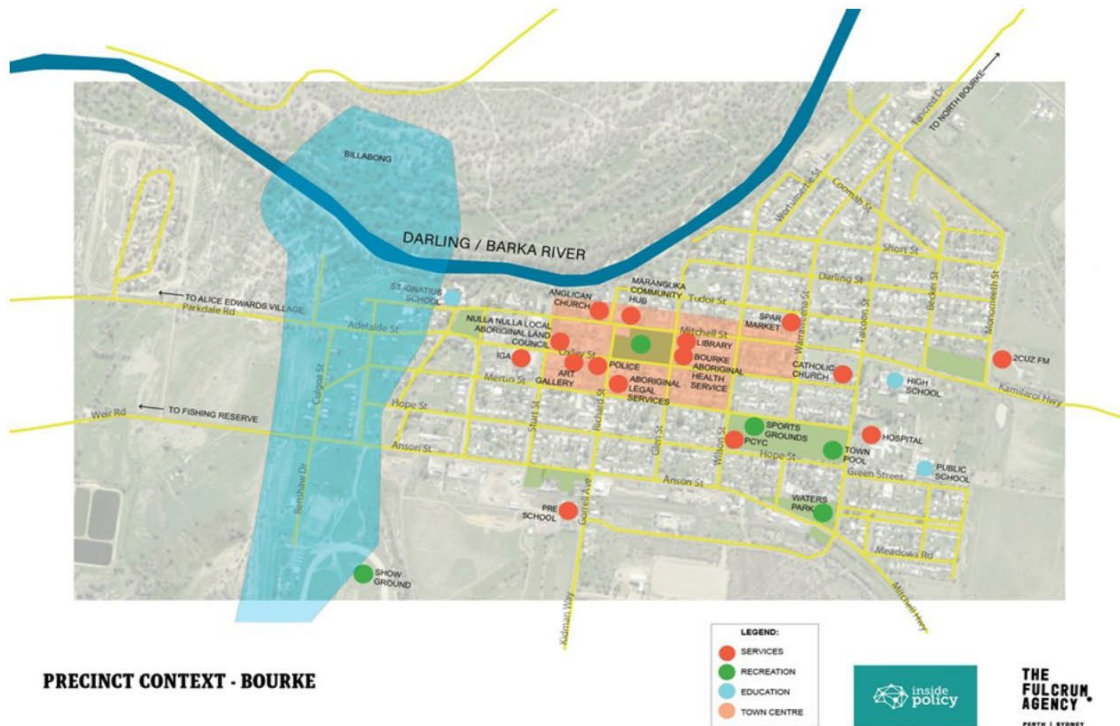


The highway between Cunnamurra and Bourke.
Image: © A. Lazarus (Megapixel).

Percy was one of 10 children. His mother was the daughter of Sergeant Frank Williams, an Aboriginal tracker for NSW Police, and his father's family were early settlers in the district. Percy's win was wildly celebrated in Bourke.

The Percy Hobson Mural was completed in April 2021 by renowned Lightning Ridge artist John Murray, local artists Brian Smith and Bobby Barrett, Melbourne street artist Lucas Kasper and a crew of local Indigenous artists.¹⁹

NGEMBA COUNTRY - BOURKE



The population of Bourke is 2,340, with Aboriginal people making up 30% of the population.²⁰ There are limited services and retail businesses in Bourke so the local community will often travel to Dubbo to access hospitals, and to buy goods and services. There is also limited public transport, though a coach service is available from Bourke to Dubbo. The nearest train station to Bourke is located in Dubbo.



Darling River at Bourke. Image: © K. Griffiths (Megapixls).



WAILWAN COUNTRY - BREWARRINA



Brewarrina is in the north-west of New South Wales on the banks of the Barwon River. The town is located on the lands of the Morawari, Barkinji, Weilwan, Kamilaroi, Koamu, Valarai, Baranbinja, Wiradjuri, Ngemba, and Yualwarri people's.²¹ One meaning for the name Brewarrina is that it is the Aboriginal word 'place of the gooseberry bush'.²²

Brewarrina is known for its Aboriginal fish traps, which local Aboriginal people refer to as Baime's Ngunnhu. Baime is the creator being, a sky god who created the rivers, mountains and forest and gave Aboriginal people laws and traditions. Ngunnhu has been suggested to be the oldest surviving human structure in the world and shows ancient Aboriginal people's ingenuity in harnessing natural resources. The Ngemba people are the original custodians of the traps, which they shared with other tribes.²³

In 2023 Brewarrina hosted the 8th Baime's Ngunnhu Festival on the banks of the Barwon River. The festival included stalls showcasing Aboriginal art and design, cultural activities, dancing and music. There were opportunities for learning with dancing and language workshops, as well as Elders sharing histories.²⁴

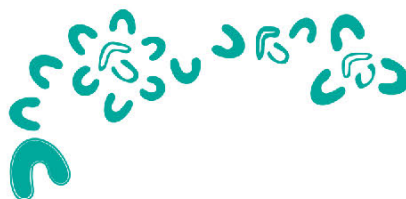


The town of Brewarrina on the Barwon river. Image: © J. Carnemolla (Megapixel).

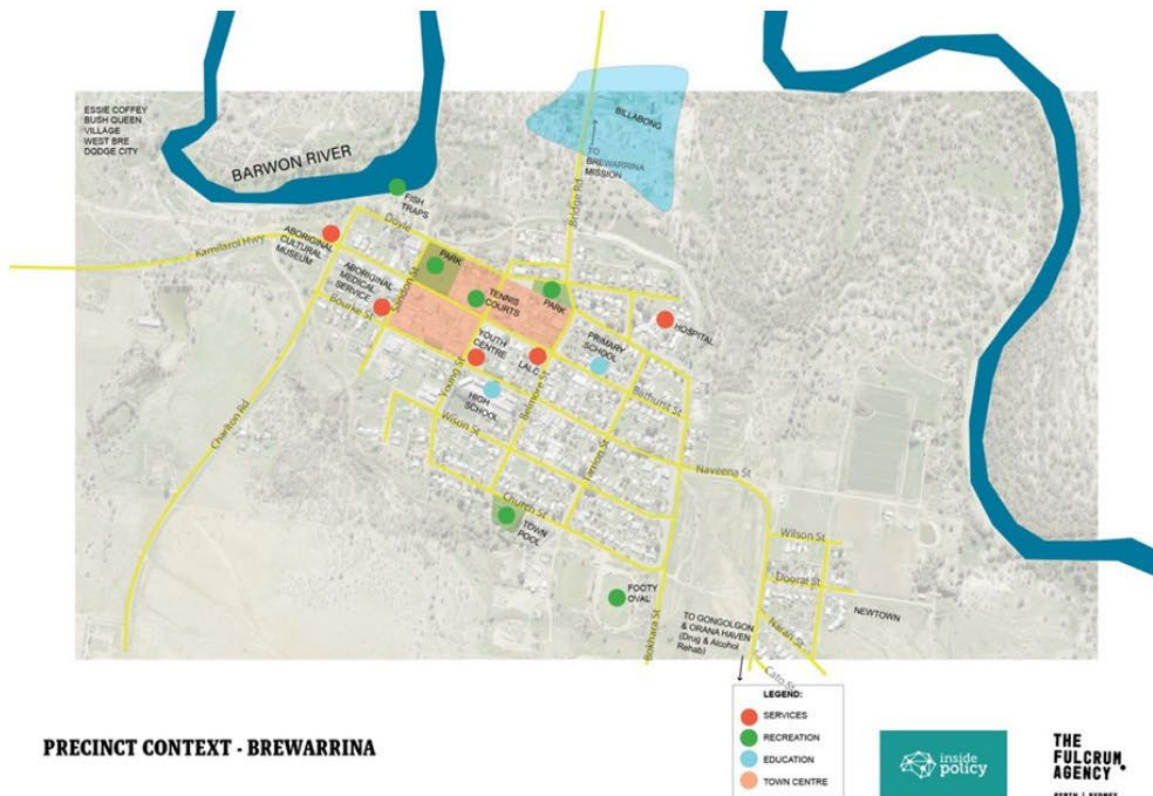
Brewarrina is known as a stop on the Great Artesian Drive, one of eight stops in north-west New South Wales where people can experience therapeutic hot artesian pools. The region has many beautiful locations for appreciating the land with whilst bird watching, fishing or camping.²⁵

Brewarrina is the birthplace of some famous Aboriginal people. Jimmie Barker (1900-1972) was the first Aboriginal person to become a published author. His book - *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* - was an autobiography about his life at Mundiwa, Milroy and Brewarrina Mission.²⁶ Brewarrina is also the birthplace of Essie Coffey (1941 – 1998) who was a singer, actor, film maker and community worker. Essie co-founded the Western Aboriginal Legal Service.²⁷

The population of Brewarrina is approximately 1,356 with Aboriginal people making up 51% of the population.²⁸ There are limited bus services linking Brewarrina to surrounding communities. Travelling to Sydney by public transport involves a bus ride to Dubbo, then a transfer to a train to Sydney. Due to the small population there are limited services in Brewarrina and many people travel to Dubbo to access health and other services.



WAILWAN COUNTRY - BREWARRINA



PRECINCT CONTEXT - BREWARRINA

Map source: The Fulcrum Agency 2023



Brewarrina historical Aboriginal fish traps on the Barwon River.
Image: © J. Carnemolla (Megapixel).

WIRADJURI COUNTRY - DUBBO

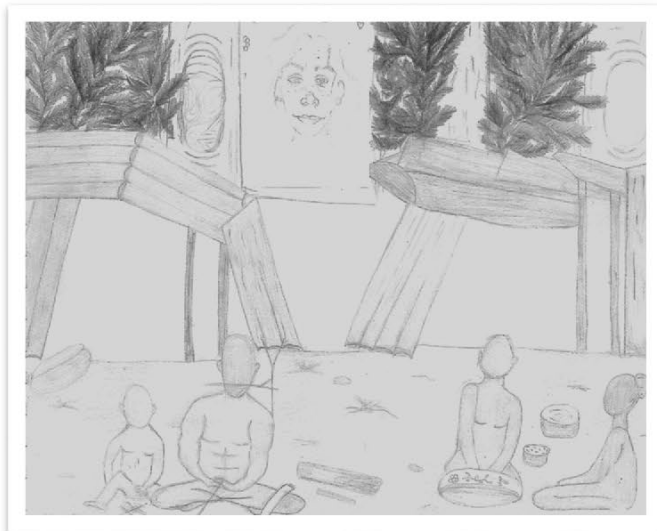
Dubbo is a thriving and beautiful city in the Orana region of New South Wales, located on Wiradjuri country. The Tubbagah of the Wiradjuri Nation are the traditional owners.²⁹ They are the people of the three rivers and the Wambuul (Macquarie River) runs through the centre of Dubbo.³⁰

The spiritual beliefs of the Wiradjuri people centre on Baiame the creator being, and his emu wife Goobperangalnaba, and the giant serpent Kurree. Baiame is a sky god who created rivers, mountains and forests and gave people laws, traditions and culture, while Kurree the giant serpent created the landscape.

Wiradjuri people have sacred sites connected to their spiritual heroes, known as Jin. There are multiple jin, and each is connected to an animal or plant. A person inherits their jin from their mother and with it the responsibility for caring for the sacred site of their jin. Many Wiradjuri people still know their totems and avoid eating their jin animals.³¹

Meet the artist: Shamika Kentwell

We live on Wayilwan Country in Warren. My ancestors cared and managed Country. When the English invaded my ancestors made the decision to live at the Beemunnel on the Ewenmar Creek. Beemunnel means Baiame's chest, strength. My people lived at the Beemunnel until they were told to move into the town of Warren. Our connections are strong and still alive. We inherit resilience and the ability to journey where life takes us. Our shelters at the Beemunnel were homes and community was strong. When we moved into Warren we relied on our Elders for guidance and strength.



'Strength through Connections' by artist Shamika Kentwell, from Warren Central School.



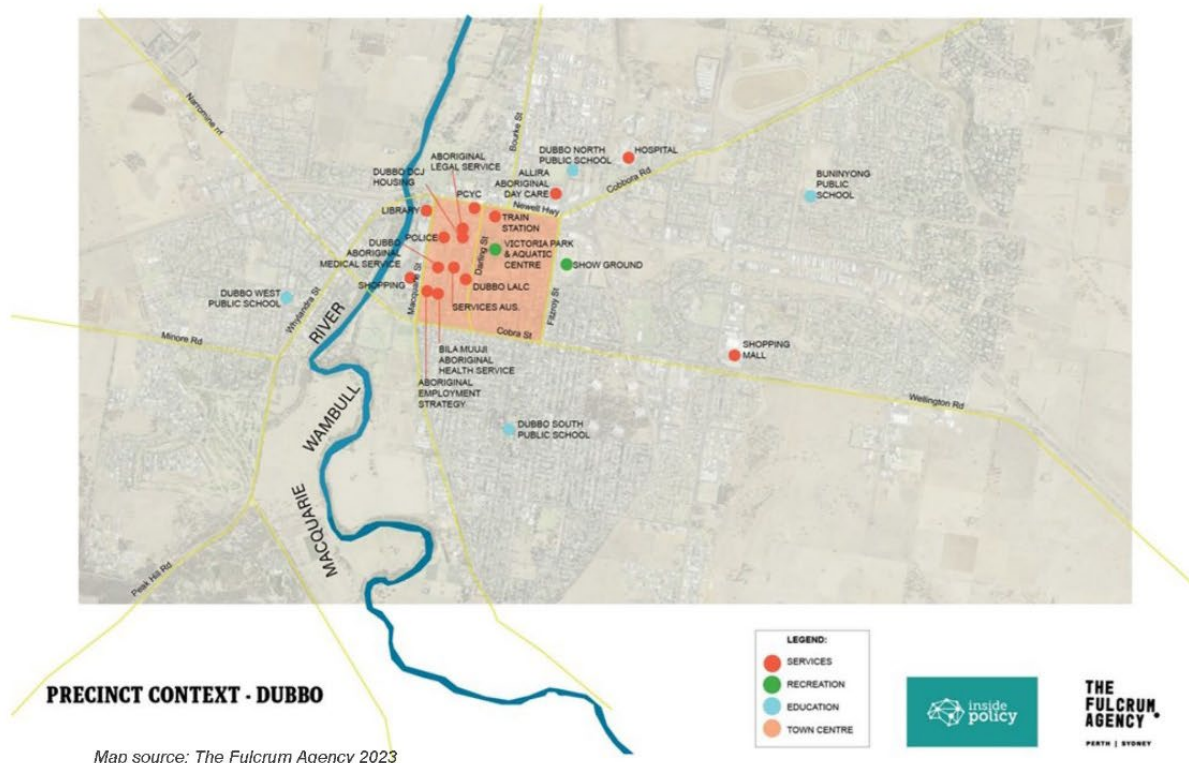
Shamika Kentwell. Photo courtesy of Warren Central School.

'Allison Fuller represented strength for us at school. Allison was our beloved Aboriginal Education Officer at Warren Central School. She was always there for us. We miss her. My art symbolises life's journeys: as community, as family and as students at school. Our homes are where we sense we belong and are strengthened through the meaningful connections we make' - Shamika Kentwell.

WIRADJURI COUNTRY - DUBBO

There are many talented Dubbo residents who have achieved success in their fields. Pearl Gibbs was an Aboriginal activist who spent much of her adult life in Dubbo. She set up a hostel to care for the families of Aboriginal patients in Dubbo, she was the only Aboriginal female to ever serve on the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board, and she supported the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.³²

Ella Havelka is the first Aboriginal person to join the Australian Ballet and was a member of the Bangarra Dance Theatre.³³



The population of Dubbo is almost 75,000 people, with Aboriginal people representing 16% of the population.³⁴ Dubbo is a regional hub, with Aboriginal people travelling there from surrounding communities. People travel to and from Dubbo to connect with family and Country, for Sorry Business or to escape the heat - as Dubbo can be hot and humid during the summer months. Many people travel to Dubbo from smaller towns for their medical needs including to give birth or to access treatments like dialysis or to see a specialist.



Dubbo down from the foot bridge. Image: © T. Vyshnya (Megapixel).

DHARAWAL, JERRINJA, WODI WODI, WANDI WANDIAN, YUIN COUNTRY

ILLAWARRA AND SHOALHAVEN



The Illawarra is on the south coast of New South Wales. The word Illawarra is believed to come from the Tharawal word '*Elouera*' meaning 'pleasant place by the sea' or 'high place by the sea'. The city of Shoalhaven is located south of the Illawarra.³⁵

Illawarra is the traditional land of the Dharawal people. Other nation groups that reside in the Illawarra include people of the Yuin, Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, Bundjalung, Dunghutti and Gumbayggir Nations.³⁶ The Shoalhaven is the traditional land of the Jerrinja, Wodi Wodi, Yuin and Wandj Wandian people.^{37,38}

Sandon Point is one of the many sacred places for Aboriginal people in the Illawarra. It has been used since Creation for ceremonies, gatherings and burials. Before non-Aboriginal people arrived in Australia, Sandon Point was a meeting place for coastal Aboriginal people.^{39,40} Booderee National Park in the Shoalhaven is co-managed by Parks Australia and the local Aboriginal community at Wreck Bay. Visitors to the park can learn about Aboriginal history and culture from the traditional owners of the land who demonstrate weaving, share dreamtime stories, and discuss bush tucker, on-country healing and Aboriginal astronomy.⁴¹ The Illawarra and Shoalhaven is bordered by beautiful beaches and mountains and is a magnet for tourists. Wollongong is the largest city in the Illawarra/Shoalhaven region.⁴²



Hyams Beach. Image: © Showface (Megapixel).

The Illawarra has a population of around 313,800 people, with Aboriginal people representing 3% of the population.⁴³ In the Shoalhaven, the population is 108,531 with Aboriginal people making up 6% of the population.⁴⁴ There is a huge range of events, festivals and weekend activities across the Illawarra Shoalhaven area that take advantage of the natural beauty of the region, the bountiful seafood, arts and crafts, local produce and the natural history of the region. The Illawarra and Shoalhaven have hospitals and a good network of health and other services supporting the community. Most towns are a reasonably close distance to hubs where goods and services can be accessed. Public transport is good, with most towns having access to a bus network, plus the South Coast rail line runs from Sydney through to Bomaderry in the Shoalhaven.



The view from Saddleback Mountain Lookout across to the Illawarra Escarpment. Image: © Hollyharvoz (Megapixel).

AWABAKAL COUNTRY / LAKE MACQUARIE



Lake Macquarie is a beautiful and vibrant city in the Hunter region of New South Wales, located on Awabakal Country.⁴⁵ The Awabakal people have lived on, loved and looked after this rich coastal area for thousands of years. The Awabakal people were known for being strong and determined defenders of their territory.⁴⁶ This resilience is seen today in organisations such as The Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd, which provides community support, and the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre, which skills Aboriginal people throughout Australia to preserve and disseminate traditional languages.

To the Awabakal people, the wedge-tailed eagle has special significance. Their celestial being Koin (or Coen), looks like an Aboriginal man - but in flight it looks like an eagle. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Awabakal people extensively practised cultural burning, which helped them hunt and navigate the dense and prickly landscape. Fishing was an important part of Awabakal people's diet.⁴⁷



Lake Macquarie. Image: © B. Jeayes (Megapixel).

There are many talented Lake Macquarie residents who have achieved success in their fields. Sandra Griffin is an Awabakal woman and was the first elder in residence at the University of Newcastle's Wollotuka Institute and is actively involved in her community.⁴⁸

Biraban is a well-known historical figure in the Awabakal people's history, born in Belmont around 1800. He was abducted by the British and raised in military barracks in Sydney. He went on to learn fluent English and become a translator, guide and tracker. He was able to act as a spokesman for the Awabakal people, liaising between the clan and the British. The Lake Macquarie community has honoured Biraban for his legacy as a leader and linguist by naming a school after him. The University of Newcastle has a building named after Biraban, and Canberra has a street named after him.⁴⁹

Visitors to Lake Macquarie enjoy all the water activities and water sports available, viewing art at the Museum of Art and Culture and playing at the Speers Point Park.⁵⁰ The population of the Lake Macquarie region is 200,000, with Aboriginal people representing 5% of the population.⁵¹ Many Aboriginal people travel to the Lake Macquarie area from smaller towns for their medical needs. Some travel to Lake Macquarie for education, employment, entertainment, shopping, as well as sport and recreation. They also travel to and from Lake Macquarie to connect with family and Country, attend community events, or for Sorry Business.

Photo of Emakie Roberts courtesy of Swansea High School.

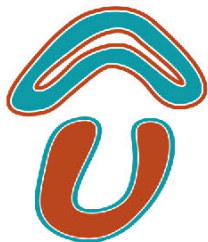
Meet the artist:

My name is Emakie Roberts, I am 13 years old, and I am a proud Bundjalung and Gamilaroi woman living on Awabakal country. I love connecting to my culture through my art works, which has given me a number of opportunities through showing my art to community.

My painting represents the connectedness of the spiritual world and kinship links with the living world. The spirit world consisting of the kinship ancestral links between both ancestors and kin connections on mother earth. This demonstrates my movement amongst kin and my links to kin in the ancestral world.

I have had my artwork on display at my local medical centre (East Lakes) and want to grow the exposure of my art to the community where ever I can. I won 1st and 3rd prize for the Wandayli Art Show, and the manager of Wandayli has commissioned a painting for the managers new office. The Mirabel Foundation bought one of my paintings which they will use it in their promotional postcards. Lab learning have asked me to paint a painting for them. The Swansea women's Rugby League seen my DCJ winning painting on the Swansea High School Facebook site and loved my design and have asked would I be interested in using the paintings design or create a new design for all of the 2024 Swansea Rugby league Teams shirts next year and for me to sign my name on the shirts.





WIRADJURI COUNTRY - ORANGE

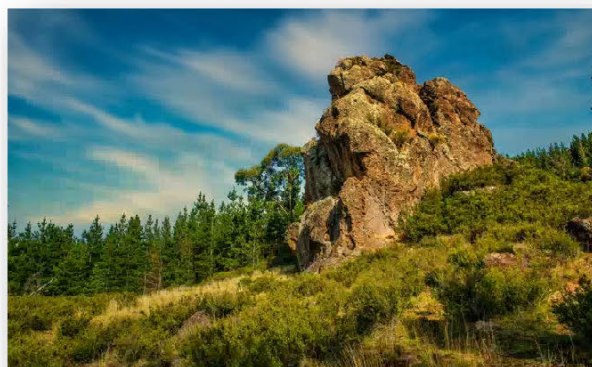
The town of Orange is located in the Central Tablelands region of New South Wales on the land of the Wiradjuri nation.⁵² The spiritual beliefs of the Wiradjuri centre on Baiame the creator being, his emu wife Goobperangalnaba, and the giant serpent Kurreea.

Biaame is a sky god who created rivers, mountains and forests and gave people laws, traditions and culture. Kurreea the giant serpent created the landscape.^{53,54}

Wiradjuri people have sacred sites connected to their spiritual heroes, known as Jin. There are multiple jin, and each is connected to an animal or plant. A person inherits their jin from their mother and with it the responsibility for caring for the sacred site of their jin. Many Wiradjuri people still know their totems and avoid eating their jin animals. The Wiradjuri people are known for the use of carved trees to mark the burial site of distinguished Wiradjuri people. One of these carved trees can be seen at the grave of Yuranigh, a renowned Aboriginal man who acted as guide for surveyor Thomas Mitchell as he explored inland Australia in the 1840's.⁵⁵

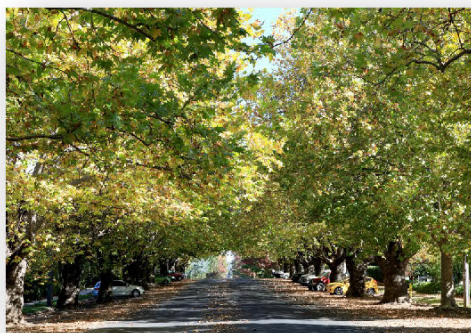
One of the significant local sites is Mount Canobolas, known to the Wiradjuri as Gaanha Bulu, meaning 'two shoulders'. Gaanha Bulu is part of a local songline about three brothers, and is linked to two other local peaks.⁵⁶

The Deputy Mayor of Orange is Aboriginal business owner Gerald Power. Gerald is a Jaru man from Bowen who settled in Orange as a young man. Gerald owns and operates a business in Orange offering visitors cultural tours and an Aboriginal bush tucker experience.^{57,58}



A massive rock formation in the Canobolas forest near Orange. Image: © A. Mandiagli (iStock).

Orange is a picturesque country town known for its wineries and thriving fruit district. Orange hosts a number of food and wine festivals and events throughout the year and is a hub for local art shows and cultural events. The region has a rich history from the Dreamtime through to the gold rush and bushranger eras. It has vibrant autumn landscapes and many walking trails to explore and appreciate the land that Aboriginal people have looked after for thousands of years.⁵⁹ Orange has a population of just over 61,000 people, Aboriginal people make up 7% of the population.⁶⁰ The town is on the Main Western rail line which connects Sydney to Bourke. It has a local bus service and a daily bus to Sydney. The health services include Orange Hospital and community health services.



A leafy street with Autumn colours in Orange. Image: © Harlz (Megapixel).

GADIGAL COUNTRY - REDFERN

Redfern is located in Sydney's inner southern suburbs on Gadigal country and has a rich and significant Aboriginal history, particularly in Eveleigh Street. Redfern is a geographical high point in the landscape, and prior to colonisation it is thought to have been a meeting place for the Gadigal people as they traveled through their territory. It was once a place of wind-blown sand dunes covered in Banksia scrub and wetlands interspersed with fresh-water soaks.⁶¹ Baiame is the Creator god of the Gadigal people: Baiame came down for the sky and shaped the land, creating the rivers and mountains.⁶²

Recorded observations of Sydney at the time of colonisation reveal open grasslands interspersed with trees, which gave the city a manicured appearance thanks to Aboriginal practices of burning scrub. It was at Redfern that Aboriginal people held great feasts and faced many hard-fought battles from colonisation onwards.⁶³



Eveleigh Railway Yards was Sydney's largest employer from the time it opened in 1886 and it was one of the biggest employers of Aboriginal people.⁶⁴ The prospect of jobs at the Eveleigh Railway Workshop and factories on Botany Road, along with the opportunity for a better life away from the control of the Aborigines Protection Board, triggered an influx of people migrating from Aboriginal reserves across New South Wales into Redfern. In the 1950's Redfern developed into an urban Aboriginal community. It was a safe and tight-knit community where discrimination was less prevalent.⁶⁵



'Welcome to Redfern'. Image: © K. Ng (iStock).

The Redfern All-Blacks Rugby League team was co-founded by Bill Onus in 1945: it later became a community and political organisation throughout the 1950's and 1960's. The Redfern All-Blacks became the political power base of the legendary Redfern community organizer and activist Ken Brindle.⁶⁶

Redfern played a crucial role in the movement for Aboriginal self-determination during the 1970's, a time of significant change for Aboriginal people and the nation. Redfern is the location of the first Aboriginal Legal Service, the first Aboriginal Medical Service, the Black Theatre, a childcare center and preschool run by Aboriginals, and the Aboriginal Housing Company.⁶⁷



The population of the Redfern is 13,000, with Aboriginal people representing 3% of the population.⁶⁸ Redfern also has interesting things to see and do, such as self-guided tours of the public Aboriginal art. For twenty years an iconic mural of the Aboriginal flag was located near The Block in Redfern: sadly it was recently demolished to make way for a new housing development. However, there are many other murals honoring this iconic area, especially the 'Welcome to Redfern' mural which covers the entire wall of a local terrace house. The house is located on the corner of Caroline and Hugo Streets and represents Aboriginal history, culture, and activism. Reko Rennie, an Aboriginal artist, transformed the building with the help of other local artists to a work of art that represents inspiring Aboriginal leaders.⁶⁹

Many Aboriginal people across NSW visit Redfern because it has an abundance of services available for Aboriginal people and families. These services include health care, education, housing, employment and family services. There are also organisations that provide cultural support and access to Aboriginal arts, languages and cultural activities. Due to its central location, there is easy access to public transport options and community facilities.



'Welcome to Redfern'. Image © G. Kohlms (Megapixel).

KAMILAROI, YUWAALARAAY AND NGAYIIMBAA COUNTRY

WALGETT



Walgett is a town in northern New South Wales, located on the Kamilaroi (also known as Gamilaraay) nation. The Aboriginal people of Walgett are mostly from the Kamilaroi, Yuwaalaraay and Ngayiimbaa nations. These nations have a cultural heritage which is particularly renowned for its warrior weapon making. The name Walgett comes from a Kamilaroi word meaning 'the meeting of two waters'. Walgett is located near the junctions of the Barwon and Namoi Rivers and the Kamilaroi and Castlereagh Highways.⁷⁰

The local Dharriwaa Elder Group is comprised of Elders from the three Aboriginal nations. Their logo features the totem animals for each nation: the wayamba (short-necked turtle) for the Yuwaalaraay people, the dhinawan (emu) for the Ngayiimbaa people, and the bawurra (red kangaroo) for the Kamilaroi people. The name Dharriwaa comes from the name for one of the local sacred sites (also known as Narran Lakes).⁷¹



Walgett. Image: © J. Carnemolla (Megapixel).

Walgett is known for the Burren Junction Hot Artesian bore bath, one of the eight stops on the Great Artesian Drive where people can experience the therapeutic effect of hot artesian pools.⁷² The region also has beautiful locations for appreciating the land while bird watching, or taking a trip out to Narran Lakes, 96 km west of Walgett. Narran Lakes is part of the Narran Wetlands, which is considered a wetland of international importance.⁷³

One of the important local historical events for Aboriginal people in Walgett was the Freedom Riders visiting the town in February 1965. The Dharriwaa Elders Group erected a sign in Walgett's Trevallion Park to tell the story about when the Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA) group, led by Charles Perkins, visited Walgett to spotlight racism in Australia. The Walgett Aboriginal community will always be grateful to the Freedom Riders and their supporters for bringing Walgett's situation to the attention of mainstream Australia and the world.⁷⁴

The hugely successful Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little was a beloved resident of Walgett after he married a Walgett local, Marj Peters. Jimmy's grave is located in the cemetery on Bate Street. Born James Oswald Little, Jimmy was a legend of the Australian music industry with a career spanning six decades. He is listed in the Australian Country Music Hall of Fame Roll of Renown and received an Order of Australia medal. He was dubbed a "Living National Treasure" and also is recognised as an icon for Aboriginal Reconciliation.⁷⁵

The population of Walgett is 5,253, with Aboriginal people making up 21% of the population.⁷⁶ Travelling to Sydney by public transport involves a bus ride to Dubbo, then a transfer to a train to Sydney. Walgett contains a small rural hospital and health service. Many Walgett residents have to travel to Dubbo to access goods and services unavailable in Walgett.



A birds-eye view of the town of Walgett. Image: © J. Carnemolla (Megapixel).

Executive summary

This research is focused on understanding the housing experience of Aboriginal people as they move between communities. This report is a starting point for government in NSW – providing an evidentiary basis for future consideration and progress by DCJ and the social housing sector more broadly. While many of the recommendations are broad, this report still aims to provide practical and specific recommendations where identified.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility

Mobility is central to Aboriginal ways of being. Following Songlines, connecting to Country and visiting significant sites is core to Aboriginal culture. Mobility is a part of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and is important for strengthening and respecting kinship relationships and broader communities. Mobility practices persist today and can cause large groups of people to temporarily relocate to a town for Sorry Business, season change, kinship support, family support, or sporting events such as the NSW Koori Knockout. Mobility, can be defined as movement of Aboriginal people ‘between places of shelter for reasons including culture, health, family, education and employment’.⁸

Long-standing patterns of Aboriginal mobility do pose policy challenges from the perspective of housing services that typically operate on the assumption of individuals having a common single place of residence and within state borders.⁹ Increased understanding by government and policy makers of mobility patterns in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has the potential to contribute to better planning and policy responses for Aboriginal families and their communities. This includes improved outcomes that meet Aboriginal mobility and social housing needs.

Mobility needs and patterns vary across Aboriginal communities in NSW and Australia. For non-Aboriginal Australians, this experience may not be well understood, simply because it is a different way of living. While extensive literature exists regarding low housing supply, pre-existing overcrowding, and its social impact upon Aboriginal peoples and communities, there is still much to understand about Aboriginal housing and mobility, particularly as it relates to different nations and locations across NSW.^{10, 11, 12, 13, 14}

Intersections with the social housing system

Mobility can cause several impacts on an individual’s social housing experience. This includes overcrowding, forced absences and financial implications. Flow on impacts from mobility and overcrowding can include poor maintenance of property, health and safety impacts and negative housing experiences. The social housing system must be responsive and supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s mobility needs to promote positive housing experiences.

⁸ Beck, K. and Shard, S., (2010) *SAFE TRACKS: A Strategic Framework for Supporting Aboriginal Mobility and Reducing Aboriginal Homelessness*, Parity, Vol. 23(9), p 2

⁹ Habibis, D, Birdsall-Jones, C, Dunbar, T, Scrimgeour, M, Taylor, E, Nethercote, M, (2011) *Improving housing responses to Indigenous patterns of temporary mobility*, AHURI Final Report No.162. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

¹⁰ Andersen, M.J et al., (2018) ‘*Housing conditions of urban households with Aboriginal children in NSW Australia: Tenure type matters*’, BMC Public Health, vol. 70(18).

¹¹ Andersen, M.J et al., (2016) ‘*There’s a housing crisis going on in Sydney for Aboriginal people”: Focus group accounts of housing and perceived associations with health*’, BMC Public Health, vol 16(429).

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Housing Circumstances of Indigenous Households: Tenure and Overcrowding*, (online content) AIWH, 2014, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹³ Dockery, A.M. & Colquhoun, S, (2012) *Mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: A literature review*, Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs

¹⁴ Milligan, V, et al., (2011) *Urban Social Housing for Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islanders: Respecting Culture and Adapting Services*, AHURI Final Report No. 172.

Aboriginal mobility as a policy issue can be mapped to Closing the Gap Socio-Economic Outcome 9: 'Aboriginal People secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.'¹⁵

Under Key Action Area 3 of the Implementation Plan, the Government recognises the need for 'a range of flexible housing responses to support cultural and seasonal mobility and ensure housing is culturally responsive.'¹⁶ The driver of this research is to better support mobility. Key Action Area 3 also recognizes the need for flexible asset responses and its direct effect on overcrowding in Aboriginal communities.

Social housing is secure and affordable rental housing for people on low incomes with housing needs in urban, regional, and rural/remote areas of NSW. The social housing sector encompasses the following:

- Housing Pathways, which is the entry point to apply for housing assistance in NSW. Housing providers who want to participate in Housing Pathways need to be registered as Housing Pathways providers. Some, but not all, CHPs and ACHPs are registered Housing Pathways providers. Registered Housing Pathways providers can select approved applicants from the NSW Housing Register to offer them a property.
- public housing properties owned by the Land and Housing Corporation managed by DCJ Housing or CHPs
- properties owned by the Aboriginal Housing Office managed by DCJ Housing
- properties owned by the Aboriginal Housing Office and managed by CHPs and ACHPs (some LALC's are also ACHP's)
- community housing properties owned or managed by non-government organisations (or community housing providers (CHPs))
- Aboriginal community housing properties owned and managed by ACCOs (or Aboriginal community housing providers (ACHPs))
- Specialist homelessness services (SHS) funded by DCJ. Accommodation properties used by SHS providers may be owned by DCJ or owned and managed by SHS providers.

Each social housing provider manages its tenancies in accordance with the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010*, *Housing Act 2001*, and *Aboriginal Housing Act 1998*. While the legislation governs many aspects of housing administration, social housing providers often have flexibility when implementing the legislation. For example, different providers have their own tenancy management policies for what constitutes overcrowding, managing antisocial behaviour and definitions in what is considered an absence from a dwelling.¹⁷

Applications for housing assistance are managed in NSW through Housing Pathways, a partnership between DCJ Housing, including the Housing Contact Centre, the AHO and participating community housing providers and Aboriginal community housing providers.¹⁸

DCJ Housing seeks to improve policy, practice, and partnerships to enable social housing providers to:

- support the mobility practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- alleviate the negative impacts of housing stress, and

¹⁵ Commonwealth Government, *The National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, (online content) Commonwealth Government, 2020, p.30, accessed 4 May 2023.

¹⁶ NSW Government, *2022-2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap*, NSW Government, 2022 p 86.

¹⁷ NSW Department of Communities and Justice, *Social Housing*, (online content) DCJ, 2019, accessed 12 May 2023

¹⁸ NSW Department of Communities and Justice, *Housing Pathways*, (online content) 2019. Accessed 15 May 2023.

- foster positive housing experiences.

Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Research that involves or will impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the design, delivery and outcomes of the project. This recognises historic disempowerment and over-consultation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and empowers Aboriginal people to guide decisions about their community. Research supports the fact that Aboriginal people are best placed to make decisions about themselves.

To uphold these notions, Inside Policy has strictly followed the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' code of ethics. The project team and leadership from Inside Policy and DCJ Housing includes Aboriginal researchers. The voice of Aboriginal people is strongly valued and highlighted in the report and directly informs findings.

The project also consulted a Mobility Project Reference Group (MRG) with key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and representatives from relevant NSW Government and non-government agencies and organisations. The MRG allowed the project to have Aboriginal governance and input from expert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the social housing sector.

To recognise the input from communities and to ensure benefit is derived from the research, a Closing the Loop report will be created and provided to each community and participant in consultations. This report will be a short, plain English document that summarises key findings and recommendations from the consultations. The information will be tailored to ensure it is beneficial and useful for the communities.

Project purpose

This project aims to better understand and support the mobility needs and patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their interactions with the NSW social housing system. Evidence-based recommendations are made for how housing providers can better support mobility.

This project undertook a mixed-method approach examining the context of Aboriginal communities' understanding of mobility, the positive and negative impacts associated with Aboriginal mobility and housing stress, and what policy, practice and partnership solutions are available to government.

Key questions

To undertake the research, three key research questions were developed and investigated:

1. Is mobility a driver of crowding and housing stress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW?

Mobility, while not a complete driver of crowding and housing stress, can be problematic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Mobility can cause crowding and housing stress when individual agency is not optimised. In addition, mobility can present challenges when tenants are not supported to deal with the stressors that mobility can cause. Despite this complexity, mobility is an integral part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' way of life and can have positive impacts for individuals.

2. What is the relationship between housing stress and negative housing experiences?

When housing issues are compounded, individual agency to manage and deal with complex situations can be difficult. It is these compounded issues that often result in negative housing experiences. One instance of overcrowding or temporary financial hardship does not create a negative housing experience. When multiple factors of

housing stress combine and remove individual agency, the flow on impacts can present as health problems, financial stress, homelessness and reduced access to opportunity.

3. How can DCJ develop policy that supports mobility and enables positive housing experiences?

Stakeholders highlighted the need for policy development on mobility to be client-centred, flexible and culturally responsive. Stakeholders identified a number of policies that could be reviewed to include best practice principles and client-centred policy design, such as the rent reduction and bedroom entitlements policy. In reviewing key policies, collaboration between all organisational and government stakeholders is encouraged to meet the best outcomes for community.

Key findings

The following findings were made and triangulated across the multiple sources:

Aboriginal mobility remains a central part of cultural identity

Connections to family, Country, and culture is a critical driver of mobility for Aboriginal people. Seasonal and cultural mobility is a fundamental part of Aboriginal societies, health and wellbeing. Connection to family and culture remains a strong theme in lives of contemporary Aboriginal communities. The challenge for DCJ, its partners, and stakeholders is to ensure a social housing response is crafted with a cultural lens and facilitates mobility and positive housing experiences for Aboriginal people.

Mobility impacts on housing, life and culture

Mobility has interactions with almost all aspects of a person's life. The impacts of mobility depend on its type, circumstances and the individual. For many Aboriginal people, access to Country is a key driver of mobility. When mobility is hindered, access to Country and fulfillment of cultural responsibility is constrained.

Examples of mobility drivers include attending Sorry Business, connecting with family or overcrowding. These can lead to positive flow on impacts such as increased cultural wellbeing, access to supports or education. They can also be a trigger for homelessness, antisocial behaviour, overcrowding, poor property care, negative exits and rental arrears.

Mobility patterning operates in a continuous loop

Aboriginal mobility is not linear, but operates a continuous loop driven by 'pull' and 'push' factors. 'Pull' factors include Country, kinship, cultural, and caring obligations. 'Push' factors include access to services, employment, education, family safety, interaction with the justice system, or child protection systems.

Urban-regional loops and intra-regional loops are continuously defined by kinship links, connection to Country and extended family responsibilities as well as education and employment opportunities, access to services, justice system interaction, and family safety.

The housing journey is not linear

People do not follow one pathway in and out of housing. The NSW social housing system is complex with many different services, providers, models, and funding arrangements, in addition to legislative and regulatory instruments. While DCJ Housing only has jurisdiction over DCJ Housing managed functions, people may enter and exit at many different points in the system at many different points in their life. This research is an initial step for supporting change across the sector through co-design and guidance by Aboriginal representatives from across the social housing system, and other social services sectors (including child protection, justice, disability and planning and environment).

Aboriginal mobility is a complex phenomenon which can be understood through a number of factors

Mobility can be influenced by a number of factors. These factors can be 'voluntary or involuntary', 'push or pull' and may relate to the reason behind the mobility such as health, connection to culture or sport. How these factors relate to the agency a person has can dictate if they have a positive or negative housing mobility experience.

Personal agency or self-determination is connected to the positivity or negativity of housing experiences

There is a direct correlation between the level of individual agency or self-determination available to Aboriginal people and the positivity or otherwise of housing experiences. There is currently limited individual agency available to Aboriginal people in the NSW social

housing system, beyond the ability to nominate a geographical preference. This limitation is not exclusive to Aboriginal people, it is a feature of the current social housing system.

Impacts of Aboriginal mobility are both positive and negative

Historical experiences of colonialism and assimilation policies have not afforded Aboriginal communities their own agency and self-determination at the individual, family and community levels.

Not moving can be positive or negative for individuals. When people lack the agency to move, this can produce negative outcomes such as missed opportunities or being disconnected from family and culture.

There are a range of types of mobility

There are a broad range of mobility types and interactions. The type of mobility, agency of the individual and surrounding circumstances all contribute to the impact of mobility, both positive and negative. This report understands mobility through three factors:

1. Voluntary / involuntary

Voluntary / involuntary mobility relates to the individual agency of the mobile individual. If a person is mobile by choice, for example going on holiday, this is voluntary. Examples of involuntary mobility include incarceration or eviction. There is a correlation between voluntary mobility being positive and involuntary mobility being negative. This definition of mobility should be treated as a spectrum and not binary.

2. Push and pull

In addition to agency, mobility can be impacted by push and pull factors. Push factors can be understood as reasons for leaving a place, these can be voluntary such as seeking education or going on holiday, or involuntary and forced including accessing health services, being placed in a correctional facility, or fleeing DFV. Conversely, Aboriginal people also experience pull factors which may be understood as reasons to visit a place, including drawing people home to visit family, community, and Country. Together, push and pull factors create a dynamic loop of mobility.

3. Mobility drivers

Across all nine sites, community and professional stakeholders cited the following drivers of mobility:

- Family and kinship relationships
- Health and medical services
- Disability
- Connection to Country and culture
- Sorry Business and funerals
- Education
- Employment
- Cost of living
- Housing supply
- Homelessness
- Corrections and justice
- Domestic and family violence (DFV)
- Safety and security
- Child protection
- Sport
- Retail access
- Natural disaster and climate change

Detailed information about mobility drivers and evidence to support findings is on pages 51 to 62.

There are different types of overcrowding

Since February 2022, DCJ Housing has been working on the ground with Aboriginal households identified in Closing the Gap data as being overcrowded.¹⁹ This work has identified at least 3 types of overcrowding:

1. **Casual overcrowding:** this is considered to be one of the main types of overcrowding. This is due to mobility and people staying for a short or medium term period. This type of overcrowding instigated the Mobility Research Project.
2. **Technical overcrowding:** this is where the number of people in the household has not changed, however a child in the household who is sharing a bedroom with another child of the opposite gender turns six or eleven (over the age of five is considered overcrowded by CNOS and over the age of ten is considered overcrowded by DCJ Housing's current bedroom entitlements policy).
3. **Structural overcrowding:** this is where the property is not suitable for the number of people living in it.

In some overcrowded households identified in the research, there were circumstances where additional occupants were approved even though it was known that it would lead to overcrowding, or the tenancy was established as overcrowded. This should not be viewed as entirely negative as the alternative may have been homelessness.

Impacts of overcrowding can be positive or negative

Higher density households provide cultural and kinship benefits, but inflexible housing types, rigid policy and practice, and poor housing standards contribute to negative housing experiences.

Also, there were some findings that linked positive and negative overcrowding with voluntary and forced mobility. This again shows that negative housing experiences can be related to the amount of agency over a situation. For example, having visitors over Christmas for a brief period of time is voluntary mobility and is a positive for tenants. If those same family members are in the household for an undefined period after Christmas, this is involuntary mobility and begins to cause stress on all parties involved.

Overcrowding is more complex than the number of bedrooms

Overcrowding is not just about the number of bedrooms. Tenants in consultations explained that other factors such as length of time of stay, who is staying with them, and financial status changes the amount of stress that overcrowding causes. As such, ways to deal with overcrowding needs to include support for social housing tenants and changing definitions of what constitutes overcrowding. To further mitigate stress, adequate amenities and health hardware could be considered to support large or fluctuating households.

Maintenance and adequate health hardware contribute to positive experiences of housing and mobility.

The research suggests that overcrowding stress is often less about the number of people in the house than how well a house is functioning. Participants highlighted that poor maintenance and health hardware issues created additional stress. Maintenance and

¹⁹ Australian Government, Productivity Commission. [Closing the Gap – Information Repository](#). 2022.

alterations being completed that are not fit for purpose or reflective of tenant wishes also contributes to stress.

Tenants documented experiences of racism

In line with Closing the Gap National Agreement clause 19C, governments and institutions have responsibilities to address any issues of 'systemic, daily racism, and promote cultural safety and transfer power and resources to communities'.^{20,21} Many people consulted with through this project felt discriminated against in a range of housing experiences including social housing, private rental and government service interaction. It is clear that there is community perception of racism within DCJ, and steps must be taken to reduce negative client interactions and regain community trust.

Aboriginal voice and agency in the design and delivery of social housing will help to address system level issues that continue discrimination and stigmatisation of Aboriginal communities.

Impacts on Aboriginal mobility occur at different built environment scales

The 2022–2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap identifies the significance of the built environment in relation to overcrowding and mobility.²² Community consultations identified that Urban/Macro, Precinct/Neighbourhood, Residential Site, and Dwelling/Built environment scales all impact mobility and housing experience at both individual and combined levels.

Gaps exist between DCJ Housing policy and practice and Aboriginal community perceptions and experiences

There is an existing gap between current DCJ Housing policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal communities around NSW. Broadly, the objectives of policy instruments appear to not be meeting community needs in practice. This is, in part, the result of not having Aboriginal communities included in policy design or decision making.

Housing providers have opportunities to learn from each other and implement good practice

Research identified several examples of good practice to support Aboriginal tenants and mobility including flexible application of policy, a person-centred approach and cultural considerations. This is despite existing policy and housing stock supply barriers and capacity and capability barriers within the community housing sector itself. Key themes across the examples show the importance of cultural awareness, supporting people with housing stress and engaging with community voice.

Data gaps

Research identified and experienced systemic data gaps due to differing systems between the range of social housing providers and the lack of capacity for smaller CHPs and ACHPs to provide specific data to DCJ. The ACHP/CHP data sources often lacked the level of granularity and are not always comparable with DCJ data. This results in significant challenges in any meaningful comparative analysis.

Social housing provider policies support housing mobility to some extent

²⁰ Australian Governments, Coalition of Peaks. [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#). 2020.

²¹ Everyday racism can be understood as 'small doses' of racism people experience on a daily basis such as being treated with less respect, feeling people are afraid of them or being insulted. See Thurber, K., et al. (2021) [Prevalence of Everyday Discrimination and Relation with Wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Adults in Australia](#), 18(12) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

²² New South Wales Government, [2022-2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap](#). 2022.

Social housing provider policies, including allowing for an extra bedroom for confirmed Aboriginal tenants, rent reduction in certain circumstances, extended timeframes and increased eligibility for certain assistance, for example Recognition as a Tenant/Succession of Tenancy and affiliation with a location. Priority allocations for those in crisis, including DFV, are supporting housing mobility to a certain extent.

Community and tenant perceptions of DCJ Housing policy indicate current responses lack the systems to ensure policy is consistently achieving positive housing experiences for Aboriginal people and families across NSW. System wide adjustments, including further support and investment in social housing reforms, can have positive downstream effects for Aboriginal mobility.

There is a need for more flexible policy and practice

The findings in this report point to the need for improved flexible application of policy and practice, collaborative service delivery and a person-centred approach to policy and decision making through adjusting housing policies. These principles must be applied to policy with an understanding of Aboriginal ways of living, including mobility. This can be done by listening to Aboriginal people and actively adapting policies to include opinion and valuable cultural guidance from Aboriginal communities. This in turn will further help to promote culturally appropriate service delivery and built environments to support mobility and positive housing outcomes.

There is a need for collaborative and coordinated service delivery for shared Aboriginal clients

DCJ Housing regularly collaborates with other agencies and service providers to coordinate holistic service delivery and support for shared Aboriginal clients and families. The purpose of these interagency meetings and other collaborative practice is to move away from a siloed approach towards more community and client-based service delivery.

The research considered a range of interagency meetings across the state however, incorporating this information into the report was out of scope. Not all forums reported on outcomes and some meetings were attended by multiple Districts, making any analysis by District challenging. Based on the available information, there appears to be potential to increase collaboration across key services that impact on mobility. For example, strengthening connections to agencies responsible for justice and community corrections can have an impact on preventing homelessness and recidivism. In addition, further enhancing existing localised models for collaboration may support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to co-design policy and service delivery and share in authority and decision making at all levels. The research identified a number of areas to increase collaborative practice including education, health, climate change and justice.

Recommendations

This report contributes to key actions under socio-economic outcome 9 in the NSW Closing the Gap implementation plan. Inside Policy has developed a range of key recommendations out of the research to better support Aboriginal mobility, reduce overcrowding and increase positive housing experiences for social housing tenants. Implementation of these recommendations by DCJ and DPE as well as completing further research under the implementation plan will support positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW. Other social housing providers may choose to leverage off the findings and recommendations in this report to better support mobility for their clients.

Client service delivery recommendations have been assigned the following suggested timeframes for implementation:

Immediate: Immediate start

Short term: six to twelve months

Medium term: twelve months to three years

Long term: three to five years.

Client service delivery implications and recommendations

1. Person centred policy design and practice enables positive housing experiences and self-determination

Placing Aboriginal communities and self-determination at the centre of social housing policy can shift emphasis from a 'one size fits all' systemic approach to one that focusses on the holistic needs and experiences of Aboriginal people, families, and communities impacted by poor housing solutions. Using a cultural lens will have benefits for Aboriginal people and may also have positive flow on effects for other cultural groups and their social needs.

It is clear that Aboriginal mobility remains central to cultural identity. Recognition and support of mobility by government policy, practice and partnerships can have beneficial impacts on the lives of Aboriginal communities in terms of overall wellbeing, kinship connection and cultural maintenance.

Individual tenants shared different views on how they want to be supported through mobility and housing stress. There is significant diversity amongst Aboriginal communities with different housing needs. Client centred policy recognises this diversity and the differing individual needs of all social housing tenants. Any proposed policy changes must balance tenant rights and responsibilities, culture, the impact on community and a range of other social factors.

Recommendation:

Implement and promote person centred policy and practice that is flexible and responsive to the spiritual, cultural and social needs of Aboriginal communities, families and clients and that also support mobility.

Actions to achieve this include:

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
Review internal communication and training for policies which interact with mobility to promote flexibility for Aboriginal households on a case-by-case basis.	DCJ Housing	Short term

Review DCJ Housing visitor policy and empower DCJ Housing staff to waive visitor time limits on a case-by-case basis e.g., in the case of DFV or fulfilling cultural obligations. Guidance should be developed by DCJ Housing to support this.	DCJ Housing	Short term
Review policy provisions that intersect with Back to Country to consider mobility drivers and the need for flexible policy design.	DCJ Housing	Short term
Consider expanding \$5 rent abatement to include people who need to travel from remote locations to access health services and other forced mobility drivers.	DCJ Housing	Short term
Review policies to identify opportunities to support tenants during mobility, including supporting the use of caretakers, provisional leases and investigate ability to expand mutual exchange with other housing providers.	DCJ Housing	Short term
Review and strengthen priority status for Stolen Generations who apply for housing assistance.	DCJ Housing	Short term
Recognise that Aboriginal mobility and cultural obligations can lead to overcrowding. Create additional provisions for Aboriginal tenants similar to extra bedroom entitlements, such as brokerage funding for extra household items such as refrigerators or fold out couches.	DCJ Housing	Medium term
Review the allocation zones used by DCJ considering the tension between administrative boundaries and Traditional Country boundaries.	DCJ Housing and AHO	Medium term
DCJ and Justice to consider aligning policies to reduce homelessness and recidivism.	DCJ Housing and NSW Corrections	Medium term
Support Housing Affordability schemes, helping families to build positive rental histories, save money for a 'housing kitty' and to assist with loans.	All social housing providers	Medium term
Review underoccupied and overcrowded properties and identify opportunities to house or re-house people who have applied for a transfer to appropriate sized housing based on their current and future housing needs.	DCJ Housing	Immediate priority
2. Culturally appropriate communication and support based in best practice <p>Consultations recognised that there is a lack of housing supply across the whole social housing sector including assets managed by DCJ. DCJ also faces constrained budgets and staff shortages as well as constraints in the broader support systems.</p> <p>The view of people who participated in consultations is that ACHPs and CHPS are already modelling best practice within a constrained environment. Examples were also given of positive practice by particular DCJ staff and programs, including sustainable tenancy</p>		

programs. Best practice included demonstrating cultural understanding of their tenants through flexible policy implementation and people-centered approaches.

These best practice initiatives must be supported, and all social housing programs must be appropriate to the cultural needs of tenants. Clients with complex needs also require wrap around supports to have safe and sustainable tenancies. Communication to clients must also be improved on so that Aboriginal people know what supports are available, what products and services they may access, and how to participate in consultations.

Recommendation:

Develop a strategy for building relationships and trust with Aboriginal communities, families and clients, rather than intervening at a point of crisis. This can be done through community engagement, culturally appropriate communications, actively listening to client needs and concerns, considering all client circumstances (not just housing related) and demonstrating positive changes to community.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
Ensure housing providers are adequately resourced to provide culturally appropriate wrap around supports to tenants.	AHO	Short – Medium term
Develop a monthly communication to Aboriginal tenants about where to get help, what housing products and services are available, how different policies work, and how to participate in consultations.	DCJ Housing	Short – Medium term
DCJ staff to increase cultural awareness through meaningful engagement in community events and acknowledging country where able.	DCJ Housing	Short – Medium term
Promote the DCJ Anti-racism Strategy.	DCJ Housing	Immediate
DCJ to continue to meaningfully engage with and support NSW Government actions under priority reform three of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.	DCJ Housing	Short – Medium term
Provide referrals to local supports for Aboriginal clients with complex needs.	DCJ Housing	Short – Medium term
Promote open communication between government agencies, CHPs and ACHPs to improve and share insights on best practice, streamlined approaches and culturally aware practice.	All providers	Medium term

3. Coordinated and collaborative responses are required to support Aboriginal clients with complex needs

Improved coordination and innovative responses, informed by Aboriginal organisations and communities, are required across the NSW social housing sector to address Aboriginal mobility and reduce overcrowding and negative housing experiences. There are a range of potential partnerships and responses that are outlined in the below actions.

One opportunity for collaboration includes leveraging existing interagency meetings. Analysis of the service types and locations of the existing interagency meetings suggests that, while they are similarly structured across Districts and types, they aim to serve a locally-identified purpose or need. Reviewing interagency meeting arrangements could be considered to best understand their effectiveness and the outcomes they are achieving.

Recommendation:

Strengthen and formalise (where required) partnerships with Government, non-Government service providers and Aboriginal organisations and communities; and encourage Aboriginal clients to consent for service providers to share information to enable co-ordinated and holistic service delivery for shared clients.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
Engage with Transport for NSW, Service NSW, and NSW Health to explore low-cost transport options for vulnerable people undertaking forced mobility e.g., fleeing DFV or accessing healthcare.	DCJ Housing	Medium term
DCJ, Transport for NSW, and Service NSW to consider enhancing partnership/s and developing a strategy to assist people leaving prison to return to their community/support networks rather than stay in the locations where they were released.	DCJ Housing and NSW Corrections	Medium term
Investigate viability of transitional/non-crisis accommodation similar to Aboriginal Hostels Ltd model to support voluntary mobility, such as access to health services, and increase temporary accommodation for those with no other options, such as men escaping domestic and family violence.	DCJ and asset owners	Medium-long term
Conduct an internal review of current interagency forums to understand how they may be leveraged to best support Aboriginal clients.	DCJ Housing	Medium term
Explore establishment of partnerships with Aboriginal organisations such as Aboriginal Medical Services and Aboriginal Legal Services to best support shared Aboriginal clients.	DCJ Housing	Medium to long term
Collaborate with Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services	DCJ Housing	Medium term

(ATAAS) to review and update existing state-wide and local Memorandums of Understanding between DCJ and ATAAS.

4. Aboriginal community voice should be present in DCJ governance and policy considerations and decision making (short to long term)

Aboriginal communities and their organisations need a voice in social housing policy and decisions that affects them at the local, regional and state-wide levels. This ensures fit for purpose, culturally appropriate policy and service delivery. There are opportunities to create and expand governance and policy mechanisms to achieve this. There is also an opportunity to partner with communities in relation to self-determination, authority and decision making.

DCJ already utilises mechanisms that consult local communities and organisations in NSW, such as but not limited to the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. Expanding local governance models while linking in with existing regional and state-wide governance arrangements presents a strong opportunity to bring community voice into policy and decision making.

Recommendation:

Pursue opportunities to incorporate Aboriginal voice into DCJ Housing governance and policy design and decision making.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
DCJ Housing could utilise community engagement and governance arrangements to build more genuine partnerships and incorporate Aboriginal voice into policy reviews, this should also take into account a circular feedback loop.	DCJ Housing	Short – Medium term
Leverage existing partnership models with Aboriginal stakeholders and peaks, to provide oversight and identify key priorities in housing policy.	DCJ Housing and AHO	Short – Medium term
Creating a mechanism for frontline Aboriginal DCJ Housing staff and Aboriginal tenants to share practical community insight into policy and practice.	DCJ Housing and AHO	Short – Medium term
Investigate local decision-making agreements with Aboriginal communities in other jurisdictions and consider developing and implementing a strategy for local decision making with NSW Aboriginal communities.	DCJ Housing and AHO	Long term

5. Data validity and reliability

There is an opportunity for greater data linkages between ACHPs, CHPs and government agencies. All social housing providers use different data platforms and commonly capture

and report on different indicators. Improving the available data sets would allow for a more culturally appropriate understanding of mobility, overcrowding and housing experience.

Recommendation:

DCJ to consider developing a mechanism for improving data practice with the broader social housing sector for example through Memorandums of Understanding.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
Conduct a review of what data on Aboriginal tenants and applicants is collected and what data is required. This review should include the community housing provider peak bodies – ACHIA and CHIA to ensure data is fit for purpose and accessible. The review should also take into consideration Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.	DCJ Housing, AHO, ACHIA, CHIA	Medium term
DCJ to review the definition of overcrowding to ensure it is reflective of the experience of Aboriginal people and other cultures.	DCJ and DPE	Medium term

Detailed implications and recommendations – Built environment

The following implications and recommendations relate to the built environment and will be reported to the relevant asset owners for consideration.

The built environment can be broken down in four scales:

1. Urban scale
2. Precinct/neighbourhood scale
3. Residential scale
4. Dwelling scale

1. Urban scale built environment

Recommendations at the urban scale will have long term implications for planning policy in NSW. Those that have emerged from the research are focused on how overcrowding is defined. Due to the extended nature of housing construction and redevelopment, asset owners will need to determine timeframes for any recommendations they choose to implement.

While policy changes are important, sustainable investment in housing supply is critical. Community members strongly believe that overcrowding will not be solved until more housing becomes available.

Recommendations:

Increase and sustain investment in appropriate housing supply that is aligned with current and future demand.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions

Investigate the potential to integrate the Strategic Goals of the Draft Connecting with Country Framework, ²³ when developing housing policy						
Consider the on-going impacts of climate change in determining housing types and locations.						
Investigate housing 'uplift' models that better respond to the constraints of stand-alone properties and respond to client, cohort and community need.						
<p>2. Precinct/Neighbourhood scale</p> <p>Recent Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) literature suggests that the neighbourhood scale is where opportunities are greatest for creating sustainable design efficiencies around housing, transportation and infrastructure.²⁴ Literature highlights a range of top/down and bottom/up initiatives that can help to improve residents' experiences including renewable micro grids, ride share opportunities, community gardens, circular construction processes for managing demolition waste, community-led digital platforms and others.²⁵</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Explore opportunities to consider and/or strengthen collaborative planning and upgrading opportunities to help ensure that tenants live within culturally appropriate and safe environments.</p> <p>Actions to achieve this include:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Actions</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Integrate social housing into the wider community where properties are located on the fringes of towns and away from services.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Work with local Councils to investigate ways to improve availability and access to safe public areas and cultural spaces (parks, yarning circles, playgrounds and recreation areas).</td></tr> <tr> <td>Work with local Councils to review the public realm (accessible footpaths, street lighting, wayfinding, shade and shelter).</td></tr> <tr> <td>Work with local Councils to review safety and security (street lighting and visibility).</td></tr> <tr> <td>Provide better housing choice aligned with need.</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Actions	Integrate social housing into the wider community where properties are located on the fringes of towns and away from services.	Work with local Councils to investigate ways to improve availability and access to safe public areas and cultural spaces (parks, yarning circles, playgrounds and recreation areas).	Work with local Councils to review the public realm (accessible footpaths, street lighting, wayfinding, shade and shelter).	Work with local Councils to review safety and security (street lighting and visibility).	Provide better housing choice aligned with need.
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Work with local Councils to review safety and security (street lighting and visibility).						
Provide better housing choice aligned with need.						
<p>3. Residential site</p> <p>At the scale of the residential site, recommendations to emerge from the research are primarily related to design and development of properties.</p>						

²³ DPIE (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) (2020) [Draft Connecting with Country Framework, DPIE](#).

²⁴ Duhr S, Berry S, Moore T (2023) [Sustainable housing at a neighbourhood scale](#), AHURI Final Report No. 396, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne 2023.

²⁵ Duhr S, Berry S, Moore T (2023) [Sustainable housing at a neighbourhood scale](#), AHURI Final Report No. 396, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, p 11.

It is noted that government agencies already have obligations and guidelines around disability support. Aboriginal people often require greater access to health hardware in housing.²⁶ This is due to the higher prevalence of chronic disease and the cultural obligation to have more people in homes. Designing homes with health hardware principles in mind allows for aging in place and accommodating of visitors who may have accessibility requirements.

Recommendation:

Agencies should explore different models and consult with service providers to best support community needs on the residential scale.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions

Consider adopting an 'Aging-in-Place' approach and investigate whether all houses (new and refurbished) are either disability accessible or adaptable for people with a disability.

Consider improving site accessibility (parking, footpaths and ramps).

Consider improving site security with legible building entries and exits, better lighting and fencing where appropriate (CPTED principles).

Consider improving the semi-private/shared realm (landscaping, seating, playgrounds).

Consider improving disability access in and around the dwelling.

Consider improving house siting, optimizing solar access and passive heating and cooling.

4. Dwelling scale

At the scale of the dwelling, it is imperative that houses function well, with well-maintained health hardware. A key finding of this research was the importance of maintenance in upholding agency, creating and sustaining positive housing experiences and overall wellbeing. Regular and responsive repairs and planned cyclical maintenance regimes will support healthier homes and reduce the negative impacts of housing occupation.

Recommendation:

Work with the broader community housing sector and Aboriginal communities to appropriately design and maintain social housing.

Actions to achieve this include:

Actions

Consider developing design excellence guidelines suitable for refurbishment, alterations and additions.

Investigate collaborative opportunities with all social housing providers to implement best practice in timely and responsive maintenance. Examples include using local service providers for property maintenance and upgrades.

²⁶ Health Hardware is the physical equipment needed to ensure housing and environments support good health. For example, hand washing facilities near toilets or having waterproof kitchens. Housing for Health (2023), [Health Hardware – why we all need it](#), (online).

Consider innovative and planned responses to mobility such as flexible and portable accommodation such as pods or caravans as seen in natural disaster and DFV responses, upgrading existing facilities and amenities to support larger and fluctuating households such as installing additional toilets and/or shower where plumbing already exists or upgrading cooking facilities such as a larger oven or increasing bench space.

Investigate if the design of new dwellings address needs of fluctuating households including:

- Design for sufficient private spaces, communal areas, wet areas and toilets
- Design for adequate food storage and preparation areas
- Design for environmental health, maximising ventilation, minimizing mould and controlling dust, and
- Ensure materials specification are strong and appropriate for use and context

AHO to consider expanding design guidelines to cover renovations and repairs.

Consider working with local disability support services to understand cohort need, and home modification to support people with complex needs. Agencies could consider local insights to further enhance existing obligations around disability accessibility

Detailed findings

To address the three key research questions, this section is divided into five sections. The sections include:

1. **Understanding Aboriginal housing mobility in NSW.** This section seeks to understand the history of housing mobility and unpack the factors influencing housing mobility.
2. **Impacts of housing mobility.** This section seeks to explore the positive and negative impacts resulting from housing mobility in NSW, including overcrowding.
3. **Factors intersecting with mobility and its impacts.** This section explores housing stress factors which may compound negative experiences of housing mobility and its impacts.
4. **Mobility and the Built Environment.** This section explores the built environment and how it may interact with experiences of housing mobility and its impacts.
5. **Mobility interactions with housing policy.** This section explores current DCJ Housing policy as it relates to housing mobility and its impacts, experiences of broader social housing policy, and insights into principles housing policy should incorporate to support Aboriginal housing mobility and its impacts.

1. Understanding Aboriginal housing mobility in NSW

Section overview

The following section seeks to understand Aboriginal housing mobility in NSW. In order to do so, this section explores:

- Current understandings of Aboriginal housing mobility in NSW, including existing research,
- Colonial history of mobility, and
- Factors impacting housing mobility, including agency, push and pull factors, drivers of mobility, barriers to mobility, methods of mobility, and mobility regions.

Key findings

Aboriginal mobility remains a central part of cultural identity

Connections to family, Country, and culture is a critical driver of mobility for Aboriginal people. Seasonal and cultural mobility is a fundamental part of Aboriginal society, health and wellbeing. Connection to family and culture remains a strong theme in lives of contemporary Aboriginal communities. The challenge for DCJ, its partners, and stakeholders is to ensure a social housing response is crafted with a cultural lens and facilitates mobility and positive housing experiences for Aboriginal people.

Mobility patterning operates in a continuous loop

Aboriginal mobility is not linear, operating in a continuous loop driven by 'pull' and 'push' factors. 'Pull' factors include Country, kinship, cultural, and caring obligations. 'Push' factors include access to services, employment, education, family safety, interaction with the justice system, or child protection systems.

Urban-regional loops and intra-regional loops are continuously defined by kinship links, connection to Country and extended family responsibilities as well as education and employment opportunities, access to services, justice system interaction, and family safety.

Aboriginal mobility is a complex phenomenon which can be understood through a number of factors

Mobility can be influenced by a number of factors. These factors can be 'voluntary or involuntary', 'push or pull' and may relate to the reason behind the mobility such as health, connection to culture or sport. How these factors relate to the agency a person has can dictate if they have a positive or negative housing mobility experience.

Personal agency or self-determination is connected to the positivity or negativity of housing experiences

There is a direct correlation between the level of individual agency or self-determination available to Aboriginal people and the positivity or otherwise of housing experiences. There is currently limited individual agency available to Aboriginal people in the NSW social housing system, beyond the nomination of an area to apply for housing in.

Current understandings of Aboriginal housing mobility in NSW

Much of the literature on Aboriginal mobility is focused on the tropical north and desert regions of Australia.²⁷ In NSW, however, limited research has been undertaken on Aboriginal mobility and its impacts on housing. Sarah Prout in her paper, *On the move? Indigenous temporary mobility practices in Australia*, notes 'there is very little available data regarding the mobility trajectories of Indigenous peoples living in the densely populated, primarily southern, coastal regions of Australia. The existing research record suggests that family networks are the primary delimiter of movement in these areas.'²⁸

Mobility needs and patterns vary across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in NSW and Australia, there is still much to understand about Aboriginal housing and mobility, particularly as it relates to different nations and locations across NSW.^{29,30}

This research project is unique in its examination of mobility in urbanised coastal and regional areas of NSW, and the findings support Prout's assertion that family connections are indeed key drivers of Aboriginal mobility across the state.

*"Our culture is not going to change. We are very family orientated.... So sometimes the system has to fit with us."*³¹

Mobility for Aboriginal people is a poorly understood concept in literature due to its nuanced and varied nature among Aboriginal people and communities. Aboriginal participants in this project were able to define mobility by its drivers and its impacts. Community members said mobility is family, mobility is cultural obligation and mobility is what has been done for thousands of years along Songlines.³² When living in a Western system that does not

²⁷ The AHURI and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) have written extensively on mobility in northwest Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. Paul Memmott's *Indigenous mobility in rural and remote Australia* and Daphne Habibis' *Improving housing responses to Indigenous patterns of temporary mobility* are important contributions to this body of work.

²⁸ Prout S (2008), *On the move? Indigenous temporary mobility practices in Australia*, CAEPR working paper 48, ANU, Canberra.

²⁹ Andersen, M.J et al., (2018) '*Housing conditions of urban households with Aboriginal children in NSW Australia: Tenure type matters*', BMC Public Health, vol. 70(18).

³⁰ Andersen, M.J et al., (2016) '*There's a housing crisis going on in Sydney for Aboriginal people*': Focus group accounts of housing and perceived associations with health', BMC Public Health, vol 16(429).

³¹ LALC Interview.

³² 8.1, Service Interview.

support mobility, it can instead mean fractured communities, instability, and housing stress.^{33,34,35}

“I will not wash away my culture with Western standards of living”³⁶

Colonial impacts on mobility

To understand mobility and overcrowding within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households, one must understand the impact of colonisation and how it plays out in parts of Australia to this day.

For Aboriginal communities, widespread dispossession became the norm after contact with the British. Historically, governments moved Aboriginal families and individuals from their homes to reserves, missions, or stations on the outskirts of towns:³⁷

- Reserves were often parcels of land Crown Land set aside for Aboriginal people to live on and overseen by the government to a limited extent (i.e. may have received rations and blankets).³⁸ In NSW, under the *1983 Aboriginal Land Rights Act*, these reserves have been transferred to LALCs.
- Missions were run by churches and missionaries.³⁹
- Stations were managed by ‘officials appointed by the government’⁴⁰ who oversaw schooling, rations, housing, and labour (including with little or no pay).⁴¹

The location of these lands limited Aboriginal people’s access to the economic opportunities available to the broader population, including education and employment. The legacies of dispossession and segregation, therefore, are the socioeconomic ‘gaps’ that mark today’s Aboriginal disadvantage.⁴² As an example, a range of Aboriginal family groups from around Australia are situated in Bourke as a result of historic forced mobility.⁴³

Elders who took part in the research shared stories of such mobility centring on dispossession, the mission management system, and the impacts of the Stolen Generations policies and practices up to the early 1980s in NSW. Community members also shared stories of women sent to urban areas such as Redfern for re-education or labour as domestic servants.⁴⁴

This historic, forced mobility caused inter-generational impacts for communities, housing and the patterns of Aboriginal mobility. One of the outcomes of Aboriginal communities being forced onto missions is that some people continue to reside in poor quality housing stock. These houses are in areas where asset rich, but cash poor, LALCs are faced with trying to maintain buildings and infrastructure. These communities also face additional geographical

³³ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

³⁴ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

³⁵ 7.1, Community Member Interview.

³⁶ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

³⁷ AIATSIS (n.d.) [Missions, stations and reserves](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023. For a map of missions and reserves in NSW between 1883 and 1969, see Australian Museum (2021) [Missions, reserves and stations](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023.

³⁸ AIATSIS (n.d.) [Missions, stations and reserves](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023; Australian Museum (2021) [Missions, reserves and stations](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023.

³⁹ AIATSIS (n.d.) [Missions, stations and reserves](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023; Australian Museum (2021) [Missions, reserves and stations](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023.

⁴⁰ AIATSIS (n.d.) [Missions, stations and reserves](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023.

⁴¹ AIATSIS (n.d.) [Missions, stations and reserves](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023; Australian Museum (2021) [Missions, reserves and stations](#) [online] accessed 7 August 2023.

⁴² Arabena K, Holland C and Hamilton S., (2020) [Reimagining Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth: The Necessary Ecological Response to Unlock the Potential in the Indigenous Estate](#), Karabena Publishing, Melbourne.

⁴³ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

⁴⁴ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

challenges when taking into account the long distances to access services and supports.⁴⁵ This, in turn, impacts community pride and contributes to an economic divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.⁴⁶

“The missions and the fringe dwellers are always on the edge of town, and they still are today, even in a spiritual setting. We weren’t allowed to go to town much because of that mentality.”⁴⁷

Australia’s accumulation of wealth through property has occurred at the expense of some 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups across Australia who were dispossessed of their land. A report published in 2020 points to the significant gap in intergenerational wealth transfer between Aboriginal peoples and the wider Australian population. Some 63% of Australia’s household wealth is in property, valued at \$6.9 trillion.⁴⁸ Housing accounts for 60% of wealth accumulation, primarily through inheritance. The impacts on Aboriginal people of inequitable access to education, health, housing and livelihoods has been profound; and, as we have found in this research, the interplay between Aboriginal mobility and housing opportunity in NSW is another chapter in a difficult story.

Modern mobility

Community members spoke of traditional movement practices which still endure today, such as travelling along Songlines and visiting extended family, demonstrating strength and resilience, despite more than two centuries of government interference.^{49,50}

Modern mobility for Aboriginal people is a complex blend of historical Aboriginal and Western influences combined with modern drivers and inhibitors of mobility. On a macro scale mobility is viewed as a range of push and pull factors to and from communities (discussed below).

“While the Missions Act has been abolished now and that people are free to move around we’re still restricted to where we can live in terms of built stock.”⁵¹

Factors to understand housing mobility

The following section explores factors which are important to understanding housing mobility.

Voluntary or involuntary mobility drivers

The interviews, yarning circles and workshops conducted at each of the research sites indicate that Aboriginal mobility patterns in NSW can be located along a spectrum of individual agency. Where agency is greatest, mobility can be said to be voluntary and desirable. Where agency is diminished, mobility is more likely forced and undesirable.

Analysing all types of mobility shared by participants in the project and supported by the below diagram, there is a clear relationship between agency and how positive a mobility experience is. The type of mobility is an indicator of the positive or negative nature of the mobility experience, with involuntary mobility generally leading to negative experiences and

⁴⁵ 4.5, Community Member Interview.

⁴⁶ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

⁴⁷ 4.5, Community Member Interview.

⁴⁸ Arabena K, Holland C and Hamilton S (2020) [*Reimagining Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth: The Necessary Ecological Response to Unlock the Potential in the Indigenous Estate*](#), Karabena Publishing, Melbourne.

⁴⁹ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

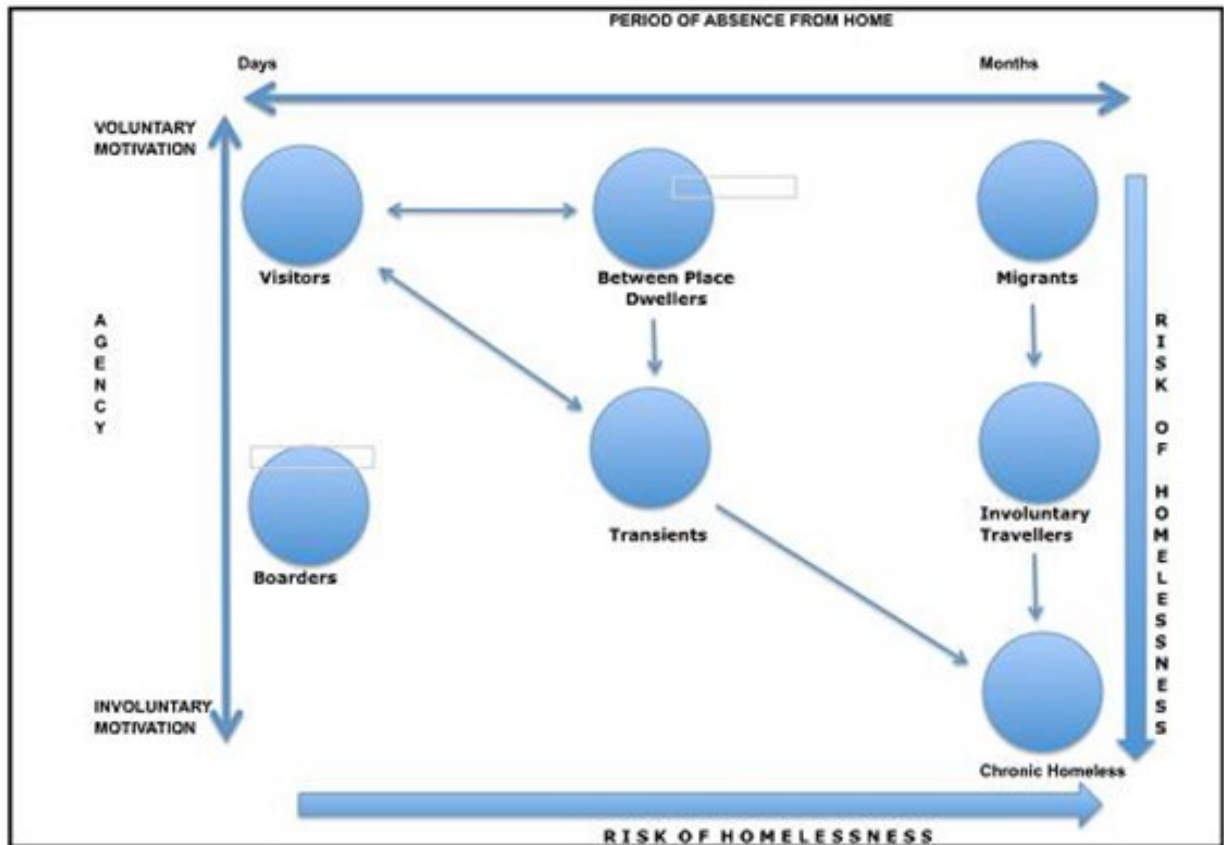
⁵⁰ 8.1, Service Interview

⁵¹ 8.1, Service Interview.

negative housing impacts. There is a direct correlation between the level of individual agency and the positivity or otherwise of the experience.

Habibis proposes a matrix of mobility categories related to agency (voluntary or not) and duration of movement (short or long term) with levels of vulnerability identified. The matrix is useful to understand the link between lack of individual agency and negative housing outcomes.

Figure 1: Indigenous Temporary Mobility, Migration and Homelessness



Source: Habibis, D. et al. (2011), *Improving housing responses to Indigenous patterns of temporary mobility*, AHURI Final Report No.162. AHURI, Melbourne, p 8.

Agency

Agency is more complex than a voluntary/involuntary binary. Agency can be defined as the capacity of an individual to actively and independently choose and to affect change. Other words to describe agency are free will or self-determination.

Push and pull factors

In addition to agency, mobility can be impacted by push and pull factors. Push factors can be understood as reasons for leaving a place, these can be voluntary such as seeking education or going on holiday, or involuntary and forced including accessing health services, being placed in a correctional facility, or fleeing DFV. Conversely, Aboriginal people also experience pull factors which may be understood as reasons to visit a place, including drawing people home to visit family, community, and Country. Together, these push and pull factors create a dynamic loop of mobility.

“Because you’ve got mob spread across 16 communities, people are moving. People will move out because they are trying to get away from the rural and remote communities. They go to the big towns but then there are things that are always going to be calling them home be it death, not having access to the home, and just needing to be on Country... with that,

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people don't have access to their own home so it causes overcrowding and there is just not adequate housing either.”⁵²

It must be acknowledged that viewing mobility as either voluntary or forced risks overlooking the complex interplay between location, duration, agency and the range of structural barriers noted below. From a strengths-based, wellbeing perspective:

“Mobility is simply a means to accessing those things that contribute to wellbeing and avoiding things that contribute to illbeing.”⁵³

Drivers of mobility

Across all nine sites, community and professional stakeholders cited the following drivers of mobility, which fall upon the abovementioned spectrum of agency, involuntary/voluntary mobility and push and pull factors:

- Family and kinship relationships
- Health and medical services
- Disability
- Connection to Country and culture
- Sorry Business and funerals
- Education
- Employment
- Cost of living
- Housing supply
- Homelessness
- Corrections and justice
- Domestic and family violence (DFV)
- Safety and security
- Child protection
- Sport
- Retail access
- Natural disaster and climate change

Case Study One:

A community member originally from northern NSW is living in central-west NSW for medical reasons. The community member drives between towns to visit her four children, with two residing in the central west and the other two in northern NSW. The children live separately as result of court orders. The community member left northern NSW on the presumption that they would get a social housing transfer to the central west, however this has not been possible. The community member spent months couch surfing and living with friends and has now moved into a women's refuge. When asked what mobility looks like for her, she said:

“Mobility looks like instability, it's very hard, it's not promising.”

The community member expressed how voluntary mobility is linked with the need for Aboriginal families to stay connected with culture and with each other. This is also amplified in the context of caring responsibilities. The community member explained:

“Aboriginal people need connection with certain family members. Maybe there's some stuff that's going on in the family. Some might need extra support; kids sometimes need carers. Your nan or aunty might be sick and need extra support.”

⁵² 4.11, ACHP Interview

⁵³ Dockery, A.M. (2014), *Reconceptualising mobility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, CRC-REP Working Paper CW015, Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs p.246

"Family support is super important, it builds... that sense of security for children, keeping in touch with cousins...and encouragement when you find out ...one of your relatives is doing a certain career pathway, or you just get information about different aspects of the community and... support."

The community member shared that her son had special needs, and this was particularly difficult while couch surfing. The community member expressed that her son was missing family, and that connection and support is a big driver of mobility and overcrowding.

Each driver of mobility will be described in detail below:

Family and kinship

Family and kinship ties were the primary and most important driver of mobility nominated by all participants. Family and kinship are seen as having flow on impacts on all other drivers. Aboriginal people will move to be with family for support, to undertake caring responsibilities or to maintain regular contact. This can be a short-term arrangement in the form of a visit,⁵⁴ or longer-term 'temporary' arrangement of months or even years in circumstances such as caring for family.

"...[people coming and going] is to do with family, its culture and family. It has nothing to do with the word mobility."⁵⁵

Some community participants also considered following family as a driver of mobility.⁵⁶ There is a desire to be living in a community where family are located.⁵⁷ Services providers in rural sites believed that while people would travel to, for example, Dubbo or Orange due to an involuntary driver, they would always respond to the pull of family support and return home to Bourke, Brewarrina or Walgett.⁵⁸

Family networks like this exist across the state. Community members in Lake Macquarie talked of having family ties in places like Taree and Dubbo, where people in Wollongong said their family ties extended right down the south coast to the Victorian border and beyond.

"...it's hard because they don't have that family support wherever they're going to as well. So, they'll go back to Bourke where there's more support"⁵⁹

Some participants mentioned tourism and holidays to visit family as an example of mobility. Community shared stories of visiting family or yearly events such as family reunions or Easter.^{60,61} Holidays are closely linked to family and cultural drivers of mobility. Some service providers expressed concern at the impacts that tourism was having on local housing stock.⁶²

One peak time of movement is during school holidays where families return home to Country and family. It is common for large numbers of school aged children to stay with extended family during this time, increasing the number of people in a household. This is a regular pattern of short-term mobility.

Participants across all sites were keen to express that 'family' in an Aboriginal context is much more than the Western notion of family. Family includes extended family such as

⁵⁴ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

⁵⁵ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

⁵⁶ 1.1, Service Workshop.

⁵⁷ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

⁵⁸ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

⁵⁹ 4.10, DCJ Interview.

⁶⁰ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

⁶¹ 4.4, Community Member Interview.

⁶² 1.3, Service Interview.

cousins and close family friends.⁶³ Cultural obligations to care for and connect with family are firmly built on this broader definition of family.⁶⁴

“We don’t say extended family, everyone is just family”⁶⁵

According to data supplied by DCJ, Aboriginal tenants are more likely to stay with family and friends when leaving social housing (24%) than non-Aboriginal tenants (16%).⁶⁶

Health and medical

The majority of tenant, community and service provider participants at all sites consulted for the research described health and access to medical services as a key driver of mobility. The quantitative data supplied by DCJ supports this claim, showing that medical reasons is the most common driver of non-urgent social housing transfers across nearly a third of Aboriginal households (27% of responses) and nearly half of non-Aboriginal households (41% of responses).⁶⁷

Participants described such medical mobility as a ‘push factor’ in so far that it moves people from smaller towns to regional centres and, if necessary, into urban areas. Common reasons for medical mobility cited in Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett included improving access to birthing services, dialysis services and medical specialists, more generally. Most of these services are in regional hubs such as Dubbo or Broken Hill, forcing people to travel in order to access medical care.⁶⁸

Negative experiences often arise from the financial pressures of medical mobility. Financial strain, combined with a lack of accommodation near medical services and limited transport options for people to return to their communities are part of the medical mobility experience.

For instance, stakeholders highlighted that pregnant women in Bourke had to travel to Dubbo to access birthing unit services, as the birthing unit at Bourke Hospital had been unstaffed for some time (staffing issues were further compounded by the COVID pandemic). Once released from hospital in Dubbo with newborn babies, the mothers found themselves unable to return home.⁶⁹ Often already struggling on low incomes, the women could not cover travel costs starting at, for example, \$69.54 for two people on the once-a-day Dubbo to Bourke coach service (a considerable portion of a Centrelink fortnightly income).⁷⁰

Participants in Bourke shared further stories of mothers with newborns (and people who have just been through major medical treatment) being forced to sit through lengthy bus journeys back home. Some participants also spoke of people who were unwell or medically vulnerable experiencing difficulty finding transport to and from medical services.⁷¹

Staying overnight to access medical services is another feature of medical mobility, coming with its own issues, including the limited affordable accommodation options in regional centres. Participants explained that prohibitive costs and limited availability often meant

⁶³ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

⁶⁴ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

⁶⁵ 3.1, Community Interview.

⁶⁶ Tenancy Management – Tenancy Exits & Classifications (incl AHO) June 2022

⁶⁷ DCJ supplied data showing ‘Application categories (main reason) of tenant households that were transferred/relocated from the NSW Housing Register during 2020/21 by Aboriginality – non escalated transfers/relocations’. Medical (TMED) was the most common response, followed by Community Housing Tenant (21.0% of Aboriginal respondents), and compassionate grounds or severe overcrowding (18.8% of Aboriginal respondents).

⁶⁸ 4.11, ACHP Interview.

⁶⁹ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

⁷⁰ NSW Government Transport, [NSW TrainLink](#), (online content) Transport for NSW, n.d., accessed 12 May 2023.

⁷¹ 3.1, Community Interview.

traveling alone became the expedient option. This comes at a cost of isolation and limited family support during times of medical stress.⁷²

“A lot of the time they’ve got to come down on their own, they have to come on public transport. They have to stay away from their family and their community for periods of time awaiting the birth of the baby. And maybe if there’s complications or any extra medical need, “They have to stay longer than they just discharged all of a sudden, and they’ve got to get back to their own accommodation. If they’re relying on public transport, sometimes that doesn’t align. So they’re still stuck here. Yeah. And the babies are born off Country”⁷³

“People in those communities need to travel two and a half hours to have dialysis a couple of times a week. There is no housing for them to stay here for that week to get that treatment so they are forever travelling to and from those regional communities but most of them don’t have access to a vehicle. The cost of petrol, the cost of accommodation plus the stress that places on the family. A lot of them have kids or are looking after their grandparents...We’ve got mob that have to go away to Adelaide...but they don’t have the funds to do that when they are paying so much in rent as well especially for sub-par homing”⁷⁴

Access to medical services also drives longer-term mobility with families moving permanently or semi-permanently to metropolitan and regional centres for regular access to medical treatment. Consultations revealed this was often the case for people living with disability, with stakeholders commenting that moving to areas such as Lake Macquarie had become more common so that people with disability may access services as part of their National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) package.⁷⁵

“The further you get out west, the less services you’ve got. So it’s depending on your individual circumstances, but also around better health services and education as well...a lot of people look for opportunities, not only for themselves, but also for their families”⁷⁶

Disability

Experiences of disability may also interact with housing mobility. As noted above, people with disability may need to travel to medical appointments and services to ensure they receive the care they need. People with physical disability may find it difficult to travel due to a lack of suitable transport or accommodation which may limit their agency and ability to move for personal, cultural or seasonal reasons. As Indigenous Australians are 1.7 times more likely to be living with a disability than non-Indigenous Australians,⁷⁷ there may be a greater need for Aboriginal people to live in accessible homes to ensure the needs of extended family members can be accommodated to fulfil communal obligations.

Notably, there is a lack of disability data available for First Nations people which limits the understanding of impacts and effects of disability and its intersection with housing mobility.

Connection to Country and culture

Tenants, community members and service providers described Connection to Country and culture as a large driver of mobility in all nine sites. The majority of community members described a yearning and a need to return to their home at regular intervals. Some spoke of being a saltwater or freshwater person and the need to connect to the right environment.⁷⁸

⁷² 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

⁷³ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

⁷⁴ 4.11, ACHP Interview.

⁷⁵ 1.1, Service Workshop.

⁷⁶ 7.4, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

⁷⁷ Grant E, Zillante G, Srivastava A, Tually S and Chong A (2017) [Lived experiences of housing and community infrastructure among Indigenous people with disability](#), AHURI Final Report No. 283, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, note 5, accessed 8 May 2023.

⁷⁸ 2.1, Service Workshop.

This links directly to traditional Aboriginal practices of moving around, following Songlines and connecting to Country and family.⁷⁹ These Songlines and connections see people mobile between their place of residence to where their extended families and communities are located.

“We all tend to go home every holidays or every six months? So yeah, I have children as well that I take back to Country every at least six months minimum.”⁸⁰

Sorry Business and funerals

All sites confirmed attending Sorry Business was a driver of mobility. Many community members noted that funerals were becoming more common, requiring more regular travel. Community members also noted it was now typical for funerals to closely follow one another.⁸¹ As there is a cultural obligation to attend funerals, Sorry Business is a contributing factor to large scale temporary mobility lasting months, causing pressures on local housing.⁸² While Sorry Business is an important cultural obligation, the lack of housing in community and supports for large scale mobility reduces individual and community agency contributing to negative housing experiences.

“We can have two funerals at once in a community and, you know, 2000 people turn up, and they’ve got to stay, they got to stay somewhere, you know. And the, the issue with that is, the houses become overcrowded.”⁸³

Education

Access to education is a pull factor and driver of mobility from rural/remote and regional areas to more populated hubs. For instance, various participants spoke of relocating children and young adults from rural or regional areas to larger urban hubs, such as Greater Sydney, to access high school or tertiary education opportunities. However, in the cases presented during the research, social housing policies were not flexible enough to support the young people’s relocation efforts. Despite the young people assuming a regular pattern of mobility based on their education needs and the locations of extended family, a common story arose of social housing providers advising tenants that they did not have enough bedrooms to accommodate the extra person. Additional rent charges were another common deterrent, despite rent subsidises and a cap on rent at market rates.

“I want to bring children from the bush to stay with [me] in the city to study but I don’t have a big enough house. The child also doesn’t want to stay somewhere they don’t know family.”⁸⁴

Employment

Across all nine sites participants confirmed employment was another driver for moving from rural or remote areas to hubs such as Dubbo or the coastal cities. Participants explained that employment opportunities were limited in the regions and people could be forced to move to find employment.⁸⁵ Employment can also cause short term mobility between nearby towns. For example, some workers may live in Brewarrina and work in Bourke or live in Wollongong and work in Sydney.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ 8.1, Service Interview.

⁸⁰ 1.1, Service Workshop.

⁸¹ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

⁸² 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

⁸³ 8.1, Service Interview.

⁸⁴ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

⁸⁵ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

⁸⁶ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

*"I have a lot of relatives that have that have come and pretty much built their lives around Newcastle, just [those] that are from those regional areas, because there's nothing. There's no employment. If you want a career, you wouldn't be there."*⁸⁷

Cost of living

Cost of living was also cited as a common driver of mobility. At multiple sites, tenants in particular, shared stories of moving in with other families to save on cost of living and to avoid paying rent.⁸⁸ Cost of living is also forcing many adults to move back in with their parents.⁸⁹ Cost of transport and petrol is a current limiting factor on mobility through and between communities.⁹⁰ In many circumstances, cost of living is forcing people out of the housing market and into homelessness. Participants confirmed 'couch surfing' had become more common.

Housing supply

Consultation with participants across the nine sites revealed a lack of housing supply across NSW was forcing mobility as people search for adequate and secure housing. Community members spoke of living in inadequate housing (sometimes in a town away from family and support) while waiting for housing stock in their local area. As with the broader population, Aboriginal people who have been priced out of Sydney are moving to areas such as Lake Macquarie and Newcastle, in turn generating higher house prices in those areas.⁹¹

*"We've got a lot of families that do move around purely because of a lack of permanent assets within community. It is quite challenging for some families to maintain their housing in the communities that they live. So often, we will have families that will jump from family to family to family. They will wear their welcome out with one family and go to the next and sometimes that's in another community. I know under the mobility project they were talking about football and all that kind of stuff, but in my region its less about that and more about not being able to have access to permanent accommodation."*⁹²

Homelessness

Many participants felt cost of living, lack of housing stock and other mobility drivers were contributing to homelessness and a cycle of disadvantage. Homelessness itself was seen as a driver of mobility, causing people to shift between family, friends and communities. This is causing long-term (and in some cases lifelong) transiency and entrenched disadvantage.⁹³

*"I got into high school, and I never once had my own bedroom again. I always had to sleep with my cousins, that's why I moved around. So, the reason I moved around was because I didn't have a home. I had to hope one of my cousins would take me in. So, when I came back to Bre[warrina] I stayed with three of my cousins in one year. It becomes hard because you're just another person they have to look after. The older you get, the less they want you."*⁹⁴

Mobility also impacts Temporary Accommodation (TA) and the ability to provide supports to people in transit. If not adequately supported by policy, Aboriginal mobility can lead to issues of homelessness. Aboriginal people moving cross-jurisdictionally may also face greater vulnerabilities if they are not eligible to access services outside of certain jurisdictions.

⁸⁷ 1.1, Service Workshop.

⁸⁸ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

⁸⁹ 1.1, Service Workshop.

⁹⁰ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

⁹¹ 1.1, Service Workshop.

⁹² 5.2, Service Interview.

⁹³ 2.4, Community Member Interview.

⁹⁴ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

“Many service providers... regarded the line between temporary mobility and homelessness as blurred and sometimes did not distinguish between the two. Yet, despite this overlap between the two categories, temporary mobility barely features in national or state policies on housing and homelessness.”⁹⁵

Habibis et al. (2011) note that ‘temporary mobility is a largely overlooked area of housing need, disappearing into the space between provision of permanent, affordable housing and the range of homelessness services’.⁹⁶ Further policy development is needed in this area so that Aboriginal mobility does not continue to be a risk factor for homelessness.

Corrections and justice interactions

Participants at all sites flagged entry and exits from correctional facilities as a driver of forced mobility, commenting that interactions with the justice system created forced mobility for offenders. One participant maintained that the placement of correctional facilities in locations such as Orange, Bathurst, Wellington and Windsor had generated an influx of Aboriginal people to those regions.⁹⁷

Anecdotal stories shared during the project’s yarning circles centred on overcrowding in and around social housing in towns with prisons. Participants commented that former prisoners remaining in the areas on their release had caused disruption, exhibited challenging behaviours and posed risk to lease holders’ tenancies. Similar stories were also heard about people exiting rehabilitation or group homes and returning to their home community.

“The only option is either to be released to community on a link to home or a temp accommodation. Let’s say someone is in custody and has nowhere to go, but their goal is to get somewhere to stay. A lot of clients will go straight to Dubbo into temp accommodation like a hostel or halfway house. They will try to stay there as long as possible. They will put in their housing application and try to stay there until they get put [into longer term housing]. It’s usually not a long-term solution and people don’t last there.”⁹⁸

“I think when it comes to that release date, ideally that person gets released regardless... Essentially, you can get released into homelessness.”⁹⁹

Interviews and workshops with stakeholders highlighted specific justice system related challenges for Aboriginal people impacting mobility. For instance, stakeholders felt that it could be very difficult to obtain bail or parole without a permanent address, disproportionately affecting Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁰ Stakeholders also highlighted that Aboriginal people were often bailed to properties that were overcrowded or unsafe, or in general were highly inappropriate for a post-release prisoner, leading to cycles of homelessness and mobility.¹⁰¹ Multiple participants also raised that Aboriginal people may reoffend to return to the shelter and stability prison provides.¹⁰²

Stakeholders also highlighted the supports available for people exiting the justice system including funds such as a bus ticket back to their community, as well as some Centrelink and

⁹⁵ Habibis D, et al (2011) [Improving housing responses to Indigenous patterns of temporary mobility](#), AHURI Final Report No.162, AHURI, Melbourne.

⁹⁶ Habibis D, et al (2011) [Improving housing responses to Indigenous patterns of temporary mobility](#), AHURI Final Report No.162, AHURI, Melbourne.

⁹⁷ 6.2, DCJ Interview.

⁹⁸ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

⁹⁹ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

¹⁰⁰ 2.4, Community Member Interview

¹⁰¹ 6.3, ACHP Workshop.

¹⁰² 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

access to TA.¹⁰³ Despite these supports, participants believed Aboriginal people were often released into homelessness.

In addition, service providers in Western NSW noted the location of courts in Bourke and Brewarrina as a driver of mobility.¹⁰⁴ This is despite COVID-19 generating an increase in virtual court appearances. There are a number of complex links between mobility and the justice system that were raised in this project and warrant further exploration, noting that mobility and how it relates to appearances in court were beyond the scope of this research.

Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)

At every site, community and service providers raised DFV as a driver of mobility. Described as a hidden epidemic, DFV was seen as causing widespread displacement of Aboriginal women and children across NSW.^{105,106} Specific and serious concerns were raised by both community and service providers regarding mobility and its interaction with DFV, including the impacts on women with young children.¹⁰⁷

Despite the significant supports in place, fleeing DFV has become a major, contemporary driver of mobility for Aboriginal communities, impacting overcrowding and negative housing experiences.

Stakeholders commented that women leaving DFV with the intention of staying in women's refuges, often find that they are full or can only be offered as short-term arrangements. This has meant many Aboriginal women experiencing DFV have to move in with family or friends elsewhere in the community or state.¹⁰⁸ Stakeholders explained that a lack of alternative social housing in their local area meant some people have no other option but to return to their home where their partner was living, putting them (and often their children) at high risk of being subject to further DFV.¹⁰⁹ While programs such as Staying Home Leaving Violence exist to assist people experiencing DFV, it would appear that further work to improve awareness of available supports is still needed.

"If you're the one experiencing domestic violence and you've got children, the person causing that violence, they're going to stay constantly, harassing you and then sometimes you don't have any other recourse but to relocate away from that person."¹¹⁰

"Some women are in domestic violence and have nowhere to go so they just choose to stay and just deal with domestic violence."¹¹¹

"I've seen a lot over the years that I've been here or family members that have come here. And I've had to stay in emergency housing because they have no real estate. They couldn't afford it. They've got like four or five kids and they'd have to go into a Women's Refuge"¹¹²

Some participants in multiple sites also expressed concern about a lack of support for Aboriginal men in DFV situations. Participants perceived a lack of refuge options for men across NSW.¹¹³ Furthermore, community members and service providers felt that men with children in their care were also not able to access refuges. One service provider felt that the

¹⁰³ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

¹⁰⁴ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

¹⁰⁵ 8.1, Service Interview.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, (2022) *Understanding family violence and housing in Indigenous families*, AHURI Brief.

¹⁰⁷ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁰⁸ 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹⁰⁹ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

¹¹⁰ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

¹¹¹ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

¹¹² 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹¹³ 5.2, Service Interview.

majority of tenancy arrangements in social housing favoured women, relegating men (both perpetrator or survivor) to homelessness or moving from house to house through friends and family for extended periods.¹¹⁴ Research supports the notion that male victims of DFV are less likely to seek support services.¹¹⁵ Additional policy development could be considered to increase housing support for perpetrators of DFV, support men's rehabilitation in community and connection with potential supports, to limit negative experiences of mobility.

Safety and Security

Community members identified safety and security concerns as a driver of mobility in some sites. Community members in Bourke explained how local crime was impacting on their mobility in two ways. Fear of homes being broken into stopped people from leaving¹¹⁶ and excessive crime and perceptions of being unsafe were also leading to people moving out of their community.¹¹⁷ Elders in Wollongong expressed feeling physically unsafe in their house due to the area they lived in.¹¹⁸

Child Protection

Community members consulted for the research project contended children in Out-of-home Care (OOHC) was a driver of mobility in many communities. Community members shared stories of being moved into OOHC as a child, away from their communities and family and cultural connections, leading to mobility over the course of their life.¹¹⁹

Service providers corroborated such accounts, speaking of young people being placed in residential care, which in effect moved the children away from their community. For instance, service providers commented that in Far West NSW, most young people placed in residential care were moved to Orange, resulting in many of these young people becoming mobile later in life to return to their communities to access family support.^{120, 121}

A response to this mobility can be seen in the Family Assist program pilot in Western NSW and Southeast Sydney. This pilot program provides a five-year subsidy to support family preservation and restoration. This allows families to work towards preservation and limits housing and mobility stress for families that need it.

Community members in Wollongong also shared stories of becoming mobile to visit their children in OOHC. Parents, as well as other family members, were making round trips to places like Sydney on public transport to see their children or relatives for a short period of time.¹²² These stories are illustrated in the below quote:

*"When your children are in care and if they go from temporary to full time care, they will be moved a million miles away from where you live... They expect you to pay for your own travel to visit your own children and that might be for only an hour."*¹²³

Sport

Sport is an important part of the lives of Aboriginal communities. While highlighting sport as a driver for mobility was less prominent compared to factors highlighted above, some

¹¹⁴ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

¹¹⁵ Fiolet, R., et al, (2021) *Indigenous perspectives on help-seeking for family violence: voices from an Australian Community*, 36(22) Journal of interpersonal violence.

¹¹⁶ 4.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹¹⁷ 4.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹¹⁸ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹¹⁹ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

¹²⁰ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

¹²¹ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

¹²² 4.1, DCJ Interview.

¹²³ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

participants noted attendance or involvement in sports carnivals or regular sporting events as a driver of mobility and short-term overcrowding in Aboriginal communities.¹²⁴

The best example of sport impacting mobility trends highlighted by participants was the annual Koori Knockout football tournament. The Koori Knockout football tournament is a major rugby league event attracting corporate and government sponsorship. Held in a different location annually over the long weekend in late October/early November, the tournament sees a high number of Aboriginal people travelling to attend, with some staying on the following weeks. This creates an identified, annual strain on local social housing that could be planned for in advance.

Retail Access

Community and professional participants also highlighted shopping for groceries and other essentials as a driver of mobility in smaller towns lacking local, affordable amenities. Residents of Walgett, Bourke and Brewarrina, for example, stated they sometimes travelled to larger centres for essential items. In some areas such as Walgett, travel can be quite extensive. One participant mentioned it could take a round trip of seven hours to purchase items such as clothing in the nearest large town of Dubbo.¹²⁵

As expected, participants reported that mobility to access retail was less of a driver in coastal and metropolitan communities, but may still be an issue for those who did not have a licence, access to public transport or those with disability.

Natural disaster and climate change

Participants consulted for the research project underscored natural events such as flooding, and bushfires were becoming more common. These events had created serious displacement issues, impacting many communities at different times.

Western NSW communities recently experienced severe flooding and fires prior to the site visit for the research project. The flooding created localised pressures on housing, with research participants commenting family were staying with them while their home remained inaccessible due to flood damage.¹²⁶ Aboriginal families have communal obligations to care for one another, especially through crisis including natural disasters. Participants also spoke of people having to find alternative routes between towns due to poor road conditions.¹²⁷

Government responses to extreme flooding in Northern NSW in 2022 provided a range of examples of innovative ways to assist people who were forcibly displaced from their homes. There is potential for these responses to be applied to other examples of forced mobility for Aboriginal people.

Case Study Two:

From September 2022 to - February 2023, parts of North Western and, in particular, Northern New South Wales experienced devastating flooding, greatly impacting the lives of many people in the region. So as not to burden people already displaced and under pressure, it was decided Northern NSW (beyond Lake Macquarie) would not be included in the community consultations for this project.

While engaging with communities in North Western NSW, the impact of the floods as being a driver for mobility were shared by those who took part in the research:

'Last year, when we had the issues with the floods out in our area, quite a few people, sort of, you know, that were quite mobile during that time'.¹

¹²⁴ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹²⁵ 3.1, Community Member Interview.

¹²⁶ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

¹²⁷ 4.7, Transport for NSW Interview.

In response to the floods, the NSW Government established several housing support options across each region, including emergency accommodation. By February 2023 over 15,500 people across the two regions had been assisted with emergency accommodation over the last 12-month period. Rentstart assistance was also available for those displaced by the floods. Rentstart assistance provides eligible clients with up to four weeks bond loan and two weeks advance rent into the private rental market.

DCJ also explores longer term housing solutions with people who have been displaced by floods through a variety of avenues, including the DCJ Housing Flood Recovery Service. The DCJ Housing Flood Recovery Service has an onsite presence in Northern NSW, as well as virtual teams within the Housing Contact Centre. The teams work closely with every person in emergency accommodation to develop an exit plan into longer term accommodation. DCJ also reviews available and appropriate social housing properties and conducts client meetings around social housing eligibility.

DCJ works closely with the NSW Reconstruction Authority (previous known as Resilience NSW) on the Temporary Housing (Pod) program and has referred over 150 people from emergency accommodation into a Pod as alternate accommodation.

Barriers to mobility

This research has found that mobility – whether voluntary or forced – can be constrained by barriers that diminish agency and have a compounding negative effect on movement. These include:

- rising cost of living
- a lack of affordable transportation options
- limited housing availability in towns to which people move
- difficulty understanding social housing rules and obligations
- misalignment between housing availability and location of schools and services
- inappropriate housing allocations ill-suited to a family's composition
- excessively long waiting lists for social housing
- racism and discrimination in the private rental market
- difficulty in obtaining confirmation of Aboriginality through LALCs or registered Aboriginal community organisations
- predatory pricing practices in the private rental market
- policy barriers such as time limitations on visitors and tenancy absences that hinder the ability to fulfill cultural obligations
- rental arrears that bar access to new housing options
- fear of tenancy breaches
- feelings of being surveilled
- difficulty in accessing support benefits without a permanent address
- living with a disability and the need for disability modifications
- living in poverty
- chronic health conditions and
- property crime and personal safety.

Other factors affecting mobility include COVID-19 and its subsequent restrictions put in place between 2020 and 2022. After COVID-19 movement restrictions were lifted in 2020 and again in 2022, Aboriginal people became mobile in a return to pre-restriction movement, as with the rest of the Australian community.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ 2.1, Service Workshop.

Length of mobility

Length and method of mobility will depend on an individual's circumstances and personal preferences. For example, for one person living in Sydney, returning home to Brewarrina once a year to visit family around work and other commitments may be viewed as adequate. For another, it may be preferable to make a long term move to Brewarrina to raise children on Country surrounded by family and cultural supports. However, long-term absences cannot be supported by the social housing sector which requires to balance availability of housing stock and housing those most in need (see Section 5).

“...temporary mobility can be thought of as trips of varying duration that do not involve a change in the place or places one usually has access to for accommodation, only absences from those places.”¹²⁹

Method of mobility

Methods of mobility range depending on the length of travel required. Participants consulted for the research maintained that to get where they need to go, Aboriginal people on the move may access whatever means necessary.¹³⁰ Participants also highlighted that carpooling was a common approach to travel for Aboriginal people. For instance, events such as Sorry Business, typically occasioned groups of people travelling to the same location, facilitating carpooling.¹³¹ In recent years, social media has further facilitated making arrangements for this kind of travel:

“I think that's made a huge difference as well with mobility, social media [...] they're able to still get onto the social media so that they still be able to send somebody a message saying, Hey, I'm stranded.”¹³²

In rural/remote and regional areas, mobility is difficult without access to a roadworthy vehicle. In towns such as Bourke and Brewarrina, community members consulted for the research spoke of people without cars walking across town in high heat conditions to attend appointments or get groceries.¹³³ Community members in all nine sites shared the difficulty of attending appointments without a car, noting the financial impact and accessibility issues of taxis and public transport regardless of geographic location.¹³⁴

Public transit routes in places also impact on mobility and varied throughout the areas covered by the research. For example, participants noted:

- There is no direct bus between Bourke and Cobar meaning travel options between the towns are limited.¹³⁵
- In Lake Macquarie and Wollongong, most services were along the bus line. In addition, supports such as community transport and taxi vouchers were reportedly available.¹³⁶
- The train line along the coast between Newcastle and Wollongong, through Sydney, allows for easier mobility between these sites, especially to access health services.¹³⁷

¹²⁹ Dockery, A.M. (2014), *Reconceptualising mobility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, CRC-REP Working Paper CW015, Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs p.249

¹³⁰ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹³¹ 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹³² 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹³³ 4.5, Community Member Interview.

¹³⁴ 6.3, ACHP Workshop.

¹³⁵ 4.4, Community Member Interview.

¹³⁶ 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹³⁷ 1.4, ACHP Interview.

- Community transport is also offered in communities such as Bourke but community members felt it was inconsistent.¹³⁸

“Sometimes they pick you up and sometimes they won’t.”¹³⁹

- Buses and other public transport were perceived as ‘terrible in the Wollongong area.’¹⁴⁰

“If you don’t have a license, you’re doomed”¹⁴¹

Family is also an important facilitator of mobility in the form of sharing cars.¹⁴² Community participants across the sites shared stories of using family to travel locally, for example, within town or to the closest town to go to the doctor or to purchase groceries. All participants from urban, regional and rural/remote sites spoke of travelling further for holidays or Sorry Business in other parts of the state.¹⁴³ Without sharing resources within the extended family, this type of travel would be considerably more inaccessible for many Aboriginal people on low incomes. For those with health or disability issues to factor in, this type of travel may be impossible on their own.^{144 145}

Mobility Regions

Aboriginal mobility has both ‘spatial’ and ‘temporal’ dimensions. Spatially, mobility has been characterised as ‘intra-settlement,’ ‘intra-regional’ and ‘inter-regional’.¹⁴⁶ The evidence that has emerged from the data collected from Aboriginal communities in this research supports this observation. Participants told us that Aboriginal mobility in NSW occurs within discrete towns, between towns in a single region, and between regions and larger urban settlements, suggesting movements of great distances between the far north-western corner of the state to the urbanised eastern coast. Movement also occurs in multiple directions, outward and inward, from smaller towns to larger cities and back.

Mobility and its complexities can be visualised by mapping what Memmott calls ‘mobility regions.’¹⁴⁷ Understanding the patterns of mobility can help inform decisions regarding, for example, where to locate medical facilities and other services, where transportation should be improved and where more housing is needed.

At each of the research sites, participants described the breadth of movement into and out of the area. The accompanying diagrams help describe the spatial character of mobility in remote, regional and urban NSW. Map 1 shows a remote mobility region in the northwest shared by Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett. The map demonstrates the fluid nature of mobility in this area by showing movement direction and the various ‘push and pull’ factors such as education, health and justice. Map 2 shows the mobility region into and out of the regional towns of Dubbo and Orange, and Map 3 illustrates the mobility region described by Lake Macquarie and the Central Coast. In each case, movement is extensive and on-going.

“The connection between Cobar, Bourke, Bre[warrina] and Walgett, is not there and we do hear from community that is a corridor that would be good to look at. It is quite a complex

¹³⁸ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹³⁹ 4.2, Community Member Interview.

¹⁴⁰ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁴¹ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁴² 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹⁴³ 4.2, Community Member Interview.

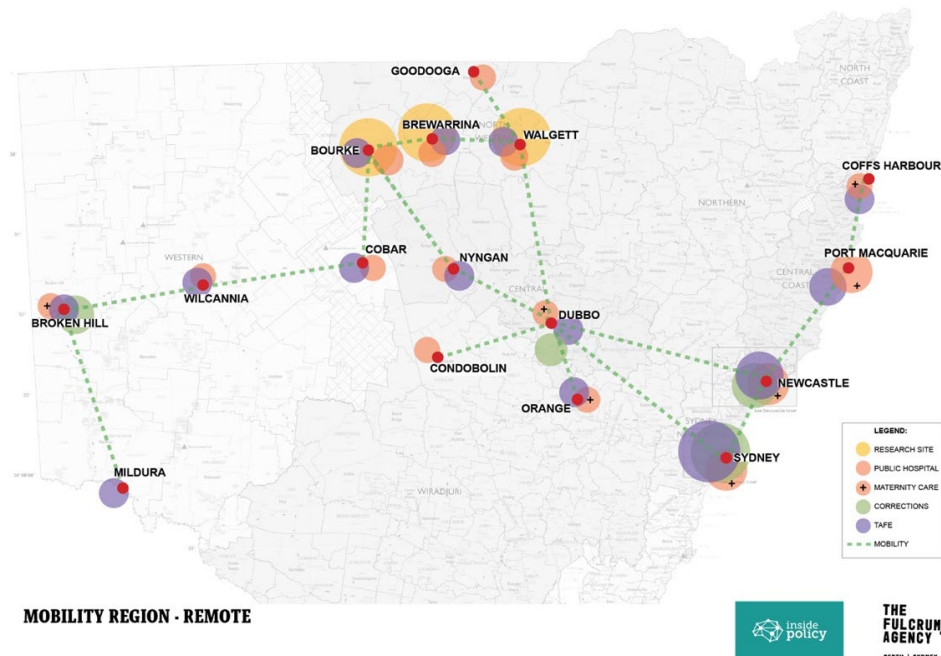
¹⁴⁴ 4.2, Community Member Interview.

¹⁴⁶ Memmott, P., Long, S., and Thomson, L. (2006), [Indigenous mobility in rural and remote Australia](#), AHURI Final Report No. 90, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, p.1

¹⁴⁷ Memmott, P., Long, S., and Thomson, L. (2006), [Indigenous mobility in rural and remote Australia](#), AHURI Final Report No. 90, AHURI, Melbourne.

corridor because we would need to figure out how that works. If it's just a one trip across or if it's a day return between the two because of accessing medical. There is a family link between the towns. Cobar has got different shops to Bourke and Bre. So that is something we are exploring [...] but we would need to have conversations with all of those communities to see what that looks like.”¹⁴⁸

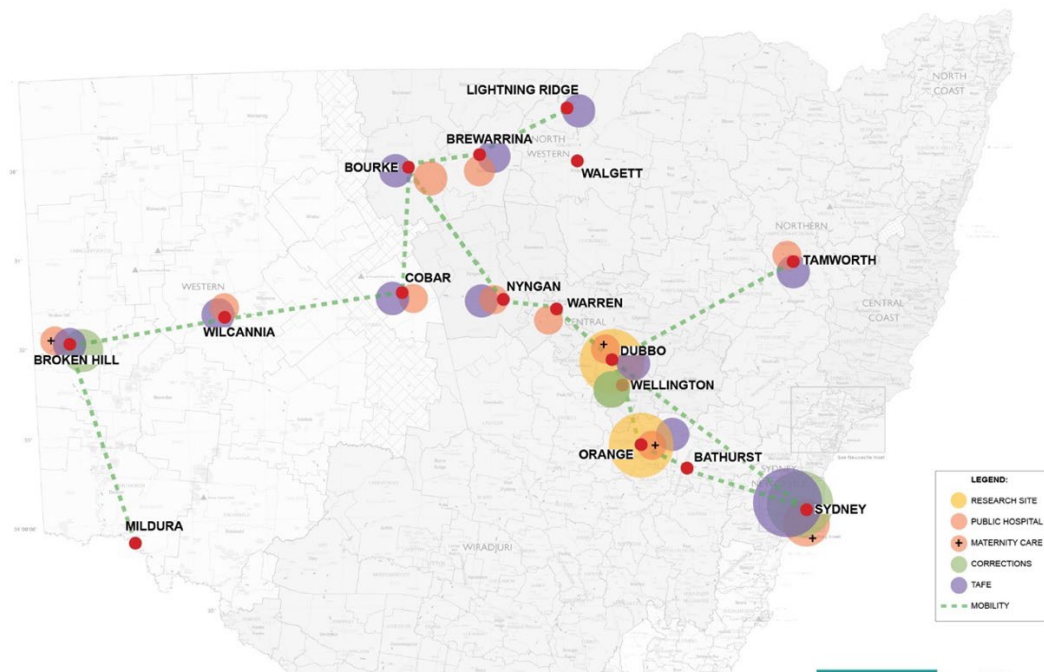
Map 1: Mobility region – Remote



Source: The Fulcrum Agency 2023

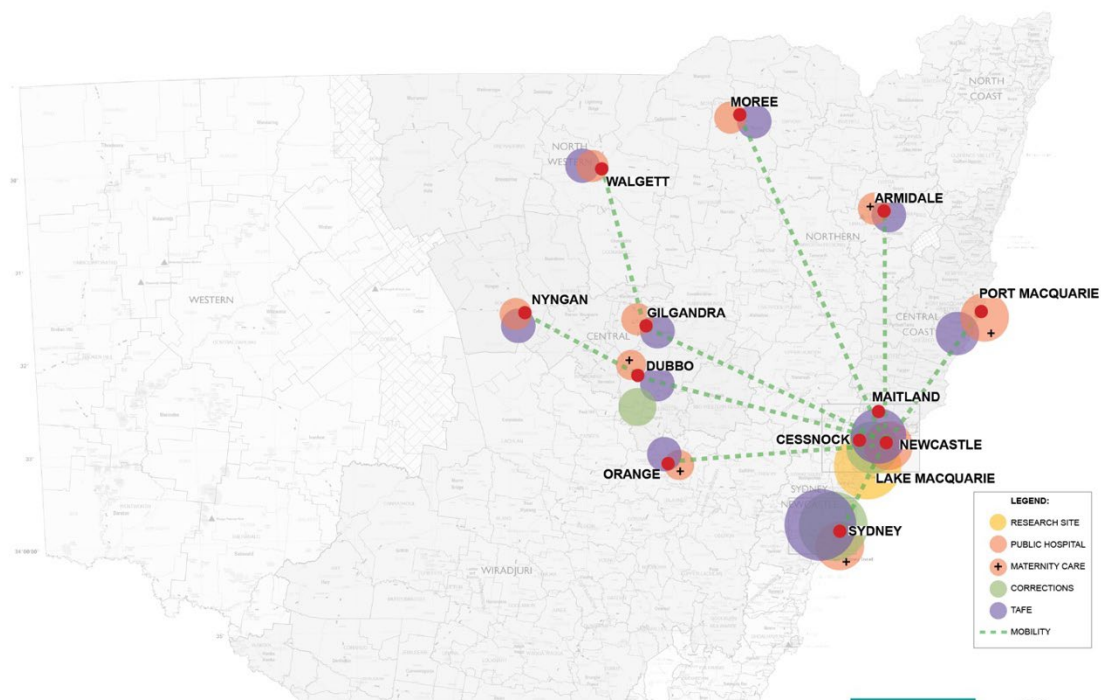
Map 2: Mobility region – Regional

¹⁴⁸ 4.7, Transport for NSW Interview.



Source: The Fulcrum Agency 2023

Map 3: Mobility region – Urban



Source: The Fulcrum Agency 2023

2. Impacts of housing mobility

Section overview

The impacts of mobility are neither inherently positive nor negative. The impacts of mobility should be understood within the above context of agency, push and pull factors, and drivers, and will differ from individual to individual.

Across all nine sites, community and professional stakeholders cited the following impacts of mobility, as outlined in the section below:

- Overcrowding
- Strengthening culture
- Being with family
- Access to services and support
- Access to opportunity
- Financial impacts
- Community impacts
- Health impacts
- Poverty

Key findings

Impacts of Aboriginal mobility are both positive and negative

Positive or negative experiences of Aboriginal mobility are directly related to a person's agency. Drivers of housing stress are beyond the control of Aboriginal communities due to a lack of agency at the individual, family and community levels. Not moving can be positive or negative for individuals. When people lack the agency to move, this can produce negative outcomes such as missed opportunities or being disconnected from family and culture.

Impacts of overcrowding can be positive or negative

Higher density households provide cultural and kinship benefits, but inflexible housing types, rigid policy and practice, and poor housing standards contribute to negative housing experiences.

This section explores the nine impacts of mobility identified through the consultations (listed above). Notably, the impacts of mobility are neither inherently positive nor negative as explored here. Additionally, the below also explores issues where agency and mobility are constrained.

Please note that there are a number of interactions between housing mobility and social housing policy, including limitations regarding being away from their property, antisocial behaviour, and rental arrears which are captured in Section 4.

Overcrowding

Mobility can lead to overcrowding. Overcrowding is prevalent in Aboriginal households – particularly given the intergenerational nature of some Aboriginal families where standard housing is not fit-for-purpose. This in turn leads to overcrowding.

In 2018/19 nearly one in five (18% or 145,300) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally were living in overcrowded housing.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, data supplied by DCJ

¹⁴⁹ Australian Government Department of Health (2021) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031, page 47

highlights that at 30 June 2021, 6.51% of Aboriginal households in DCJ managed NSW social housing were experiencing overcrowding, compared to 3.24% of non-Aboriginal households.¹⁵⁰ Notably, social housing providers do not include short-term visitors¹⁵¹ in overcrowding data; only additional occupants who are living at the property and who don't have a permanent address to return to are captured.

Consultation with community highlighted both positive and negative outcomes of Aboriginal overcrowding.

Positive impacts included fostering kinship relations, having family close-by, providing for family and keeping family safe. For example, a community member consulted felt having family together meant providing them with safety and protection. This community member was living with ten extended family members and had adapted to living in an 'overcrowded' house. The community member explained:

*"Building a four-bedroom home just means I can fit more people. It doesn't mean that there's going to be one kid in each bedroom"*¹⁵²

Another family in Sydney further exemplified the importance of agency and other supporting factors relevant to positive experiences of overcrowding. Technically considered overcrowded, this household reported a positive experience. The official resident of the household was an Elder who liked having family close and had the resources to provide for them.

Case Study Three:

A community member grew up in social housing and regularly moved around, starting school in Sydney and finishing in Northern NSW. When their grandfather fell seriously ill the family moved to Sydney. They subsequently completed high school and university in inner Sydney in social housing. All of their paternal family lived in Central West NSW and they went back every school holidays.

"When my brother and I were younger, until I was about in Year 8 or 9, mum would drive us halfway to meet my aunty and one of the cousins at this one petrol station. This was such an exciting time because we knew it was the start of our holidays. From about 13, my brother and I began catching the train which we loved because we often meet up other kids who were going to school in Sydney and were also returning home for the holidays to visit their family".

They would stay between various family homes, often travelling to the next town to stay with family.

"I loved staying with my Aunty. We would sometimes have 15 kids staying there. The loungeroom was filled with air mattresses, the bedrooms also had mattresses on the floor. This wasn't always how it was, but my favourite memories with my cousins are from those times".

When asked their thoughts on "overcrowding", they explained it didn't feel crowded, it felt like being connected with family. As an adult, they often reflect positively on the time spent with family and friends. Regularly returning is very important to them as growing up off Country was hard. Although they appreciate living, working and studying in the city, disconnection and isolation are very real feelings to navigate when away from extended family and cultural ties. They now travel back to Country for family and cultural obligations

¹⁵⁰ Source: DCJ Supplied Data. Data includes 4,327 AHO properties – 9,154 Aboriginal public housing households and 83,977 non-Aboriginal or not known public housing households.

¹⁵¹ Short-term is defined as those staying less than 28 days.

¹⁵² 6.3, ACHP Interview

and often host family in their home in inner Sydney regularly come to Sydney for medical appointments, family events, and cultural events such as Yabun each year.

"It's like a two-way stream. My family opens their door to me, I open my door to them. It's a reciprocal obligation".

Further, it is often assumed that the stress from overcrowding is primarily a function of the number of people in a household. Participants in this research suggested otherwise; that it is often the duration of family visits that creates the stress associated with overcrowding. One tenant explained:

*"... it's not always a problem, right. Like, if you've got a bunch of [family] over Christmas, and it's only for a couple of weeks. Yeah. Then that's okay. But if you've got the same amount of people staying over six months, yeah."*¹⁵³

While Aboriginal mobility and overcrowding present a range of positive benefits, there is a direct link between stress caused by overcrowding and negative housing experiences for Aboriginal people in NSW. There are various negative effects of overcrowding when it interacts with and exacerbates various 'stress factors'. For instance, when a house is overcrowded, this can cause stress on the fixtures and physical environment leading to an increase in the need for maintenance and repairs.

Having extra people in the household can also cause financial stress due to increased food expenses, buying more furniture or having the rental subsidy reduced. Extra visitors can also take a toll on mental wellbeing stemming from sharing a tight space and a loss of independence (social housing designs are generally inappropriate to accommodate additional people staying with tenants).¹⁵⁴ This is especially a risk of financial elder abuse to Aboriginal Elders. 'Humbugging' is a risk for Aboriginal Elders where family members will repeatedly ask for money and resources from Elders, amounting to great financial and mental strain on the Elder.¹⁵⁵ Client centred approaches and connecting with supports such as the Aboriginal Legal Service or Legal Aid can assist elders who are experiencing this kind of abuse.

Overcrowding, when it has negative implications, can be one factor which leads to housing stress, as shown in the case study below.

Case Study Four:

A community member explained their experience moving from far north-west New South Wales to Sydney:

"We first went to Sydney... we went for a two-week holiday and then my dad decided to keep us down there. And we moved in with different families. Aboriginal people have big families, six and seven kids. So we would move in with dad's cousins, and they'd have their kids so we would be bunking in their room...his cousin and his wife and then us kids are all either be in one room or out in the lounge room sleeping. Then it would be a problem of bathrooms and what times we have to go and shower. Girls are all in together and the boys are all in together and then things like that".

The community member, now an adult residing back in far north-west New South Wales, reflected on their experience moving to Sydney and growing up in an "overcrowded" household. They said overall it was a positive experience, however there were pressures that the family faced. For example, there were conflicts in the house because of many personalities and due to limited access to amenities within the house, such as the toilet and showers. The community member also

¹⁵³ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

¹⁵⁴ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁵⁵ Kimberly Jiyigas, (2020) [No more Humbug. Reducing Aboriginal Financial Elder Abuse in the Kimberly](#), online content, accessed 14 August 2023.

expressed that maintenance and amenities issues in particular were an issue when families are living in overcrowded conditions as it causes housing stress.

As this section highlights, crowding is a measure of density and, on its own, may fail to grasp whether people are experiencing the stress of large numbers of people or if this is manageable. The impact that overcrowding (or density) has on an individual's sense of agency within their living environments and whether that agency is undermined by subjectively experienced stress factors (discussed in Section 3) is an important consideration.

Strengthening culture

Mobility allows for Aboriginal people to connect with Country, spirit and culture. This is an important part of Aboriginal peoples' lives and wellbeing.¹⁵⁶ Given the intergenerational impacts of colonisation, dispossession and the forced removal of children during the Stolen Generation, cultural connection and maintenance is understandably of central importance to Aboriginal communities. Government policies, process and practice should be designed to support and not hinder mobility that is related to the positive benefits of Country, spiritual and cultural connection.

"I am frowned upon if I don't house that family and then I have to answer to my Elders."¹⁵⁷

Where mobility is constrained and Aboriginal people do not have agency to move for cultural or family reasons, this can lead to stress and illbeing.

Family and kinship

Family and kinship connection is an important and positive impact of mobility that all community members who participated in the research strongly expressed.¹⁵⁸

"We take care of family. That's the way we were brought up by our ancestors"¹⁵⁹

Kinship connection is an unchanged central tenet of Aboriginal culture. Ensuring family members are safe and in some form of housing, no matter the level of appropriateness, has become a feature of familial and kinship obligation.¹⁶⁰

Access to services and supports

Mobility impacts upon service access. Simply, people find it difficult to access supports that are far away from them. As forced mobility, movement to access services takes agency away from individuals and communities resulting in negative experiences. Further, travelling to access service moves people away from their local support networks further inhibiting positive experience.

In addition, many services and supports are difficult to access without a permanent address which can be hard to obtain for a highly mobile person. Examples include Centrelink, NIDS or education. These can be difficult to access as online forms will require addresses, mail correspondence is still common for some services and identity documents can also be difficult to attain for people with no address. This adds extra hurdles to jump through just to access a service.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ 4.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁵⁷ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁵⁸ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁵⁹ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁶⁰ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁶¹ Sarah Richards, [How do you access mail and other services without an address? It's a catch-22 for Queensland's homeless](#), ABC News, 2023.

Further, many communities simply do not have enough services to support the most vulnerable in their community.¹⁶² Service providers noted that this is setting people up for failure.¹⁶³ For example, as mentioned earlier, many Aboriginal people exit custody with no supports in place. Service providers believed that post-release prisoners needed accommodation to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.^{164, 165}

“So you send them ... not only off Country, but you send them to a place that has no support, no vehicles to get around.”¹⁶⁶

A lack of access to services also has major flow on effects. These include abandonment of properties in areas with limited or no local services, homelessness, and reduced health, education and employment outcomes. For instance, service providers explained many people were provided with social housing in Cobar due to limited housing stock in other towns. However, multiple service providers and community members in Western NSW described Cobar as housing rich but service poor. As a result, moving people away from their social networks had produced negative outcomes in Cobar.

“There was a pregnant mother with a disability. One of the biggest things stopping her from keeping that baby was a lack of housing. She accepted a house in Cobar but then realised she wouldn’t have that family support, would not have the services to wrap around her to keep her and baby safe.”¹⁶⁷

“People give up and go back to fringe dweller days. People go back to survival living in a tent or a tin shack.”¹⁶⁸

In addition, many service providers noted a range of negative issues that may arise from referrals to new support services, including Aboriginal clients experiencing racism and a lack of funding or capacity to respond to new clients appropriately.¹⁶⁹ Such referrals may be required when moving to another community to access social housing.

“But once she moves from Orange to Bourke, all her parole stuff has to switch over. Right, all the services that she was working with no longer operate in this area.”¹⁷⁰

Access to opportunity

As noted, drivers of mobility include seeking education or employment opportunities. Community members in Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett all conceded that the education opportunities in town were limited and people needed to leave to improve their lives. However due to mobility inhibitors including finances, health, and family connections, some people are never able to make that move.

In Bourke, this phenomenon is described as ‘levee syndrome’ where locals will not leave town and as such have a limited worldview and limited opportunities.¹⁷¹ This is a contributor to Dubbo being the most in demand area for transfers in Western NSW, as Dubbo has a lot more support and opportunities.

“This is all they know, Walgett. Some people haven’t even been outside”¹⁷²

¹⁶² 4.1, DCJ Interview.

¹⁶³ 2.5, Community Member Interview

¹⁶⁴ 2.5, Community Member Interview.

¹⁶⁵ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

¹⁶⁶ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview

¹⁶⁷ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

¹⁶⁸ 1.3, Service Interview.

¹⁶⁹ 6.1, DCJ Interview.

¹⁷⁰ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

¹⁷¹ 4.10, DCJ Interview.

¹⁷² 3.1, Community Member Interview.

Financial impacts

Mobility can be an expensive undertaking premised on access to driver licences, road worthy vehicles, and the ability to pay for petrol or public transport costs. At all sites participants complained about the cost of petrol. Public transportation costs were also commonly raised across the coastal sites, as well as the price of attaining a driver licence,¹⁷³ upkeeping vehicle registration or even getting child restraints.^{174,175,176} Those without a car may need to rely on taxis which is also a great financial burden.¹⁷⁷ This impacts mobility at a macro and micro scale.

*People in those communities need to travel two and a half hours to have dialysis a couple of times a week. There is no housing for them to stay here for that week to get that treatment so they are forever travelling to and from those regional communities but most of them don't have access to a vehicle. The cost of petrol, the cost of accommodation plus the stress that places on the family. A lot of them have kids or are looking after their grandparents... We've got mob that have to go away to Adelaide... but they don't have the funds to do that when they are paying so much in rent as well especially for sub-par homing.*¹⁷⁸

The need to travel to access medical treatment (or support someone requiring medical treatment) can also impact the ability to remain in paid employment. Community members shared the difficulty of travelling overnight to attend a medical appointment as it meant they missed days at work.¹⁷⁹

Community impacts

Mobility has impacts on the makeup of communities. For instance, in Bourke, historical mobility shaped a region made up of a range of Aboriginal family groups, creating a cultural hub with community members speaking of safe community spaces, communal markets and a sense of belonging.

However, due to a shrinking local population, property abandonment and a lack of reinvestment, many of these community spaces have dissolved.¹⁸⁰ This has led to a lack of community spaces and a lack of community pride.

Redfern is another community built on Aboriginal mobility. Community members described Redfern as a landmark of Aboriginal Australia and the birthplace of Aboriginal political advocacy in NSW. Many important community-led services began in Redfern, including the Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Medical Service and other such cultural institutions.¹⁸¹ Having such a strong Aboriginal Community makes Redfern an important place and a meeting point for Aboriginal people. In terms of Aboriginal mobility, this has resulted in historic and ongoing mobility into the area over generations.

Health impacts

Poor housing conditions where it intersects with overcrowding can have a significant impact on health outcomes for Aboriginal families. Research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families living in overcrowded and poor housing circumstances are more susceptible to contracting infections through lack of hygiene from poor sanitation and close

¹⁷³ 1.1, Service Workshop.

¹⁷⁴ 4.7, Transport for NSW Interview.

¹⁷⁵ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁷⁶ 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁷⁷ 6.3, ACHP Workshop.

¹⁷⁸ 4.11, ACHP Interview.

¹⁷⁹ 4.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁸⁰ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

¹⁸¹ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

contact with others. Chronic ear infections, eye infections, skin conditions, gastroenteritis, respiratory infections, and exacerbating of family violence and mental health issues are all potential outcomes from overcrowded environments.¹⁸²

Poverty

The link between poverty and overcrowded housing was not discussed during consultations. However, research suggests that relatively permanent, negative features of an individuals' social environment or living conditions (specifically, the combination of poor housing conditions and overcrowding) can trigger negative outcomes, including poverty and chronic stress.¹⁸³ This in turn can contribute to the spread of communicable disease.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), [National Guide to a preventive health assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#). 2018.

¹⁸³ Australian Human Rights Commission, [Social determinants and the health of Indigenous peoples in Australia – a human rights based approach](#). 2007.

¹⁸⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission, [Social determinants and the health of Indigenous peoples in Australia – a human rights based approach](#). 2007.

3. Factors intersecting with mobility and its impacts

Section overview

This section explores the interactions of mobility with various factors (i.e. financial, safety etc) which can accentuate housing stress.

Key findings

Maintenance and adequate health hardware contribute to positive experiences of housing and mobility.

The research suggests that overcrowding stress is often less about the number of people in the house than how well a house is functioning. Participants highlighted that poor maintenance and hardware issues created additional stress. Maintenance and alterations being completed that are not fit for purpose or reflective of tenant wishes also contributes to stress.

Tenants documented experiences of racism

In line with Closing the Gap National Agreement clause 19C, governments and institutions have responsibilities to address any issues of 'systemic, daily racism, and promote cultural safety and transfer power and resources to communities'.^{185,186} Many tenants consulted with through this project felt discriminated against in a range of housing experiences including social housing, private rental and government service interaction. It is clear that there is community perception of racism within DCJ, and steps must be taken to reduce negative client interactions and regain community trust.

Aboriginal voice and agency in the design and delivery of social housing and decision making will help to address system level issues that continue discrimination and stigmatisation of Aboriginal communities.

Housing stress is a symptom of lack of control over housing stressors and the built environment. The dual pillars of housing stressors and poor built environment at all scales negate people's agency to respond in positive ways to potentially negative housing impacts.

The positive or negative housing impacts on Aboriginal people is related to the clash between individual agency and outside factors (explored below).

Housing stress factors

This section outlines the housing stressors cited in consultations across the nine sites. Participants outlined these stressors by way of a 'cycle of rejection' involving elements of financial, employment, safety and family pressures all impacting negatively on health and wellbeing.

The commonality of this set of housing stress factors were apparent across the communities involved in the research, as well as supported by the analysis of relevant literature. Methods for determining overcrowding that exclusively consider density overlook 'stress measures.' Stress measures refer to additional data that may impact overcrowding negatively.

Financial

¹⁸⁵ Australian Governments, Coalition of Peaks. [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#). 2020.

¹⁸⁶ Everyday racism can be understood as 'small doses' of racism people experience on a daily basis such as being treated with less respect, feeling people are afraid of them or being insulted. See Thurber, K., et al, (2021) [Prevalence of Everyday Discrimination and Relation with Wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Adults in Australia](#), 18(12) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

Income and financial stress levels are well-established social determinants of health and wellbeing in Australia. Households with lower levels of income typically experience higher levels of stress in meeting basic living costs and have more limited choices than those on higher incomes.¹⁸⁷ Aboriginal people consistently earn lower average incomes than non-Aboriginal Australians, contributing to poorer health and wellbeing outcomes and increased reliance on government supports.¹⁸⁸

Community members and service providers also shared how the impacts of the current housing shortage in NSW and the cost-of-living crisis had combined to create a precarious living situation. For instance, when most of a tenant's pension is allocated to their rent, they are not left with much to pay for food, utilities and other living costs.⁵⁵ When obligation to support extended family is added to this, financial pressures can be severe.

*"...have extra people in the house and now you have to feed them all."*¹⁴²

*"Bills begin to pile up and you might need to pay for things for the guests staying."*¹⁴³

Financial pressures mean that Aboriginal people may be forced to move to places where they have family they can stay with, or where the cost of living may be cheaper.

*"It's quite hard at the moment too, because the cost of living is so high that you will find a lot of families just moving in together. Because it's just easier. That's the only way that they can all afford to live."*¹⁸⁹

Structural and maintenance issues

In 2018-19, one in three, or 33% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households nationally were living in housing with one or more major structural problem, such as major cracks in walls or floors, sinking or moving foundations, or major electrical or plumbing problems. This proportion had not shifted comparatively since 2012/13. This was significantly higher than in the non-Aboriginal population at 3%.¹⁹⁰

The research suggests that overcrowding stress is often less about the number of people in the house than how well a house is functioning. When the hot water system fails or the toilets stop flushing or there is insufficient space to store or prepare food, occupants lose control of their environments. Under these conditions, houses become stressful places with residents experiencing overcrowding stress.

In line with this finding, participants consulted for the research highlighted maintenance issues as a stressor, with community members providing examples of properties that were in 'dangerous and uninhabitable conditions', with mould and damaged structures.⁵³ This has reportedly resulted in tenants having negative exists, as their properties were unliveable.

*"The quality of housing is shocking. [...] Repairs and maintenance aren't being done. It's hard to determine what is tenant damage and what is upkeep [...] It's also about Aboriginal Housing Providers not getting adequate funding to upkeep that housing as well."*¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Braveman P, Egerter S & Williams DR (2011). [The social determinants of health: coming of age- external site opens in new window](#). Annual Review of Public Health vol 32, p 381–98.

¹⁸⁸ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [Indigenous income and finance. Australia's welfare 2021. Snapshot](#). (online content) AIHW, 2021, accessed 9 May 2023

¹⁸⁹ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁹⁰ Australian Government Department of Health (2021), *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031*, DoH, p 73.

¹⁹¹ 4.11, ACHP Interview.

“We did surveys across the Murdi Paaki region and went to each community to talk to them about what they needed and their housing issues. We have identified that there is over \$60 million worth of repairs and maintenance in the Murdi Paaki region to be conducted”¹⁹²

Tenants also spoke of moving into properties that had not been renovated, creating further maintenance issues.⁵⁰ These maintenance issues were seen to be putting pressure on tenants having family and friends to visit:

“These houses can barely hold their actual families let alone if they do you want to have family come over”¹⁹³

One community member stressed the need to ensure appropriate materials specifications for houses that experience high visitor numbers. Wall materials such as plasterboard and carpets on the floor quickly show wear and tear, putting tenancies at risk of accountability for what is fundamentally an inappropriate selection of construction materials.

“Houses are poorly maintained with rotten carpets and lack of paint.”¹⁹⁴

“Some of our tenants don’t even have heating, proper heating in their homes. What about cooling for the summer, around the fans in my house? I’ve had to actually pay for my wall fans in my house.”¹⁹⁵

Lack of maintenance creates a safety impact as well. Some houses have holes in the floor that you could fall through. Some are missing screens increasing break and enters to the house.

In some areas, participants reported housing stock sitting vacant with no apparent maintenance or repairs work being carried out.

Case Study Five:

Non-payment of rent is a common form of action tenants take in lengthy maintenance cases. One tenant explained how they exited a property as result of prolonged maintenance issues and being in rental arrears. The tenant explained:

“I stopped paying rent because they [Housing] wouldn’t come carry the maintenance out”.

The tenant explained that after stopping payment of their rent, they were taken to the tribunal and was ordered to pay an extra \$100 on top of their weekly rent. By this stage the tenant was paying \$400 per week and the maintenance issues at the property had not been addressed. The tenant opted to vacate the property because they couldn’t afford the additional rent. They advised that the property remains in the same condition that they left it in.

Finally, tenants highlighted requests for maintenance repairs as an area requiring improved responses. For example, one tenant who asked for the swinging door in their shower be replaced with a sliding door for ease of access, ended up having their bathtub taken away. It was later replaced with a hospital type shower, which the tenant does not like.¹⁹⁶

Safety

Much of what tenants, community members, DJC Housing and CHP/ACHP raised around safety, also stemmed from a lack of available or appropriate social housing stock. For instance, participants explained that in DFV situations, a lack of local housing and supports

¹⁹² 4.11, ACHP Interview.

¹⁹³ 6.4, Community yarning Circle.

¹⁹⁴ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁹⁵ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

¹⁹⁶ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle

meant that perpetrators and survivors of DFV could find it logistically difficult to separate (in rural NSW, this problem is magnified). The limits on men accessing alternative accommodation and crisis support (as discussed in section 1) means men often remain in the family home as there is nowhere else to go.

In another situation recounted during consultation, a woman moving in with friends due to DFV had teenage children with her who wanted their own space, leading to a stressful, overcrowded housing situation for all involved. Tenants in unsafe situations need to be empowered to engage community and government supports to increase agency in dealing with stressful housing situations such as this one.

Consultations also revealed a perceived link between generic definitions of overcrowding and fears of interactions with child protection authorities. Aboriginal community have a general fear of child removal underpinned by the high rates of Aboriginal children in out of home care and historical experiences of the Stolen Generation.¹⁹⁷ Participants at almost all sites shared a fear that Aboriginal children may be removed from overcrowded households, when that property may be the safest and healthiest option for that child.

DCJ staff consulted expressed that overcrowding was not a pathway to child removal in any way and that preference is always for family preservation and kinship care arrangements that keep children safe. DCJ policy confirms this as best practice. Community perceptions therefore highlights a need for DCJ to repair the historical fear Aboriginal people still hold and undertake actions to build trust and rapport with community.

*"I've been in homes when I was a kid with no furniture and 20 mattresses, because it was safe."*¹⁹⁸

*"So, we've got 10 in the family. We adapt to that. And then we get overcrowded inside of a house. Building a four-bedroom home just means I can fit more people. It doesn't mean that there's going to be one kid in each bedroom". Having family together means providing safety and protecting."*¹⁹⁹

Participants also highlighted having certain family members remaining in the family home presented safety issues. Cultural obligations, caring requirements, the lack of alternate accommodation solutions or a combination of all of the above can result in family members remaining in a household despite challenging social behaviours, mental health, or alcohol and other drug issues.

*"Families probably do not want the uncle who's got a real bad ice addiction and just bashing his partner to stay with you, but if you're family, you're family. It's like a cultural pressure [...] so you've got grandma, then you've got grandkids, you've got the kids, parents, you've got uncles coming in, released from jail, all living together. So you've got vulnerable kids with people that probably haven't been corrected. Then you've got some really unhealthy stuff going on in the house"*²⁰⁰

*"You want take on vulnerable people as well, because then you're like, oh, then their issues come with you. And that's in your house. Because you want to help but then you're like, oh, I don't want to deal with that. Because they're gonna bring DOCS into my home. And then they start looking at you. And we're very fearful."*²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Krakouer, J., et al, (2021) [*First Nations children are still being removed at disproportionate rates. Cultural assumptions about parenting need to change*](#), The Conversation.

¹⁹⁸ 8.1, Service Interview.

¹⁹⁹ 6.3, ACHP Workshop.

²⁰⁰ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.

²⁰¹ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

The cultural obligation to shelter direct and extended family for periods of time was also associated with creating stressful home environments. Some participants expressed a preference to have more periods of rest from extended family visits. Social housing providers can use visitor policies to support tenants who do not want family members to stay for extended periods of time.

“I can’t handle too many people too much...I can’t handle that. I’m happy with my two daughters and my two daughters only.”²⁰²

Employment

Housing stress has broad impacts on employment, for instance, having stable and safe accommodation facilitates finding and retaining employment. Conversely, having stable employment allows individual to meet the salary requirements for private rentals.²⁰³ As housing is a major expenditure in the private market (often the largest ongoing household cost) adequate and stable employment represents an overarching influence on the quality of life that individuals can lead, affecting not only their health, but also their well-being and vulnerability to poverty.²⁰⁴

Health

Health and housing are interrelated. Adequate housing is essential to good health and housing is used as an indicator or determinant of health for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. As outlined in the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031* there is a set of cultural determinants that are the protective factors for Aboriginal people that ‘enhance resilience, strengthen identity and support good health’.²⁰⁵ These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- housing, basic amenities and the environment
- connection to Country
- family, kinship and community
- beliefs and knowledge
- cultural expression and continuity
- language, and
- self-determination and leadership.²⁰⁶

As such, a supportive home can increase health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people. With a strong foundational home environment, agency is increased making mobility and housing experiences more positive.

“A home is the foundation of wellbeing and without that, where is your wellbeing at?”

Racism

Aboriginal participants in this research highlighted experiences of systemic and everyday racism throughout government interaction. This included DCJ Housing policy not being flexible to cultural needs, frontline workers not displaying cultural understanding and neighbours making unfounded complaints to housing providers. One community member

²⁰² 4.4, Community Member Interview.

²⁰³ Bentley R, Baker E, LaMontagne A, King T, Mason K, Kavanagh A (2016), [Does employment security modify the effect of housing affordability on mental health](#), SSM Population Health, accessed 17 May 2023..

²⁰⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2022) *Social determinants of health*, Australian Government, accessed 10 May 2023 and (2022) [Social Determinants of health for Indigenous Australians](#), accessed 10 May 2023

²⁰⁵ Australian Government Department of Health (2021) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031, p 18.

²⁰⁶ Australian Government Department of Health (2021) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031, p 18.

gave an example where there was a stolen car in their street and the police came straight to their house because they were the only Aboriginal family.

On top of government interactions, broader experiences of racism is another stress factor for Aboriginal people. The most recent Australian Reconciliation Barometer in 2022 reported an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing at least one form of racial prejudice to 60% compared to the two previous Barometers in 2020 (52%) and 2018 (43%).²⁰⁷ This further increases the stress Aboriginal people live with further reducing agency which can create negative housing experiences.

Community members also expressed the difficulty of breaking into the private rental market. While cost of living and low incomes was noted as a factor, stakeholders at all sites felt that the private rental space was racist and would not give a fair go to Aboriginal people looking to rent.²⁰⁸

“Good housing in the private market is upwards of \$300 a week, and Aboriginal people have no chance at securing a rental because of discrimination.”²⁰⁹

Under Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three, governments are partners in identifying and eliminating racism and challenge unconscious biases that result in decisions based on stereotypes.²¹⁰

In 2022, DCJ established an Anti-Racism Taskforce. The taskforce comprised staff from diverse backgrounds with lived experience to better understand the problem and design a strategy to identify solutions to address and eliminate racism at DCJ. In 2023, the DCJ Anti-Racism strategy was implemented. It focuses on four key areas:

- leadership
- policy and procedural reform
- supporting staff experiencing racism
- building an anti-racist DCJ.

Other stress factors

When agency is removed from Aboriginal people, multiple stress factors are experienced. Tenants and community members shared the following points that contribute to stress and negative housing experiences in relation to mobility, including:

- the dynamics of the family living in inappropriate dwellings
- financial stressors such as having to feed larger family group or higher utilities costs
- the impact and influence of larger numbers of children in the household and their behaviour
- having to stay with extended family and not having any personal space
- feeling unstable or insecure in their home environment, and
- a combination of multiple situations occurring at one time creating stress on the extended family

“They will go and stay with a family until their mental health and the health of the family is just about worn out and then will move onto another.”²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Reconciliation Australia (2022), [Australian Reconciliation Barometer](#), Reconciliation Australia, Kingston, p 5

²⁰⁸ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

²⁰⁹ 3.1, Community Member Interview.

²¹⁰ Closing the Gap, [National Agreement on Closing the Gap – Priority Reform Three](#), (online content) Closing the Gap, 2020, accessed 15 May 2023.

²¹¹ 5.2, Service Interview.

4. Mobility and the built environment

Section overview

The combined forces of ageing, out of date and poorly designed social housing, involuntary mobility and a poor built environment removes individual agency from Aboriginal people, resulting in negative housing experiences for community and the inability for the social housing system (and the people working within it) to support them.

Key findings

Impacts on Aboriginal mobility occur at different built environment scales

Urban/Macro, Precinct/Neighbourhood, Residential Site, and Dwelling built environment scales all impact mobility and housing experience at both individual and combined levels.

The combined forces of ageing, out of date and poorly designed social housing and the built environment may result in negative overcrowding experiences for Aboriginal peoples. To ensure health and wellbeing, housing must embed culturally-responsive design, including consideration of kinship, family and community living arrangements.²¹² As outlined in *The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031* its vital to recognise ‘the strong link between healthy and responsive housing and positive physical, mental, and social and emotional wellbeing outcomes.’²¹³

Housing policy and design often falls short of addressing cultural obligations and considerations of the needs of Indigenous peoples domestically and internationally.²¹⁴²¹⁵ Disparities between housing policies and programs are not isolated to Australia and echo similarities of experience for First Nations peoples in Canada and Māori people in New Zealand.

The impacts of mobility on housing stress and overcrowding play out at several built environment scales. Understanding the levels of the challenge will help inform responsive policy objectives. The scales we have identified include:

- Urban
- Precinct/Neighbourhood
- Residential Site
- Dwelling

The following are brief descriptions of each of these scales and the key findings that apply to them. Additional commentary is provided on select issues.

Urban Scale

At a macro level is the Urban scale. It includes the planning regulations and strategies that shape the larger elements of city making, including transportation, housing, health, education, employment, commerce and the public realm that supports these elements. It

²¹² Australian Government Department of Health (2021) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031, page 46

²¹³ Australian Government Department of Health (2021) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031, page 46

²¹⁴ Boulton, A., Allport, T., Kaiwai, H., Harker, R. and Potaka Osborne, G. (2022) *Maori perceptions of ‘home’: Maori housing needs, wellbeing and policy*, Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online, 17:1, 44-55.

²¹⁵ Belanger, Y., Weasel Head, G. and Awosoga, O. (2011) *Assessing Urban Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness in Canada*. Final Report prepared for the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians (OFI), Ottawa, Ontario. March 30, 2012

also includes the broader cultural landscape described by Country, with custodial boundaries and languages. At a macro level, Aboriginal mobility is facilitated or constrained by the policies that determine the planning and design of urban, regional and remote places; and access to Country is made easier or harder by these planning policies.

Discussions with community members and housing and service providers at each of the research sites suggest several common themes:

- Mobility regions are multi-directional and extensive.
 - This theme is explored in section 1
- Connecting with Country is a key driver of mobility.
 - This theme is explored in section 1
- The chronic shortage of suitable housing has significant impacts on mobility and overcrowding.
- Access to reliable and affordable transportation is critical to supporting mobility.
- The need to respond to the impacts of climate change is urgent
 - There needs to be further research and investment into how to future proof houses with hardware such as solar panels or air-conditioning
 - Murdi Paaki is beginning work in this area through their Regional Plan
- The data that is used to inform social housing policy does not capture the full picture of Aboriginal mobility.
 - This project has attempted to define mobility and its insights should be used to update policy
 - Further policy updates need to consider mobility in their design
 - Data collection tools that government and housing providers use needs to show understanding of mobility

Precinct/Neighbourhood Scale

The Precinct scale encompasses the more localised context of housing – from the suburban or street scale to connections across the neighbourhood centre and township. The experience of overcrowding is often influenced by the ability to walk to the local shops, to enjoy local recreational and gathering spaces outside of the home, and through the neighbourhood composition (including other Aboriginal families that may or may not have kinship relationships). The accompanying maps help to illustrate the Precinct context for several research sites. Please see community summaries at the start of this document for an understanding of the broader context of these sites.

Research findings include:

- The importance of housing location (integrated into the wider community verse. communities on the fringes of towns).
- The need for a range of housing options to meet individual and family requirements (large and small apartment units, single and double storey cottages, granny flats).
- The importance of access to public spaces (parks, playgrounds and recreation areas).
- The importance of access to local services, employment, health, education, and justice.
- The importance of the public realm (landscaping, accessible footpaths, wayfinding, shade and shelter).
- Safety and security within the neighbourhood (street lighting and visibility).

Housing location was one of the key concerns to emerge from interviews. There is a sense that Aboriginal people are forgotten, particularly when housing is located on the fringes of towns where it may be difficult to get into town for shopping and medical attention. Location is also evident during climate emergencies. The recent bush fires and floods, for example, highlight the vulnerability of many residents living on the margins of towns. The photo below

of recent floods at Namoi Village in Walgett is a startling illustration of how remote populations experience environmental emergencies.

Figure 2: Aerial view of Namoi Village in Walgett NSW during 2022 floods



Source: NSW SES for ABC

Limited housing options are another community concern. Residents and service providers consulted noted there was a mismatch between the housing options available and the needs of social housing tenants and families. An example given was that there are not enough larger three- and four-bedroom dwellings to accommodate several families or multiple generations living in one house. One interviewee noted an instance of an elderly couple living by themselves in a large house while a larger family had difficulty finding a suitable tenancy for their needs. Housing providers are often constrained by the available housing stock (both size and location), understandably opting to provide a roof over one's head regardless of whether the accommodation is suitable to the need.

Site observations in the Lake Macquarie region suggested that access to safe and secure public spaces at the neighbourhood scale is limited for both discrete estates as well as for tenants living in detached dwellings within the wider community. The ability to access well-managed and maintained public areas for recreation is important in helping to reduce the stress felt at home. Community members indicated that they did not want to send their kids to the local playground for fear of being exposed to drug use and antisocial behaviour. Communities need to be safe for community members to transit through them. Again, reduction in stress factors for Aboriginal people increases agency and promotes positive housing experiences.

Residential Site Scale

Residential site-based influences include the features of the dwelling's lot. These range from the 'yard' area around a detached dwelling to a shared courtyard or private open space within a block of units. Residential sites also require access to safe cultural spaces such as community halls or yarning circles in or near the home. The orientation of the house, its relationship to the street (e.g., behind parking, above shops, detached with landscape buffers), and proximity to neighbours may influence housing stress and the experience of overcrowding. Research findings include the importance of:

- Site security, such as building entries/exits, lighting and visibility, fencing.

- Site accessibility, including parking, footpaths and ramps.
- Access to the semi-private/shared public realm, including landscape, seating, play areas.
- House orientation, such as solar access, passive heating and cooling, relationship to street and neighbours.
- Disability, or universal, access around the dwelling site.
- Ease of access to Precinct amenities.
- Fostering community pride through investing in new housing, providing upkeep and maintenance, and providing culturally and physically safe communal spaces.

Dwelling Scale

The individual dwelling (including house, terrace, semi, villa, unit or apartment) will have a direct influence on the ability for occupants to manage household stressors such as increased density, impacts of climate change, and the drivers of the negative effects of crowding, such as lack of access to functioning health hardware, limited private space, poor acoustic performance and substandard provisions for disability access.

“Townhouses so it’s like two bedrooms probably upstairs and a small bedroom downstairs and then you had your living area which had your dining room and lounge, like a lounge in there. So yeah, when you really got family who come down then you’ve got a lot of mattresses.”²¹⁶

Research findings include:

- The importance of disability and universal access into and within the dwelling.
- Design of private spaces, communal areas, wet areas and toilets.
- Design of kitchens, and adequacy of food storage and preparation areas.
- Environmental health issues (ventilation and mould, dust and weatherproofing, and fire safety).
- Appropriate materials specification.
- Timely and responsive Repairs & Maintenance regimes.

Universal access is noteworthy. Citing ABS data, Grant notes that, “...Indigenous Australians were 1.7 times more likely to be living with a disability than non-Indigenous Australians, and also 1.7 times as likely to be living with a severe or profound core activity limitation.”²¹⁷ Grant observes that the “built environment and physical environment can often be so inaccessible it renders someone disabled...”²¹⁸

“An elder talked about having a hospital bathroom at home that is inadequate for them. They have to tiptoe to wash their face as the sink is too high.”²¹⁹

At the dwelling scale, design guidelines and standards are critical to ensuring design quality and durability. LAHC, through its *Design Standards and Dwelling Requirements*, set standards for its housing designs, including numbers of bedrooms and minimum floor areas. Other design guidelines identify best practice approaches to siting of dwellings, solar orientation, and other passive design principles appropriate to the climate zone. There are also a range of standards for universal accessibility and adaptable housing. The *Livable*

²¹⁶ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

²¹⁷ Grant E, Zillante G, Srivastava A, Tually S and Chong A (2017) [Lived experiences of housing and community infrastructure among Indigenous people with disability](#), AHURI Final Report No. 283, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, p 17 accessed 8 May 2023.

²¹⁸ Grant E, Zillante G, Srivastava A, Tually S and Chong A (2017) [Lived experiences of housing and community infrastructure among Indigenous people with disability](#), AHURI Final Report No. 283, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, note 5, accessed 8 May 2023.

²¹⁹ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

Housing Design Guidelines are exemplary in this regard. AHO has its own *Design Guidelines* as well. They include a section on cultural sustainability and considerations of Country and the importance of consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“my son will come and watch TV with me. And my sister and her whole family live in a very big room out the back and my son has his own room. But it’s like small families living in each room as a little home.”²²⁰

A community member explained their experience moving from Lighting Ridge to Sydney, including conflicts in the house because of personalities, access to amenities within the house such as bathrooms.¹⁷ This shows that health hardware is critical to dealing with mobility and reducing the stress of crowding.

“We first went to Sydney... we went for a two-week holiday and then my dad just decided to keep us down there. And we moved in different families. Aboriginal people have big families, six and seven kids. So we would move in with dad’s cousins, and they’d have like their kids so we would be bunking in their kids in the room, his cousins and his wife and then us kids are all either be in one room or out in the lounge room sleeping. Then it would be a problem of bathrooms and what times we have to go and shower. Girls are all in together and the boys are all in together and then things like that”.¹⁶

Healthabitat’s [Housing for Health – The Guide](#) is helpful in regard to the design of amenities. *The Guide* outlines design recommendations for health hardware (taps, drains, electrical safety switches, etc.) to support what it calls the “9 Healthy Living Practices.” Housing for Health data has been derived from over 190 projects in more than 7,500 houses across Australia. The Housing for Health Survey Fix methodology has been implemented in numerous remote and regional parts of NSW. The Survey Fix process checks the functionality of over 280 household items. The data that is collected generates immediate trade jobs for plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, and helps to establish performance and improvement against the “Critical Healthy Living Practices.”²²¹

Connecting with Country

The NSW Government Architect has done much to influence the built environment industry in NSW with its *Draft Connecting with Country Framework*. Within a few short years, this document has dramatically shifted how government, developers and built environment professionals now approach major building projects in NSW. The *Framework* seeks commitments and actions from the industry to better integrate a deeper understanding of Country into building projects, and these actions are being called to account by State Design Review Panels.

The importance of the *Framework* is in its potential to influence the macro decisions that are made in urban planning and design in NSW. The three Strategic Goals of the *Framework* are noteworthy:

1. “Impacts of natural events such as fire, drought, and flooding, exacerbated by unsustainable land- and water-use practices, will be reduced.”
2. “Aboriginal cultural knowledge will be valued and respected. Aboriginal knowledge-holders will co-lead design and development of all NSW infrastructure projects.”

²²⁰ 1.1, Service Workshop.

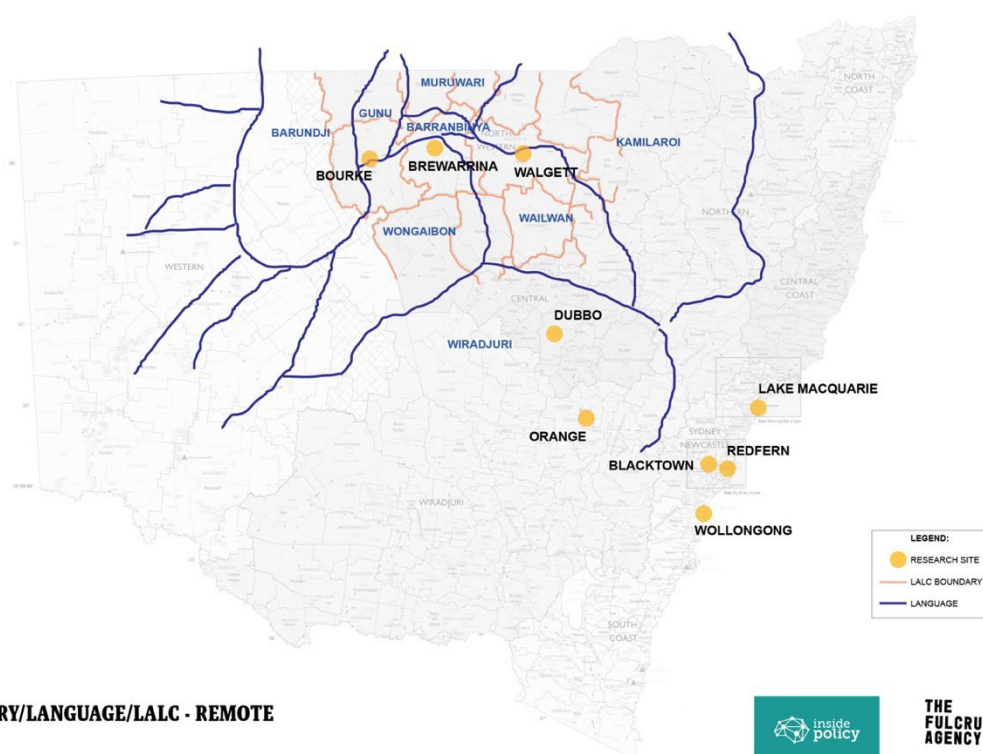
²²¹ Healthabitat Ltd (2023) [Housing for Health – The Guide](#), (online content) Housing for Health, 2023, accessed 8 May 2023.

3. “Aboriginal people will have access to their homelands so they can continue their responsibility to care for Country and protect sensitive sites.”²²²

The third goal is particularly relevant to this research project, as access to Country is a key driver of mobility. When mobility is hindered, access to Country and fulfillment of cultural responsibility is constrained.

Maps 4 and 5 show traditional Country in two of the research areas (Remote and Urban) with an overlay of the nearby LALCs. This map helps to illustrate the complex relationship between administrative boundaries as defined under *the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* and traditional Country illustrated by the AIATSIS language map. Community members told us, for example, that one of the obstacles to mobility is proof of Aboriginality in gaining access to social housing through the AHO. This can be difficult for someone who is new to town and is not known to the LALC and may prevent someone who is legitimately Aboriginal from accessing AHO assistance.

Map 4: Country/Language/LALC – Remote



Source: The Fulcrum Agency 2023

Map 5: Country/Language/LALC – Urban

²²² DPIE (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) (2020) [Draft Connecting with Country Framework, DPIE](#).



Source: The Fulcrum Agency 2023

Connecting with Country and the cultural landscape is also described by post-colonial history. The forced removals and displacement of Stolen Generations children, for example, continues to have an impact on survivors and their descendants. Community members commented in several instances that Aboriginal mobility is often defined by this displacement. Force removal and living off country is negative for many Aboriginal people and inhibits connection to land and culture.

Furthermore, housing investment priorities can also affect access to Country. In a 2021 AHURI report on *Sustainable Indigenous housing in regional and remote Australia*, the authors note that “tacit decisions are being made about where to invest resources in new or refurbished housing, at the expense of marginal outer regional and remote areas. These trajectories reflect funding pressures on the sector and may run counter to a political program to support Indigenous people to remain on Country...”²²³

In several research sites, housing for Aboriginal people is in discrete communities on former Aboriginal reserves and missions, themselves a legacy of historic policies of containment and cultural erasure. These include the Mission and Dodge City in Brewarrina; the Barwon Mission or Gingie and Namoi Village in Walgett; and in Bourke there are several discrete housing sites including Alice Edwards Village. In Wollongong the Old Pooncarie Mission, Coomaditchie and Hill 60 have historical significance and cultural relevance. As explored in Section 1, Aboriginal mission sites are owned by LALCs.

“The missions act is abolished but we’re still on those missions; we’re still in that mentality.”²²⁴

²²³ Lea et al, 2021, p. 65. Lea T, Grealy L, Moskos M, Brambilla A, King S, Habibis D, Benedict R, Phibbs P, Sun C and Torzillo P (2021) [Sustainable indigenous housing in regional and remote Australia](#), AHURI Final Report No. 368, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, p. 65, accessed 8 May 2023

²²⁴ 8.2, Community Interview.

Housing supply

The strongest message delivered by community members and service providers at each of the research sites is that investment in social housing in NSW has been inadequate and that the shortage of housing stock has chronically failed to meet demand. Community members strongly believe that overcrowding will not be solved until more housing becomes available.

“It’s sort of hard because we know that there’s no properties to move these people to. And like a lot of them, it’s their family, they won’t let them be homeless.”²²⁵

There is a correlation between crowding and a lack of housing stock, when people come to the area, they can’t find a house so will stay with family.²²⁶

For some regions, an influx of people arriving for employment purposes (e.g., mining and associated workers) placing upward pressure on local private rental markets exacerbating the housing situation with long private rental waitlists and increased prices.⁵⁷

“A community member has been on the social housing waitlist for nearly 20 years, and now not eligible for social housing because they earn 2 or 3 thousand dollars over the threshold, however, struggles to afford in the private market.”²²⁷

In line with community sentiment, the Community Housing Industry Association of NSW (CHIA) together with Homelessness NSW and the NSW Council of Social Services in 2020 suggested that “there is a shortfall of more than 200,000 social and affordable homes in NSW now, with almost 60,000 households on waiting lists for social housing.”²²⁸ CHIA has called on NSW Government for the establishment of a Social and Affordable Housing Capital Fund to build 5000 units per year.²²⁹

From 2012 to 2022, the average annual number of people on the social housing register (waiting list) was 55,519. This highlights the current housing shortage and the built environments inability to cope with the amount of people needing housing. The following graph plots the wait list over that period.²³⁰

²²⁵ 1.2, Service Workshop.

²²⁶ 1.3, Service Interview.

²²⁷ 3.1, Community Member Interview.

²²⁸ NCOSS, Homelessness NSW, CHIA, [NSW Government urged to back social and affordable housing infrastructure boom in response to COVID-19](#) (online content) NCOSS, Homelessness NSW and CHIA, 2020, accessed 8 May 2023.

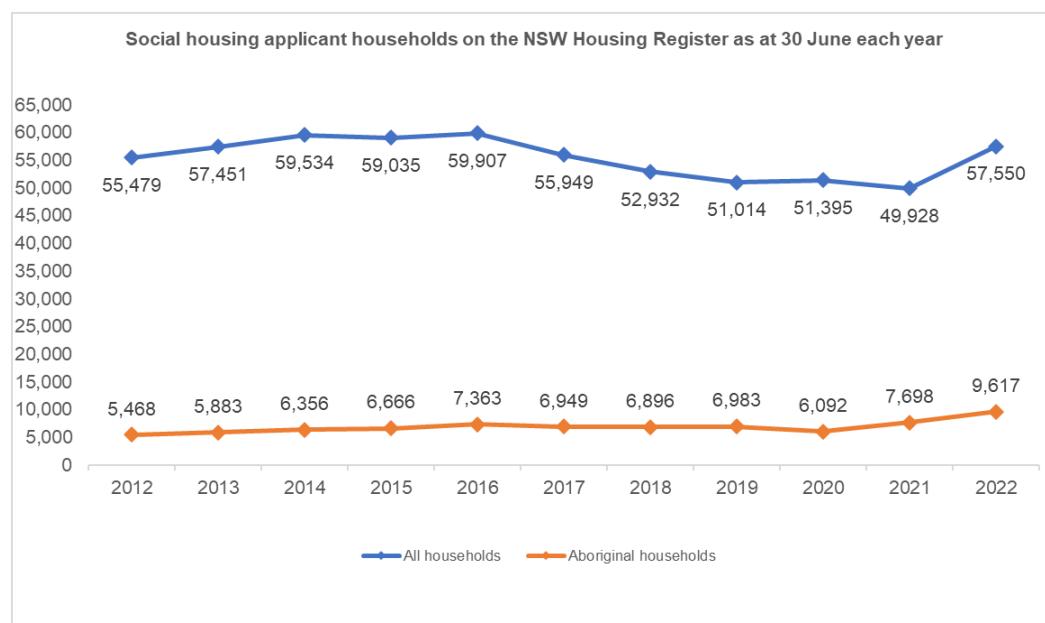
²²⁹ CHIA (Community Housing Industry Association), [NSW social housing investment key to new jobs and stopping rise in homelessness](#), (online content) CHIA, 2021, accessed 8 May 2023.

²³⁰ Barnes E, Writer T, Hartley C (2021) [Social housing in New South Wales: Report 1 Contemporary analysis](#), Centre for Social Impact, Sydney.

Figure 3: NSW Housing Register 2012 to 2022

Note: Excludes transfers/relocations of existing tenant households. From June 2017 onwards, data exclude suspended social housing applicants and counting rules for Aboriginal households can vary over time. Source: DCJ Annual Statistical Report 2021-22, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/statistics/statistical-report-2021-22>.

“In NSW social housing as a proportion of total housing stock has decreased consistently in the ten years since 2011. NSW has the fourth lowest social housing stock as a proportion of total housing behind the Northern Territory (14.5%), ACT (6.4%), Tasmania (5.4%), and Western Australia (5.3%).”²³¹



“Social housing as a proportion of total housing in NSW is now at its lowest rate since 2011, at 4.71%.”²³²

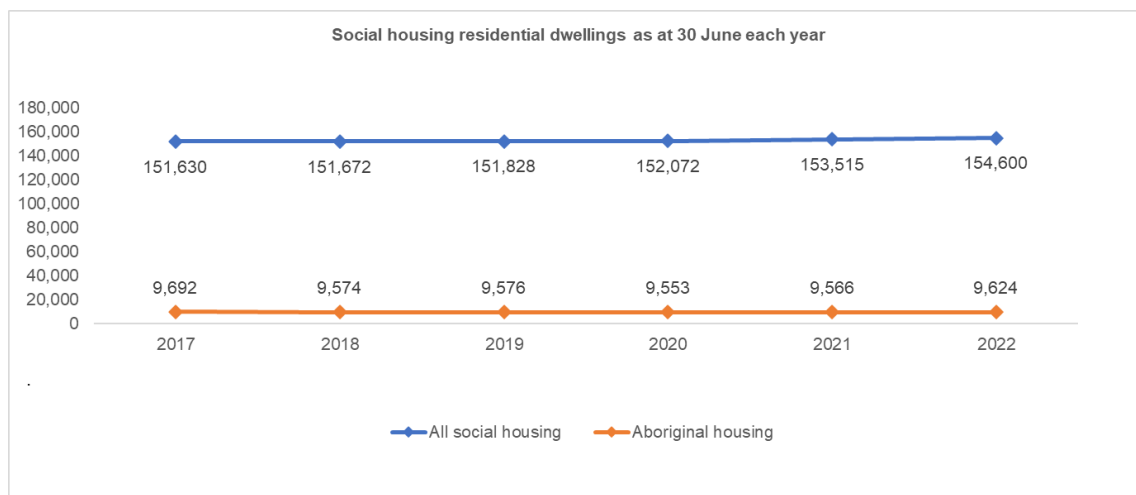
Over the period 2017 to 2022 we can see in the chart below that social housing stock has slightly increased, but it has not grown at the same rate as total housing stock. According to the 2021 Census private dwellings have increased by 11% since 2016.

Source: Dwelling count of private dwellings <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/1>

Figure 4: Social Housing Residential Dwellings as at 30 June each year

²³¹ Barnes E, Writer T, Hartley C (2021) [Social housing in New South Wales: Report 1 Contemporary analysis](#), Centre for Social Impact, Sydney p 26.

²³² Barnes E, Writer T, Hartley C (2021) [Social housing in New South Wales: Report 1 Contemporary analysis](#), Centre for Social Impact, Sydney p 28.



Note: All social housing includes public housing managed by DCJ, Aboriginal Housing Office dwellings managed by DCJ, Indigenous Community Housing and community housing. Aboriginal housing includes Aboriginal Housing Office dwellings managed by DCJ and Indigenous Community Housing. Source: DCJ Annual Statistical Report 2021-22, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/statistics/statistical-report-2021-22>.

A LAHC snapshot of social housing need in the Lake Macquarie region, for example, shows that existing housing stock is made up primarily of cottages constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. Approximately 900 cottages are between 40 and 60 years old and some 600 cottages over 60 years old. In Blacktown the numbers are even starker. Approximately 4000 cottages are between 40 and 60 years old. Due to the property age and the design guidelines of the time, these properties are no longer suitable for the needs of aging tenants, larger families, and those experiencing disability.²³³

The figures above are alarming and suggest that until significant investments are made, housing supply will continue to fall well short of demand.

The NSW Government is not unaware of the housing supply problem. Its *2022-2024 Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap* highlights the shortfall of housing stock and makes various commitments to address this under its Key Action Areas.

“By 2024, we will develop a program to address the predicted shortfalls in the ACHP sector by providing an additional construction stimulus program for the sector to provide new supply of dedicated Aboriginal housing stock. This will add to dedicated Aboriginal housing stock, lifting supply in response to projected demand.”²³⁴

Some of this work is already underway. In 2019 the AHO developed a set of guidelines aimed at architects and builders. The *AHO Design Guidelines NSW* help to establish standards for design excellence in new housing for Aboriginal people. The *Guidelines* consider factors such as geographic location and climate zones. The *Guidelines* primarily focus on single storey detached dwellings and offer suggestions for siting, yard design, floor layout and detailing for thermal performance. In addition, the *Guidelines* provide provisional suggestions for Designing with Country. The *Guidelines* note, however, that they are not appropriate for alterations and additions.

Upgrades and property repairs and maintenance accounted for \$65.8m in AHO expenditure in 2020/21 while new builds were \$46.4m.²³⁵ A set of design guidelines for upgrades,

²³³ NSW Government Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC), [Local Area Analyses](#), (online content) LAHC, 2023, accessed 8 May 2023.

²³⁴ NSW Government (2022), *2022-2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap*, NSW Government, p 84.

²³⁵ Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) (2021), *Aboriginal Housing Office Annual Report 2020-21*, AHO.

additions and alterations that established similar standards of design excellence would be an important tool given the bulk of spending is in this area.

This research project did not look at individual house layouts or materials specifications. Community members did tell us, however, that there was a lack of privacy and often not enough toilets. Their concerns also went to the lack of responsiveness to repairs and maintenance needs. One of the key drivers of stress within households is the lack of functioning health hardware, for example, leaky taps and faulty toilets. (Health hardware is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.2 above on structural issues and maintenance).

Data validity

Below is a summary of validity of various data sources and definitions for crowding and health hardware. No data points are completely valid due to their limited scope and known tendency of Aboriginal people to mistrust government. It is this mistrust that may lead to underreporting in certain domains. As such, increasing community trust will also serve to improve data validity in social housing

Data validity – CNOS

As outlined in the section 2.1 above on overcrowding, there should be consideration around the validity of data used to inform policy.

The literature also considers CNOS a potential barrier to housing opportunity where housing providers who use its metrics for housing allocation may inadvertently exclude those seeking shelter. Women and children who are escaping family violence, for example, may not comply with the bedroom calculation defined by CNOS, potentially hindering their eligibility for available housing.²³⁶

Data validity – Small Area Housing Assistance Need (SAHAN) Model

DCJ and the AHO use the “Small Area Housing Assistance Need” model to estimate and project social housing eligibility in various locations (e.g., Local Government Areas). The SAHAN model relies upon ABS Census data, which the literature on Aboriginal mobility suggests may not capture the full picture. “From an Aboriginal perspective, a person may not be at their place of usual residence but may still form part of the identifying population. Alternatively, a person may be in their usual place of residence but may not be part of the identifying population, due to their customary connections being elsewhere.”²³⁷

Alongside the SAHAN, LAHC and the AHO also use their own demand model.

Data validity – LAHC Property Uplift Strategy

LAHC’s strategic objectives are to deliver more social housing across NSW. To achieve this LAHC “leverages the value of LAHC’s social housing portfolio...by working with the private and not-for-profit sectors to accelerate and deliver an uplift in social housing.”²³⁸ LAHC depends upon the sale of ‘high value’ properties and rental revenue to generate income for these new developments.

²³⁶ McKay A (2021) [National Occupancy Standards: Use and Misuse](#), BC Society of Transition Houses, UBC, Mitacs.

²³⁷ Memmott P, Long S and Thomson L (2006) [Indigenous mobility in rural and remote Australia](#), AHURI Final Report No. 90, AHURI, Melbourne, note 5.

²³⁸ DPIE (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) (2019) [NSW Land and Housing Corporation Statement of Business Intent 2021-2022](#), DPIE.

The constraints LAHC faces in delivering ‘uplift’ was discussed in our interviews with LAHC representatives and during the Mobility Project Reference Group testing workshop, where LAHC noted that ‘uplift’ of properties (maximising yield) is often dependent upon the size and location of a property. A row of contiguous cottages for example provides greater opportunity for medium and multi-residential development than discrete one-off blocks offering smaller yields. When developable properties are identified, there may be further stresses imposed upon tenants who are forced to relocate while development occurs.

LAHC has been successful in working with the private sector to deliver a range of new social housing projects throughout the state which is commonly advertised on their website.²³⁹ Nonetheless the limitations of a market driven approach suggest that the model may not be working for Aboriginal people. A market driven approach means that covering costs must be paramount rather than supporting clients and culture. It also means that new developments depend upon sale of property and rental revenue.

Healthabitat’s data collection over more than 30 years and across many projects challenges several misconceptions. One is that tenants damage houses. The data suggests that in fact over 90% of hardware failure is due to either poor construction or lack of maintenance. The data has shown as well that investment in new housing does not necessarily address the problem of poorly functioning houses. Improvements in hardware function and the ability of people to live healthier lives have been realized with relatively minor investments in existing houses. Remoteness, too, shows no more correlation with poor functionality than houses located in more urbanized areas.

Built environment solutions to overcrowding

Land and property solutions to overcrowding and mobility are beyond DCJ’s jurisdiction. Its relationship with other departments, however, and the connections that have been reinforced through the research project’s MRG may help to shape a response.

The policy implications raised in the research will be influenced by a range of factors including the NSW Government’s budgetary priorities. Importantly, social housing policy must put Aboriginal people and a cultural lens at its centre.

Many of the land and property policy levers are likely to reside in how Land Rights and Native Title are administered in NSW. Crown Lands, for example, has committed to working with Aboriginal people to accelerate land transfers many of which could be developed for social housing. But with more than 38,000 unresolved claims (as of 2020), the task is enormous. (Refer State Strategic Plan – A Vision for Crown Lands 2020 and Crown Land 2031 – State Strategic Plan 2021).

Within the current policy landscape, the continued development and advocacy for good design guidelines and support for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing sector may offer the most practical approach to ensuring appropriately designed, maintained and managed dwellings.

The Government Architect’s Draft Connecting with Country Framework sets a new benchmark to thinking about development more generally and how to integrate principles of Country into design thinking. This, too, can offer ways of crafting stronger policy approaches.

²³⁹ NSW Government Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC), [Land and Housing Corporation](#), (online content) DPIE, 2023, accessed 15 May 2023.

5. Mobility interactions with housing policy

Section overview

This section examines current DCJ Housing policies which interact with housing mobility and its impacts. It also considers broader interactions with the social housing sector and potential future responses for supporting Aboriginal housing mobility.

Key findings

Gaps exist between DCJ Housing policy and practice and Aboriginal community perceptions and experiences

There is an existing gap between current DCJ Housing policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal communities around NSW. Broadly, the objectives of policy instruments appear to not be meeting community needs in practice. This is, in part, the result of not having Aboriginal communities included in policy design.

Housing providers have opportunities to learn and implement good practice.

Research identified several examples of good practice in support Aboriginal tenants and mobility. This is despite existing policy and housing stock supply barriers and capacity and capability barriers within the community housing sector itself. Key themes across the examples show the importance of cultural awareness, supporting people with housing stress and engaging with community voice.

Data gaps

This research encountered systemic data gaps due to differing systems between the range of social housing providers. The ACHP/CHP data sources often lacked the level of granularity, and are not always comparable with DCJ Housing data. This results in significant challenges in any meaningful comparative analysis.

Social housing policies support housing mobility to some extent

Social housing policies, including allowing for an extra bedroom for confirmed Aboriginal tenants, \$5 rent/rent reduction under some circumstances, extended timeframes and increased eligibility for certain assistance, for example Recognition as a Tenant/Succession of Tenancy, affiliation with a location and priority allocations for those in crisis, including DFV, are supporting housing mobility to a certain extent.

Community and tenant perceptions of DCJ Housing policy indicate current responses lack the systems to ensure policy is consistently achieving positive housing experiences for Aboriginal people and families across NSW. System wide adjustments, including further support and investment in social housing reforms, can have positive downstream effects for Aboriginal mobility.

AHO Housing Services Guidelines to support ACHPs

ACHP policies were not made available for this project however, a number of ACHPs attended consultations.

The 2017 AHO Housing Services Guidelines set out the minimum standards expected for registered ACHPs that are contracted by the AHO to manage Aboriginal housing properties

to deliver housing and housing related services.²⁴⁰ Each ACHP must have documented policy areas.

Sample of current CHP policies that interact with mobility

A sample of CHP policies that interact with mobility were reviewed. Most align with DCJ Housing policies however some services have different names e.g., Recognition as a Tenant (DCJ) and Succession of Tenancy (CHPs).

Current DCJ Housing policies which interact with housing mobility

The tables below outline the DCJ Housing policies and sub policies stakeholders engaged for the research most commonly cited as affecting their tenancy/and or mobility requirements, both negatively and positively. Following each table, these stakeholder views are outlined.

During a Tenancy Policy

Table 1: DCJ Housing During a Tenancy policy and sub policies

Policy Name	During a Tenancy Policy
Purpose	During a Tenancy Policy explains how DCJ Housing manages tenancies.
Description	<p>The tenant and DCJ Housing have rights and obligations under the Acts and guidelines listed below. The During a Tenancy Policy outlines how DCJ Housing will manage tenancies in accordance with these Acts, regulations and guidelines, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Housing Act 2001</i> • <i>Residential Tenancies Act 2010</i> • <i>Residential Tenancies Regulation 2019</i> • Residential Tenancy Agreement • Ministerial guidelines
Scope	This policy applies to all DCJ Housing and AHO tenancies managed by DCJ Housing. ²⁴¹
Sub-policy	People living in the home
Description	<p>Tenants have 28 days to advise DCJ Housing of changes in circumstance including changes to household income and household complement.</p> <p>DCJ Housing will take action against tenants failing to advise and provide evidence to confirm the type of household change under the <i>Residential Tenancies Act 2010</i> and/or the Rent Subsidy Non-Disclosure Policy.²⁴²</p>

²⁴⁰ NSW Government, Aboriginal Housing Office, [Housing Service Guidelines](#) (online content), 2017, accessed 18 October 2023.

²⁴¹ Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenancy Policy Supplement](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁴² Department of Communities and Justice, [During a Tenancy policy – Access to a Property](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

Sub-policy	Visitor Policy
Description	Tenants are permitted to have short-term visitors at their property; however, tenants must provide evidence on request (when there is an allegation) to DCJ Housing that their visitor resides at another address. Those who cannot provide acceptable evidence and stay longer than a month are considered unauthorised visitors.
Sub-policy	Visitor Sanctions
	<p>A Visitor Sanction may be used where there has been a breach of the Tenancy Agreement. A visitor sanction will be applied when behavioural requirements are not met by tenants, household members, or visitors; new people join the household without approval (including visitors staying in excess of 28 days); or when tenants receiving rent subsidies do not declare the income of all people living in the household.²⁴³</p> <p>Visitor sanctions are also used to combat antisocial behaviour.</p> <p>Having a visitor sanction means the tenant needs to apply for approval from DCJ Housing if a visitor wishes to stay at the property for more than 3 days.</p>
Banning Notice Policy	<p>Separate to the 'During a Tenancy' policy, DCJ Housing also has powers to limit access and use of public housing to people who do not have a legitimate reason to be on the premise under the Banning Notice Policy.</p> <p>In line with the Visitor Sanctions, DCJ Housing can also issue a banning notice "to people who are engaging in unlawful or antisocial activity or cannot demonstrate a reason to be in or enter the premises, in accordance with the <i>Inclosed Lands Protection Act 1901</i>, based on a recommendation from the NSW Police. This is irrespective of whether they are invited as guests by a resident."²⁴⁴</p>
Sub-policy	Unauthorised additional occupants
Description	<p>Tenants will be in breach of the terms of their tenancy agreement if they permit unauthorised additional occupants.</p> <p>DCJ Housing will take action under the <i>Residential Tenancies Act 2010</i> and/or the <i>Rent Subsidy Non-Disclosure Policy</i>.²⁴⁵</p>
Sub-policy	Authorised additional occupants

²⁴³ Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenancy Policy Supplement](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁴⁴ Department of Communities and Justice, [Banning Notice Policy](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁴⁵ Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenancy Policy Supplement](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

Description	Tenants must submit an Application for an Additional Occupant if they want an additional occupant to be authorised to live in their DCJ Housing property. If approved, rent subsidies will be reassessed based on the new household income.
Sub-policy	Notification of change of household circumstances
Description	Tenants have 28 days to advise DCJ Housing of changes in circumstances that may affect their tenancy including but not limited to the income and assets of household members. The rent subsidy is recalculated based on the updated household income. ²⁴⁶
Sub-policy	Being away from the property
Description	<p>DCJ Housing intends to maximise benefits gained from housing resources by ensuring properties are used and not left vacant over long periods. To ensure this, DCJ Housing has put in place the following measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenants require approval to be away from their home for more than six weeks • absences may be approved for up to six months,²⁴⁷ and • absences will not be approved of more than 12 months in total over a five-year period. <p>Further, during periods of absence, the tenant must appoint an agent to act on their behalf. The agent is required to undertake regular inspections of the property as well as to maintain the property's standard. However, the tenant remains legally responsible for meeting tenancy agreement obligations during their absence, with breaches resulting in DCJ Housing taking action in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal.</p> <p>There are also exemptions for medical conditions requiring regular treatment, or for tenants experiencing domestic violence.²⁴⁸</p>

Perceptions of visitor sub-policy

DCJ Housing policies under the During a Tenancy policy are important in reducing potentially negative outcomes that sometimes occur with too many visitors:

"We do have issues with visitors who overstay. They basically become a tenant, but they are not paying the rent. They are just there too long, and we are finding they are causing issues with the neighbours. We have a couple of properties where it is not the tenant and the kids

²⁴⁶ Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenancy Policy Supplement](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁴⁷ Tenants going to prison, rehabilitation centre, or to a nursing home can apply to retain tenancy for up to six months. If DCJ is reasonably satisfied the person will be away from more than six months, DCJ can ask the tenant to relinquish their tenancy. See, Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenancy Policy Supplement](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁴⁸ Department of Communities and Justice, [During a tenancy policy](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

causing issues, it's the people that are visiting. What do we do? ...it is on the tenant, but it is hard to help them understand that it's their lease that will be affected."²⁴⁹

However, visitor policies are also inhibiting mobility for a number of reasons. Firstly, several people consulted noted that visitors often wish to stay longer than the 28-day period dictated in DCJ Housing policies. DCJ Housing should demonstrate to tenants that this rule is flexible and respectful of the clients' needs.

*"I'm aware of a house where I've probably got three or four families living there at the moment and by the policies that I work under, that shouldn't be happening. [...] If it was DCJ, I know that after three weeks you are no longer a visitor. I can walk out my front door and the mob that live across the road from me, has probably got at least an extra two families staying there. Every time they see a white car pull up; I see them all running. [...] If I was the boss of everything there would be a policy that allowed for more than three weeks, and we know that people are going places at the moment and they're not going home because there is nowhere to go. The rent is so expensive."*²⁵⁰

There is a misconception that tenants must to notify DCJ Housing of every visitor. Tenants may have a person stay as a genuine short-term visitor for up to 28 days. However, as a genuine short-term visitor they must permanently reside at an alternative address. Approval for genuine visitors to stay for more than 28 days can be assessed by DCJ on a case-by-case basis.

The perceived need to notify DCJ Housing of visitors does not align with the unexpected nature of visitors to Aboriginal households. Further, people often do not have the time or mental capacity to report when visitors stay over.²⁵¹ This places stress on households who feel have to choose between their tenancy and supporting their family:

*"When my son was born, our rent went up. Then, when I had family come down for Christmas, I had a nosy neighbour. Next thing I get a knock on the door from Department of Housing. [...] They said to me for every week they're here we are owed a week rent. My father-in-law heard them, and he packed up and left the next day."*²⁵²

*"With Aboriginal families, extended family stay. A lot of Aboriginal people are in houses with the Department of Housing. They have a lot of rules about how many people can be in the house and for how long. A lot of people stay and it can upset the people who are living in the house. We don't always have the exact dates of when we are coming and going"*²⁵³

Further, a breach of visitor policy may lead to eviction, as exemplified by a service provider:

*"I know a CHP at the moment ...who is doing drive by at a house to try and catch the tenant out with more people in the house. In the 21st century that doesn't fly anymore. This person has gone out and taken video of these people and then they've been given a 90-day notice because they've taken photos of people driving by so it's a breach of their tenancy agreement because they are causing nuisance to the neighbours. That's discrimination."*²⁵⁴

DCJ Housing building trust and increasing informational communication with clients would serve to reduce the stress tenants feel when having visitors. Many tenants feel adversarial towards DCJ Housing and thus see visitor reporting as onerous and punitive. Visitor reporting does have the capacity to support tenants with unwanted guests. DCJ Housing must communicate the purpose of these policies to clients and frontline workers.

²⁴⁹ 7.5, ACHP Interview.

²⁵⁰ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

²⁵¹ 1.1, Service Workshop.

²⁵² 2.2, Community Yarning Circle.

²⁵³ 7.1, Community Interview.

²⁵⁴ 8.1, Service Interview.

Evictions remain a fear for many households fulfilling the cultural obligation of looking after their family, as a large number of visitors in the home will impact on upkeep and maintenance. Notably, housing providers may approve additional occupants even though it will result in overcrowding as the only other alternative is homelessness.

Case Study Six illustrates the above.

Case Study Six:

A tenant in the Central West has had their daughter and two granddaughters living with them for a few months. The tenant's daughter suffers with substance abuse issues. The tenant's niece also comes to stay regularly with her partner and three kids.

The tenant received a notice they had 10 days to vacate the extra occupants from the property. The tenant expressed their concern that they did not receive an email or phone call to warn them of the 10-day notice to vacate.

The tenant expressed concern their daughter has nowhere to go because accommodation options in the area are extremely limited. The daughter attempted to organise accommodation in the caravan park, however they were no longer taking families with children. The daughter was also unable to get temporary or emergency accommodation because the hotel where TA clients are placed was under renovation. The daughter does not own a car, limiting her ability to access services.

The property has some maintenance issues as result of overcrowding such as carpet stains, pen and crayon marks on the walls, broken tiles in the kitchen and paint coming off the doorway. The maintenance issues further contributed to the vacate notice.

The tenant was taken to the tribunal with \$1070 in rental arrears. They were ordered to pay an extra \$300 on top of their weekly rent. After the workshop for this research, the tenant was heading to the courthouse to follow up the notice to vacate as the situation remained unresolved.

DCJ Housing building trust and increasing informational communication with clients would serve to reduce the stress tenants feel when having visitors. Many tenants feel adversarial towards DCJ and thus see visitor reporting as onerous and punitive. Visitor reporting does have the capacity to support tenants with unwanted guests. DCJ must communicate the purpose of these policies to clients and frontline workers.

Perceptions of the 'people living in the home' policy

Community members and service providers raised concerns in relation to the 'people living in the home' policy and the tethering of rent to the income of additional people who stay over 28 days. The time taken for rent to return to normal after visitors leave also had a large financial impact on people.²⁵⁵ A primary example of this is rental levels increasing to include additional persons in a household, where the actual timeline of people in and out of a dwelling does not match the pace of reporting and changes to rental payment levels. This, combined with historic distrust of government, may be resulting in an unquantifiable level of underreporting of overcrowding.

"My rent went up for my own child because she's 18. What do you want me to do, kick her out?"²⁵⁶

"When it's time that there's an inspection everyone's gotta be out of the house."²⁵⁷

"DCJ will say there is \$2000 going into a house like that week. Why aren't we collecting more rent. But that isn't always going to be the case because they might be there for a few

²⁵⁵ 1.1, Service Workshop.

²⁵⁶ 5.1, Community yarning Circle.

²⁵⁷ 5.1, Community yarning Circle.

*months and then they're going to go and the one tenant who actually lives in the property is going to have to cop that rent."*²⁵⁸

DCJ Housing has advised that there is no change to a rental subsidy for genuine visitors, even if they stay over 28 days. If the person does not have a permanent address to return to and has stayed for more than 28 days, they are no longer a visitor, they are an additional occupant, and the rental subsidy is re-assessed, based on the income of everyone in the household. Every tenant is charged market rent and DCJ Housing pays a rental subsidy to household based on the income of the occupants (not visitors). It may appear that the rent is increasing, where actually the amount of the subsidy is decreasing. DCJ Housing does not charge more than market rent. Communications to tenants about the Visitor Policy and the Charging Rent Policy may help to increase an understanding about rent.

Being away from your home

Service providers expressed concern around tenancy impacts when people leave their properties for an extended period of time. Potential risks include rent in arrears or being evicted.²⁵⁹ Tenants may also feel hopelessness and have negative wellbeing impacts if they are deemed an unsatisfactory tenant.²⁶⁰

Participants found it helpful during absences when a contact of the family was able to maintain the property and protect it from damage.²⁶¹

However, community members at all sites felt that the being away from your home policy did not adequately support Aboriginal mobility needs. For instance, the requirement to notify DCJ Housing of absences does not account for the unexpected nature of Aboriginal mobility, leading to the underreporting of absences.

*"DCJ policies don't really marry up with those timeframes. Essentially, how can we say that Sorry Business is going to take a week, it could take two months, it could take six months. So, we don't really have insight on or mechanisms to incorporate that and support our tenants."*²⁶²

The absence from dwelling policy also provides limited financial considerations for people who are mobile and not eligible for rent reductions during mobility events such as Sorry Business:

*"I did notice that our clients [...] also ended up with their tenancy placed at risk, because they had to travel, they had people, you know, Sorry Business as well as just buying presents for the kids. We spoke about budgeting throughout the year, but they just said we can't do it. We can't do it on the income we received. It is impossible."*²⁶³

Charging Rent Policy

Table 2: DCJ Charging Rent Policy

Policy Name	Charging Rent Policy
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²⁵⁸ 4.11, ACHP Interview.

²⁵⁹ 6.3, ACHP Workshop

²⁶⁰ 6.3, ACHP Workshop

²⁶¹ 6.1, DCJ Interview

²⁶² 6.1, DCJ Interview

²⁶³ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

Purpose	The Charging Rent Policy explains how DCJ assesses rent charges. ²⁶⁴
Description	<p>DCJ requires all tenants to pay rent on a weekly basis, either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market rent: the amount of rent that a real estate agent or landlord would charge each week if the property were rented in the private market. or • Subsidised rent: the difference between the market rent and the rent a tenant pays based on their household's assessable income and rent assessment rules. <p>While DCJ charges market rent for all its properties, low- or moderate-income households may apply for a rent subsidy.</p>
Scope	The Charging Rent Policy applies to all tenants living in a property owned by LAHC and the AHO that is managed by DCJ. ²⁶⁵
Sub-policy	Calculating subsidised rent
Description	<p>Subsidised rent is calculated according to household size, type and gross assessable income.</p> <p>Eligible households will pay between 25% to 30% of household income as rent, with the minimum amount of rent to be paid set at \$5 per week.²⁶⁶</p> <p>In certain circumstances, such as a person is in custody, a nursing home, or rehabilitation centre, DCJ can apply \$5 rent for the period of the absence to help the tenant not go into rent arrears.²⁶⁷</p>
Sub-policy	Assessing income and assets to calculate subsidised rent
Description	<p>DCJ uses the gross assessable household income, when calculating a tenant's eligibility for a rent subsidy and/or amount of rent to be paid.</p> <p>A tenant must complete a Rent Subsidy Application, including proof of income received by all household members aged 18 years and over. If the tenant's partner is under 18, the tenant must also provide proof of their income.²⁶⁸</p>
Sub-policy	Assessing eligibility for the Start Work Bonus where a tenant or any member of the household over the age of 18 starts a paying job

²⁶⁴ Department of Communities and Justice, [Charing Rent Policy – Calculating subsidised rent](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁶⁵ Department of Communities and Justice, [Charing Rent Policy – Calculating subsidised rent](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁶⁶ Department of Communities and Justice, [Charing Rent Policy – Calculating subsidised rent](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁶⁷ Department of Communities and Justice, [Charing Rent Policy – Calculating subsidised rent](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁶⁸ Department of Communities and Justice, [Charing Rent Policy – Calculating subsidised rent](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

	<p>The aim of the Start Work Bonus is to encourage DCJ tenants to move into paying jobs.</p> <p>The Start Work Bonus provides for a grace period of up to 26 weeks from finding work to having a rent subsidy altered in line with the changed income.²⁶⁹</p>
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Rent reductions

According to the community members consulted for the research, policies around rent reduction had served to ease pressure on families. Policies such as these were underscored as beneficial, as they recognise the forced mobility people experience, and do not financially punish people for absences out of their control.

Nonetheless, rent reduction policy only applies in a set of strict circumstances, and does not apply for some drivers of mobility.²⁷⁰ Under DCJ Housing policy a tenant can request \$5 rent or DCJ Housing can apply \$5 rent without a tenant requesting it. For example, if DCJ Housing receives advice that a tenant has been incarcerated, a \$5 rent abatement can be applied without the tenant needing to request it. If there is no mechanism to enable information sharing between DCJ and an organisation, the tenant must provide consent to share information. This means that a third party can advise DCJ Housing of a tenant's change in circumstances, and DCJ can then apply the appropriate policies to help sustain the tenancy.

*I was in a Department of Housing house. I went through DV. Police didn't help me, Housing didn't help me. I nearly lost my life... I went to jail and they ended up putting a \$10,000 debt on my house.*²⁷¹

Social Housing Eligibility [and Allocations] Policy

Table 3: DCJ Housing Social Housing Eligibility [and Allocations] Policy

Policy Name	Social Housing Eligibility [and Allocations] Policy
Purpose	This Social Housing and Eligibility Policy seeks to ensure social housing assists those most in need.
Description	<p>This policy encompasses properties / tenancies managed by DCJ Housing and owned / provided by LAHC and the AHO. It also aligns with the community housing eligibility policy which covers tenancies managed by CHPs and ACHPs who are Housing Pathways providers.</p> <p>Clients under this policy are required to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low-income clients who can live independently without support or with appropriate support in place, and • low-income clients having difficulty obtaining appropriate affordable housing in the private market.

²⁶⁹ Department of Communities and Justice, [Charging Rent Policy – Calculating subsidised rent](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁷⁰ Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenancy Charges and Account Management Policy Supplement](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁷¹ 2.5, Community Member Interview.

Scope	Social Housing and Eligibility Policy applies to all applicants for housing assistance under Housing Pathways. ²⁷²
Sub-policy	Eligibility for social housing – entitlements
	<p>When matching and offering a property to a client, DCJ Housing takes into consideration the following factors:²⁷³</p> <p>Number of bedrooms: the numbers of bedrooms is based in the client's household size (and number of children). Aboriginal people are entitled to an additional bedroom to help them meet family responsibilities.</p> <p>Age: Elderly clients aged 80 years or older, or Aboriginal persons aged 55 years or older.</p> <p>Aboriginality: Aboriginal people may choose to be placed on the NSW Housing Register to be eligible for AHO properties, seek accelerated progression on the NSW Housing Register if they are over 55 years old, or may nominate their interest in living in a Senior Communities property if they are over 45 years old. Confirmation of Aboriginality is required through a LALC, ACCO, or Statutory Declaration. Preferred location: Clients can nominate a preferred location to live. When required in high-demand areas, Locational Needs Assessment are used to match clients to the approved allocation area when living in a high demand area is important to a client's physical and mental health. An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander client who has an affinity with a particular area satisfies locational need. In this case, affinity with an area is demonstrated by applicant's kinship group residing in the requested area or the area is the traditional homeland.</p> <p>Preferred type of property: matches to a house, townhouse, unit, high-rise unit or a studio and are allocated according to availability and client needs.²⁷⁴</p> <p>Having special needs: Clients may special requirements due to medical, social, and other needs.</p>
Sub-policy	Eligibility for priority housing assistance – urgent housing needs
	<p>There are four sub-categories for eligibility for priority housing assistance – urgent housing needs, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unstable housing circumstances 2. At risk factors 3. Existing accommodation is inappropriate for basic housing requirements

²⁷² Department of Communities and Justice, [Eligibility for Social Housing Policy](#), (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁷³ Department of Communities and Justice, [Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations policy supplement – Eligibility for social housing – entitlements](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁷⁴ Property type depends on the client's housing needs and is a lot more complicated as they may have needs around disability or medical requirements.

	<p>4. Stolen Generations Survivors and clients who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse²⁷⁵</p> <p>There are a number of circumstances that sit under each sub-category. Priority housing eligibility is based on a person's case by case needs, not their cohort, apart from Stolen Generations survivors and clients who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse. These two cohorts are eligible for priority housing if they are eligible for housing assistance.</p>
Sub-policy	Locational Needs
	<p>DCJ Housing makes locational needs assessments based on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Priority assistance clients 2. Ongoing medical condition or disability 3. Clients providing evidence to support request to live in a high demand area. For example, letters of support from health professionals.

Allocations

Professional and community participants at every site gave examples of people waiting for years to be allocated, as well as inappropriate allocations. This included Elders allocated to five-bedroom homes, large families placed in small houses, people with disability placed in properties far away from support services or houses located at great distances from transport options.^{276,277,278} Most service providers and community members commented that the housing shortage had compounded these issues.²⁷⁹

“ I know one who was [on the waiting list] for seven years. They put in for a house and they never got back to them. His kids don't like going to school [where they are currently living]”²⁸⁰

“You know, we see people who relocate to the area and are offered properties straightaway. But then we have clients, who we're working very closely with, who are at high risk of doing many things, whether it be relapsing, whether it be reoffending, whether it be staying with a violent partner, you name it everything. I feel like we're in a constant uphill battle against DCJ, just to try and get them assessed for priority housing. Even then, once they're placed on priority, it's just a waiting game. There's just nothing available.”²⁸¹

Extra bedroom policy

The extra bedroom policy for Aboriginal families in public housing also assists Aboriginal mobility and ways of living. For some households receiving a small number of visitors on a regular basis, this extra bedroom supports mobility and staying with family.

²⁷⁵ Department of Communities and Justice, [Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations policy supplement – Eligibility for priority housing assistance – urgent housing needs](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023

²⁷⁶ 4.2, Community Member Interview.

²⁷⁷ 1.1, Service Workshop.

²⁷⁸ 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

²⁷⁹ 1.4, ACHP Interview.

²⁸⁰ 4.4, Community Member Interview.

²⁸¹ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

However, a single extra bedroom cannot support the full scale of Aboriginal mobility. Community told us that mobility can be unexpected, with large groups of family staying for unknown periods of time.²⁸²

In response to the inadequate policy options available, DCJ Housing workers and service providers consulted for the research felt they had to approach supporting mobility in a strategic way, which sometimes meant bending the rules of policy to get positive outcomes for families.

Tenant Transfers

Table 4: DCJ Housing Tenant Transfers

Policy Name	Tenant Transfers ²⁸³
Purpose	To outline how DCJ Housing tenants may apply for a transfer to another property, when their home is no longer suitable.
Description	The names of approved applicants will be added to the NSW Housing Register. Waiting times are dependent on reason for transfer as well as the number of suitable vacant properties in the applicant's required location.
Scope	Any eligible social housing tenant may apply for a transfer. However, transfers are only approved for applicants with valid reasons for wanting to transfer.
Sub-policy	Tenancy re-instatement
	<p>DCJ Housing recognises that tenants may have to leave tenancies without first discussing the situation with their housing provider.</p> <p>Reasons outlined include leaving under duress, moving into residential care, or moving into custody (see 'during a tenancy - being away from the property' above). Tenancy reinstatement may be available in circumstances when there is a relationship breakdown.</p> <p>After disclosing the reason to housing providers, providers may require the tenant to release the property, with an offer to later re-instate that tenancy in an available suitable property.²⁸⁴</p>
Sub-policy	Overcrowding (moderate and severe)
	<p>In NSW, DCJ Housing employs the following definitions of housing overcrowding, including some measures of severity and impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate overcrowding: Moderate overcrowding is when there is an increase in the size of the household which results in the household having fewer bedrooms than they would otherwise be entitled to, but the overcrowding is not severe.²⁸⁵

²⁸² 8.2, Community Yarning Circle.

²⁸³ Department of Communities and Justice, [Transfer Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁸⁴ NSW Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenant transfers](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁸⁵ NSW Government Communities and Justice, [Transfer Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 10 May 2023.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe overcrowding: may arise as the result of reunited family, an award of custody for children, marriage, the birth of a child/children. Specific needs such as a disability or special medical need, severe behavioural problems or children of different genders sharing a room and reaching puberty.²⁸⁶
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Tenancy Reinstatement and Housing Priority

Various service providers commented on positive interactions between their clients and the Tenancy Reinstatement policy, including the category of Housing Priority. Under this policy, it is possible to have a tenancy reinstated when the tenant leaves under duress.²⁸⁷ For example, if a person is fleeing DFV or leaving custody, the tenant can apply to have their previous tenancy reinstated.²⁸⁸ This policy is an example of DCJ Housing ensuring people are not punished for mobility that is out of their control.

Perceptions of overcrowding measures and definitions

Consultation with community highlighted that such measures and related policy settings do not necessarily represent the views of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on overcrowding:

“DCJ’s overcrowding policy is far different from how us Blackfella’s see overcrowding. Overcrowding isn’t considered for our people. If there is a space on the floor or a spare bed, or if we have to double up on a mattress then that is what we have got to do. That’s because we are providing a roof over our family’s head.”²⁸⁹

Alternative models for determining whether a household is overcrowded or not include wellbeing and stress perspectives that look at the ability of occupants to exercise control – or have individual agency – over their environment. What underpins these alternate approaches is consultation and partnership with Aboriginal communities.

National overcrowding definitions

The Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) is used by Commonwealth Government for Closing the Gap reporting to set a measurable standard for assessing bedroom requirements and associated housing need. As this standard is embedded within Closing the Gap, state and territory governments must also report to this standard, though it is not embedded within the NSW policies. The assumption is that where occupancy fails to meet the standard, additional bedrooms will be required to address the gap.

CNOS uses age and gender to determine recommended bedroom occupancy limits:

- there should be no more than two persons per bedroom
- children under five years of age (ten years in NSW) and of opposite sexes may share a bedroom
- children over five years of age (ten years in NSW) and of opposite sexes should have separate bedrooms
- children under 18 years of age and of the same sex may share a bedroom, and
- single household members 18 years and older should have a separate bedroom, as should parents and couples.

²⁸⁶ NSW Government Communities and Justice, [Transfer Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 10 May 2023.

²⁸⁷ Department of Communities and Justice, [Tenant Transfers](#), (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 12 May 2023.

²⁸⁸ 6.1, DCJ Interview.

²⁸⁹ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), households that require at least one additional bedroom, based on this measure, are assessed as experiencing 'moderate overcrowding'. Houses that require two or more bedrooms are assessed as experiencing 'high' overcrowding; while those needing four or more additional bedrooms are 'severe', with occupants effectively being homeless.²⁹⁰

There is a body of literature on CNOS that suggests that it is a culturally biased measure based on non-Aboriginal notions of family composition and cultural values. Much of this literature argues that CNOS fails to account for cultural differences, particularly in Aboriginal families where crowding may not necessarily be a cause of stress and instead have benefits in fostering kinship relations.

*"The thing about the overcrowding stuff is they're using models based on Canadian models. The First Nations ... in those countries and in those jurisdictions are different than ours here. We're talking about the oldest, continuously surviving culture on the planet. That's got to mean something. And it's got to be part of those discussions, that needs to be the bedrock, cornerstones of the discussions from this point forward."*²⁹¹

Changing a tenancy

Table 5: DCJ Housing Changing a Tenancy Policy

Policy Name	Changing a Tenancy Policy
Purpose	The policy aims to explain the criteria for changing DCJ Housing managed tenancies.
Description	Changing a Tenancy is based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCJ Housing relocating a tenant for management purposes • Mutual exchange with another tenant, and • The original tenant dies or leaves the household as a result of being imprisoned or for health reasons.²⁹²
Scope	The policy applies to DCJ Housing managed tenancies (including AHO tenancies). Tenant initiated transfers are covered under the Transfer policy (see above).
Sub-policy	Mutual Exchange
	As per the policy, a mutual exchange is "where one tenant exchanges properties with another tenant. It provides a way for public housing and AHO tenants to move to a location they prefer, or to obtain more suitable accommodation". ²⁹³
Sub-policy	Recognition as a Tenant
	A household member or other eligible person connected to the household can request to continue living in a property managed by

²⁹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness](#), AIHW, Canberra.

²⁹¹ 8.1, Service Interview.

²⁹² NSW Government Communities and Justice, [Changing a Tenancy Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 10 May 2023.

²⁹³ NSW Government Communities and Justice, [Changing a Tenancy Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 10 May 2023.

	<p>DCJ Housing if the original tenant dies or leaves the household as a result of being imprisoned or for health reasons.²⁹⁴</p> <p>There is no succession of tenancy policy for DCJ managed housing. Notably, “DCJ will balance the rights of access to public housing and Aboriginal housing against the need to make public housing available to clients on the NSW Housing Register, particularly those approved for priority housing”.²⁹⁵</p> <p>If a householder member wishes to be Recognised as a Tenant, they must inform DCJ Housing as soon as possible and lodge an application within six weeks for non-Aboriginal persons, and ten weeks for Aboriginal persons.</p>
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Perceptions of Recognition as a Tenant

Community members expressed concern that leases could not easily be transferred to family members also residing in the home, creating an environment where a house may be lost if the lease holder dies or loses their tenancy.

“The house is in dad’s name. We have been in that house for 51 years now. [...] After my father passed, we needed to change it to my mother’s name and if I can’t get her Certificate of Aboriginality, they are going to downsize her and take the house off us [...] Mum’s got dementia and she is 80 years of age and she needs someone around her all the time. [...] If they were to take her out of that house it could cause great difficulties.”²⁹⁶

“They won’t put me down on the lease so what’s going to happen if my mum passes is that I am going to be kicked out on the street”²⁹⁷

“We might be renting them, but these houses are our homes”²⁹⁸

These policy interactions are leading to loss of family homes. In one example from a coastal site, an Elder and his family had been in the same public housing property since 1969. Within a week of the Elder’s death, the family were advised they had to vacate the premises. Understandably, this saddened the family, as the property was the only family home they had ever known. In circumstances such as this, DCJ Housing should have advised the family that they could apply for Recognition as a Tenant, to have the tenancy transferred to another eligible member of the household.

“when you have memories in that house, you’ve lived in that family home, it’s really hard for family members then to just see it go ...”²⁹⁹

Policy verse practice

While the above tables demonstrate there are some considerations for Aboriginal tenants and household members, a number of DCJ Housing staff were not aware of these policies or the level of discretion they had to Aboriginal clients:

“We don’t have anything in place or any mechanisms in policy to support Aboriginal people in their mobilities”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁴ NSW Government Communities and Justice, [Changing a Tenancy Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 10 May 2023.

²⁹⁵ NSW Government Communities and Justice, [Changing a Tenancy Policy](#) (online content) DCJ, 2022, accessed 10 May 2023.

²⁹⁶ 2.4, Community Member Interview.

²⁹⁷ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

²⁹⁸ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

²⁹⁹ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

³⁰⁰ 6.1, DCJ Interview.

DCJ Housing workers are trying to achieve the best outcomes for their Aboriginal clients, but some felt DCJ Housing's policies and systems were not in place to support them as staff members. This represents a gap between policy and practice.

*"They say we have to go off policy, which is black and white, but every person has a grey area. You can be dealing with someone that has multiple issues whether there is DFV, mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues or they just got out of jail. Trying to work with people's probation and parole and all that stuff so people can succeed in their tenancy"*³⁰¹

Most DCJ Housing policy is designed with an element of flexibility, and DCJ Housing team leaders can approve out of guidelines actions as long as the decision is substantiated and would stand up in any audit. DCJ Housing frontline staff across all nine sites are flexibly implementing policy though many felt they were doing this through 'finding the grey areas.' This highlights a need for better policy communication and training of DCJ Housing staff.

*"I think the people up higher need to have an understanding and give a congratulations or a thank you. It's just worry about KPI's. We want these people to succeed so sometimes you have to case manage people."*³⁰²

Temporary Accommodation

TA is provided as a support for people experiencing homelessness, DFV or other social issues. Many CHPs will also offer short term crisis housing such as refuges or homeless centres.³⁰³

Community and service providers at all sites said that gaps in TA were contributing to cycles of homelessness and impacted on mobility, elaborating that gaps in TA stemmed from the short timeframe permitted for people to find housing while in TA. Tenants commented that it was not long enough forcing people to become homeless.³⁰⁴

Participants also reported that TA being full was a common occurrence. A community member in one of the remote sites shared a story of not being able to access TA as it was full and not being able to stay with their family due to overcrowding. As such this community member became homeless with a three-month-old baby.³⁰⁵ Another community member shared a story of not being able to access TA during the floods.³⁰⁶

*"If Dubbo doesn't have the emergency accommodation, where do you go next?"*³⁰⁷

Other policies and responses to mobility

LAHC Policies

In addition to the DCJ Housing policies highlighted above, LAHC has a range of [policies](#) that may directly or indirectly have an impact upon Aboriginal mobility and its effect on housing and overcrowding.

These include:

- [Community Housing Provider Asset Management Allocation Policy \(2020\)](#)
- [Heating and Cooling \(2020\)](#)

³⁰¹ 4.10, Service Interview.

³⁰² 4.10, Service Interview.

³⁰³ Department of Communities and Justice, '[Housing Assistance Options Policy](#)' (online content) DCJ, 2021, accessed 10 May 2023.

³⁰⁴ 1.3, Service Interview.

³⁰⁵ 3.2, Community Member Interview.

³⁰⁶ 3.2, Community Member Interview

³⁰⁷ 7.4, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

- [Property Assessment Survey \(2021\)](#)
- [Strategic Tenant Relocations \(2021\)](#)
- [Community Housing Provider Direct Dealing Policy \(2022\)](#)
- [Local Area Analysis](#)

Those policies directly related to the built environment include the [Heating and Cooling](#) policy, which aims to deliver reverse cycle air conditioning and solar photovoltaic power systems to a mix of new and existing properties, prioritising retrofits to existing houses in communities most affected by climate change and increasing temperatures.

New air conditioners (ideally powered by renewables) are a necessary health response to the impacts of climate change and increasing summer temperatures. They also provide opportunity for Aboriginal people to stay on Country. However, rising energy prices are also disproportionately affecting social housing residents on low incomes, putting increasing strain on already tenuous energy security.

Complementary measures such as insulation, draught proofing, ceiling fans and solar systems are, according to the [Heating and Cooling](#) policy, subject to budget availability. Yet these are essential measures to improve energy efficiency and lower running costs.

It is recommended that these measures be viewed as essential and go hand in hand with the installation of new air conditioners to ensure effective, efficient and affordable comfort.

The [Strategic Tenant Relocations](#) policy outlines approaches to tenant relocation when properties are renovated, sold or redeveloped. A cultural lens on this policy would suggest that it is likely to create negative and involuntary mobility, causing further strains in other locations where people may be forced to move. Further, there is no guarantee that residents can move back into the house or neighbourhood once refurbishments or new development is complete. Again, this may adversely impact the ability of Aboriginal people to remain on Country and in community and is therefore contrary to the aim of fostering positive mobility and good housing experiences.

LAHC's [Local Area Analysis](#) papers note that, "We are prioritising building 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings that are well located close to transport and other amenities." While smaller units are important to meet the needs of singles and small families, many of those interviewed in this research suggested that it was larger 3- and 4-bedroom dwellings that were needed most to accommodate large families and visitors.

Child protection

As a driver of mobility, the child protection space has policy interaction with mobile Aboriginal people. Mobility can be a way to improve child protection by letting children move to stay with kin or on Country. However, community and service providers stressed that the housing policies in place were inhibiting them from taking care of family:

*"We have a family where we have got significant worries in that child protection space and you haven't got the services to support. But they've got a family member that is willing to come in and stay within the home and help out."*³⁰⁸

*"We've got three children who are in an alternate care arrangement but we can't place them back on Country back into their hometown. We've got family that are putting their hand up saying we can take them, but we need larger accommodation."*³⁰⁹

DCJ Housing policy and programs are not easily able to respond to these needs, limited by housing availability. Service providers in multiple sites shared stories of DCJ placing

³⁰⁸ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

³⁰⁹ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

children into unsafe or overcrowded houses and not considering the impact this would have on households.³¹⁰ Safety risks may include being in a house that is not secure or being around other household members that pose a risk. That being said, overcrowded households is a better alternative to breaking up families or risking homelessness for tenants. As such, DCJ must consider extra supports and working with local service providers to mitigate the safety risks associated with placing a child into an overcrowded environment.

Participants also highlighted that other supports could work to better support mobility and experiences. According to these participants, it was also difficult to access Centrelink supports if you were mobile and did not have a permanent address.³¹¹ Furthermore, participants held that Centrelink supports were too low for some people to even pay for social housing. While Centrelink is a federal responsibility, further consideration could be given around how states and territories work with the Commonwealth to support those most vulnerable.

“On the ground, I think anyone that is dealing with input into legislation needs to be talking about upping Centrelink payments. It’s just impossible for people to live.”³¹²

Service providers and community members at all sites spoke of the need for wraparound support to allow people to be mobile and have sustainable tenancies. These participants felt that any way people could be linked in with positive supports would have a positive impact on mobility. Service providers such as Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) services shared stories of providing opal cards, community transport and forms of TA to support mobility.³¹³ DCJ should continue to support these services as a way to support mobility and positive housing experience. The NSW government funded sustaining tenancies program is also relevant to meet these needs.

Local Coordinated Multiagency Offender Program

The Local Coordinated Multiagency Offender Program is a partnership between DCJ (including Corrective Services and Housing), Police and NSW Health to manage individuals in community with a history of reoffending or DFV.³¹⁴ The program aims to reduce reoffending and improve offender management in community. The program supports individuals to access services through prioritising access in some circumstances and streamlining processes to coordinate services and minimise retelling of personal circumstances.

The program operates in ten locations across NSW and is overseen by a number of Interagency and Multiagency working and coordination groups. For further details about interagency groups and collaborative practice, see Appendix A.

Broader social housing experiences

The following section outlines experiences of housing providers and their approaches within the social housing sector in NSW.

Mixed experiences of cultural awareness

There were positive stories provided of frontline DCJ Housing teams finding ways to support cultural safety in Western Sydney, including the example of a DCJ Housing team buying a coffee for themselves and the tenant on the way to visiting the property because they knew

³¹⁰ 1.4, ACHP Interview.

³¹¹ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

³¹² 2.9, ACHP Interview.

³¹³ 1.1, Service Workshop.

³¹⁴ NSW Government (n.d.) [Reducing Reoffending: Local Coordinated Multiagency offender management](#) (LCM) online content, accessed 14 August 2023.

the tenant would want to be hospitable but would struggle to do so. This kind of approach builds rapport and trust with DCJ Housing staff and vulnerable tenants.³¹⁵

“Family look after family. We acknowledge that is the way some families operate. If it gets to the point where the children suffer then it becomes a problem for us. There are some service providers out there and other agencies that think it’s an issue and you’ve got to stop and think, this is the way they have done this for I don’t know how many years.”³¹⁶

Case Study Seven:

DCJ Housing frontline staff provided examples of how they have previously dealt with overcrowding by being strategic with vacant properties and allocations. For example, there was a two- bedroom property that had 12 people living in it. The main tenant was the grandmother, and she wouldn’t allow the extra occupants to leave as she was supporting her grandchildren. DCJ Housing moved both families to live three houses away from each other to keep the family unit together, allowing the grandmother to continue supporting her grandchildren. This response mitigated the housing stress and overcrowding for the family group.

However, community members and service providers consulted provided significant examples of government policy seriously impacting their lives stemming from entrenched misunderstandings of Aboriginal ways of living.

“We need to exercise some sort of cultural restraint and really invest in cultural safety”³¹⁷

Applying a cultural lens to policy design and implementation is a first step to ensuring cultural safety in social housing policy generally, and DCJ Housing policy specifically. Various community participants across all sites were critical of the level of cultural awareness of DCJ Housing staff. Participants also critiqued the policy constraints staff must work within, as they were seen to curtail the ability of staff to provide housing solutions for Aboriginal people.

At the systems level, participants commented that current requirements for applications can be restrictive for Aboriginal community members.

“I think they need to be able to apply over the phone [...] when you apply for housing you go through everything, but you have still got to email some documents. That can be a challenge. People don’t have emails, or they can’t use computers.”³¹⁸

Culturally appropriate CHP and ACHP practices

The tenants in ACHP housing who participated in the research commonly agreed that their housing providers were responsive and culturally appropriate. When asked to expand on this, tenants agreed the most important part for them was feeling listened to. In practice, tenants and ACHP staff nominated the following common factors:

- open community rooms in housing precincts for community use
- building or modifying houses to be fit for purpose and respond to community need (for example, more housing for single women, Elder flats or transitional properties)
- sharing stories among the team about best practice and working with Aboriginal tenants
- applying policies such as absences, visitations and overcrowding on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the needs and circumstances of the tenant

³¹⁵ 8.1, Service Interview.

³¹⁶ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

³¹⁷ 8.1, Service Interview.

³¹⁸ 4.8, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

- providing wrap-around support to the tenant and their family as a response to housing stress and overcrowding. This can look like anything from linking people into homelessness supports to providing food packages, and
- exploring options for rent to buy schemes.

ACHPs who took part listed listening, building trust and negotiating with tenants as important foundations to implementing policies in an appropriate way.

“Trying to understand the situation. And then how can I best fit within policy reasonably, for the benefit of the household, or the person too? Yeah, and that’s, that’s the balance, whether it’s mobility or other things, trying to fit a good outcome within the current framework.”³¹⁹

Community conflict

Favouritism related to allocations of premises was a minor theme highlighted by CHPs and ACHPs. At some sites, community members also perceived acts of favouritism, claiming allocations for social housing had been made on the basis of familial or other connections.

“The nepotism that happens in this town to housing. And that’s why a lot of people do overcrowding and do live with family because they can’t get a house because Lands Council or housing or real estate”³²⁰

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, many LALCs use an external provider to manage their social housing properties. While this removes potential conflicts, including with family members, there can be problems with external providers. A LALC consulted shared a story of using an external provider to manage their houses. This provider did not upkeep maintenance on the properties leading to at least 19 properties requiring demolition, a huge financial loss to the LALC. NSWALC confirmed this story was not isolated to LALCs in regional areas.

“They were handed over and throughout the management the house may have burnt down or is in too poor of a condition to be relet”³²¹

Lack of capacity

Many smaller community housing providers are seen to be challenged by a lack of resources and capacity to manage properties and support tenants as effectively as larger CHPs.

“There’s a chance they may not be putting in the same time and effort that someone else might be. They may not be doing their inspections, may not be following up things like rental repairs. If they’re not inspecting the properties, it’s a bit hard to tell if the property is overcrowded.”³²²

“We’ve got 25 Land Councils within our zone. And they’re all doing different things. So we’ve got a few that manage their own, we’ve got a few that absolutely will not manage their own, don’t blame them. Yeah, so I know that there’s a couple of different ways they can go about it. And it’s just all personal preference. Some of them, they prefer to manage it themselves. They’ve got no issues. And that’s, that’s what works for them.[...] The number of houses that they’ve got to manage, of course, plays a huge part in that because, you know, if they’ve got less than 10 houses, that might be something manageable for a CEO to take on top of their everyday duties. However, you know, if they’re getting up there in the numbers, that’s it’s going to take a lot of time, it’s going to start consuming their time. So that’s probably when

³¹⁹ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

³²⁰ 4.3, Community Yarning Circle.

³²¹ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

³²² 4.9, Service Interview.

*they're looking at getting external providers in or even employing someone specifically to take care of the housing.*³²³

Using government systems

ACHPs often see overcrowding but do not have the policy levers for change. Providers expressed frustration with the system, at a number of levels, including:

- at the **administrative level** – for example, a lack integrated processes to support clients with up-to-date information on their housing applications
- a **systemic level**, coping with the reality of an overall housing shortage and also witnessing what they perceive as poor decision-making in relation to purchasing new housing stock, and
- at the **community level**, having to support vulnerable clients, including the ability to provide support for those with higher level or more complex needs, in addition to managing community tensions and inequities.

There is also an issue with LALCs managing properties in a system participants view as operating under non-responsive, Western constructs and approaches. An example of this is with NCAT proceedings. ACHPs have challenging front-line roles as administrators of the property 'charging and collecting rent' but also taking on advocacy and social support roles for tenants.³²⁴ As a result, ACHPs are being punished at the NCAT for not harshly enforcing rules.

*"They might not have paid rent in five years. So you take them to Tribunal. The first thing the [Tribunal] Member is going to ask you is where is all the documentation to show you have been following this up? Why have you let it get to five years? More than likely it will be thrown out because of that. And in saying that, if it is a successful hearing, a repayment plan might be put in place of \$5 a week"*³²⁵

Community members across all nine sites felt that despite ACHPs being Aboriginal providers they were being forced to implement policies that were not in line with Aboriginal ways of living, due managing houses under Western DCJ systems.

*"Those are the areas where we need to do this or we need to meet to maintain our accreditation, receive funding from government bodies, and then continue growing the housing that we do have and supporting the community into those houses. So that is a sort of a catch 22."*³²⁶

When attempting to apply flexibility to the policy system, CHPs and ACHPs felt that they are at risk in some situations.

*"If they choose not to implement the [state government] policies they might have those properties taken off them. [...] Those properties will be transferred to another housing provider."*³²⁷

Building and modifying houses

An ACHP in coastal NSW described being flexible with funding sources to achieve a housing continuum that responds to community need. When they had older people living in family homes, they redeveloped other properties into Elder units to make sure people had in fit-for-

³²³ 4.9, Service Interview.

³²⁴ 4.9, Service Interview.

³²⁵ 4.9, Service Interview.

³²⁶ 2.9, ACHP Interview.

³²⁷ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

purpose housing. Other communities are allowing tenants to have direct input into the house designs.

“We’ve got some Land Councils that are actively seeking grants, to provide more housing for the communities, whether that be a block of units or things like that, doing renovations to houses as well. So we’ve got we’ve got quite a few that are trying to do those sorts of things.”³²⁸

Allocations

Similar positive practices were shared for placing tenants into properties. A housing provider with a new unit built was able to immediately hand it over to an Elder who was a cancer patient and living in their car.³²⁹ Another housing provider shared a story of their staff member moving out of their own social housing property to allow a family fleeing DFV to live in a fit-for-purpose house. These examples show that some Aboriginal community members working within the social housing system are deeply connected to the communities that they are working in and draw on this knowledge to try to make the system work.

Providing the tenant with case management support

CHPs and ACHPs expressed the need to support people to reduce housing stress, sustain tenancies and break the cycle of homelessness. To achieve this many CHPs and ACHPs interviewed, partner with each other and support services to achieve the best outcomes for their client. If a tenant is stressed from overcrowding, an ACHP may refer their family to a SHS, TA or case manage them through internal supports. Likewise, DCJ Aboriginal Specialist staff support clients and, in certain locations, case management may be provided by the AHO program, Services Our Way.

Accessing support in general is often a barrier for Aboriginal people, including accessing supports for mobility and housing. Service providers noted many Aboriginal people were not aware of the supports that were available, commenting they had worked hard to educate community on what was out there that could help them.³³⁰ Despite this, government service providers underscored that Aboriginal people were generally reluctant to engage with services:

“Sometimes we don’t actually see anything because people don’t like to reach out because of the distrust historically of welfare services”³³¹

Some services such as SHS programs do outreach specifically with those most vulnerable and in homelessness. These services include targeted youth programs that go out and assist young people. It is also noted that the DCJ Housing Contact Centre is also a strong source of information. This should be advertised to service providers and community members along with building trust so people feel comfortable reaching out for support.

“Without the SHS program, then they probably wouldn’t know the subsidies that they can get.”³³²

Mobility assistance

Service providers shared stories around supports they had in place to assist people with mobility. These include employment assistance, assisting people to get their drivers licence or giving people Opal cards for public transport.

³²⁸ 4.9, Service Interview.

³²⁹ 1.3, Service Interview.

³³⁰ 1.1, Service Workshop.

³³¹ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

³³² 1.1, Service Workshop.

Community transport is another example of mobility assistance. Most community health services provide local transport to and from appointments. A Transport for NSW pilot program in Bourke is providing public transport to local residents, improving local mobility.

Supports for most vulnerable

There is an existing range of government supports in place for those who are most vulnerable. In particular, policy focuses on those who undertake forced mobility due to justice interactions, DFV or medical reasons. The responses from community members explored in the sections above suggest that these approaches could be applied more broadly or interact more collaboratively with DCJ Housing policy to achieve outcomes for Aboriginal tenants.

One example of this is the local coordinated management program.

“[the local coordinated management program] works alongside the parole officers and essentially makes sure for these clients if you jumped through all the hoops, if you did all your mental health appointments, if you did all your drug and alcohol appointments, you do all these things, they advocate for you to get into housing, like a flat.”³³³

Widespread perceptions of feeling unheard by DCJ Housing has led to a sense of disenfranchisement at the hands of government, continuing an entrenched intergenerational experience with authority. This is of particular pertinence to the social housing context, as it's the area of government meant to be supporting the most vulnerable. Most tenants interviewed felt they are not being listened to.

Community voice

The need to involve Aboriginal voice at all levels of policy design and implementation and process development was consistently raised across all nine sites. This was one of the common themes of the discussions held with community members, and examples were given of 'housing forums' held at the local or regional level in the past with former iterations of DCJ. Some community members referred to the Local Decision Making (LDM) run by Aboriginal Affairs NSW under its Ochre Policy. Under the policy, the NSW Government and regional Aboriginal governance bodies enter into agreements to jointly address agree regional priorities. The LDM model was designed in recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach does not align with success in Aboriginal communities.³³⁴

“We always come and stay with Mob, but the Government needs to come and see. There is never any change”³³⁵

“It doesn't matter how many Aboriginal reference groups or Aboriginal staff you have in your agency if you aren't reaching out and connecting with people on Country, on the ground, then you're not meeting the brief.”³³⁶

Further, some bodies and agencies are already undertaking research and consultation in the housing and mobility space. One example is Transport for NSW consultations with local Aboriginal stakeholders in Bourke around their transport and mobility needs. These consultations were undertaken in a way that was deemed culturally appropriate by local Aboriginal Elders.³³⁷ This data around mobility could be shared among government agencies to address existing siloes and gaps in information and increase the effectiveness of the consultation outcomes.

³³³ 4.6, Service Interview.

³³⁴ NSW Government Aboriginal Affairs NSW (2023) [Local Decision Making](#), accessed 12 May 2023

³³⁵ 1.3, Service Interview.

³³⁶ 8.1, Service Interview.

³³⁷ 4.7, Service Interview

“Bourke as an example, we did significant engagement with service providers in Bourke to find out what the gaps were, and what they what they were doing for transport because they had none. And then we go out to the community. So we use face to face conversations, we use Facebook, we have surveys online as well. Sometimes we attend interagency meetings and meet with different organisations face to face as well.”³³⁸

The Murdi Paaki Regional Alliance has also led a range of community consultation, data gathering and reporting on housing, including what dwellings the community needs. The Alliance has also created a regional environmental health plan and a business case to drive meeting community needs.³³⁹ An alternative energy project has already been implemented under the plan. Consultation with community revealed, demonstration of action, such as this Murdi Paaki Regional Alliance example, serves to build community trust.

Community members in Lake Macquarie and Wollongong shared stories of AHO decision makers visiting them in their services or on properties. This allowed for consultation with leadership and led to speedy outcomes. However, community members felt this was no longer happening.

Options for home ownership

Earlier in this report, the work of Professor Kerry Arabena on Aboriginal housing, health and wealth was mentioned to explain that health, housing and wealth can be powerful agents of population-level betterment. Home ownership does not simply provide financial security. Some of the community members in yarning circles spoke of seeing home ownership as having somewhere safe to come home to, and a way to reduce stress and insecurity.³⁴⁰

“I think the fact the tenant has a rental history should be taken into account if they’re to purchase the property. [...] I think if they’re living in a property for forty odd years, why can’t that rent be used to buy that house after a while or giving them an option to buy something else.”³⁴¹

“What we are trying to do here is build a home that they can actually own, they can live in, look after it and pass it on to the next generation.”³⁴²

Secure, stable and sustainable housing is the bedrock of wellbeing for people. Community members and service providers at all sites in this research stressed the need for policy change to support Aboriginal housing, mobility and wellbeing.

Suggestions for future policy development

As recognised by Moskos et al in *What works to sustain Indigenous tenancies in Australia* (2022), a one-size-fits-all approach to housing policy and practice is unlikely to support Aboriginal people realise their aspirations. Housing policies and programs need to be flexible and holistic, with different types of support provided depending on the circumstances of an individual and the housing outcomes they aspire to.³⁴³ This was reflected in consultations:

“Being purpose built for families. Our culture is not going to change. We are very family orientated and so, we have to fit with the system and... sometimes the system has to fit with us... Our families are going to stay together and the chances of our family staying together is

³³⁸ 4.7, Service Interview

³³⁹ 4.11 Service Interview

³⁴⁰ Arabena K, Holland C and Hamilton S (2020) [*Reimagining Indigenous Housing, Health and Wealth: The Necessary Ecological Response to Unlock the Potential in the Indigenous Estate*](#), Karabena Publishing, Melbourne, accessed 8 May 2023.

³⁴¹ 4.11 Service Interview

³⁴² 4.5 Community interview

³⁴³ Moskos, M., Isherwood, L., Dockery, M., Baker, E. and Pham, A. (2022) [*‘What works’ to sustain Indigenous tenancies in Australia*](#).

*a lot more is if we have the houses built... We as a people had to adapt to the system.
Systems never adapted to us”³⁴⁴*

“I have a client who is 42 years old. Heroin and opioids his whole life. He’s never had his own house. Whenever you get out of jail, you’re living under someone else’s rules. It’s hard to manage if you have a bad day, you gotta come back to someone else’s rules. [...] I just think if there was a [housing] option it could change his life. [...] not having the trickle on effects with family, domestic family violence is cut out of equation, it’s only a single bedroom flat.”³⁴⁵

Outlined in the section below are future policy design principles and actions available to DCJ Housing to support positive experiences of Aboriginal mobility. While DCJ Housing’s policy levers cover a wide range of areas, implementing some of the principles outlined would necessitate extending beyond DCJ Housing’s remit and require buy-in and partnerships across government agencies and the service sector.

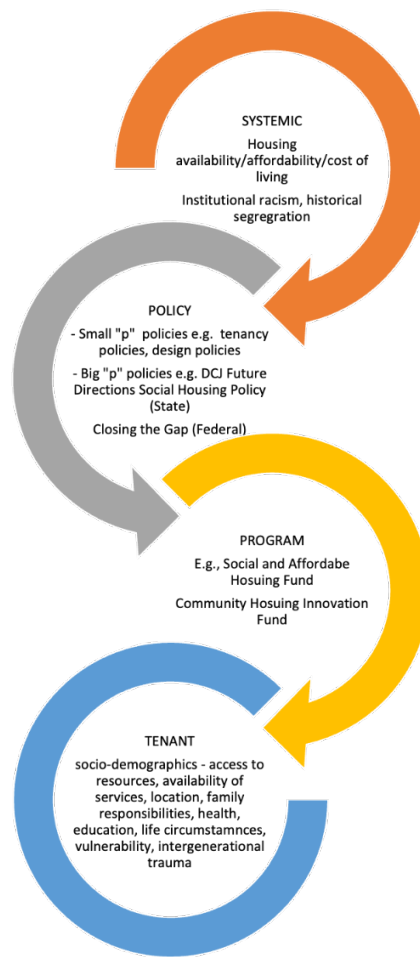
Furthermore, there are systems level issues that should be considered in the context of future policy making going forward. These systemic issues have been highlighted throughout the report and include factors such as access to appropriate and affordable housing, and institutional and systemic racism.

The below diagram conceptualises the flow of influencing factors from system level down to impacts on tenants relevant to this section. To improve outcomes for tenants, change must occur at all levels.

Figure 5: Levels of housing policy development

³⁴⁴ 6.3, ACHP Workshop.

³⁴⁵ 4.6, Community Corrections Interview.



Source: Adapted from Moskos, M., Isherwood, L., Dockery, M., Baker, E. and Pham, A. (2022) [‘What works’ to sustain Indigenous tenancies in Australia](#), AHURI Final Report No. 374, p 4-5.

Policy effectiveness review

The current suite of DCJ Housing and social housing policies and guidelines may benefit from a contemporary review to assess overall effectiveness. Implementation impacts should be a part of any review, as what was heard across the nine sites was a disconnect between existing policy and practice and what is experienced by Aboriginal communities. A review using an Aboriginal cultural lens is also required, taking into account the following:

- the often regular changes in Aboriginal families and households
- better awareness of the impacts of family violence, trauma, substance abuse and incarceration, and
- the cost of housing and rising costs of living

Flexibility in policy and practice

CHPs and ACHPs seek shared practices around client centred tenancy inspections such as rescheduling when tenants are away and being more understanding around the general upkeep of overcrowded properties.³⁴⁶

“We did get reports in around overcrowding and we went back to the people reporting and said what do you see as the solution here and nine times out of ten they didn’t have one. We ask the family if they’ve got an issue and if they’re worried about the overcrowding and if so I

³⁴⁶ 7.1, Community Interview.

will go hell for leather in supporting them [...] If they say we have got it covered then we will back out, there is no need to intervene.”³⁴⁷

As noted above, most DCJ Housing policy is also designed with an element of flexibility.

Responsive and respectful communication

“We want a voice, and we want our voices heard”³⁴⁸

To be responsive to community needs listening and understanding community is paramount. Frontline staff in Central NSW believe all DCJ Housing staff should know the Country they are working on and the significance of the history of the area. It was noted that staff members in Orange attend local events such as Harmony Day, NAIDOC events and in person training with local service providers.³⁴⁹

A community participant in Dubbo felt that there could be better communication between housing services and tenants. For example, a miscommunication led a tenant to believe they would be able to transfer their social housing tenancy from another part of regional NSW to Dubbo, but this was not possible under the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010*. This resulted in them (and their children) not being able to secure housing in Dubbo and having to rely first on friends, then eventually, a refuge.³⁵⁰

DCJ Housing staff noted that internal communication could be improved such as providing consistent case notes.

The best way to design appropriate communication standards for engaging with Aboriginal communities is to design them with the communities and their organisations. Participants in the coastal sites were adept at offering solutions such as DCJ Housing explaining their reasons for making decisions and not simply advising of the decisions in a communication vacuum. A structure for local governance that includes Aboriginal tenants was raised with a specific suggestion that the boards of community housing providers should include Aboriginal representation.

“We need to see more government agents, like the policy developers, or people who are creating the policy, to come out in the community there needs to be more consultation”³⁵¹

Community members and service providers at all sites expressed how important it is to have actual communication with decision makers. This does not include consultants or contracted researchers. This could include decision makers attending forums, yarning with community members or better communication why decisions are being made through any avenue of communication.

People would like to see more transparency and points of contact with DCJ Housing on questions related to housing lists, policies and DCJ Housing decision making. For many people, digital literacy is an issue meaning accessing policy information on a website can be challenging. Online information and centralised call centres also lack a human touch in the communication that communities are calling for. As such, DCJ Housing must investigate more appropriate ways of client communication such as yarning circles, client home visits or visiting community events.

Empowering Aboriginal communities

³⁴⁷ 4.1, DCJ Interview.

³⁴⁸ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

³⁴⁹ 6.1, DCJ Interview.

³⁵⁰ 7.1, Community Interview..

³⁵¹ 2.3, Community Yarning Circle.

Self-determination and embedding Aboriginal voices and perspectives into policy development and decision making supports better outcomes. This has not been attempted in the in the context of Aboriginal mobility in NSW.

“Think about how the supports can empower people; give them a hand up not a handout.”³⁵²

Where possible, CHPs and other related services and initiatives should be locally driven and connected to the local Aboriginal community. Intentions from government to keep local organisations funded were raised, as were instances where well resourced, national organisations win tenders over local CHPs.³⁵³ This issue was raised by service providers at multiple sites around NSW.

“We’ve got the asset base we just need to get the circumstances right to have an appropriate and well managed portfolio [we need to get the infrastructure right to implement] opportunities for purchases, rent to buy, sub-division, new lands, new builds where people can put their own houses on there [this will allow] for income streams to cover for any shortfalls that will fund growth and development and empower financial success of that community.”³⁵⁴

One simple example given by service providers of empowering local communities was building capacity of local Aboriginal tradespeople to undertake maintenance and upgrades on social housing properties. Tenants expressed that this would make them feel safer and more heard.

Supports to home ownership

Housing providers could support Housing Affordability schemes, helping families to build positive rental histories, save money for a ‘housing kitty’ and to assist with loans.³⁵⁵ The long-term promotion of intergenerational wealth so that Aboriginal families move out of social housing is a valid consideration. Rent to buy schemes are an option raised by some participants in the context of self-determination.³⁵⁶

Collaborative and integrated service

Service integration and coordination is essential for supporting Aboriginal mobility. Policy responses require a strong orientation towards integrated approaches that break down siloes between universal services that support mobility (such as housing, health and education). Options could include assertive outreach that is culturally appropriate and in particular breaks down siloes between housing and health.

An ACHP interviewed described a situation where a tenant had vacated a property for a long period of time. As there was no information about where the tenant was, the ACHP was preparing to deem the property abandoned’. The tenant returned just before the process was finalised. The tenant told their NDIS worker that they were in hospital with a heart condition, but this information had not been reported by the NDIS to the ACHP, which would have allowed the ACHP to apply the appropriate policies to sustain the tenancy. It was down to luck that the tenant was discharged from hospital well-timed; otherwise, they would not have been able to return to the house.³⁵⁷

DCJ Housing staff also identified opportunities for tenants to be linked up with support services as early as possible, especially around mental health. In DCJ Housing’s view, tenants with access to more integrated support are more likely to have better tenancies.

³⁵² 4.5, Community Member Interview.

³⁵³ 7.5, ACHP Interview.

³⁵⁴ 5.1, Community Yarning Circle.

³⁵⁵ 7.4, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

³⁵⁶ 7.4, Aboriginal Affairs Interview

³⁵⁷ 7.2, ACHP Interview.

There is more work to be done to better understand Aboriginal tenant needs and the underlying issues so that those with mental health issues are not all placed together in the same blocks of units in some areas.³⁵⁸

DCJ Housing should look to consolidate efforts in this area with other initiatives underway to support Aboriginal mobility. For example, research is underway by AHURI and Murdi Paaki to better understand mobility needs, learning from examples of best practice and promising initiatives in other jurisdictions.

Innovative thinking

Participants at all sites said that DCJ Housing and government more broadly needs to think outside the box in policy development and responses to housing stress.

“We had a family say I’ve got a garden shed in the backyard; can you help me set it up as a bedroom. Can you buy us beds and a small little fridge and stuff [...] why can’t we harness that.”³⁵⁹

Examples from community and literature for addressing the ebb and flow of Aboriginal mobility and overcrowding included:

- core and cluster models of social housing³⁶⁰
- flexible and portable, and
- accommodation such as pods, caravans, demountables or granny flats.

Particularly for young people, what we find is, it’s when young people are living in overcrowded housing, and they get to an age, start arguing and fight start. And that’s where a lot of that family violence sometimes can come from. And what we find is, if they have their own space, you know, that will lessen the risk of the family violence [...] So we actually proposed [to DCJ the idea of] if you were able to do a little pod or something like that, that could be like putting the backyard of this house. So the young people then can have their own space [...].”³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ 7.4, Aboriginal Affairs Interview.

³⁵⁹ 5.2, Service Interview.

³⁶⁰ Core and Cluster is an innovative model that allows for independent living and privacy while also providing access to supports. Under the Core and Cluster model, self-contained accommodation is located next to a ‘core’, which provides access to services such as counselling, legal assistance, education and employment support. The sites may contain meeting rooms, audio-visual equipment for court appearances, communal kitchens, and playgrounds.

Department of Communities and Justice, (2022) [What is Core and Cluster?](#), DCJ

³⁶¹ 5.2, Service Interview.

Appendix A: Collaborative Practice

Key finding

Collaborative practice brings together diverse stakeholders to discuss issues across a broad range of service types

Analysis of the service types and locations of the existing interagency meetings suggests that, while they are similarly structured across Districts and types, they aim to serve a locally-identified purpose or need. The research identified a number of areas to increase collaborative practice including education, climate change and justice.

Collaborative practice has become central to how government works in Australia. This shift is in part an acknowledgement of the limitations of a siloed service system.³⁶² As outlined by McDonald and Rosier in 2011 *'Agencies that work alone (i.e., in "silos") cannot tackle significant, intractable problems as effectively as agencies that work in collaboration. Furthermore, a siloed service system typically cannot meet the needs of families with multiple and complex problems as effectively as agencies that work in collaboration'*.³⁶³

An interagency meeting is a meeting where two or more representatives of different agencies, departments or organisations meet to discuss or disclose information pertinent to the purpose of coordinating services relevant to their work. Interagency meetings are commonly used in the social policy arena of government including health, education, justice, housing, child protection, family services more broadly, DFV and Aboriginal Affairs sectors.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY) provides a set of characteristics for collaboration within and across government in the form of an interagency:

- Dense, interdependent connections with multiple partners across traditional silos
- Frequent communication leading to cooperative and coordinated approaches
- Tactical information sharing via a cooperative approach to sharing information in a strategic way
- Pooled, collective resources in order to achieve shared goals
- Negotiated shared goals requiring participating agencies to adopt a shared vision and commit to collective goals, and
- Shared power between organisations with trust nominated as a critical aspect of this process.³⁶⁴

Collaboration via an interagency model may include funded NGO service providers, or may be purely inter or intragovernmental. The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) cites two situations where a collaborative, interagency approach is preferred: for problems with inherent complexity that fall into the domains between two organisations such as

³⁶² Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies: Australian Family Relationships Clearing House, McDonald, M and Rasier, R (2011a) *AFRC briefings*, No. 21-A 2011 Interagency collaboration: Part A: What is it, what does it look like, when is it needed and what supports it?, page 1, <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/interagency-collaboration-part-what-it-what-does-it-look-when> accessed 5 May 2023

³⁶³ (2011b) *AFRC briefings*, No. 21-A 2011, Interagency collaboration: Part A: What is it, what does it look like, when is it needed and what supports it?, page 2, AIFS website, accessed 5 May 2023

³⁶⁴ (2013b) *What is collaboration? Fact sheet 1*, https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/289/filename/Advancing_Collaboration_Practice_-_Fact_Sheet_1_-_What_is_collaboration.pdf, accessed 5 May 2023

homelessness and poverty; and when dealing with vulnerable and at-risk families facing multiple and complex problems that cannot be resolved by a single service provider.³⁶⁵

To inform the analysis, Inside Policy was provided with an overview of 58 established interagency meetings across the seven District Clusters. These were constituted across ten service types as follows:

- All service
- Housing
- Health
- Mental Health
- Child Protection
- Employment
- Justice
- Police
- Youth, and
- Aboriginal Reference Groups.

Of the housing service stream, interagency meetings broadly include the following:

- Meeting regularly, generally on a bi-monthly basis.
- Bringing together government (i.e. AHO, DCJ, NSW Health, local council) and non-government (i.e. service providers, charitable organisations, housing providers) teams.
- Developing strategies and providing advice to address issues experienced by tenants, housing providers, or people experiencing homelessness (depending on the focus of the interagency meeting).
- Coordinating outreach activities, case management, and referrals.
- Supporting tenant housing applications and housing offers.

Partnering with Aboriginal organisations, such as Aboriginal Medical Services and Aboriginal Legal Services would also strengthen collaborative, person-centred and culturally appropriate service delivery for shared Aboriginal clients.

The other interagency meeting types reviewed are generally structured similarly to the above (i.e. meeting monthly or bi-monthly, have government and non-government membership), but cover content related to their area of focus (i.e. health, child protection). See Appendix F for an overview of the current interagency meetings as at May 2023.

Themes of collaborative practice for further exploration

A number of key issues arose through the research of potential areas of collaborative practice. They are included here for the potential for further consideration at the inter-agency level.

Post release prisoners

Better understand how current processes are negatively impacting Aboriginal people and their communities upon release from a correctional facility in terms of overcrowding, endangering tenant leases and other negative outcomes.

Family safety

³⁶⁵ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies: Australian Family Relationships Clearing House, McDonald, M and Rasier, R (2011a) *AFRC briefings*, No. 21-A 2011 Interagency collaboration: Part A: What is it, what does it look like, when is it needed and what supports it?, page 6, <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/interagency-collaboration-part-what-it-what-does-it-look-when> accessed 5 May 2023

Consider how mobility can be driven by the need for family safety. Understand how safety outcomes are affected by lack of available and appropriate social housing options.

Rural health access

Review the extent to which intra-regional and intra-state mobility is driven by the need to access health services for Aboriginal people in regional NSW.

Transport barriers

Consider how transport barriers may be impacting access for Aboriginal communities at the urban/macro, precinct/neighbourhood and residential scales.

Education

Consider how flexible schooling policies could support Aboriginal mobility. Explore how Aboriginal people travel for education opportunities and how social housing policies and practice may impact individuals seeking better educational outcomes.

Climate change impacts

Better understand how increasing climate events are driving Aboriginal mobility. Ensure disaster recovery approaches are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

Appendix B: MRG membership list

Representative	Position and Organisation
Andreas Vorst-Parkes	Manager, Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes, DCJ
Leetina Smith	Senior Program Officer, Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes, DCJ
Tenisha Lawrence	Ngarra Housing and Homelessness Aboriginal Staff Network, DCJ Housing
Deslin Foster	Director, Aboriginal Housing Office
Christine Pocock	Housing Director, Housing, Disability and District Services (HDDS), Frontline, DCJ Housing
Kim Campbell	Housing Operations Manager, Housing, Disability and District Services (HDDS), Frontline, DCJ Housing
Daniel Barakate	Director, Child Protection and Permanency, Districts and Youth Justice, (CPPYJ), DCJ
Tristan Webb	Principal Policy Officer, Policy and Innovation, LAHC
Ian Randall	Manager, CPPYJ, DCJ
Natalina Cheatham	Senior Project Officer, CPPYJ, DCJ
Lizzie May	Project Officer, CPPYJ, DCJ
Danielle Gentles	Manager, Property and Management Transfers, Housing Statewide Services (HSS), DCJ Housing
Lisa Sampson	Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA)
Adam West	Head of Business Services, Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) NSW
Joanne McLean	Senior Program Officer, Industry Support and Development, Community Housing Branch, DCJ
Jenny White	Manager, Industry Support and Development, Community Housing Branch, DCJ
Jacob Allen	Team Leader, Bankstown, HDDS, DCJ Housing
Tamsin Knight	Manager, Homelessness Strategy, SPC, DCJ
Maria Kevin	Manager, Research and Analysis, AHO
Sarah Greenless	Senior Policy Officer, SPC, DCJ

Michelle Craig	Manager, Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service
Stephen Powter	Business Development, NSW Aboriginal Land Council
Tracey Stokoe	Executive Director, ISSNSW District, HDDS, DCJ
Monique Wiseman	Homelessness NSW
Kylie Jane Nash	Community Corrections, Corrective Services
Natalie Clark	Manager and Project Lead, Housing Policy, Quality and Review, HSS, HDDS, DCJ Housing
William Hayman	Senior Project Officer, Housing Policy, Quality and Review, HSS, HDDS, DCJ Housing
Melanie Goldstein	Identified Project Officer, Housing Policy, Quality and Review, HSS, HDDS, DCJ Housing
Sarah Matthews	Identified Project Officer, Housing Policy, Quality and Review, HSS, HDDS, DCJ Housing
Claire Wadsworth	Project Officer, Housing Policy, Quality and Review, HSS, HDDS, DCJ Housing
Amy Barnes	Facilitator, Ngurra Advisory
Debbie Lee	NSW Policy Closing the Gap NSW Officer, First Peoples Disability Network
Harriette Poiner	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO)
Julie Elias	Manager, Policy Review, HSS, HDDS, DCJ Housing
Sharif Deen	NSW Aboriginal Land Council

Appendix C: Discussion guides and consultation tools

This section includes the interview guides, roundtable and workshop agendas and participant pre-reading material.

Interview / Focus Group: DCJ, Serviced Providers and Aboriginal Organisations

Question guide

Do you have any questions about our research or what we are doing today?
Can you introduce yourself/yourselves and tell me where you are from?
<p>When you think about mobility (people moving from place to place) what does that look like to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the reasons Aboriginal people might move around the state? • How long might they be there? • How will they get there and back again? • How does this affect the places they left? • How does it affect the places they go?
<p>How do people's mobility effect the people where they go?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families? • Communities? • Themselves? • Positive? • Negative?
<p>How does mobility effect housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their own? • The households they visit?
<p>I want to ask about overcrowding and other negative effects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you know that having people staying in a household is having a negative effect? • What does overcrowding look like to you? • What do you think is the relationship between mobility and housing stress?
What are the current responses to mobility, overcrowding and housing stress?
<p>What do you think could happen to support people that want or need to be mobile?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role for social housing providers? • What is the role for Aboriginal organisations? • What is the role for service and support providers?
<p>How can households that have people staying be better supported?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role for social housing providers? • What is the role for Aboriginal organisations? • What is the role for service and support providers?
Is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to say about mobility, housing, overcrowding or anything we have talked about today?
Thank you for your time

Interview / Focus Group Outline: Tenants and Community Members

Question guide

Do you have any questions about our research or what we are doing today?
Can you introduce yourself/yourselves and tell me where you are from?
<p>When you think about mobility (people moving from place to place) what does that look like to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the reasons Aboriginal people might move around the state? • Can you tell me a little about what it looks like • How long might they be there? • How does this affect the places they left? • How does it affect the places they go?
<p>How do people's mobility effect the people where they go?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families? • Communities? • Themselves? • Positive? • Negative?
<p>How does mobility effect housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their own? • The households they visit?
<p>I want to ask about overcrowding and other negative effects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you know that having people staying in a household is having a negative effect? • What does overcrowding look like to you? • What other risks come with having people staying at the house?
What do you think could happen to support people that want or need to be mobile?
<p>How can households that have people staying be better supported?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings and homes? • Services? • Health and wellbeing? • Maintaining housing?
Is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to say about mobility, housing, overcrowding or anything we have talked about today?
<p>Thank you for your time</p> <p>(provide incentive card/s)</p>

Workshop outline

Greet participants

- Offer refreshments
- Set up materials
- Social chat
- Ask participants to add their name and organisation to the attendance sheet

Acknowledgement or Welcome to Country

- Welcome if this has been arranged
- Acknowledge Country

Introductions

- Introduce Inside Policy team.
- Invite DCJ representative or Mobility Project Reference Group member to introduce themselves and set the scene.
- Invite participants to introduce themselves and say why they think it is important to be talking about mobility and housing.

Brainstorm - Defining Mobility

Ask participants to say what they think we mean when we say mobility. Use prompts to get more information. Record all responses on butchers paper.

What are the reasons Aboriginal people travel?

What is different about Aboriginal people's mobility and others?

Effects of mobility

Small groups activity

Break participants into groups of 3 – 4 and provide each group with Printable 1 and markers.

Remind the groups that they will need to nominate a scribe and speaker.

Ask small groups to discuss and write down their responses to the following questions.

What are the positive and negative effects of mobility on?

- Housing
- Culture
- Family
- Health and wellbeing
- Communities

Break

Focus on housing

As participants to break into pairs for 5 minutes and briefly discuss the following questions.

What are the housing risks associated with mobility?

How do we recognise overcrowding or other issues arising from mobility?

How do we currently respond?

- To mobility?
- To overcrowding?
- To housing stress?

Debrief their discussion by question and record the responses on butchers paper.

A better response

Place butchers paper with the following themes around the room. Provide participants with markers and post-it notes and invite them to move around the room writing down what they think could be done to improve our response in relation to each theme.

- Supporting mobility
- Overcrowding
- Housing stress
- (other themes as guided by workshop outputs)

Debrief by walking around the room and calling out post-its to explore key ideas further.

Close

- outline any next steps,
- invite questions
- thank participants, and
- close the workshop.

Appendix D: Literature review

Inside Policy and The Fulcrum Agency undertook a literature review better understand Aboriginal mobility, overcrowding and approaches to social housing solutions to meet Indigenous community needs, both domestic and international in comparative context. The review focused on a range of materials, including policy and regulatory arrangements to better understand a suite of domains including:

- The mobility of Aboriginal people and its impacts on housing, communities and the social housing system
- Options for flexible service delivery, including tenancies
- Social housing policies related to mobility, including how providers define overcrowding
- Closing the Gap use of CNOS to measure overcrowding
- Options for redefining overcrowding
- Innovative solutions for accommodating large families
- Land and property solutions to address overcrowding and support mobility
- Cross-jurisdictional consideration of initiatives to support mobility, and
- Best practice based on domestic and international literature.

Sixty published reports, policy and regulatory arrangements were reviewed including:

- Two Australian government guides on housing
- Seven NSW government policy, strategy or guides on social housing, Crown Lands, design guides and standards
- One South Australian social housing policy
- One World Health Organisation guideline on housing and health
- 37 journal articles and papers published in Australia
- Five journal articles and papers
- Four journal articles and papers published in Canada, and
- One international article comparing Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Literature review key findings

The key findings from the literature review were:

Table 10 Key Findings from the Literature Review.

Domain	Key Findings
The mobility of Aboriginal people and its impacts on housing, communities, and the social housing system.	(Voluntary) Aboriginal mobility is largely driven by kinship relationships and is not confined by town limits and state borders.
	Aboriginal mobility is viewed as negative by service providers.
	Aboriginal mobility is often forced (involuntary) mobility.

	Modern tenancy arrangements often conflict with Aboriginal ways of living and mobility.
Options for flexible service delivery.	Aboriginal people are disproportionately impacted by issues related to mobility.
	Housing and homelessness policy and practice requires flexibility to accommodate Aboriginal communities.
Social housing policies related to mobility, including how providers define overcrowding.	There are limitations in official measures used as indicators for overcrowding.
Closing the Gap use of Canadian National Occupancy Standards (CNOS) to measure overcrowding.	The Canadian National Occupancy Standards (CNOS), and other international standards that are based on bedroom count, fail to account for cultural differences in Aboriginal families.
Options for redefining overcrowding.	Overcrowding on its own may fail to grasp whether people are experiencing the stress of large numbers of people.
Innovative solutions for accommodating large families.	There is a need for diversity in housing types to meet the need of Aboriginal tenants with large families.
Land and property solutions to address overcrowding and support mobility.	Good housing design, including funding support for the Aboriginal controlled housing sector are the most likely avenues to address stress and overcrowding
Cross-jurisdictional consideration of initiatives to support mobility.	Aboriginal geographies reflecting coherent cultural or kinship networks persist and do not necessarily reflect government impositions like state/territory borders.
	At cross-jurisdiction points there is an argument for systems that respond to Aboriginal geographies.
	Mobility makes important contributions to Aboriginal wellbeing, particularly the maintenance of kinship relationships.
	Holistic policy approaches centred on Aboriginal wellbeing are required.
	Better understanding of the links between Aboriginal mobility and homelessness is required.

Best practice based on domestic and international literature.

The success of Aboriginal tenancies can be linked to best practice in housing policy and service delivery that is participatory, client focused and strengths-based.

Appendix E: Cross-jurisdictional and NSW intra- and inter-agency Initiatives Mapping

The following table provides an overview of current government initiatives across the Australian and State/Territory governments, and within DCJ and across NSW agencies that provide supports for Aboriginal communities in the context of mobility and housing.

Jurisdiction, Agency/ies	Initiative
International initiatives	
New Zealand	Healthy Housing Programme (HHP)
Housing New Zealand Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at improving tenancy outcomes for Housing New Zealand Corporation tenants by addressing housing issues including health and wellbeing (Waldegrave et al. p.38) The program targeted larger families and included renovation opportunities to address overcrowding (Waldegrave et al. p.38), and The program was evaluated and overall, ‘tenants considered their health and well-being had benefited by the changes to their housing circumstances’ (Waldegrave et al. p.38).
US, Canada, Europe and Australia	Housing First Model
	<p>Pathways Housing First (PHF) was developed by Sam Tsemberis in 1992 in New York, in response to so-called ‘stairway’ models of support (e.g., Continuum of Care or Linear Residential Treatment) that focused on individual treatment and what ‘they needed to do’ to be accepted into housing.</p> <p>Housing First starts with the principle that housing is a right not a privilege. PHF is client-driven and based on human values principles. Here the focus is on ‘how can I help?’ The client is the expert and PHF assists clients in achieving goals that they set for themselves. The program is based on the principle that housing is a basic human right, and there should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> respect, warmth and compassion for service users a commitment to working with service users for as long as they need scattered site housing using independent apartments (i.e. homeless people should not be housed within dedicated buildings but within ordinary housing)

- separation of housing from mental health, and drug and alcohol services (i.e. housing provision is not conditional on compliance with psychiatric treatment or sobriety)
- consumer choice and self-determination
- recovery orientation (i.e. delivering mental health services with an emphasis on service user choice and control; basing treatment plans around service users' own goals), and
- a harm reduction approach (i.e. supporting the minimisation of problematic drug/alcohol use but not insisting on total abstinence).

European models focusing on stable housing and security of tenure have sought to widen the Housing First approach, suggesting instead the term 'Housing Led'. (Refer European Consensus Conference on Homelessness 2010).

The literature identifies the need to 'localise' or 'indigenise' the Housing First model to make it more relevant to First Nations peoples who are over-represented in homelessness statistics. Key references include:

- Distasio, J., et. al. (2019). *Localized Approaches to Ending Homelessness: Indigenizing Housing First*
- Harben, S., (2021), *Reimagining Housing First Through a Cultural Lens #1: The Noongar Cultural Framework*, *Parity*, Vol. 34, No. 9, and
- Silbert, L., (2021), *Moorditj Mia (Strong Home): Aboriginal Housing First Support from the Heart*, *Parity*, Vol. 34, No. 10.

In Western Australia, the Housing First model has been successfully adapted to First Nations' cultural protocols and needs. In 2021, a partnership between ACCOs Noongar Mia and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation saw five-year funding for Moorditj Mia (WA's first Aboriginal Housing First support service) to build on local knowledge and experience and develop a strong service model that puts Noongar cultural values at the centre of service delivery.

United Kingdom

Choice Based Lettings

Local councils and housing associations in the United Kingdom are able to make social housing properties available through Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes.

CBL schemes allow applicants to make choices about where they want to live, and which housing type or design is most suitable for them. The scheme works through a bidding and points system. When a property becomes available, new and existing tenants can place a bid if they think it suitable for them.

Each applicant has a certain number of points based on priority needs and current situation. Priority levels are based a range of factors including homelessness, size and condition of current home, local connections and income.³⁶⁶

Cross-jurisdictional initiatives	
<p>South Australia</p> <p>Department for Families and Communities (DFC) and Housing</p>	<p>SAFE TRACKS Strategic Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered by the Department for Families and Communities (DFC) and Housing. This program has already been discussed in this literature review; however it also provides lessons into best practice regarding Aboriginal mobility and housing. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culturally safe and designed in partnership with community Evidence-based approach to addressing housing issues Identifies the categories of “Aboriginal homelessness” in South Australia and how mobility may fit into these categories, and Aligned with South Australia’s ‘Closing the Gap’ requirements and obligations.
<p>Victoria</p> <p>Department of Human Services</p>	<p>Indigenous Tenancies at Risk (ITAR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered by the Department of Human Services Aimed at establishing and sustaining Aboriginal tenancies Caseworkers support tenants with a range of issues, and Culturally sensitive.
<p>AHO / Australian Government</p>	<p>Employment Related Accommodation Program</p> <p>The ERA was established to help Aboriginal people from remote areas to seek better work and study opportunities in larger regional centres. It aims to provide accommodation to encourage more people from remote areas to study and</p>

³⁶⁶ Accent Housing (2023), What is Choice-Based Letting? Accessed 15 May 2023

	<p>seek out better work opportunities in bigger regional centres.</p> <p>The ERA is a joint Commonwealth and State Government initiative funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. There are currently homes in 17 NSW locations.³⁶⁷</p>
Australian Government	<p>Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Government initiative assisting families at risk of homelessness • The program is not Indigenous specific; however it demonstrates successful rates in addressing homelessness and housing concerns • The program provides funding for community organisations and Centrelink caseworkers • Flexible brokerage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Financial assistance is a key part of case management • Evaluation of the program indicated that '92 per cent of families avoided homelessness and remained in their homes or improved their housing, 93 per cent of families had their immediate financial crisis resolved and 93 per cent of families improved their debt situation, with 66 per cent reducing or totally wiping their debt and 31 per cent stabilising their debt' (Brackertz, N, et al, 2017 pg. 46), and • Successful case study of HOME Advice Program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In South Australia, the HOME Advice Program funded the Wodlitinattoai service (specific to Indigenous tenants) ○ 100% of their referrals sustained their tenancies in 2007-08 ○ The service worked with Centacare and Centrelink to provide support to Indigenous peoples at risk of homelessness through early intervention ○ The following quote demonstrate how the Wodlitinattoai can provide a lesson to improving practice regarding mainstream housing programs specific to Aboriginal people, according to Flatau et al. (2009) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'recognition of the need for non-Indigenous workers to understand

	<p>the impact of Indigenous history and traditions in order to develop appropriate ways of working with Indigenous clients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ acceptance of the need for Indigenous workers to contribute to the wider community in which they work ▪ willingness to modify the physical environment of services to make it welcoming for Indigenous clients, and ▪ recognition of the stresses of community obligations on Indigenous workers and the provision of support for them' (Brackertz, N, et al, 2017, pg. 46).
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Other relevant initiatives

NSW Government	Initiative
DCJ	<p>Assertive Outreach</p> <p>Since 2017, DCJ has been working in partnership with the NGO sector to conduct Assertive Outreach street patrols in all DCJ Districts (since 2020) to proactively engage with people experiencing street homelessness, many of whom are Aboriginal, and provide a pathway to stable long-term housing.³⁶⁸</p>
DCJ	<p>Start Work Bonus</p> <p>The aim of the Start Work Bonus is to motivate DCJ tenants to transition into paying jobs.</p> <p>The Start Work Bonus provides for a grace period of up to 26 weeks from finding work to having a rent subsidy altered in line with the changed income.</p>
Aboriginal Hostels Ltd	<p>Aboriginal Hostels</p> <p>In NSW and nationally, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd (AHL) have provided short-term safe, culturally appropriate and affordable accommodation for Aboriginal people who are travelling, relocating or who need to stay away from home to access services and economic opportunities. Currently there are 43 Aboriginal Hostels across Australia and seven</p>

³⁶⁸ NSW Government Communities and Justice, Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness, Assertive Outreach, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/reforms/homelessness/premiers-priority-to-reduce-street-homelessness/assertive-outreach> accessed 4 May 2023

	of these are located in NSW in Tamworth, Dubbo, Newcastle (2) and Sydney (3).
SHS (DCJ)	<p>Link2Home</p> <p>Link2Home is a state-wide homelessness information and referral telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year. The service provides callers with information, assessments and referrals to homelessness supports and accommodation services across NSW.³⁶⁹</p>
DCJ	<p>Together Home Program</p> <p>The Together Home Program is a \$177.5 million investment by the NSW Government. It aims to support over 1,072 people street-sleeping across NSW into stable accommodation, linked to wraparound support. The program also includes an Aboriginal-led model.</p> <p>The program is a key initiative to support the Premier's Priority to halve street homelessness by 2025.</p> <p>Together Home aims to transition people onto a trajectory away from homelessness and into long-term stable housing, while improving overall personal wellbeing. It is underpinned by Housing First principles and is being delivered across NSW by 18 Community Housing Providers that sub-contract the support component to Specialist Homelessness Services or other partners. Support providers work to coordinate and strengthen relationships between the various services involved in a person's support plan, including disability supports.³⁷⁰</p>
AHO	<p>Home Ownership Program</p> <p>A range of assistance and advice to help Aboriginal people into home ownership.³⁷¹</p>
AHO	<p>Property Management Transfers</p> <p>AHO recently transferred 1,382 owned properties from DCJ Housing to ACHPs to increase community control and the sustainability of ACHPs. The process was facilitated by DCJ Housing.</p>
AHO	<p>Services Our Way</p> <p>Services Our Way provides culturally appropriate service coordination, support and capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families experiencing</p>

³⁶⁹ NSW Government Communities and Justice (2023) [Link2home](#), accessed 12 May 2023

³⁷⁰ NSW Government Communities and Justice (2023) [Together Home](#), accessed 12 May 2023

³⁷¹ See, NSW Government, Aboriginal Housing Office (n.d.) [General Home Ownership Information](#) and [Home Ownership](#).

	vulnerability, empowering them to improve their wellbeing and achieve their goals. ³⁷²
Public Interest Advocacy Centre Review into Child Protection and Public Housing barriers	Across two different systems
Housing Pathways Application process	<p>Raised by MRG members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application process create barriers to people registering • Constantly hearing this in other forums • 50 page doc a requirement to complete online application form • Lack of support for people who don't have the req tech access
Asset Delivery Planning Process	<p>How can asset planning assist mobility?</p> <p>AHO working with Housing Strategies Team</p>
Legal Aid / DCJ	Aboriginal Women Leaving Custody Report into barriers to housing

³⁷² NSW Government, Aboriginal Housing Office (n.d.) [Services Our Way](#).

Appendix F: Stakeholders invited to participate in research

Stakeholders who engaged in the research:

	Stakeholder / organisation	Site(s)
1	Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) NSW	State-wide
2	Murdi Paaki Regional Alliance	Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett
3	Aboriginal Affairs NSW	State-wide
4	DCJ Housing	Wollongong, Lake Macquarie,
5	Walgett Community Working Party	Walgett
6	Mission Australia Women's Refuge	Walgett
7	Walgett Aboriginal Medical Centre	Walgett
8	Thiyama-li	Walgett
9	Legal Aid NSW	Walgett
10	Wellways	Walgett
11	REDIE	Walgett
12	PCYC	Walgett
13	NSW Police	Walgett
14	The Healthy Communities Foundation	Walgett
15	Mackillops Family Services	Walgett
16	My Supports	Walgett
17	Kirinari	Walgett
18	DCJ Housing Client Services	Dubbo, Orange, Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett
19	Bourke Tribal Council	Bourke
20	Community Corrections	Bourke
21	Maranguka	Bourke
22	Mission Australia family Preservation Programs	Bourke, Brewarrina
23	Transport for NSW	Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Dubbo, Orange
24	NSWALC	State-wide
25	NSW Justice – Community Corrections	Bourke, Brewarrina

26	Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council	Brewarrina
27	Orana Support	Dubbo
28	Bridge Housing	Redfern
29	Barang Regional Alliance	Lake Macquarie
30	Yerin Elanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Services	Lake Macquarie
31	Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council	Lake Macquarie
32	Wahroonga	Lake Macquarie
33	Wandiyali Aboriginal Community and children's services	Lake Macquarie
34	Bungree Aboriginal Association	Lake Macquarie
35	Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation	Wollongong
36	Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service	Wollongong
37	Housing Plus	Orange, Dubbo
38	Dreamtime Housing	Orange, Dubbo
39	Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council	Orange
40	Illawarra Aboriginal Community Based Working Group	Wollongong
41	Central Coast Community Legal Centre	Lake Macquarie/Central Coast
42	NSW Health – Ngiiyan Program	Lake Macquarie/Central Coast

Stakeholders invited to engagement but did not participate:

	Stakeholder / organisation	Site(s)
1	Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA) NSW	State-wide
2	Justice – Aboriginal Strategy and Policy Unit	State-wide
3	Justice - Corrections	State-wide
4	DCJ - Partnerships & Premier's Priorities	State-wide
5	DCJ – Finding your way pilot	State-wide
6	Home in Place	Walgett, Brewarrina, Lake Macquarie
7	Bourke Aboriginal Corporation Health Service	Bourke
8	Bourke Land Council – Nulla	Bourke

9	Catholic Care Wilcannia-Forber	Bourke
10	Mission Australia Housing	Blacktown
11	Dubbo Local Aboriginal Land Council	Dubbo
12	Department of Corrections	Dubbo
13	Western Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service	Dubbo
14	Three Rivers Regional Assembly	Dubbo
15	Orange Council	Orange
16	Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council	Orange
17	Mid-Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Management Company	Orange, Dubbo, Brewarrina
18	Orange Community Working Party	Orange
19	DCJ Representatives	Orange, Redfern, Blacktown
20	Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Corporation	Redfern
21	Aboriginal Corporation for Homeless and Rehabilitation Community Services	Redfern
22	Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation	Redfern
23	Aboriginal Legal Service	State-wide
24	Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service	Redfern
25	Redlink	Redfern
26	The Fact Tree Youth Service	Redfern
27	Weave Youth and Community Services	Redfern
28	Community Corrections	Redfern, Blacktown
29	Innari	Redfern
30	Metro Land Council	Redfern
31	Woolloomooloo Integrated Services Hub (WISH)	Redfern
32	Redfern/Waterloo Affordable Housing Alliance / Inner Sydney Aboriginal Interagency Network	Redfern
33	Blacktown City Council and members of the Western Sydney Koori Interagency	Blacktown
34	Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council	Wollongong
35	Buttabah Local Aboriginal Land Council	Lake Macquarie
36	Awabakal Enterprises, Ltd and LALC	Lake Macquarie

37	We Care	Lake Macquarie
38	Turool Kore/Buttahba	Lake Macquarie
39	Muloobinba	Lake Macquarie
40	Warlga Ngurra	Lake Macquarie
41	Birabahn LALC	Lake Macquarie
42	Morimi Housing Cooperative	Lake Macquarie
43	Kirinari Hostel	Lake Macquarie
44	Justiz	Lake Macquarie
45	Windale / Education	Lake Macquarie
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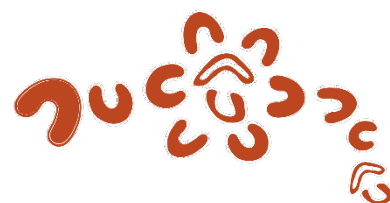
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