**INDIGENOUS HOUSING NEED AND MAINSTREAM PUBLIC HOUSING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY RESPONSES**

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*Australian Social Policy Conference*
*20-22 July, 2005*

University of New South Wales

**Abstract**

Indigenous people are significantly overrepresented in conditions of homelessness and other forms of marginal housing, in housing affordability and tenancy access and sustainability problems and in terms of overcrowded and sub-standard accommodation. It is the coincidence of these forces which drives the Indigenous housing reform agenda. Mainstream public housing provides a critical pathway through which secure and affordable accommodation can be made available to Indigenous people in housing need. This paper examines mainstream public housing responses to the position of Indigenous people in housing need. This study shows that gains have been made in improving access outcomes in mainstream public housing for Indigenous people in housing need. The high levels of continuing unmet housing need in the Indigenous population indicate, however, that more needs to be done to improve housing outcomes in this area. The case study evidence presented in the paper further supports this contention. We also need to continue to develop programs designed to ensure that vulnerable households in public housing at risk of losing their tenancy are supported through difficult times so that a cycle of eviction/vacant possession and churning through crisis and emergency housing and other tenuous accommodation options can be avoided.

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Disclaimer

We would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Australian Housing Urban Research Institute (AHURI) Ltd for the Indigenous Access to Mainstream Public Housing research project. This paper draws on components of the project’s Final Report a copy of which is available at www.ahuri.edu.au. The remaining authors of the report are Amanda Hart, Mary Morris, Carol Lacroix, Marc Adam, Andrew Beer, Selina Tually and Cathrine Traee.

AHURI Ltd is an independent, non-political body which has supported this project as part of its program of research into housing and urban development. The opinions in this publication reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Ltd, its Board or its funding organisations. No responsibility is accepted by AHURI Ltd or its Board or its funders for the accuracy or omission of any statement, opinion, advice or information in this publication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In May 2001, Federal, State and Territory Housing Ministers approved the text of a landmark document *Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010* which affirmed a commitment to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people. BBF contains a number of implementation strategies designed to improve Indigenous housing outcomes. One of the most significant is to improve Indigenous access to mainstream public housing (strategy 1.4). This study provides an assessment of the extent to which the BBF strategy of improving Indigenous access to mainstream public housing is being realised.2

The need to improve Indigenous access and sustainability outcomes in mainstream public housing does not arise from a low level of Indigenous representation in these housing sectors relative to the non-Indigenous population. Indeed, Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing lies well above the Indigenous share of the population. The need to improve access to mainstream public housing options lies rather in the serious overrepresentation of Indigenous people in conditions of homelessness and other forms of marginal housing, in housing affordability and tenancy access and sustainability problems among low-income Indigenous tenants in the private rental market and in a much higher incidence of overcrowded and sub-standard accommodation in the Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population. In other words, the prevalence of housing need in the Indigenous population is much higher than in the non-Indigenous population and it is this fact which drives the reform agenda in terms of mainstream public housing access and tenancy sustainability issues.

Mainstream public housing provides a critical pathway through which secure and affordable accommodation can be made available to Indigenous people in housing need. Given the extent of unmet Indigenous housing need, it is important to remove any barriers that impede access to mainstream public housing. Action also needs to be taken to improve the sustainability of Indigenous tenancies in mainstream public housing so that gains made in terms of better access are not lost through premature termination of the tenancy.

This study aims to assess levels of Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing and determine the extent to which Indigenous people, particularly those with unmet housing needs, face access barriers and experience difficulties in sustaining their tenancies. The paper examines what is being done by Federal, State and Territory authorities and agencies to facilitate access to mainstream public housing assistance

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1 We would like to acknowledge the following for their comments and input into the research project on which this paper is drawn: Julie Conway, Ian Hafoost, David Wilson, Sonia Whiteley, Andrew Hollows, Kerrie Bigrigworth, Danyell Bodaghi, Meredith Gibson, Malcolm Downie, Brendan Moran, Garry Ellender, Helen Fletcher, Martin Hehir, Patricia Hovey, Julie Walsh, Janice Lim, Lyn Young, Mike Neubigin, Tina Merry, Carol Croce, Adam Farrar, Linda Seaborn, David Imber, John Siviour, Tabitha Collings, Donna Bannister, Hongyan Wang, Ilona Papajcisk, Aunty Honor Cleary, Jack Gibbs and John Brady. The opinions in this paper reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of any person or organisation that has provided submissions or assisted in case studies investigations or otherwise contributed to this paper in any way.

2 This paper is drawn from a larger report *Indigenous Access to Mainstream Public and Community Housing* (see Flautau et al. 2005) which also examined community housing issues and undertook further case study research than that presented in this paper.
programs by Indigenous people and how effective are existing measures in improving access. To what extent are Federal, State and Territory mainstream public housing policies and programs impeding access? What else could be done to improve access at the policy level? The paper also examines the evidence in relation to the sustainability of mainstream public housing tenancies among Indigenous people and examines what is being done to sustain the tenancies of Indigenous households within the mainstream public housing sectors.

Mainstream Public Housing refers to Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) public housing administered by States and Territories. Mainstream public housing excludes the CSHA Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP) which in most funds government owned and managed Indigenous-specific housing (referred to in this report as State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SOMIH)). Indigenous people gain access to mainstream public and long-term mainstream community housing when they have been granted entry to a mainstream public dwelling under a tenancy agreement that is, not of a short-term nature. The extent to which Indigenous households have gained access to mainstream public housing is, therefore, measured in terms of the representation of Indigenous households in these forms of accommodation. However, quantitative estimates of the level of representation of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing tell us little about the underlying causal forces that may either impede or facilitate entry to mainstream public and so a study of Indigenous access takes us well beyond the presentation of estimates of the representation of Indigenous people in mainstream public housing.

Before a tenancy agreement can be struck an application for accommodation has to be made by (or on behalf of) the Indigenous household; the Indigenous applicant must satisfy specified eligibility criteria; all conditions for the issuing of a tenancy agreement must have been satisfied by the Indigenous household; and the Indigenous household must be sufficiently advanced in a queue of applicants to be assessed as next ‘in line’ (whether or not that line is a ‘wait-turn’ line or a ‘priority access’ queue). Hence, the question of Indigenous access to mainstream public housing is bound up with a broad range of issues including the awareness of mainstream public housing options by Indigenous households; the extent to which Indigenous people believe they can access these housing forms without meeting a range of barriers; their belief as to whether or not their specific housing needs will be met in mainstream public housing forms; eligibility policies and guidelines; the operation of wait lists and the procedures and rules governing priority access; the guidelines adopted to assess applications for accommodation in mainstream public housing and the day-to-day administration of applicable policies and guidelines by mainstream public housing authority officers.

At an even more fundamental level, issues of Indigenous access are bound up with the question of the availability of the stock of mainstream public housing. Clearly, the lower the stock, the fewer the number of households, all other things being equal, capable of gaining access to mainstream social housing options. An examination of the issue of Indigenous access to mainstream housing must also address the question of the suitability of the accommodation to the needs of the occupants. Incomplete access occurs when the basic shelter needs of the occupants are not met on gaining entry to the dwelling. The most obvious example of incomplete access is overcrowding.
In this study, the issue of the sustainability of mainstream public housing tenancies is addressed by examining the extent to which households, who would otherwise be in a position of significant housing need without accommodation in the public housing sector, are able to maintain that tenancy. Voluntary exits from the public housing stock as a result of an improved household income position are not evidence of a sustainability problem (irrespective of the duration of that tenancy); the reverse would typically be the case. Evictions and voluntary separations from mainstream public housing tenancies of households in need to less secure accommodation, or to a state of homelessness do, however, represent evidence of a sustainability problem; one whose causes requires examination and quick and deliberate policy responses. The shorter the duration of a tenancy prior to a transition to a more vulnerable housing position the worse the sustainability problem.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 of the paper sets out the key barriers Indigenous people potentially face in accessing and sustaining mainstream public housing tenancies while section 3 provides an outline of the policy context for this paper. In section 4 we present findings from our analysis of mainstream public housing and CSHA-based mainstream community housing data. Our analysis shows that Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing programs has increased significantly in recent years. However, it is difficult to determine the extent to which trends in Indigenous representation is affected by a better capturing of Indigenous household status in various jurisdictions. The quantitative analysis also reveals that Indigenous households continue to experience tenancy sustainability problems in mainstream public housing although again data quality issues affect the interpretation of the results.

In sections 5 and 6 we present a review of mainstream public housing policies and programs. The analysis includes a presentation of public housing authority perspectives on access and tenancy sustainability outcomes based on responses received to a short questionnaire presented to them. We also provide an examination of how State and Territory mainstream public housing policies and programs act to influence Indigenous mainstream public housing access and tenancy sustainability outcomes. Mainstream public housing authorities have moved strongly in recent years to develop programs to improve Indigenous mainstream public housing access and tenancy sustainability outcomes.

Finally, in section 7 we provide summary findings from case study evidence of Indigenous people in housing need and agencies that work with those in need. The case study evidence points to the fact that gaps remain between the lived experiences of Indigenous households in severe housing need in terms of their access to public housing and the recent initiatives undertaken to improve Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability outcomes. The conclusion draws together the various findings and discusses the implications of these findings from a policy perspective.

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3 The evidence presented in this paper is drawn from one case study site that was studied as part of a wider study of Indigenous Access to Mainstream Public and Community Housing See Flatau et al. (2005, forthcoming) for evidence from the remaining case study sites.
2. **BARRIERS TO INDIGENOUS ACCESS TO AND SUSTAINABILITY OF MAINSTREAM PUBLIC HOUSING TENANCIES**

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impediments faced by Indigenous people in accessing mainstream public housing assistance programs and sustaining tenancies in mainstream public housing. There now exists an extensive Indigenous housing literature (for recent reviews see, Neutze, 2000; Read, 2000; Burke, 2004; Memmott, Long, Chambers and Spring, 2003; and Memmott, 2004). However, there exists little by way of a detailed primary analysis of the specific issue of the barriers faced by Indigenous people in accessing mainstream and public housing. This study, therefore, provides an original contribution to the literature on barriers experienced by Indigenous people and on the options available to mainstream public housing providers to improve Indigenous access to mainstream housing services and the sustainability of tenancies in these tenures.

Flatau et al. (2004) provides a detailed summary of the existing Indigenous housing literature insofar as it bears on the issues in the present study. Here we suggested a number of major potential barriers to mainstream public housing access and to the sustainability of tenancies and these are briefly summarised here.

**Discrimination:** State/Territory Housing Authorities and mainstream Community Housing Organisations (CHOs) have universally adopted a non-discriminatory position with respect to Indigenous access to mainstream public housing services. Despite this, the question that needs to be addressed is the existence of possible non-overt or indirect discrimination among public and mainstream community housing providers and/or housing client officers, and perceptions of discrimination by Indigenous clients. To the extent that discrimination occurs, it may result in longer waiting times, higher rates of eviction and/or higher rates of application rejection for Indigenous people than would otherwise be the case. Where Indigenous people in need are unable to gain access to secure public housing options, they will often seek accommodation with other Indigenous families. This, in turn, exacerbates, in many cases, existing overcrowding, housing quality and emerging rent arrears problems. Such problems are primary risk factors driving future evictions. A cycle of eviction may thus be perpetuated. In addition to the problems of discrimination generating and perpetuating a cycle of eviction, perceptions of discrimination in the Indigenous population are also likely to lead to an underutilization of services.\(^4\)

The issue of discriminatory practices in relation to public housing has recently been examined in Western Australia. In December 2004, the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) released a report entitled *Finding a Place An Inquiry into the Existence of Discriminatory Practices in Relation to the Provision of Public Housing and Related Services to Aboriginal People in Western Australia* (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004b). The EOC Inquiry had been established following the receipt by the Equal Opportunity Commissioner of a large number of complaints from Indigenous people against Homeswest. Complaints against Homeswest by Indigenous people represented 37 per cent of all complaints received by the Commissioner from

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Indigenous people. The *Finding a Place* report provides significant evidence from past, present and prospective Indigenous public housing tenants of perceived unfavourable treatment by Homeswest in respect of access to public housing and the housing services provided by Homeswest. The *Finding a Place* report concluded that ‘Aboriginal people experience disadvantage and less favourable treatment in relation to many aspects of public housing access, services and residence’ (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004b p. 239). The report listed 165 recommendations in relation to a broad range of areas including awareness and accessibility, eligibility, waiting lists, rent setting procedures, priority access, tenancy management, anti-social behaviour, and staff training.

**Cultural and Historical Forces:** Indigenous people are traditionally more mobile than the non-Indigenous population. Large and extended family structures are also an integral component of the Indigenous way of life. These features of Indigenous life can place pressures on the personal management of tenancies, the payment of rent and can lead to severe overcrowding problems. Overcrowding places extra demands on housing structures and equipment which are often not sufficiently robust and durable. Large maintenance bills, neighbourhood complaints and possible eviction may result.

Another factor Memmott et al. (2003 p.14) point to is the spiritual and psychological homelessness that is felt by individuals and families who have been removed from their traditional land and their families (the stolen generation) over time. The stresses created through this process persist through the generations leaving many Indigenous people in a vulnerable and distrustful position when it comes to accessing services. Feeding into this process is a cycle of grief, anger, frustration, and depression. Some Indigenous people may also not have the home management and urban living skills, which are often required to maintain mainstream public tenancies and housing in addition to living alongside non-Indigenous neighbours (Cooper and Morris, 2004). Indigenous people may be reluctant or refuse to come to public housing offices because they are ashamed of previous debts or bad behaviour. Feelings of shame, shyness and fear of prejudice are likely to lead to an underutilisation of services (House of Representatives, 2001).

European style housing is, in many instances, inappropriate to the cultural, social and traditional requirements of Indigenous people. There are many reasons for this including the inflexibility and immobility that this style of housing requires, the inability of the inhabitants to influence their surrounds and the fact that European housing tends to be isolating relative to the communal structures of Indigenous camp environments. These problems are exacerbated when an Indigenous family is further isolated within non-Indigenous neighbourhoods as may occur within mainstream public housing accommodation (Neutze, 2000). Inappropriate allocations can also often occur (Martin et al., 2002). An example is when feuding families are placed within the vicinity of each other which results in vandalism and other maintenance issues. Indigenous people may also be located in areas where they are marginalised from their support networks and also from other relevant services and opportunities including employment (Berry et al., 2001a, 2001b).5

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5 For further discussion of cultural and historical forces see Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (2001), Durkey et al. (2003) and Hansen and Roche (2003).
**Disadvantage and Risk Factors:** The inter-related problems of poverty, domestic and family violence, incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness all represent risk factors in accessing and sustaining tenancies in mainstream public housing. Recent surveys suggest the prevalence of such problems in the Indigenous population is higher than in the non-Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2002a). Such problems are more likely to result in potential tenants being assessed as being in greatest need and, therefore, experiencing shorter waiting times in accessing mainstream public housing. (The same may not always be true in mainstream community housing where wait-turn rather than priority listing often applies.) However, the same problems lead to a higher chance of falling through gaps in terms of accessing accommodation, of falling behind in terms of rent payments and of being evicted and developing bed debt histories which can prove major barriers to re-entry to mainstream public housing.

Indigenous people may also suffer from higher rates of breaching of income support payments which results in payments being withdrawn or reduced, resulting in loss of income for rental, food and other basic essentials (Saunders, 1999). Welfare reform measures that increase the likelihood of income support breaches will exacerbate such problems.

Women who have been assaulted as a result of domestic violence or family violence are difficult to re-house. In particular, such women are more likely to be housed in crisis accommodation than in public housing or long-term community housing options. In some remote communities it may be difficult to re-house women at a safe distance from their perpetrator/s. In urban communities this issue is not as evident but whatever the situation, it often means that the women and their family leave homes to be re-housed in other locations. Re-housing does not necessarily mean immediate access to mainstream housing but use of emergency shelters, crisis accommodation, short term housing until mainstream housing becomes available. Indigenous people are over-represented in the prison population. Offences are related to family violence, assaults, alcohol abuse and non-payment of fines. Indigenous people make up a much larger percentage of prisoners than their proportion of the total population and generally serve shorter sentences. Access to public housing options on discharge can be difficult. Once a prison sentence has been served, homelessness is often a likely outcome.6

**Service Delivery:** Indigenous people are more likely than the non-Indigenous population to have complex physical and mental health and social needs (ABS and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2003). Australian health and welfare service providers aim to provide coordinated responses to such problems but inevitably coordination difficulties in service provision arise. When this happens greater stresses are placed on Indigenous families in accessing and sustaining mainstream services.

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3 POLICY CONTEXT

Housing assistance programs are financed and delivered by both the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. The Commonwealth Government takes the major role in the financing of housing assistance programs while the States and Territories are primarily involved in the provision of such programs. The CSHA, negotiated between Federal and State and Territory partners, provides the framework for the financing and provision of mainstream public housing programs in Australia. There has been a recent shift in Indigenous housing policy and program assistance to an increased emphasis on targeting Indigenous-specific housing assistance funding and programs to remote Indigenous locations; and the better tailoring of mainstream housing assistance to service and accommodate Indigenous people in regional centres, towns and cities. However, as will be evident in the profile of Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing presented in the following section, the provision of mainstream public housing services to Indigenous tenants in outer regional, remote and even very remote areas remains of fundamental importance in Western Australia (WA), Queensland (Qld) and the Northern Territory (NT).

The objective of improving access to mainstream public housing is most clearly evident within the Australian Housing Ministers’ Ten Year Statement of New Directions for Indigenous Housing BBF document, which represented the major outcome of the May 2001 Housing Ministers Conference (FaCS, 2001). BBF outlines new directions for improving Indigenous housing circumstances and options over the years to 2010. It represents a significant commitment by Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers and the Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (Commonwealth), to a national effort to making a real difference to Indigenous housing and environmental health outcomes.

BBF not only represents an important formal commitment by Australian governments to ameliorating and improving Indigenous housing circumstances and options, it also provides a framework of priorities, objectives, desired outcomes and implementation strategies for working towards and achieving sustained improvements in Indigenous housing. BBF (FaCS, 2001, p.1), states that:

‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia will have:

- access to affordable and appropriate housing which contributes to their health and well-being;
- access to housing which is safe, well-designed and appropriately maintained.’

Four objectives have been endorsed as part of the BBF framework to achieve the above vision (FaCS, 2001, p. 3). These include identifying and addressing the unmet needs of Indigenous people; improving the capacity of ICHOs and involving Indigenous people in planning and service delivery; achieving safe, healthy and sustainable housing; and the better coordination of program administration.

The first objective is the most relevant to this study. The implementation strategies to achieve this objective are (FaCS, 2001, p.3):

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7 Flatau et al. (2004) provides a more detailed overview of the policy context.
1.1 to ‘develop and use a multi-measure approach to quantifying Indigenous housing need, and to assist in informing resource allocation at national, State, Territory and regional levels’.
1.4 to ‘…continue to improve Indigenous access to mainstream public housing’
1.5 to ‘implement the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information, including data collection to support national performance indicators, a NMDS and reporting systems that will facilitate performance appraisal at the national, State, Territory, regional and local levels’.

For our purposes the most important strategy is strategy 1.4 which is listed as an implementation strategy to address the problem of unmet housing need among Indigenous people.

The current CSHA, the 2003 CSHA, effective from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2008, sets out a number of priorities of relevance to this study. First, and foremost, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have formalised their commitment to BBF by agreeing to its implementation. As set out in Recital J of the current CSHA: ‘Under this Agreement, and in accordance with the Council of Australian Governments’ resolution to reduce Indigenous disadvantage by improving program performance, the Commonwealth and the States commit to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people by implementing BBF’ (Department of Family Services (FaCS), 2003). Second, the 2003 CSHA Recitals state clearly the policy position that Indigenous-specific public housing is to be targeted to rural and remote areas and that Commonwealth and State Governments will work to increase access to mainstream public housing in urban and regional centres. The CSHA states:

‘K. The Commonwealth and the States acknowledge that the Commonwealth’s policy is to target ARHP funds to rural and remote areas where there is high need and where mainstream public housing and private housing are unavailable. For this Agreement, the priority for the ARHP is to ensure that houses are well maintained and managed to achieve health related outcomes for Indigenous people.
L. Through this Agreement, the Commonwealth and the States will work together to improve access to mainstream housing options (public housing, community housing, private rental and home ownership) for Indigenous people living in urban and regional centres (CSHA 2003-08)’.

The 2003 CSHA Guiding Principle Number 4 is also important in the context of the present research. This principle, one of 11 principles that guide the current CSHA, stipulates that the Commonwealth and States/Territories agree ‘to commit to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people in urban, rural and remote areas, through specific initiatives that strengthen the Indigenous housing sector and the responsiveness and appropriateness of the full range of mainstream housing options’ (CSHA 2003-08).

While not specifically addressing housing issues, The National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians, agreed to at the COAG meeting in June 2004, highlights a commitment by Australian Governments to “harnessing the mainstream”, ensuring Indigenous specific and mainstream programs and services are complementary, increasing “flexibility of funding”, developing “appropriate, coordinated and flexible” programs and services, taking account of “local circumstances and informed by appropriate consultations and negotiations”
with Indigenous communities; “strengthen[ing] accountability” for program “effectiveness” and “developing a learning framework” for best practice service provision to Indigenous people (COAG, 2004).

4. **INDIGENOUS PUBLIC HOUSING: A QUANTITATIVE PROFILE**

4.1 **Introduction**

This section provides a quantitative profile of access and tenancy sustainability outcomes for Indigenous households in mainstream public housing. The profile has been developed from a range of quantitative sources including the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) National Data Reports for the mainstream public rental housing together with a set of customised tables for the 2002-03 year produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Housing Assistance Unit in response to a request from the research team. The analysis in this section also draws on a range of other data sources including the 2001 Census and data supplied directly to the project team by State/Territory Housing Authorities.

We begin our quantitative analysis with a general overview of Indigenous housing outcomes in Australia focussing on the issue of Indigenous housing need. It is the existence of high levels of unmet housing need among Indigenous people that provides the impetus for the present study. Public housing provides an important long-term secure accommodation option for those in a marginalised housing position. It is, therefore, of critical importance that barriers to accessing mainstream public housing are removed and that Indigenous people, who would otherwise face an insecure housing future, do not experience impediments to sustaining tenancies in mainstream public housing. A decline in the stock of public housing combined with low tenant turnover in public housing limits the ability of States and Territories to assist those in housing need. The same conjunction of forces makes it even more important to ensure that access to mainstream public housing is disproportionately made available to those in the greatest need (whether from an Indigenous background or not).

The analysis proceeds in section to a detailed examination of what we know from the State/Territory Housing Authority administrative data held at the AIHW and from other sources of Indigenous access and sustainability outcomes in mainstream public housing. Here we are concerned with questions such as what is the level of representation of Indigenous people in mainstream public housing and has that level of representation increased in recent years? What do we know of trends in the relative share of Indigenous people among those who are new entrants into public housing? To what extent are new entrants to public housing coming from those in greatest need? Do Indigenous households experience longer waiting times to enter mainstream public housing than non-Indigenous households? What is the level of overcrowding

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8 We would especially like to thank Hongyan Wang and David Wilson from the AIHW for producing the set of tables for the research team.

among Indigenous households in mainstream public housing? Do Indigenous households experience shorter mainstream public housing tenancies than non-Indigenous households? Are Indigenous households more likely to be served termination notices and experience higher rates of eviction than non-Indigenous households?

To measure access and sustainability outcomes in mainstream public housing we utilise the following six quantitative indicators:

- **Overall Access**: The *Overall Access* indicator refers to the representation of Indigenous households in the mainstream public housing stock and in the flow of new households into mainstream public housing. To assess Indigenous public representation outcomes we use the following measures: (1) recent trends in the Indigenous share of the mainstream public housing stock; (2) recent trends in the share of Indigenous households in newly assisted households and (3) relative growth rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in the stock of mainstream public housing and in the inflow of newly assisted households in mainstream public housing. The analysis is presented for the 1999-00 to 2003-04 time period.

- **Access to Suitable Accommodation**: It is not only access to mainstream public housing that should be a focus of discussion but whether the access which is provided is appropriate given the needs of those assisted. Two ‘access to suitable accommodation’ measures are used in this paper. The first is an overcrowding measure which relies on the AIHW proxy national occupancy standard. The second is the regional spread of accommodation options. We present estimates of the level of overcrowding and the regional distribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous households for the financial year 2002-03.

- **Access According to Need**: A number of indicators are used to measure the level of need of existing and newly assisted Indigenous households in mainstream public housing. These include: (a) the low income and housing rent rebate receipt rates among Indigenous households in mainstream public housing relative to non-Indigenous households and (b) the proportion of Indigenous households entering mainstream public housing in the AIHW ‘greatest need’ category relative to non-Indigenous households. Financial year 2002-03 estimates are presented.

- **Access to Accommodation in a Timely Fashion by those in Need**: The wait-time measures used in this paper are median mainstream public housing waiting times experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in both the greatest need and non-greatest need categories. These indicators are conditional indicators in the sense that the measures are operationalised only for those who do gain access (and not the whole population of those on waiting lists). Financial year 2002-03 estimates are presented.

- **The Sustainability of Tenancies**: The question of the sustainability of mainstream public housing tenancies is measured on the basis of the median duration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream public housing tenancies. Financial year 2002-03 results are presented.

- **Involuntary Tenancy Termination**: Involuntary tenancy termination is measured on the basis of termination notice and eviction rates from public
housing dwellings. Due to limitations in the availability of data for all jurisdictions, data from WA for 2004 is used for indicative purposes.

The first four of these indicators have as their focus the question of mainstream public housing access while the final two indicators measure tenancy sustainability outcomes. All of these indicators, other than the involuntary tenancy termination measure, are based on mainstream public housing National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) items held at the AIHW. Involuntary tenancy termination outcomes on an Indigenous status basis are, to our knowledge, only made available publicly in Western Australia (WA).

Before presenting our findings with respect to these indicators it is important to briefly list the limitations of the available data sources. These limitations reduce the confidence with which findings on Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability can be put forward but do not obviate these findings. Readers should consult Appendix B to this paper, provided by the AIHW, which provides a detailed overview of mainstream public housing administrative data and lists certain limitations associated with this data.

First, only one data source is nationally available to analyse Indigenous housing outcomes in mainstream (as opposed to combined mainstream and Indigenous-specific) public housing. That data source is the administrative data (i.e., data gathered by State/Territory Housing Authorities in respect of their tenants) incorporated in the public housing NMDS. Other publicly available data such as the Census does not differentiate between the mainstream and Indigenous-specific components of public housing. This means that researchers cannot utilise a range of existing rich cross-sectional and longitudinal unit record files to examine mainstream public housing access and sustainability outcomes for Indigenous people.

Second, there exist major ambiguities in analysing Indigenous mainstream public housing outcomes over time. These ambiguities result from (a) past inadequacies in jurisdictional business systems in capturing Indigenous household data, (b) changes in the way business systems have recorded household Indigenous status over time (in particular the movement from voluntary to mandatory recording of Indigenous status), and (c) movements over time in the extent to which households identify themselves as Indigenous.

Third, there exist differences between jurisdictions with respect to the way that jurisdictions fast-track entry into public housing for the most needy cases (referred to as ‘priority access’) and the importance of the priority access channel to public housing entry relative to the wait-taur channel. These differences make it difficult to undertake inter-jurisdictional comparisons in respect to our Access According to Need and Access to Accommodation in a Timely Fashion by those in Need indicators. Fourth, the Public Housing Unit Record File held at the AIHW does not support a robust treatment of tenancy duration. Fifth, as noted above, the administrative data does not include data items relating to evictions and termination notices.

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10 This omission needs to be rectified so that data items related to involuntary tenancy termination (along the lines of those published in Western Australia) are included in the public housing NMDS in the future.
4.2 A Profile of Indigenous Housing Outcomes

We begin our discussion by providing an overview of the housing tenure profile of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations using 2001 Census data. (As noted in Appendix B to this study, there is significant variation in the basic counts of public rental housing between Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) surveys and censuses and the actual counts found in administrative data and these differences must be borne in mind when considering results from the 2001 Census.) The housing tenure profile of the Indigenous population is significantly different to that of the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous households are under-represented, relative to the non-Indigenous population, in the home ownership sector of the housing market. On the other hand, they are over-represented in public housing and in community housing. Their representation in the private rental market is marginally above that of the non-Indigenous population.

As illustrated in Table 1 below, 20.8 per cent of Indigenous households resided in public housing dwellings and 12.7 per cent in community housing dwellings at the time of the 2001 Census. The corresponding figures for the non-Indigenous population are 4.5 per cent in public housing and less than one per cent in community housing. The over-representation of Indigenous households in public housing programs is unsurprising given significant levels of disadvantage in the Indigenous population and the targeted nature of the public housing program (see, for example, Altman and Hunter, 2003 and ABS and AIHW, 2003).

Of more direct interest to this study is the high level of housing need among Indigenous households. The first detailed examination of housing need among Indigenous people in Australia was undertaken by Jones (1994). His analysis covered the issues of overcrowding, poor standards of housing, and housing-related poverty among Indigenous persons. Jones’ (1994) analysis showed that although Indigenous families represented around 1.4 per cent of all families in Australia in 1991, they accounted for 22 per cent of the then measured homeless population and 38 per cent of families living in improvised dwellings. Jones (1994) estimated that the proportion of Indigenous people in housing need was four times that of the non-Indigenous population.

Jones (1994) provided a foundation for the statistical description of housing need by using homelessness, overcrowding and financial stress as indicators of need. A modified version of these indicators represents the current nationally accepted approach to determining Indigenous housing need. At present, national, State and Territory housing agencies measure Indigenous housing need by taking account of five dimensions of need: homelessness; overcrowding; affordability; stock condition; and connection to essential services (i.e., water, electricity and sewerage). Further work is ongoing at the national level to improve and use administrative data on these five dimensions and to assess the feasibility of measuring appropriateness; emerging need; and security of tenure as part of a multi-measure modelling of Indigenous housing need.

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11 See also Neutze, Sanders and Jones (2000) for a needs-based analysis using the 1996 Census.
12 See, for example, AIHW (2005).
Recent estimates of Indigenous homelessness based on the 2001 Census confirm that high levels of severe housing need continue to be experienced in the Indigenous population.

As indicated in Figure 1, Indigenous people made up 2.1 per cent of the population at the time of the 2001 Census but comprised 18.9 per cent of those in ‘primary homelessness’. This category is comprised of people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting and so on and is operationalised using the ABS category of ‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’ (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2003a p. 1). Indigenous people are also significantly over-represented (11 per cent) in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) which is a key component of secondary homelessness. The SAAP program provides supported accommodation and other services to homeless people.

Table 1  Private Dwellings by Tenure and Indigenous Status, 2001 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dwellings Containing Indigenous Households</th>
<th>Other Dwellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Owned</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Owned</td>
<td>14,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Purchased</td>
<td>22,419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rental Properties</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Landlord not in the Same Household</td>
<td>11,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Agent</td>
<td>16,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State/Territory Housing Authority</td>
<td>23,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Co-Op Housing Group</td>
<td>14,628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer- Government</td>
<td>1,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer- Other</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Landlord Type</td>
<td>1,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>1,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Tenure Types</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Tenure Types</td>
<td>3,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>4,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>115,355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS (2002c). See Appendix B to this paper.
Figure 1    Indigenous Shares of Categories of Homelessness, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Boarding Houses</th>
<th>Friends or Relatives</th>
<th>SAAP</th>
<th>Improvised Dwellings</th>
<th>Total Homeless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ABS (2003b) and Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003a).

**Notes:** See Appendix B to this paper.

Since 2001 the Indigenous share of the SAAP client base has continued to grow. In 2003-04 Indigenous clients comprised 16.5 per cent of all clients (AIHW, 2005e). These recent estimates indicate that the problem of unmet housing need among Indigenous people is increasing rather than decreasing relative to the non-Indigenous population so providing the impetus to the present study and the urgent need to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in housing need. At the time of the 2001 Census, Indigenous people were also significantly overrepresented in boarding house accommodation as compared with the non-Indigenous population.

A second important dimension of Indigenous housing need is that of overcrowding. On the basis of the Canadian National Occupancy Standard, the ABS and the AIHW, in their *The Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2003* (ABS and AIHW, 2003) study, estimated that 15 per cent of Indigenous households were living in dwellings requiring at least one additional bedroom as compared with a figure of 4 per cent for other households. The extent of overcrowding among the Indigenous population, using this standard, was considerably higher in remote and very remote areas as compared with major cities and inner and outer regional areas.

One further indicator of housing need is the standard of accommodation experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous households. *The Health and Welfare of...*  

---

13 The Canadian National Occupancy Standard is that there should be no more than two persons per bedroom; children of different sexes less than 5 may reasonably share a bedroom; children over 5 of opposite sexes should have separate bedrooms; children less than 18 of the same sex can reasonably share a bedroom; single household members 18 or older should have a separate bedroom as should parents or couples (AIHW and ABS, 2003).
Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples study reported findings from the 1999 Australian Housing Survey (AHS) and the 2001 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) ABS (2001a), which indicated that Indigenous households were three times more likely than non-Indigenous households to report their homes in high need of repair while 19 per cent of dwellings covered in CHINS were found to be in need of major repair ABS (2001a). A further 10 per cent of dwellings required replacement.

The Housing Ministers’ Advisory Committee’s (HMAC) Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH) has recently completed an analysis of the level of housing need across a range of indicators. Tables 2 and 3 reproduce two tables from their unpublished report on Multi Measure Modelling of Indigenous Housing Need. Table 2 shows the absolute numbers of Indigenous households in various homelessness categories by State and Territory. The findings also highlight the large number of Indigenous households living in accommodation below community standards in Northern Territory (NT), WA and Queensland and, in particular in dwellings without a shower/bath or toilet in those jurisdictions.

Table 3 presents estimates of the level of overcrowding among Indigenous households in the 2001 Census based on a customised data extract provided by the ABS to the SCIH from the 2001 Census. The estimates presented refer to tenants in all sectors of the housing market (e.g., homeowners/purchasers, private renters, public housing tenants housing tenants) who require two or more bedrooms to meet the proxy occupancy standard specified in the National Housing Assistance Data Dictionary Version 2 (NHADD) (AIHW, 2003). This occupancy standard is detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Number of bedrooms required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single adult</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group household (adults)</td>
<td>1 per adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple, no children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole parent or couple with 1 child</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole parent or couple with 2 or 3 children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole parent or couple with 4+ children</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NHADD occupancy standard does not fully account for the needs of very large families as evident by the fact that the number of bedrooms required does not rise as the number of children increases above the four or more point.

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14 The Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH) is an advisory committee to the Housing Ministers Advisory Committee (HMAC). We would like to thank the authors of that report for supplying these tables to us.
Table 2  Number of Indigenous People who are Homeless or who Live in Accommodation that is below Current Community Standards, 2001 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State /Territory</th>
<th>Improvised dwelling, sleepers out(1)</th>
<th>SAAP accommodation</th>
<th>Couch surfers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boarding house</th>
<th>Marginal in caravan</th>
<th>In dwelling without shower/bath or toilet(2)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>1287</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>1313</td>
<td>2740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>1142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1257</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1436</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4711</td>
<td>5176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2657</td>
<td>1566</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>5883</td>
<td>1643</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>6836</td>
<td>10266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acknowledgement: This table has been reproduced from a report for the Housing Ministers Advisory Committee’s (HMAC) Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH) entitled *Multi Measure Modelling of Indigenous Housing Need*. We would like to thank the authors of that report for supplying the table to us. Further information in relation to outcomes under the above homelessness indicators is available from AIHW (2005f).


Notes A: (1) For the 1996 Census the definition of improvised dwelling included dwellings with no bath/shower or toilet. Using this definition the number of people living in improvised dwellings or sleeping out were as follows: NT: 5968, Qld: 1799 and WA:1254. In NSW, Vic, SA, Tas and the ACT there was minimal difference from the numbers in the above table. (2) Based on data from the 1996 Census, as per (1) above.

Notes B: See Appendix A to this report.
Table 3  
Number of Indigenous Households that are Overcrowded by Tenure Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure Type</th>
<th>Home owners/purchasers</th>
<th>Private renters</th>
<th>Public housing/SOMIH tenants</th>
<th>Community housing tenants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>1135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>1162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>2041</td>
<td>2300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>1062</td>
<td>1297</td>
<td>3952</td>
<td>7098</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acknowledgement:** This table has been reproduced from an unpublished report for the HMAC Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH) entitled *Multi Measure Modelling of Indigenous Housing Need*. We would like to thank the authors of that report for supplying the table to us. Further information in relation to outcomes under the above homelessness indicators is available from AIHW (2005f).

**Source:** Census 2001 - Customised data provided by the ABS.

**Notes A:** (1) It was not possible to calculate the number of overcrowded households in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), as the Census data was provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Region and the ACT comprises part of the Queanbeyan ATSIC Region of NSW.

**Notes B:** See Appendix B to this report.

### 4.3 Indigenous Access and Tenancy Sustainability in Mainstream Public Housing

Census housing questions do not separately identify mainstream public housing from their Indigenous-specific forms. Hence, census data cannot be used to provide a profile of Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability outcomes in mainstream public housing. To examine these issues from a quantitative perspective we turn to AIHW data sources and, in particular, to a set of tables produced by the AIHW Housing Assistance Unit in response to a data table request from the survey team. The original data request included a number of specific housing issues, such as eviction outcomes, which the source data would not support.

We begin our discussion with our first access and sustainability indicator that of *Overall Access*. This indicator refers to the representation of Indigenous households in the mainstream public housing stock and in the inflow of households to mainstream public housing. Estimates of the level of representation of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing for the last three financial years and the representation of

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15 An additional data source that will become available to examine issues in relation to mainstream public housing in the future is the 2005 *National Social Housing Survey of Public Housing Tenants* (NSHS). The 2005 NSHS asks the following:

1. Are you or any member of your household of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?
2. Were you offered the option of Indigenous-specific housing?
3. Why did you choose public housing over Indigenous-specific housing? (Response options include: Didn’t know about it; Prefer public rental housing; No Indigenous housing in the area I want to live in; Problems with Indigenous ‘identification’; Could be housed faster in public housing; Not available in my State; Other (please specify)).

Data from the 2005 NSHS will not be available until the latter part of 2005.
Indigenous people in the inflow of newly assisted households to mainstream public housing are set out in Tables 4 to 6. Table 4 presents findings on the representation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in the stock of mainstream public housing households at 30 June 2002, 30 June 2003 and 30 June 2004. Table 5 does likewise in terms of the inflow into mainstream public housing of newly assisted households for the financial years 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04. For both series, Indigenous household share estimates are provided.

Table 6 presents, for each jurisdiction, an index series based presentation of trends in the stock and the number of newly assisted Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in mainstream public housing and SOMIH. As a point of comparison we have also included the corresponding index series for State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SOMIH). The base point for the index series is 30 June 2000. The base point value is derived by dividing the number of Indigenous households (or non-Indigenous households as the case may be) in mainstream public housing at 30 June 2000 by itself and multiplying by 100 (so producing a value of 100 at 30 June 2000). Index numbers for subsequent years are derived by dividing the number of households in the relevant year by the base year figure and multiplying the resulting figure by 100. Presenting information in index value form provides for easy interpretation of trends in series. Index values reflect the growth rate in the stock of households in that year over the base year. Year-on-year growth rates in the stock of households can be easily derived by estimating the relevant percentage growth rate in the index series between any two years.

Before reviewing the evidence in relation to the Overall Access indicator it is worthwhile to highlight a number of features of the public housing administrative data in respect to findings of Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing and to also emphasise, once again, the qualifications that apply to the public housing administrative data (see also Appendix B).

First, no separate SOMIH sector exists in the NT and the ACT. Hence, the mainstream public housing sector represents the entire public housing sector in these jurisdictions. Second, Indigenous status is a self-report item. Furthermore, in some jurisdictions, the identification of Indigenous status is voluntary (e.g., South Australia (SA)) whereas in other jurisdictions it is mandatory (e.g., Queensland but only since October 1997). Trends over time in the Indigenous stock of households and to a lesser the number of newly assisted Indigenous households may, therefore, in part, reflect better Indigenous status reporting systems and/or a movement to mandatory reporting of Indigenous status and/or increases in Indigenous self-identification.

Third, New South Wales’s (NSW) business systems for recording Indigenous status were, until recently, poorly structured. This resulted in a significant undercount of the stock of Indigenous people in mainstream public housing and prevents the publication of Indigenous and non-Indigenous breakdowns for NSW in the profiles that follow. As indicated in the notes to Table 4, the number of Indigenous households in the public housing NMDS for NSW was 2,197 for 2002 and 2,721 for 2003, but these figures are severely under-reported against a Census-based estimate from the Department for the two relevant years of 8,700. Changes have been made to the Department’s business systems to ensure improved reporting and recording of Indigenous status. This recent
improvement allows for the presentation of mainstream public housing estimates for NSW in the case of newly assisted tenants.

Fourth, the large growth in Indigenous households in mainstream public housing in WA in 2003-04 is, in part, related to a better capturing of Indigenous household status during that year. An Indigenous household in the AIHW data is defined as a household that has one or more Indigenous persons residing in the household regardless of the Indigenous status of the head of the household or the applicant. The WA business systems did not automatically reflect this principle until 2003-04. A similar reason explains some of the growth in the number of Indigenous households in both SA and Victoria in 2002-03. In both jurisdictions, the Indigenous status of the household was previously only determined on the basis of the status of the household head rather than the existence of at least one member of the household of Indigenous status. An additional change to reporting systems lies in the movement to compulsory reporting of Indigenous status (e.g., WA in January 1999).

Finally, it is important to note that the national data on Indigenous tenants in public and mainstream community housing was first required in the 1999 CSHA. This meant that several jurisdictions were not easily able to commence reporting as existing data management infrastructure was often complex and expensive to change.16 (The reader is referred to Appendix B of this report prepared by David Wilson of the AIHW for a further discussion of data quality issues in relation to the administrative data.)

As shown in Table 4, the stock of mainstream public housing households fell from 342,467 in June 2002 to 338,035 households in June 2004. This represents a decline of around 1.8 per cent in the number of mainstream public housing households over this period. Over the longer time period covered by our data analysis (1999-00 to 2003-04), the stock of mainstream public housing households has declined by around 2.9 per cent; from 346,389 households in June 2000 to 338,035 households in June 2004. The average yearly decline in the stock of mainstream public housing households is 0.7 per cent. This decline in the stock of mainstream public housing dwellings places greater pressures on jurisdictions in providing long-term accommodation for those Indigenous households in housing need; a matter that we return to in greater depth in the following section when we consider jurisdictional policies with respect to Indigenous access and sustainability issues.

Severe under-reporting problems with respect to identification of medium and long-term Indigenous housing tenants in New South Wales (NSW) makes it impossible to provide similar estimates of the total number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing for all of Australia over this time period. However, in jurisdictions other than NSW, the number of (reported) Indigenous households in mainstream public housing rose dramatically from 6,339 in June 2000 to 11,087 in June 2004; an increase of around 75 per cent. Over the corresponding time period the number of reported non-Indigenous households in jurisdictions other than NSW fell from 215,693 in June 2000 to 202,062 in June 2004; a drop of 6.3 per cent. The consequence of these two trends was a significant rise in the Indigenous household share of mainstream public housing.

16 We are grateful to David Wilson of the AIHW for pointing this out to us.
Estimates of growth rates in the reported number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing, however, need to be treated with some caution. The growth of the reported number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing is likely to overstate, by a considerable margin, the true growth of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing. In similar fashion, the decline in the reported stock of non-Indigenous households in mainstream public housing overstates the true decline in the non-Indigenous household stock. This is because changes in reporting systems in a number of jurisdictions over the relevant time period have led to a better capturing of the number of Indigenous households in the system. It is also likely that the trend in the number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing may have been affected by an increased willingness of Indigenous people to self-identify as Indigenous. Household formation and household formation effects may also have influenced trends in the number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing.

Changes in business reporting systems over the 1999-00 to 2003-04 time period affect the interpretation of findings in three states. These are WA (structural breaks in 1999 and 2003-04) and SA and Victoria (2002-03). Improved business systems in SA and Victoria in 2002-03 and WA in 2003-04 led to a better recording of Indigenous status and as a consequence to a very large increase in the stock of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing in these jurisdictions for the years concerned. These outcomes are illustrated clearly in the jurisdictional mainstream Indigenous household index series presented in Table 6. Table 6 also illustrates, however, the fact that, in all three jurisdictions, relatively strong positive growth in the stock of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing is evident (and a corresponding decline in the stock of non-Indigenous households) for those years that were not influenced by business system changes to the reporting of Indigenous status of households.

To illustrate this point take the case of Victoria. The number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing grew by 5.2 per cent in the two year period prior to the business system change (i.e., from June 2000 to June 2002) while the number of non-Indigenous households decreased by 0.6 per cent. The following year (2003) we see a kink in the graph reflecting the business system change but strong growth remains evident in the following year. Similarly, in SA, the number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing increased by 9.9 per cent over the June 2000 to June 2002 time period, while the number of non-Indigenous households decreased by 8.3 per cent.

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17 It should be possible for Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria to present constant ‘quality’ series of the number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing by maintaining the same definition of an Indigenous households and data management rules applying to Indigenous status over the period 1999-00 to 2003-04. This would aid the analysis of trends over time in the number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing.
### Table 4  Households Occupying Mainstream Public Housing at 30 June 2002, 2003 and 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 June 2002</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>8,700**</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>2,311</td>
<td>2,098</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>1,377</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125,315</td>
<td>62,425</td>
<td>48,908</td>
<td>30,780</td>
<td>46,291</td>
<td>11,008</td>
<td>5,624</td>
<td>342,467</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 June 2003</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>8,700**</td>
<td>1,006</td>
<td>2,491</td>
<td>2,363</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1,451</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>123,088</td>
<td>62,598</td>
<td>48,582</td>
<td>30,420</td>
<td>45,351</td>
<td>11,624</td>
<td>10,896</td>
<td>338,035</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 June 2004</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>8,700**</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>2,633</td>
<td>4,041</td>
<td>1,171</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>123,106</td>
<td>62,647</td>
<td>48,490</td>
<td>30,016</td>
<td>44,529</td>
<td>11,375</td>
<td>10,823</td>
<td>336,255</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indigenous Households in Mainstream Public Housing as a Share of All Mainstream Public Housing Tenant Households**

- **At June 2002**: 1.24, 4.73, 6.82, 1.75, 3.82, 1.29, 24.48
- **At June 2003**: 1.61, 5.13, 7.77, 2.47, 3.85, 1.70, 26.50
- **At June 2004**: 1.72, 5.43, 13.46, 2.63, 4.34, 1.59, 28.43

**Indigenous Population Share**

| Census 2001 | 1.9 | 0.5 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 1.6 | 3.5 | 1.2 | 25.1 | 2.2 |

**Source**: Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement National Data Reports Public Rental Housing, 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04. See AIHW reports in the reference list.

**Notes A**: NSW reported 8,700 Indigenous households in mainstream public housing for both 2002 and 2003. This figure is estimated based on the 2001 Census, adjusted for census undercounting of public housing households. The number of Indigenous households in the public housing NMDS was 2,197 for 2002 and 2,721 for 2003, but these figures are severely under-reported. Changes have been made to the Department’s business systems to ensure improved reporting and recording of Indigenous status, but it will be a number of years before Indigenous status is of sufficient quality for detailed data analysis.

**Notes B**: See Appendix B to this report.
Table 5  Newly Assisted Households Occupying Mainstream Public Housing 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NT</th>
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Newly Assisted Indigenous Households in Mainstream Public Housing as a Share of All Newly Assisted Mainstream Public Housing Tenant Households

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<th>2003-04</th>
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<td>At June 2002</td>
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<td>8.77</td>
<td>8.82</td>
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<td>3.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>At June 2004</td>
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Indigenous Population Share

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Source: Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement National Data Reports Public Rental Housing, 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04. See AIHW reports in the reference list.

Notes: See Appendix B to this report.
## Table 6  Households Occupying Mainstream Public Housing and SOMIH

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**Source:** Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement National Data Reports Public Rental Housing, and SOMIH 1999-00, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04. See AIHW reports in the reference list.

**Notes:** See Appendix B to this report.
In WA, the growth in the stock of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing has been even greater than that evident for Victoria and SA in years unaffected by business system changes. For example, the stock of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing grew by 26.1 per cent over the period June 2001 to June 2003 while the stock of non-Indigenous households in mainstream public housing fell by 3.3 per cent over the same time period. The underlying growth rate in WA is particularly high relative to other jurisdictions. It may have been influenced by a number of policy initiatives including that to provide tenant support programs to at-risk mainstream public housing tenants, the effect of the WA Homelessness Strategy and the program to build more 5/6 bedroom houses. It is likely that these initiatives would have assisted Indigenous families more so than non-Indigenous households.

It is also noteworthy that States and Territories that have not experienced major structural breaks in their Indigenous household series exhibit trends in the rate of growth of Indigenous households in the mainstream public housing stock similar to those evident for Victoria, SA and WA for those years unaffected by business system changes. So, for example, the number of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing in Queensland grew by 45 per cent over the period 1999-00 to 2003-04; this represents an average annual rate of growth of around 10 per cent over the relevant time period. Both Tasmania and the ACT had similar average annual growth rates while NT experienced a more modest growth outcome. In all three jurisdictions the number of non-Indigenous households fell. The greatest fall was evident in the NT where the number of non-Indigenous households fell by 5.2 per cent between 1999-00 and 2003-04.

As compared with the mainstream public housing sector, the SOMIH sector has grown rather than diminished over the period 1999-00 to 2003-04. The number of SOMIH households grew from 11,472 in June 2000 to 12,219 in June 2004. This represents a growth rate of 6.5 per cent in the number of SOMIH households or an average annual growth rate of 1.6 per cent. This growth in the number of SOMIH households is lower than that for Indigenous households in mainstream public housing. The end result of this lower growth is that the mainstream public housing sector has begun to take a greater share of Indigenous households in public housing over the period 1999-00 to 2003-04.

Table 5 presents estimates of the flow into mainstream public housing of newly assisted Indigenous and non-Indigenous households for the last three financial years. As noted previously, NSW estimates of the stock of Indigenous households are affected by serious Indigenous status reporting problems. The same difficulties are, however, not evident with respect to newly assisted households. Hence, all-Australia trends can be presented in the case of newly assisted Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream public housing tenants whereas that was not possible in the case of the stock of Indigenous households.

As shown in Table 5, a large fall in the number of newly assisted mainstream public housing households is evident for the three year period 2001-02 to 2003-04. Newly assisted mainstream public housing households fell from 36,894 households in the financial year 2001-02 to 30,962 households in the financial year 2003-04. This represents a decline of around 19 per cent over this period.

While the total number of newly assisted households fell dramatically over the 2001-02 to 2003-04 period, the number of number of reported newly assisted Indigenous households in mainstream public housing rose over the same period. The number of
newly assisted Indigenous households in mainstream public rose from 3,492 in 2001-02 to 3,641 in 2003-04. This represents a rise of 4.3 per cent in the number of newly assisted mainstream public housing Indigenous housing tenants. The number of non-Indigenous mainstream public housing tenants fell by 18.2 per cent over the same time period. As a consequence, a large increase in the share of newly assisted mainstream public housing taken by Indigenous households is evident. The share of newly assisted mainstream public housing household tenants taken by Indigenous households rose from 9.5 per cent in 2001-02 to 11.8 per cent in 2003-04.

Table 6 presents trends, using index series, from 1999-2000 to 2003-04 in the number of newly assisted Indigenous and non-Indigenous tenants for each jurisdiction in Australia. Our interpretation of these trends in the number of newly assisted mainstream public housing Indigenous and non-Indigenous tenants is likely to be affected by the same Indigenous household status reporting changes in WA, Victoria and SA that affected the interpretation of trends in the stock of households noted previously. Notwithstanding this and in keeping with our analysis of the stock of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing, it is evident that there has been a significant compositional shift towards Indigenous households in terms of newly assisted mainstream public households across all jurisdictions. Indigenous status reporting changes have simply acted to inflate the size of the shift over what it would otherwise have been had these reporting changes not been introduced.

The number of newly assisted mainstream public housing Indigenous households grew by over 225 per cent in WA over the 1999-2000 to 2003-04 periods. No other State or Territory experienced such a dramatic increase in the number of newly assisted Indigenous households. However, positive growth in the number of newly assisted Indigenous households was evident for Tasmania (47.1 per cent over the 1999-2000 to 2003-04 period); the ACT (31 per cent); the NT (12.1 per cent); South Australia (4.4 per cent); and NSW (1.2 per cent). In WA and for each of the above jurisdictions, the number of newly assisted non-Indigenous households fell. In Victoria the number of newly assisted Indigenous households fell by 11.4 per cent over 1999-2000 to 2003-04. However, the number of newly assisted non-Indigenous households also fell and by an even greater amount (33.2 per cent). A similar pattern is evident for Queensland and Tasmania both States displaying a large drop in the number of newly assisted Indigenous households but an even larger drop in the number of newly assisted non-Indigenous households.

4.4 Access to Suitable Accommodation

We now move to the second of our access and tenancy sustainability indicators, namely that of Access to Suitable Accommodation. Two Access to Suitable Accommodation measures have been adopted in this study. The first is an overcrowding measure which relies on the AIHW proxy national occupancy standard. The second measure of the adequacy of accommodation is the regional spread of accommodation options.

Before presenting relevant estimates, it is useful to provide a brief household structure profile of Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in mainstream public housing in Australia. Sharp differences exist between the demographic and household formation profile of Indigenous households in mainstream public housing and that of the non-Indigenous population. First, Indigenous households are much more likely to be headed by a younger principal tenant than non-Indigenous households. Only 5 per cent of Indigenous households comprise a principal tenant aged 65. The corresponding estimate
for non-Indigenous tenants is 29 per cent. These estimates reflect the younger age profile of the Indigenous population and also lower rates of entry into public housing (relative to need) for the Indigenous population over past decades. There are only minor differences between jurisdictions with respect to Indigenous and non-Indigenous age profiles. Second, Indigenous people in mainstream public housing are much less likely to be in single person and couple only dwellings and much more likely to be in dwellings containing single parents with dependent children, couples with dependents, and multiple income unit households. In keeping with this profile, Indigenous households are more likely to be in larger households and households which comprise more dependent children.

The combination of larger Indigenous households in mainstream public housing together with the fact that the mainstream public housing stock is not fully configured for the number of large households currently being accommodated leads to higher overcrowding levels in the Indigenous mainstream public housing population as compared with the non-Indigenous population. Overcrowding is potentially also higher when there is a mismatch between household type and allocated dwellings for any given configuration of the housing stock. However, it is no easy matter to reallocate dwellings so that a better match between household type and dwelling type eventuates.

In the public housing NMDS classifications ‘Overcrowding’ occurs when 2 or more bedrooms are required to meet the proxy national occupancy standard (see the previous section for a discussion of the occupancy standard). ‘Moderate overcrowding’ occurs where one additional bedroom is required to satisfy the proxy occupancy standard. Figure 2 presents estimates of the moderate and overcrowding rates for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream public housing populations. The moderate overcrowding rate is defined as the number of Indigenous or non-Indigenous households in moderate overcrowding divided by the number of Indigenous or non-Indigenous households; similarly for the overcrowding rate. The overcrowding and moderate overcrowding rates are under-estimates for all jurisdictions other than Victoria and Queensland. This is because multi-family households have been excluded from the analysis for jurisdictions other than Victoria and Queensland. As indicated previously there is a higher incidence of multi-family households among Indigenous mainstream public housing households. It is likely that overcrowding represents a greater problem among multi-family households than single family households.

The estimates suggest that moderate overcrowding is greater for Indigenous households in mainstream public housing than for non-Indigenous households. This result applies across all jurisdictions. The moderate overcrowding rate for Indigenous households is over twice that for non-Indigenous households (Victoria excepted where the moderate overcrowding rate among Indigenous households is around 1.5 times that for non-Indigenous households). The moderate overcrowding rate is greatest in the NT and Queensland (around 14 per cent). The moderate overcrowding rate is also above 10 per cent in both WA and Victoria. The jurisdictional pattern of ‘overcrowding’ (the more severe AIHW measure of overcrowding) is quite different to that for moderate overcrowding. The highest rate of overcrowding in the Indigenous mainstream public housing population is found in Victoria (2.2 per cent) closely followed by the ACT (2.2 per cent) and Queensland (1.7 per cent). The Indigenous overcrowding rate is again more than twice that of the non-Indigenous population in mainstream public housing.
Figure 2  Households Assisted with Mainstream Public Housing at 30 June 2003, Overcrowding Rates by Indigenous Household Status – AIHW (exc. NSW)

Source: AIHW, 2002-03 Public Housing Unit Record File held in the National Housing Data Repository. The overcrowding numbers are under-estimates for all jurisdictions other than Victoria and Queensland as multi-family households have been excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, the estimates take no account of visitors in the dwelling. Notes: See Appendix B to this report.

Figure 3  Indigenous Households Assisted with Mainstream Public Housing in States and Territories at 30 June 2003, by ASGC Remoteness Classification – AIHW (exc. NSW)

Source: AIHW, 2002-03 Public Housing Unit Record File held in the National Housing Data Repository. Notes: See Appendix B to this report.
One point of recent policy focus with respect to Indigenous housing has been the ‘appropriate’ geographical distribution of mainstream and Indigenous-specific housing services. CSHA (2003-08) Recitals state that Indigenous-specific public housing is to be targeted to rural and remote areas and that Commonwealth and State Governments are to work to increase access to mainstream public housing in urban and regional centres.

In spite of this focus on targeting Indigenous-specific public housing to rural and remote areas and mainstream public housing to urban and regional centres the evidence suggests that a significant share of mainstream public housing in some States is allocated to rural and remote areas and that such a distribution helps to ensure greater access to public housing by Indigenous people in these areas than would otherwise be the case.

The important role that mainstream public housing plays in rural and remote areas is further underlined when we focus on those jurisdictions with significant populations of Indigenous people in outer regional, remote and very remote communities. Figure 3 provides a detailed State and Territory-based profile. As indicated in Figure 3, WA and the NT have a relatively large stock of mainstream public housing dwellings in remote and very remote areas occupied by Indigenous households. In the NT around half of all Indigenous households in mainstream public housing reside in remote and very remote locations. For WA, one quarter of all Indigenous households in mainstream public housing reside in remote areas and a further 17 per cent reside in very remote communities. Queensland, SA, Victoria, WA and Tasmania all have relatively large numbers of Indigenous households in outer regional areas.

4.5 Access According to Need

As noted previously, there has been a significant increase in the number of Indigenous households in the mainstream public housing sector during a period when the sector as a whole has declined. This growth in the Indigenous mainstream public housing stock provides direct evidence of increasing access to mainstream public housing on the part of Indigenous households. A principal source of interest in the issue of Indigenous access to mainstream public housing, however, lies not in access per se but in the role of mainstream public housing as a source of long-term secure housing for Indigenous people in housing need.

We have previously noted the high levels of homelessness and of inadequate housing among Indigenous people. It is, therefore, important to determine the extent to which the growth in Indigenous households in mainstream public housing reflects the provision of assistance to Indigenous households in a position of significant housing need. Tied in with this question is the relative role of priority access as a means of entry to public housing relative to wait-turn entry. A decline in the stock of public housing, coupled with large numbers of households in primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness, demands a reorientation of the public housing system to one even more focussed on public housing acting in the central role of a long-term secure exit point for those in need.\(^3\) An even more targeted public housing system than the

\(^{18}\) In currently accepted practice in Australia the homeless comprise those living in improvised dwellings and on the streets (primary homelessness), those in temporary accommodation or in emergency or
present would weight the allocation of new places even more heavily in favour of those in significant housing need than is currently done.

The concept of ‘significant housing need’ can be operationalised through the CSHA ‘priority access to those in greatest need’ national standard. Under this standard those households in greatest need are defined as low income households who were also (a) homeless, or (b) their life or safety was at risk in their accommodation, or (c) their health condition was aggravated by their housing, or (d) their housing was inappropriate to their needs (a range of specific needs are listed), or (e) they had very high rental costs (they paid 41 per cent or more of their income in rent).

Before presenting estimates of access outcomes on a greatest need basis it is important to note a number of caveats when considering cross-jurisdictional findings on greatest need allocations.

First, each State and Territory adopts their own priority access rules and categories. The NMDS then seeks to standardise State and Territory priority access categories against the CSHA ‘priority access to those in greatest need’ national standard. Most jurisdictions adopt roughly similar priority access rules and so results are roughly comparable across jurisdictions. The exception is Queensland. More stringent priority access guidelines apply in Queensland than other jurisdictions and much greater emphasis in Queensland is placed on wait-turn allocations. Of course, many Queensland households may have gained access to mainstream public housing on a wait-turn basis but satisfy the NMDA criteria of greatest need (but not Queensland’s own priority access criteria). Some of these households may also have been moved through the wait-turn queue more quickly because of the urgency of their case.

Second, the NMDS records for WA and Tasmania contain a large number of newly assisted cases where the greatest need status for the household is unknown. Hence, the proportion of new entrants classified as being in the greatest need category is likely to be a significant under-estimate of the true figure. However, we do not know, from the national data, the extent to which this is true. To complicate matters further all Tasmanian households entering mainstream public housing have been classified into either the greatest need category or the unknown greatest need category. There are no newly assisted Tasmanian households listed in the non-greatest need category. The same is true for WA in the case of Indigenous households. In the case of non-Indigenous households only a very small number (0.1 per cent) of WA entrants are classified as being in the non-greatest need category.

Third, NSW excludes the very high rental costs category as a greatest need category so reducing the potential pool of greatest need mainstream public housing applicants in NSW.

Figure 4 provides estimates of the proportion of newly assisted mainstream public housing tenants which entered under greatest need criteria in each jurisdiction. Only 7 per cent of newly assisted Queensland Indigenous mainstream public housing tenant households entered public housing on a greatest needs basis in 2002-03 (Figure 4). The corresponding figure for non-Indigenous households was only marginally higher at 9

transitional accommodation (secondary homelessness) and those living in boarding houses (tertiary homelessness).
per cent (Figure 4). These estimates are, of course, very low relative to those from other jurisdictions.

Advice from the Queensland Department of Housing is that Queensland’s priority allocations to public housing are much lower than other jurisdictions because Queensland’s approach to priority need is different. One point of difference suggested by the Queensland Department of Housing is that extensive use is made of the community housing sector to house those in crisis need. In Queensland, priority housing does not act as a form emergency housing with applicants who require emergency housing being referred to an appropriate crisis housing organisation. It should also be remembered that the Queensland estimates represent applicants who satisfied the stringent priority housing criteria that apply in Queensland but do not include clients in similar circumstances who were waiting to be housed through Queensland’s standard wait turn criteria. It is our understanding that there also exist provisions in Queensland’s wait-turn systems to fast-track a proportion of applicants through the wait-turn list because of their perceived level of high housing need.

It should also be noted that since 2002-03 (the year covered by our disaggregated analysis) there has been a significant increase in the proportion of those entering public housing allocations on a priority access basis in Queensland. Indeed the most recent figures available from the Department of Housing in Queensland to end-May 2005 suggest that the rate of entry into public housing through the priority access channel in Queensland has more than doubled over what it was in 2002-03.

In sharp contrast to the low rates of entry to mainstream public housing by those in greatest need in Queensland, the ACT, Victoria and Tasmania have high rates of entry for those in greatest need. In the ACT, 94 per cent of newly assisted Indigenous households in mainstream public housing fall in the greatest need category. The corresponding estimates for Victoria and Tasmania are 84 and 82 per cent respectively (Figure 4). In terms of newly assisted non-Indigenous mainstream public housing tenant households, the corresponding greatest need estimates are: the ACT (87 per cent), Tasmania (81 per cent), and Victoria (66 per cent) (see Figure 4).

There are two main conclusions from these estimates for the ACT, Victoria and Tasmania. The first is that entry into mainstream public housing in these jurisdictions is primarily on the basis of the meeting of the greatest need criteria. The second conclusion is that Indigenous households are more likely to enter mainstream public housing as greatest need tenant households than non-Indigenous households in these jurisdictions. There are a number of possible reasons for this. The first is that Indigenous households are significantly overrepresented in various categories of homelessness and so it is more likely that they would also be overrepresented in the greatest need category. Putting greater emphasis on priority access on the basis of high levels of housing need may improve further the access of Indigenous households in marginalised housing positions to mainstream public housing dwellings.

NSW, SA, WA and the NT exhibit lower greatest need entry than the ACT, Victoria and Tasmania. In WA the lower rate (mathematically) reflects the very high ‘unknown status’ count but we do not know the extent to which those households located in this category might lie in the greatest need status. All of these jurisdictions follow the pattern of higher greatest need rates of entry rates by Indigenous households.
## Figure 4  Indigenous Households Newly Allocated in the Financial Year of 2002-03 in Mainstream Public Housing, by Greatest Need Status– AIHW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2002-03 Public Housing Unit Record File held in the National Housing Data Repository.

Notes: See Appendix B to this report.

### 4.6  Access to Accommodation in a Timely Fashion by those in Need

Our fourth MNDS indicator of mainstream public housing access is the time spent by households waiting to be housed in mainstream public housing. Table 7 presents median waiting times at the jurisdictional level.

It is important to note that the data problems that affected our previous analysis of greatest need also affect our findings on median waiting times. To summarise the key points, the greatest need estimates for Queensland are particularly low largely as a result of more stringent priority access rules; greatest need entry in NSW is lower than one might otherwise expect as a result of the non-inclusion of the high rent greatest need category; and WA has large numbers of newly assisted tenants in the unknown greatest need category (Tasmania to a lesser extent). It is also important to note that the estimates presented refer to waiting times of those who gain access to mainstream public housing. They are not estimated median waiting times of all households seeking accommodation (some of whom may never gain access). In other words, the estimates are conditional estimates where the relevant condition is that access has been granted.

Households assessed as in greatest need are given priority access to public housing accommodation in the Australian system. As such, one would expect median waiting times for those in greatest need who have gained access to mainstream public housing to be much shorter than waiting times for other newly assisted tenant households. The evidence confirms this conjecture. The median waiting time for non-Indigenous newly assisted tenant households in the greatest
need category in 2002-03 is 78 days. For Indigenous tenants in the greatest need category, the median waiting time was 61 days. For those not in the greatest need category the median waiting time for non-Indigenous public housing tenants was 517 days. This compares with a corresponding estimate for Indigenous households of 236 days.

Table 7: Households Newly Allocated In the Financial Year of 2002-03 in Mainstream Public Housing, Mean/Median Length of Waiting Time (Days), by Greatest Need Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greatest Need Status</th>
<th>Indigenous households</th>
<th>non-Indigenous households</th>
<th>All newly allocated households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>Qld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean waiting time</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median waiting time</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean waiting time</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median waiting time</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean waiting time</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median waiting time</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AIHW, 2002-03 Public Housing Unit Record File held in the National Housing Data Repository, AIHW.

Notes A:
1. 465 households who were newly allocated in the financial year of 2002-03 were excluded in this analysis due to missing information on waiting time.
2. All newly allocated households include 1,854 households with unknown Indigenous status.
3. The waiting period here refers to the period of time from the date of application to the date assistance commenced. However, if an applicant is in the ‘greatest need’ category, the waiting time refers to the date of the category entry date to the date assistance commenced. If an applicant is transferred from ‘non greatest need’ category to ‘greatest need’ category, only the time spent on the waiting list from the category entry date is counted.

Notes B: See Appendix B to this report.
Figure 5  Households Who Were Assisted in the Financial Year of 2002-03 in Mainstream Public Housing, Median Length of Tenancy (Days), by Indigenous Status

Source: AIHW, 2002-03 Public Housing Unit Record File held in the National Housing Data Repository, AIHW.
Notes: See Appendix B to this report.
Our results indicate two things. First, households in greatest need are accessing mainstream public housing much faster than those who are not in greatest need. Second, Indigenous households, who gain access to mainstream public housing, do so quicker than non-Indigenous households. The latter result may, of course, reflect higher levels of severe need among Indigenous applicants than non-Indigenous applicants. If this is the case then it suggests that mainstream public housing authorities have acted in a positive direction with respect to gaining access to public housing by those in need.

4.7 The Sustainability of Tenancies

Our final NMDS indicator is that of the duration of tenancies. Ideally, the analysis of the duration of tenancies needs to account for what is referred to as censoring bias. Over any given ‘window’ of time (say the 2002-03 financial year) some tenancies will end and some will persist past the window date (say 30 June 2003). Those that end during the data window are referred to as completed tenancies. Those that remain open at the end of the data window are referred to as uncompleted tenancies or right censored tenancies (so-called because the censoring of the tenancy is at the right hand side of the data window). It is obviously not possible to determine precisely the final duration of such uncompleted right censored tenancies. However, a range of techniques have been developed by statisticians and econometricians to deal with the issue of censoring.

The AIHW advises that the NMDS system cannot currently accommodate an analysis that accounts for right censoring bias. An intermediate approach adopted by the AIHW in the present 2002-03 financial year analysis is to assume completion of all right censored tenancy spells at 30 June 2003. The adoption of this assumption induces some bias into the results. Given that the flow of Indigenous households into mainstream public housing in 2002-03 was proportionately greater than that for non-Indigenous households, the adoption of the assumption that right censored spells are complete is likely to reduce recorded Indigenous spell lengths more than non-Indigenous spell lengths.

Bearing these qualifications in mind, Figure 5 presents estimates for each jurisdiction of the duration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous tenancies (on the basis of the conversion of all right-censored tenancies into completed tenancies as at 30 June 2003).

The median duration of a tenancy for Indigenous households in WA is estimated to be 569 days — the lowest median duration estimate for any series displayed in Figure 5. This figure compares with the corresponding estimate for non-Indigenous households of 1660 days. In other words non-Indigenous households on average remain in a tenancy roughly three times longer than Indigenous households. The median tenancy duration estimate for Indigenous households in WA is, however, likely to be artificially low as WA has recently recorded a very significant jump in the number of newly assisted Indigenous households. As uncompleted (or right-censored) tenancies are treated as completed tenancies under the AIHW methodology, the influx of recent new tenancies has the effect of lowering the median duration estimate below what it would otherwise be.
While WA has its own unique features it remains the case that across all States and Territories Indigenous tenancies display much shorter median durations as compared to non-Indigenous tenancies. For example, in SA the median duration of Indigenous tenancies is 639 days as compared to the median duration for non-Indigenous tenancies of 2249 days (i.e., non-Indigenous households remain in a tenancy roughly three and half times longer than Indigenous households). In the NT the median duration of Indigenous tenancies is 777 days compared with 1729 days for non-Indigenous tenancies.

In summary: the findings lead us to the conclusion that Indigenous households experience significantly shorter tenancy durations than non-Indigenous households.

### 4.8 Involuntary Tenancy Termination

Our final sustainability indicator is that of Involuntary Tenancy Termination. The NMDS data does not include items related to tenancy termination. A cross-jurisdictional analysis of this topic, therefore, is not possible using NMDS data. As far as we are aware only WA provides detailed publicly available data on involuntary tenancy termination in public housing on an Indigenous household status basis. The Western Australian statistics do not separately identify the mainstream and State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SOMIH) sectors and so the following analysis is for the entire public rental housing program in WA.¹⁹

WA’s publicly available eviction statistics comprise the following items:

- Termination Notice (Indigenous and non-Indigenous breakdowns available).
- Court Orders obtained (Indigenous and non-Indigenous breakdowns available).
- Restored tenancy (Indigenous and non-Indigenous breakdowns available).
- Vacated or abandoned tenancy (Indigenous breakdown not published).
- Bailiff eviction (Indigenous and non-Indigenous breakdowns available).
- Action pending (Indigenous breakdown not published).
- Reason for eviction (Indigenous breakdown not published).

In WA, Homeswest may take a decision to terminate a tenancy due to a breach under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987. When it does so a Termination Notice is issued. The Termination Notice states that the tenant has only seven days to vacate the premises. Where tenants do not move out within seven days, Homeswest may apply to the Local Court nearest to the rental premises for Court Orders to evict a tenant. A Warrant of Possession can be obtained once Court Orders have been obtained. Under Homeswest’s policy final bailiff eviction action should only proceed if the tenant has not made a genuine attempt to resolve the problem underlying the original Termination Notice. A restored tenancy is one where a Court Order for

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Termination and Possession has been granted and the Warrant of Possession is not executed.

For each of the above termination/eviction items, for which an Indigenous breakdown is available, we estimate an average monthly termination/eviction rate. This rate is derived by first dividing each month’s number of Indigenous or non-Indigenous households who receive a tenancy termination notice (or who are evicted) by the estimated number of Indigenous or non-Indigenous households in public housing and then taking the average of the rates so derived (multiplying the resulting figure by 100). A monthly Indigenous and non-Indigenous split of public housing households is not available and so monthly estimates have been derived. Our estimates are likely to be affected by the change in WA’s recording of Indigenous household status in 2003-04. It is possible that the effect of this change to the Indigenous status identifier was to increase the denominator of the eviction rate expression more than the numerator and so lead to an artificially lower Indigenous eviction rate (and a higher non-Indigenous eviction rate) than would otherwise be the case.

Western Australian estimated Indigenous and non-Indigenous termination/eviction rates for 2004 are presented in Figure 6. As is evident from Figure 6 the estimated Indigenous Termination Notice rate for 2004 was 2.19 per cent compared with a rate of 0.54 for non-Indigenous households in public housing. In other words, the Termination Notice rate for Indigenous households was over four times that for non-Indigenous households. On average, around one-fifth of Termination Notices result in Court Orders being obtained. The Court Order rate for Indigenous households (0.40 per cent) remains roughly four times that for non-Indigenous households (0.11 per cent).

Around a third of those households receiving Court Orders have their tenancies restored while a further quarter abandon or vacate their dwellings on receipt of Court Orders. Bailiff evictions occur in around a quarter of the remaining cases in which Court Orders were obtained. The estimated average bailiff eviction rate for Indigenous households in public housing was 0.06 per cent (6 in every ten thousand Indigenous households are evicted in any one month) as compared with 0.02 per cent for non-Indigenous households (2 in every ten thousand Indigenous households are evicted in any one month). In other words, relative to the size of the tenant population, Indigenous households are evicted at roughly three times the rate of non-Indigenous households. Rent arrears accounts for the majority of evictions with anti-social behaviour also prominent as a reason for an eviction.
Figure 6  Estimated Average Monthly Eviction Rates for Public Housing (Including SOMIH) in WA, 2004

Source: Western Australian Department of Housing and Works (DHW).

Notes:
1 A restored tenancy is one where a Court Order for Termination and Possession has been granted and the Warrant of Possession is not executed.
2. Bailiff action occurs where the tenant is still in occupation when the Bailiff calls at the property to execute the Warrant of Possession (eviction).

4.9 Conclusion

An analysis of mainstream public housing Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability outcomes is affected by data quality and data interpretation ambiguities. However, these limitations are well understood and it remains possible to draw a number of broad conclusions in regard to Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability outcomes in mainstream public housing from the quantitative component of our study.

- Overall Access: The analysis of trends in the Indigenous mainstream public housing household stock in Victoria, WA and SA is affected by a large jump in Indigenous household numbers due to a better a capturing of Indigenous household data. However, it remains the case that, even after accounting for this artificial increase in the number of Indigenous households, there has been a compositional shift towards Indigenous households in terms both of the stock of existing household tenants and in terms of newly assisted mainstream public households. Access to mainstream public housing for Indigenous households has improved in both absolute and relative (i.e., against the non-Indigenous population) in recent years.
- **Access to Suitable Accommodation:** Overcrowding among Indigenous households in mainstream public housing remains of critical policy concern.

- **Access According to Need:** Entry into mainstream public housing is primarily on the basis of significant housing need. The highly targeted nature of public housing entry is further illustrated by the prevalence of low income outcomes among those in mainstream public housing. Indigenous households are more likely to enter mainstream public housing as greatest need tenant households than non-Indigenous households and are more likely to experience lower income levels than non-Indigenous tenants while in public housing. The public housing system is being squeezed by a declining stock. This further underlines the need to place even greater emphasis on priority access channels of entry if high levels of unmet housing need among Indigenous households are to be improved.

- **Access to Accommodation in a Timely Fashion by those in Need:** Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in greatest need are accessing mainstream public housing much faster than those who are not in greatest need. The evidence suggests that Indigenous households who gain access to mainstream public housing do so quicker than non-Indigenous households. This, in all likelihood, reflects higher levels of severe need among Indigenous applicants than non-Indigenous applicants.

- **The Sustainability of Tenancies:** Indigenous households have much shorter tenancy durations than non-Indigenous households. There remain significant tenancy sustainability problems to be addressed by Housing Authorities.

- **Involuntary Tenancy Termination:** From the limited information we have, involuntary tenancy termination is far greater among Indigenous households than non-Indigenous households.

5. **MAINSTREAM PUBLIC HOUSING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS**

This section provides an overview of State and Territory public rental policies and programs and explores how these policies and programs act to influence Indigenous mainstream public housing access and tenancy sustainability outcomes. Our review is based both on responses to a survey we administered to State/Territory Housing Authorities (hereafter the *State/ Territory Housing Authority Survey*) and our own analysis of existing jurisdictional policies and programs.\(^20\) Our review is not intended as a comprehensive evaluation of policies and programs in each jurisdiction.

The *State/ Territory Housing Authority Survey* was designed to capture information on a range of topics relevant to the present study. The survey was sent to peak State/Territory Housing Authorities. (See Appendix A for a list of survey responses.) Information was sought in six main areas: (1) State/Territory Housing Authority perspectives on difficulties or barriers faced by Indigenous people in accessing

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\(^20\) Responses to the survey were provided by the NSW Department of Housing; the Housing and Infrastructure Division of the Northern Territory Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs; the WA Department of Housing and Works; the ACT Department of Disability, Housing Services; the Queensland Department of Housing; The South Australian Department for Families and Communities; the Victorian Office of Housing (OoH); and Housing Tasmania.
mainstream public housing programs and in sustaining tenancies in public housing; (2) policies, programs and practices that may affect Indigenous access to mainstream public housing and the sustainability of Indigenous tenancies; (3) State/Territory Housing Authority views on the effectiveness of current policies and programs; (4) specific actions taken by State/Territory Housing Authorities to improve Indigenous access to mainstream public housing over the last two years; (5) the level of Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing decision making; and (6) State/Territory Housing Authority recommendations for policy action that might improve the access of Indigenous people to mainstream public housing in the future and help sustain tenancies in mainstream public housing.  

5.1 State/Territory Housing Authority Perspectives on Impediments to Indigenous Access to Mainstream Public Housing

As noted previously, the State/Territory Housing Authority Survey requested Authorities to detail any impediments that they believed limited access to mainstream public housing options on the part of Indigenous households. We begin our policy review with a brief outline of these various perspectives.

An inadequate supply of public housing was cited by a number of jurisdictions as a major factor limiting mainstream public housing options for Indigenous households in need. A limited supply of mainstream public housing dwellings manifests itself in long waiting times experienced by public housing applicants and in high levels of ‘churning’ of those in housing need through various forms of crisis and emergency housing and unstable housing situations in the private rental market.

In addition to the overall problem of an inadequate supply of mainstream public housing dwellings, jurisdictions cited three additional supply-side forces further impeding Indigenous mainstream public housing opportunities. The first is a low turnover of dwellings in public housing (more accurately a low exit rate from public

21 The specific questions put in the survey were:

1. Provide a listing and briefly summarise policies that apply in your jurisdiction that relate to the issue of Indigenous access to mainstream public housing and the sustainability (or duration) of tenancies in these particular tenancies.
2. List and briefly describe best-practice programs in your jurisdiction that improve Indigenous access to mainstream public housing and improve the sustainability of tenancies.
3. How are Indigenous people represented in mainstream public housing decision making processes within your particular jurisdiction?
4. Provide estimates and comment on the levels of Indigenous representation in mainstream public housing programs and on the duration of tenancies of Indigenous mainstream public housing tenants within your jurisdiction.
5. What difficulties or barriers are faced by Indigenous people in accessing mainstream public housing programs and in sustaining tenancies in such housing forms?
6. How effective are current policies and programs in your jurisdiction in improving Indigenous access to mainstream public housing and sustaining tenancies? What specific actions has your jurisdiction taken to improve Indigenous access to mainstream public housing in the last two years?
7. List recommendations for policy action that might improve the access of Indigenous people to mainstream public housing in the future and help sustain tenancies in mainstream public housing.
housing). A low turnover of dwellings results in fewer dwellings becoming available, over any given period of time, to meet the needs of those wishing to enter mainstream public housing. It is right to argue that a low turnover of stock is of policy concern as many incumbent mainstream public housing tenants may be potentially better equipped to cope in the private housing market than some of those on waiting lists particularly those earmarked for priority access.

A second supply-side limitation to Indigenous access to mainstream public housing options is the configuration of the available housing stock relative to the needs of Indigenous households. As noted by a number of jurisdictions, the mismatch between the profile of the stock of public housing and household structures is particularly pertinent in the case of Indigenous households because of the greater prevalence of large and multi-family households among Indigenous people and the shortage of larger sized dwellings in mainstream public housing.

Third, jurisdictions indicated that Indigenous access to mainstream public housing is impeded when shortages of mainstream public housing options exist in geographical areas exhibiting high rates of housing need.

Jurisdictions are responding to these supply-side impediments in various ways. For example, the Western Australian Department of Housing and Works (DHW) has recently begun a significant large dwelling building program that will help to ensure that mainstream public housing can better meet the needs of larger Indigenous households (Submission 6, 2004). In New South Wales (NSW), the Department of Housing recently introduced a range of measures (including limiting the length of leases) that were aimed at increasing the turnover of properties for those households who are better able to sustain tenancies in private markets.

On the demand side, poor channels of communication between Housing Authorities and the Indigenous community and a lack of knowledge about housing options by Indigenous households who are eligible to receive assistance in public housing were also considered as factors limiting access to mainstream public housing by Indigenous people. NSW, for example, commented upon the lack of awareness among eligible Indigenous households of the services that exist and of the application processes that apply (Submission 4, 2004). Language barriers were viewed as a serious impediment to access by the Northern Territory (NT) who also pointed to a limited experience by Indigenous households of government and non-government services as major impediments to access (Submission 3, 2004).

An adverse tenancy history was a factor thought to limit access to State/Territory Housing Authorities by a number of jurisdictions including the NT and Western Australia (WA). Key components of an adverse tenancy history include debts, abandonment, eviction, excessive repairs, and noise and nuisance complaints. Jurisdictions have generally moved away from a hard bar to re-entry on the part of tenants with adverse tenancy histories (particularly those with an existing debt history). Nevertheless, as pointed out by the Queensland Housing Authority, a perception exists that access to public housing is denied if households have existing
debts with the Authority (Submission 5, 2004). Indigenous households are more affected by existing debt problems than other households and, therefore, more likely not to apply for re-entry because of existing debt problems. Most jurisdictions still require clear evidence of debts being repaid before re-entry to mainstream public housing will be approved. The matter of an existing debt being an actual or perceived impediment to entry arose in the context of the Inala (Queensland) case study (see the following section) and is one that we shall return to.

A fear of discrimination against Indigenous households by State/Territory Housing Authorities and a mistrust of Housing Authorities were also considered important potential factors reducing the likelihood of eligible Indigenous households seeking access to mainstream public housing options by NSW, Queensland and the NT. Victoria also noted the problem of the lack of understanding or awareness of Indigenous culture by mainstream public housing staff as an impediment to Indigenous access to mainstream public housing (Submission 8, 2005). Low literacy and numeracy levels, family and cultural obligations and the limited understanding of urban by-laws were also presented as factors impinging on Indigenous access outcomes by the NT.

Overcrowding problems in mainstream public housing were cited by a number of jurisdictions as a major factor impacting adversely on the sustainability of tenancies. The South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) also cited extended absences from property, social issues, living skills, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic/family violence as factors that may impact on the sustainability of tenancies (Submission 11, 2004). Difficulties in contacting Indigenous clients in transient living situations were also cited as a potential cause of instability in Indigenous tenancies. Both Queensland and South Australia (SA) noted the higher incidence of absences from properties without necessary notification among Indigenous household tenants as creating problems in terms of tenancy sustainability. A similar range of factors influencing tenancy sustainability were mentioned by WA who also noted a role for family feuding, illness, financial problems, death and trauma, and the imposition of jail sentences (lasting over 6 months).

The experiences of Indigenous households who faced barriers to mainstream public housing access in WA were given a voice in the WA Equal Opportunity Commission report Finding a Place (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004b). Notably, many of the above mentioned factors limiting the access of Indigenous households to mainstream public housing were also mentioned in the submissions of Indigenous people and of tenant advocates to the Inquiry. These experiences are presented in chapter 13 of the Finding a Place report.

In December 2004, the project team hosted a workshop for those working in various aspects of housing (tenant advocacy, public housing, community housing and homelessness support, prevention and transition programs) to determine their views on impediments experienced by Indigenous households in accessing public housing and sustaining tenancies. The workshop participants focussed on many of

22 Queensland’s policy is that those with existing debts may re-enter public housing if an appropriate repayment plan can be established.
the same issues noted above, namely, the lack of public housing stock, inadequate design, the condition and size of existing stock, debt and eviction histories, and poor knowledge of the public housing sector and application processes as key impediments to Indigenous households.

The workshop also elicited the views of participants with regard to the effectiveness of existing programs and strategies aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous people in mainstream public housing. A number of these programs are discussed further below. Culturally appropriate housing design, additional resources for early support programs, improved communication mechanisms and cross-agency partnerships were key identified as key strategies which would strengthen outcomes for Indigenous people in public housing.

5.2 State/Territory Housing Authority Policies and Programs

We now turn to an analysis of existing State and Territory public housing policies and programs. Our brief outline of State/Territory Housing Authority perspectives on impediments faced by Indigenous households in accessing mainstream public housing points to a number of policy areas demanding further attention.

First, those policies which affect the supply of mainstream public housing dwellings. Second, access-related policies and programs including public rental housing eligibility policy, application processes and practices, the relative role played by wait-turn and priority access waiting lists, dwelling type and locational allocation rules and practices and guidelines related to prior tenancy history. Third, policies and programs which influence the sustainability of tenancies including the existence and structure of tenancy support programs, particularly those aimed at assisting tenancies at risk and eviction practices and rules. Fourth, programs designed to increase the representation of Indigenous people in housing offices and in the running and administration of public housing.

Policies and Programs which Affect Access to Mainstream Public Housing

There has been a decline in the number of households assisted by mainstream public housing over the last decade. The reduction in the stock of mainstream public housing occupied dwellings reduces the ability of State/Territory Housing Authorities to provide accommodation to households in need. This leaves such households, including Indigenous households, with fewer opportunities to secure affordable long-term accommodation.

The CSHA is the primary source of capital funding available to State/Territory Housing Authorities to build or purchase dwellings for mainstream public housing. However, State and Territory governments supplement CSHA-provided capital funds so as to add to the stock of public housing dwellings over and above what that stock level might otherwise be. Over the years, jurisdictions have adopted different approaches to the role of public housing and have consequently supplemented Commonwealth sources of funds to different degrees. This means that mainstream public housing’s share of total residential dwellings differs between the various jurisdictions. As a result, opportunities available to Indigenous households in
accessing mainstream public housing also differ between the various States and Territories.

Figure 7 provides a profile of the number of households assisted in mainstream public housing and in the combined mainstream and SOMIH public housing sector as at 30 June 2001 as a proportion of the number of households in each jurisdiction at the time of the 2001 Census. As evident from Figure 7, the mainstream public housing share of non-institutional (or private) residential dwellings in 2001 was considerably smaller in Queensland, Victoria and WA (less than 4 per cent of the stock of private dwellings) and to a lesser extent NSW than in SA, Tasmania, the NT and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) (over 8 per cent of the stock of private dwellings). The small share of private dwellings taken by mainstream public housing in Queensland and WA is of particular concern given the relatively high number of Indigenous households in severe housing need in these States.

We do not have accurate estimates of the number of ‘private’ residential dwellings in Australia at present. However, the decline in the mainstream public housing stock over the last four years coupled with the growth in the population, would suggest that, for all jurisdictions, the estimates presented in Figure 7 are likely to overstate the current relative share of private residential dwellings taken by mainstream public housing. In terms of relative positions, it is likely that the gap between the high public housing share states of SA, Tasmania, the NT and the ACT and the low public housing share states of Queensland, Victoria and WA has narrowed somewhat in the last three years. The stock of mainstream public housing households fell by roughly 8 per cent in SA, Tasmania and the NT over the period 2001-02 to 2003-04. This compares with an average decline of 1.2 per cent in the number of mainstream public housing households in Victoria, Queensland and WA.

In summary, there is a smaller mainstream public housing stock available for households now than there was in the recent past. This reduces opportunities for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous households to access long-term secure accommodation options in mainstream public housing. Previously, we indicated that the representation of Indigenous people in mainstream public housing has, in fact, increased in recent years. These two findings are not contradictory. They can be reconciled on the basis that the rate of growth in Indigenous households in mainstream public housing may have even been greater than it was had more opportunities for access been presented.

Access opportunities remain significantly more limited in Queensland, WA and Victoria and to a lesser extent NSW than they do in SA, Tasmania and the NT.
Figure 7  Mainstream and SOMIH Households as a Per Cent of all Private Dwellings, 2001

Access to mainstream housing is not simply a function of the available supply of dwellings. Importantly, access is strongly influenced by eligibility criteria, application processes and wait-turn and priority access policies and procedures.

Entry to mainstream public housing follows a two-step sequence. In the first step, an application for public housing assistance is submitted by a household who, simultaneously, can also apply for priority access. Priority access mechanisms apply in all jurisdictions and attempt to ensure that those applicants in greatest need can access public housing accommodation quicker than other eligible applicants on the general waiting list.

The second stage of the entry process involves an assessment being made by the relevant State/Territory Housing Authority as to the eligibility of applicant households for public housing. Where relevant, an assessment is made as to eligibility for priority access. Policies and programs with respect to the application process and the eligibility of applicants for mainstream public housing all affect Indigenous mainstream public housing access outcomes.

The application process can be a complicated one for households with limited experience in formal application processes and with poor literacy backgrounds. Housing offices may also be intimidating places for some applicants. In this environment it is important that application processes are made as streamlined as possible. It is also important that Indigenous households seeking accommodation do so in a supportive, culturally appropriate environment. In this regard, the establishment of streamlined application processes, which allow applicants to apply for both mainstream Public Housing and Indigenous Housing in one application form, are important. In SA, the mainstream Housing Authority and the Aboriginal Housing Authority (AHA) have implemented a new joint policy enabling housing applications to be transferred between the two agencies. Similar arrangements are evident in Queensland and Victoria.

Developing community-based channels by which Indigenous people can be provided with information on housing options is also important in improving access outcomes for Indigenous people. For example, the ACT funds the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service to provide a housing liaison service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service provides advice and information on housing options, assists people to access appropriate housing and supports people to maintain public housing tenancies.

The NSW Department of Housing is presently increasing the number of services delivered by organisations that are either managed by Indigenous people or who have staff who are Indigenous. This is being done with the aim of improving communication channels and the understanding of Indigenous needs. This also includes presenting adequate information about services in appropriate formats, and to supporting housing providers to work with and through Indigenous organisations to communicate their policies and services to Indigenous people. The Department has also attempted to keep service policies simple and present application forms in
plain language. An information package is being developed for clients, including a version that is culturally appropriate for Indigenous people (Submission 4, 2004).

Those Indigenous people in greatest housing need are homeless people. State and Territory based Homelessness Strategies that bring together support services in an integrated fashion at points of greatest stress offer the greatest hope for improved outcomes for Indigenous homeless people. Homelessness Strategies have been implemented in a number of jurisdictions in the last 5 years including Victoria, WA, SA and the ACT.

The most important program directed to those who are homeless is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). To generate effective long-term solutions for homeless people, the SAAP requires strong co-ordination between various agencies. In WA, The DHW and the Department for Community Development have established protocols designed to improve the outcomes and quality of service for people requiring assistance under the SAAP program. Field officers and senior managers from each Department meet regularly, and referral processes within Departments have been streamlined to allow faster assessment for clients requiring urgent accommodation. Mainstream public housing plays a vital role in providing an end-point long-term accommodation option for those who leave SAAP accommodation.

Public Housing Authorities can also play other vital roles in improving homelessness outcomes. The Western Australian DHW, for example, has established a 24 hour Helpline for homeless people, which works in conjunction with the Salvation Army’s crisis line. Other agencies involved with the Helpline include the Noongar Patrol Service (a service manned by Indigenous people to provide support for homeless people) and the Department for Community Development. While this service refers homeless people to crisis and emergency services it can also act as a starting point for applications to made to public housing and to the efficient processing of priority access claims. Likewise, in the NT, the Community Harmony Strategy has been established as a partnership between the Government groups and is aimed at creating pathways for Indigenous people towards secure accommodation.

In Victoria a number of Homelessness Strategy initiatives have been developed in which the Office of Housing (OoH) plays an important role. These include:

- The THM-Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative which provides linked housing and homelessness support for people leaving Victorian prisons.
- The Indigenous Young People Service System Intervention Project has a focus on young pregnant Indigenous women and young Indigenous parents who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.
- The Indigenous Leaving Care – Housing and Support Initiative which includes a specific youth focus in the Indigenous Young People Leaving Car.
- The Indigenous Service Mapping Initiative, which determines the extent to which Indigenous and non-Indigenous housing and homelessness programs provide housing and other support services to homeless people or those at risk of becoming homeless.
**Eligibility Criteria**

Across all jurisdictions, eligibility for mainstream public housing is conditional on the meeting of a number of criteria whose principal aim is to target accommodation to low income households. To be eligible to receive assistance the following criteria are applied across the various jurisdictions. Applicants must:

- Be an Australian citizen or permanent resident.
- Live in the State or Territory in which public housing is being requested.
- Meet income and assets tests.
- Not own, or part own, residential property in Australia.
- Be over a certain age (16, 17 or 18 years or above depending on the jurisdiction).
- Meet or be prepared to meet any prior debts from previous tenancies.

NSW requires applicants to also show that they can successfully maintain a tenancy with, or without, support while other jurisdictions may take account of past breaches of tenancy agreements and the relevant legislations in decisions on whether or not to admit a tenant (e.g., the ACT and WA). Both of these policies need to be applied with care to ensure that Indigenous households with past adverse tenancy management problems are given an opportunity to access mainstream public housing in the future.

Jurisdictions differ with respect to the setting of income and assets tests and the strictness with which a prior debt policy is implemented.

In terms of the former, SA adopts the assets test that applies in respect to Federal income support payments. For a couple the assets limit is $320,500. All other jurisdictions apply stricter assets tests than that which holds with respect to Federal income support payments. However, it is often difficult to make comparisons between jurisdictions because of differences in the definition of what counts as assessable assets (the same point applies with respect to assessable income). In Victoria, those with assessable assets (‘cash assets’ in the main) greater than $30,000 are ineligible for support. In WA, the assessable assets limit for a single person is $36,400 while for a couple the assets limit is $60,000. Other jurisdictions’ assets tests lie between these two points.

In terms of income tests, both Victoria and WA require a minimum positive income level before an applicant is eligible for public housing. Income tests applying in WA, NSW and Victoria are roughly similar. For example, a single person in WA must earn less than $390 per week (in all other areas other than the North-West and remote areas) to be eligible while in Victoria the comparable figure is $339 per week and in NSW $395. More liberal income tests apply in the NT ($550 per week) and SA ($585 per week).

In summary, public housing is provided on a targeted basis across the various jurisdictions but with some variation in the strictness with which income and assets tests are applied. In a constrained environment, such as that facing public housing at present, targeting ensures that the limited supply of new dwellings which become available is allocated to low income earners rather than to the general rental population. Indigenous households are significantly overrepresented among low
income earners. Hence, the use of income and assets tests provides a generally supportive environment to assisting Indigenous households in need access mainstream public housing.

Access to mainstream public housing can be denied to households on the basis of breaches of the terms of a prior public housing tenancy or the non-repayment of Housing Authority debts. Jurisdictions differ with respect to the strictness with which this condition is applied. However, when strictly applied, such eligibility criteria can act to prevent some of the neediest households from re-entering public housing and securing long-term low-cost accommodation.

Developing ways in which past histories do not act as a bar to re-entry must be one of the key points of focus of policy makers in improving access to mainstream public housing among Indigenous households. WA’s Debt Discount Scheme provides former tenants with outstanding debts the opportunity to get half of their debt waived. This occurs when half the debt is paid through a process of regular repayments. The Debt Discount Scheme allows former tenants to re-enter public housing sooner than they otherwise would. In Victoria, applications that have been rejected in the mainstream public housing sector can be revived by the Aboriginal Housing Board on the advice of the Aboriginal Housing Services Officer who is currently seconded to the Board at the Housing Office. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to access mainstream public housing with a debt still outstanding in Victoria.

The strongest action undertaken by State/Territory Housing Authorities to reduce impediments to access as a result of bad debt histories is that of the NT. Prior debt no longer excludes applicants in the NT from accessing mainstream public housing. The implementation of a debt management plan is now sufficient for eligibility in the NT.

The meeting of income and assets tests and other eligibility criteria simply ensures that an applicant is eligible to enter mainstream public housing. As detailed previously, those accorded public housing can wait for well over a year before they gain access to mainstream public housing accommodation. It is important in this environment that those eligible households in greatest need are accorded priority access to public housing.

As in the case of eligibility rules, priority access guidelines differ across the various jurisdictions. Differences in guidelines are a major, though not only, determinant of the relative size of the priority access entrant category (defined as the proportion of newly assisted mainstream public housing tenants housed under the priority access category). Policy decisions as to the appropriate relative size of priority access and the overall level of severe housing need in a jurisdiction will also influence outcomes.

In NSW, for example, priority access is accorded to those applicants who demonstrate that they are in urgent need of housing and are unable to resolve that need themselves in the private rental market. Those assessed as being in urgent need of housing include those experiencing one of the following conditions:

- **Unstable housing circumstances**: Homelessness, imminent homelessness, living in crisis or emergency accommodation, living with family or friends who are
unable to provide longer term accommodation and living apart from immediate family members because of a lack of appropriate housing alternatives.

- ‘At risk’ factors: Domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, threatening behaviour by one or more household members against another occupant, torture and trauma and refugees in the ‘Women at Risk’, visa subclass 204.
  - Existing accommodation is inappropriate for the meeting of basic housing requirements: severe overcrowding, substandard property conditions (extreme damp, dangerous or unhealthy conditions), lack of essential facilities (water, electricity, bathroom, kitchen), needing secure accommodation to take a child out of care and a severe and an ongoing medical condition or disability where the current housing circumstances have an adverse effect on health or wellbeing outcomes.

Other jurisdictions adopt similar criteria but some add a high rental stress category to the above set. For example, in the ACT, rental stress is assessed as current private rent being greater than 40 per cent of gross assessable income. The inclusion of an additional urgent need category, all other things being equal, increases the relative size of the priority access group (i.e., a higher proportion of newly assisted public housing tenants enter under priority access).

As noted previously, the proportion of new entrants to mainstream public housing coming from greatest need categories is particularly low in Queensland primarily because Queensland’s approach to priority access is different to other jurisdictions (the reader is referred to that discussion). One point of difference is that extensive use is made of the community housing sector to house those in crisis need. However, the recent evidence from Queensland is that there has been a significant recent increase in the proportion of those entering public housing allocations on a priority access basis in Queensland.

### 5.3 Policies and Programs which Affect the Sustainability of Tenancies

As pointed out in our discussion of the mainstream public housing tenancy duration data, data quality issues affect the interpretation of the findings. Notwithstanding these problems it is clear that the duration of Indigenous tenancies in mainstream public housing are considerably shorter than for non-Indigenous tenancies and that, based on WA evidence, eviction and termination notice rates are higher among Indigenous households than non-Indigenous households. These findings underline the need for Housing Authorities to develop supported tenancy programs to assist households that may prematurely exit from public housing or face eviction.

A number of jurisdictions have developed supported tenancy programs. In SA, seven supported tenancy programs have been established which are designed to support families and individuals with complex needs to maintain their tenancies. Private Rental Liaison Officers have also been employed in order to assist households at risk of tenancy eviction in the private rental market through services such as information provision, mediation, advice and referral. Indigenous people make up at least five per cent of targeted households. More generally the SAHT
employs Housing Support Coordinators in each of its Regional Offices; they provide case coordination, case management and case consultancy for clients, including Indigenous, at risk of tenancy failure.

Perhaps the strongest and best integrated tenant support programs exist in WA. The Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) aims to provide tenants with appropriate skills to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as tenants. The support includes regular property visits, financial counselling, family and child support, home skills and help in dealing with drug and alcohol abuse problems. One of the important features of WA’s SHAP program is the important role played by non-government agencies such as Centrecare, Anglicare and Mission Australia in delivering services under the program. Other programs include a financial services program provided to all tenants who receive a Notice of Breach of Agreement for rent arrears. The Western Australian DHW also employs Aboriginal Customer Support Officers who support Indigenous families at risk of losing tenancies, assist tenants to deal with antisocial behaviour, advise tenants on policies and procedures and assist tenants to access appropriate external assistance. The Officers are notified when a termination notice is issued to an Indigenous household. As in other jurisdictions the Centrelink Direct Deduction Scheme is utilised. Under this program tenants in public housing can have their rent (and other payments such as water bills) deducted directly from their Centrelink benefit. This helps to ensure that rent is always paid, removing the chance of rent arrears. WA has established an additional program, the Direct Debit Scheme which is available to all tenants regardless of their income source.

In addition to SHAP, there exist a number of inter-agency Western Australian programs designed to support the sustainability of tenancies. These include:

- The joint DHW and Department for Community Development Tenant Referral Program, a program that runs along similar lines to SHAP but with a greater focus on wider social problems.
- The Aboriginal Cyclical Offending Program in which a number of agencies (including the Department of Justice, the Police and Department for Community Development and the DHW) work together to provide services and assistance to Aboriginal people. From a housing perspective, the focus is on Aboriginal people in the program maintaining their tenancy or in providing priority assistance to enter public housing and ensuring that the housing provided meets the cultural needs.
- The Strong Families Program and Indigenous Families Program deal with families having problems in the community, including mainstream public housing tenants. The Indigenous Families Program is run by an Aboriginal organisation in partnership with the DHW, the Department for Community Development and a coalition of Aboriginal agencies. The Program supports Aboriginal families in sustaining existing tenancies.
- The In House Practical Support Program which provides support and skill development for Aboriginal families in conventional housing.
- The Aboriginal Tenancy Support Service. This service is funded by the Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure Directorate within the DHW and involves
six Aboriginal organisations in various locations supporting Aboriginal tenancy to enable them to fulfil their obligations as tenants. Prospective tenants are also supported.

A Tenancy Management scheme also exists in Tasmania where Indigenous tenants of mainstream housing may request their tenancy to be administered by an Aboriginal Customer Services Officer.

Victoria has recently established an Indigenous Tenants at Risk of Eviction Pilot. The OoH in partnership with the AHBV (Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria) has funded two Indigenous specific agencies to undertake an 18-month pilot to assist Indigenous tenants at risk of eviction. The Metropolitan area agency deals with tenants in SOMIH (AHBV) properties, the other pilot based in the Mallee sub-region deals with Indigenous people in both mainstream and SOMIH (AHBV) tenancies.

In Queensland, supported tenancy programs are developed on a disaggregated local area office level. For example, the North Queensland area Supportive Management Team acts to identify local public housing clients requiring supportive tenancy management and determines tenancy management options for these clients. The Brisbane South West Office works closely with other support agencies in the provision of tenancy support to at-risk public housing clients. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Team within the Brisbane Central Area Office has worked closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) housing team and Police and Centrelink Indigenous service officers in providing supported tenancy programs to at risk tenants mainly in Indigenous-specific housing. The greater application of these programs to mainstream public housing is currently under consideration.

Linkages between community housing providers and support agencies and mainstream public housing is a feature of the SHAP program but also of Queensland’s Same House Different Landlord program which was introduced in pilot form in 2000. Under the program, tenants at risk of eviction may have their tenancy transferred to a community housing provider that provides a supported tenancy management program for tenants for a period of time. A 2002 evaluation of the pilot program indicated that a very high proportion of tenants supported under these programs sustained public housing tenancies for over 18 months. The review supported a view that individual client support provided by a community agency through the Same House Different Landlord program was a significant underlying factor in facilitating successful transitions to sustainable public housing tenancies.

In summary, jurisdictions have taken the initiative in recent years to support tenants at risk of eviction maintain their tenancies. This is, of course, vital in the context of high relative Indigenous termination notice and eviction rates from public housing. There is room for further extension of these programs.

5.4 Indigenous Representation in Housing Offices and in Decision Making Roles

Increasing the representation of Indigenous people in mainstream public housing offices and in decision-making roles in mainstream public housing provides a positive environment for improved Indigenous access and sustainability outcomes. It is important in this regard that increased Indigenous representation is not simply
confined to SOMIH directorates or Authorities but is evident throughout the administrative arm of mainstream public housing. Moreover, it is important that there is a crossover between the SOMIH and mainstream public housing staff.

A number of jurisdictions have recently taken steps to increase the number of Indigenous people working in Public Housing Authorities most notably in WA where the goal of the DHW is to achieve 10 per cent Indigenous representation across the organisation. The Department also has an Indigenous Traineeship program. In Victoria, Aboriginal Housing Services Officers located in the SOMIH area can be requested to assist working with Indigenous people in the mainstream offices, for example, with the application process and with tenancy management. The Brisbane South West area office works with local Elders and other community agencies to provide support to tenants at risk of eviction.

Most jurisdictions have, in recent years, taken steps to increase the representation of Indigenous people in decision-making bodies. The ACT has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Committee, which provides direction and strategic advice on improving housing for Indigenous people. In addition, the ACT also provides funding to the Indigenous community organisation Billabong Aboriginal Corporation, to hold forums on housing issues for Indigenous people. NSW (NSW) has Indigenous people represented at a more grass-roots level on a number of tenant participation initiatives, for example, the Public Housing Customer Council (an initiative to improve communication with tenants about the housing policies and services), on Neighbourhood Advisory Boards (NABs) (Boards which run Neighbourhood Improvement Projects and provide guidance on how services could be improved) and for the Tenant Conference in terms of an organising committee to facilitate future themes and tenant participation in conferences. The SAHT has Indigenous people represented throughout various advisory groups including the Operational Policy Advisory Committee (a monthly forum which contributes to Trust policy development) and on Regional Advisory Boards and Public Housing Customer Forums (7 Boards throughout Southern Australia, locally based and tenant driven).

In Victoria there exists Indigenous representation on the Ministerial Housing Council. This provides expert advice at the strategic level on the future directions, policies and reforms of social housing. In late 2002, an Indigenous Homelessness Workers Forum (IHWF) was formed by Indigenous specific services and is funded by the Housing Authority which utilises the network to consult on a range of initiative and policy issues. Victoria has recently introduced an Indigenous Service Mapping study to determine to which extent non-Indigenous and Indigenous organisations can, or could offer housing advice and support to Indigenous homeless, or at risk of homelessness, people.23 In addition, in Victoria, the OoH is

23 Under the Victorian Homelessness Strategy and Youth Homelessness Action Plan a number of initiatives have been implemented to test and strengthen new models of assistance to address Indigenous tenancies at risk of breaking down within the public housing sectors. Findings from these projects will inform on-going funding and service arrangements for people accessing homelessness assistance for Indigenous people.
seeking to increase the participation and decision-making role of the Aboriginal Housing Board in relation to the management of Aboriginal Housing Rental Program properties.

In WA, Indigenous representation on decision-making bodies occurs in terms of the Housing Advisory Committee, Homeswest’s Appeals Mechanism (the current Chairperson is Indigenous) and the State Housing Commission Board. The State/Territory Housing Authority has an Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate and an Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Council (all Indigenous) who have a primary focus on the SOMIH program but are also involved in the direction of mainstream public housing policy.

The Indigenous Housing Authority of the NT (IHANT) integrated public housing system offers a model of deep Indigenous community involvement in the construction, maintenance and management of public housing. The fundamental objective of IHANT is that better housing for Indigenous people will be achieved if Indigenous people make decisions about Indigenous housing, all levels of government cooperate and funding is pooled to achieve the best results. In the IHANT Construction Program, the Authority allocates funds to the Regional Councils, which then determine allocations to the communities in their regions. The Authority assists communities in establishing effective management and maintenance procedures and processes for their housing stock. The IHANT program has helped many communities employ and train their own local people to do housing maintenance work. In addition, communities are able to make their own decisions about the method for collecting rent and manage their own IHANT maintenance grant within certain guidelines (Submission 3, 2004).

At a broader level, the Queensland Department of Housing’s Statement of Reconciliation provides an overarching commitment to address the concerns and issues of Indigenous people and commitments in a number of areas to create a positive environment for existing and prospective Indigenous tenants. These commitments include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and Reconciliation training, making premises more welcoming and promotional material more representative of Indigenous people and promulgating a policy specifying the correct protocol for referring to Indigenous people, recognising the traditional owners of areas throughout Queensland, improving the quality of information provided to communities to assist them in their decision-making; and providing opportunities for skills development, employment and capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At an individual housing office level the Gold Coast office has developed a draft for an Indigenous Access Strategy, which they believe will improve the participation of Indigenous people in decision making processes. Local actions such as this can play a significant part in furthering the reconciliation agenda particularly as it intersects with housing.

NSW is working together with key Aboriginal bodies (Two Ways Together) to develop an Aboriginal Affairs Plan, with commitment for all Departments. The commitment includes improving the social, economic cultural and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the NSW.
5.5 Recommendations for the Future

The *State/Territory Housing Authority Survey* requested Authorities to detail recommendations for future policy action to improve Indigenous access and sustainability outcomes. In this concluding section we review these recommendations while also noting further areas for policy development arising from our own policy review.

Our analysis of supply-side impediments suggests four key areas for policy development. They include:

- An urgent need to arrest recent declines in the overall supply of mainstream public housing dwellings;
- Better targeting of the existing stock by developing programs that would see higher rates of exit from public housing of those more able to cope in the private market;
- Greater efficiency in matching household types to dwelling types; and
- The adjustment of the household stock at the margin through the judicious selling of smaller units and the purchase or building of larger dwellings to meet the needs of larger Indigenous households.

The issue of the need to increase the overall supply of public housing dwellings was a matter raised strongly by the NT. It indicated that the Territory needs an additional $800 million to meet the current housing and infrastructure needs of the Territory’s remote communities and requires 4,281 new dwellings to address its immediate Indigenous housing needs. As suggested by the Territory in its response, this is a significant investment required for a jurisdiction the size of the Territory and cannot be achieved without a meaningful commitment given by the Commonwealth Government to addressing the unmet demand in Indigenous Housing (Submission 3, 2004).

Further recommendations put forward by jurisdictions in relation to improving access included the following:

- Explore the possibility of introducing additional clauses in allocation of tenancy management policies to promote Indigenous persons accessing and remaining in mainstream housing (Victoria);
- Research and document best practice in relation to customer services or improved approaches to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and tenants, and share information through media such as websites, conferences/seminars (NSW);
- Design and implement specific policies and strategies to address any perceptions of racially discriminatory practices occurring within mainstream service delivery and employment of State/Territory Housing Authorities (NSW);
- Develop protocol agreements or memorandums of understanding between State/Territory Housing Authorities at the regional or local level and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and/or organisations, to ensure policy development, client service delivery and asset planning are appropriate for communities (NSW);
Implement housing projects for Indigenous people with complex needs through cooperation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers (NSW);

- Develop an action plan to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, including improving access to public housing (ACT);

- Transfer of housing stock to the AHA and an agreement with AHA whereby AHA provides assistance to its customers through the Trust’s Private Rental Assistance Program (SA);

- Improve data capture relating to Indigenous status for new households allocated mainstream tenancies and investigate opportunities to update data for existing tenants (TAS); and

- Train service delivery staff in Indigenous Data Collection. An anticipated outcome of this training is improved data collection in relation to Indigenous people which in turn will enable Housing Tasmania to better monitor access and outcomes and to identify issues that may impact on future policy action to improve the access of Indigenous people to mainstream public and long term community housing (TAS).

In terms of the sustainability of tenancies we have pointed to the need to reduce overcrowding levels through appropriate supply-side policies. Such overcrowding can be an important factor in affecting the long-term sustainability of a tenancy. It is also important to implement carefully planned supported tenancy programs along the lines of those adopted in WA. In this regard, Victoria is currently exploring the feasibility of extending the Indigenous Tenants at Risk of Eviction pilot project that is currently operating in two departmental regions. NSW is further developing feedback systems to react to the needs of Indigenous tenants through the Aboriginal Customer Service Unit and a dedicated resource in the Call Centre to analyse and respond to calls from Indigenous clients and to implement an overarching quality process for dealing with complaints. It is also reviewing all policies concerning client service and tenancy management to ensure cultural appropriateness.

6. CASE STUDY FINDINGS

In previous sections we focussed on policy-related questions concerning mainstream public housing access issues. In this section we examine the public housing experiences and perceptions of Indigenous people as expressed through case study interviews with public housing tenants, with those in marginalised housing positions who have not gained access to long-term public housing tenancies and with officers in public housing and from various community support agencies.

The case study evidence provides strong insights into the barriers faced by Indigenous households in severe housing need in accessing public housing and sustaining tenancies in public housing. In this paper we report findings from the Inala case study which resonate with those highlighted in chapter 13 of the WA Equal Opportunity Commission report on Indigenous housing Finding a Place (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004b).
Before presenting the results of our qualitative research it is important to highlight a number of features of the research that set it apart from our previous analyses of the mainstream public housing administrative data and our policy review set out in the previous section.

First, the information presented is based on the responses of Indigenous people (in the main) to questions around their experiences with public housing. As such, the responses from those interviewed illustrate the lived experience of those in housing need. Second, the expressed experiences, perceptions and views of the case study participants may not necessarily correspond with the policies and practises of the relevant public housing authority. The existence of a discrepancy between what a respondent reports and the terms of policies and programs does not necessarily invalidate what respondents have said. Indeed, it provides valuable information for policy makers. For instance, it may highlight areas where, on the ground, operations and outcomes may not align with official policy and practices. Alternatively, it may draw attention to cases where individual service providers do not understand or are not aware of the existence of certain policies and practises or the precise terms of these policies. They may, for example, not be aware of recent changes in policy. It is also important to recognise that lying behind respondent views may be a history of failure to achieve access to long-term housing options in public or community housing or elsewhere and to a lifetime of discrimination and severe disadvantage and hence frustration. Discrepancies between policy settings and the lived experience of respondents, as expressed in our case study interviews, indicate areas where policy makers and administrators may well direct effort by way of dissemination activities, support measures and program implementation evaluation studies.

Third, while the richness of the information arising from the case study approach provides us with a greater understanding of the diverse and often complex housing experiences of Indigenous people, it is important to acknowledge that these experiences are often inextricably linked to other aspects and outcomes in the lives of Indigenous people, such as health and employment opportunities. Therefore, while some of the material presented in this section may appear to lie outside the precise terms of the study to examine Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability outcomes in mainstream public housing these wider concerns are fundamental to an understanding of the position that respondents find themselves in with respect to mainstream housing services.

Fourth, it is important to recognise that people in the general community, including prospective and existing public housing tenants and agencies providing support to Indigenous people, are not generally aware of, or do not always distinguish adequately between, or may misunderstand the distinction between, ‘mainstream’ and ‘Indigenous-specific’ public housing or ‘mainstream’ or ‘Indigenous-specific’ community housing. Indeed, respondents invariably referred to public housing or community housing in general and not to mainstream (or Indigenous-specific) public housing or mainstream (or Indigenous-specific) community housing.
Fifth, it is important to recognise that the findings from the different case studies reflect the focus of the different case studies and the conditions under which the research was undertaken. For example, the greatest access to Indigenous people in severe housing need was achieved in Inala. It was also here that full transcripts of interviews are available. As a result, the Inala case study provides the strongest direct voice of the perceptions of those in housing need who have experienced difficulties in accessing mainstream public housing services.

Finally, the great value of good case-study qualitative evidence is that it provides insights into Indigenous access and sustainability experiences and outcomes that may not be available in, or evident from, the quantitative data. For example, we know from our quantitative analysis the median waiting times for those who are successful in gaining a tenancy under priority access mechanisms and those who are successful under general wait-turn processes. What we do not have an understanding of is: (a) the effect that long wait times may have on those so affected, (b) the wait-time experiences of those who are not successful in gaining a tenancy and (c) the experiences of those in great housing need who do not get fast-tracked into public housing accommodation under priority access provisions. Qualitative case study research can help us to better understand these lived experiences.

The case study evidence presented is taken from Inala a large residential area in the western suburbs of Brisbane surrounded by the industrial areas of Wacol, Darra, Archerfield and Carole Park. Inala is a large public housing area with a significant number of Indigenous people as well as people from a non English speaking background. The Inala Housing Office is responsible for the provision of housing for people recently discharged from local prisons including Wolston Corrections Centre, Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre, Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre and David Longland Centre. The Inala case study, therefore, provided an opportunity to investigate the research questions relating to formerly incarcerated Indigenous people directed to the mainstream and Indigenous specific housing offices in the area.

Ethics approval for the case study was obtained from Flinders University in September 2004. Following ethics approval, contact was made with the Queensland Department of Housing’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Housing Service Area and the Department of Housing Inala area office. Both offices provided information about local housing organisations and contacts of Indigenous organisations. At the beginning of the project, contact was made with Inala Elders, and with the Aboriginal Health Service located in close proximity to the local shopping centre. Both groups of organisations offered to make personal contact with Indigenous people and this offer was accepted. They were provided with the appropriate introductory letter describing the research. Inala Elders allowed their premises to be used for individual interviews and for focus group meetings.

A total of 20 Indigenous people were interviewed. These people were already living in public housing or wanted to gain access to mainstream public housing. Twelve people were interviewed alone and another eight were interviewed as part of a focus group. All interviewees were over 18 years. Many participants were in their
early twenties thus fitting with the general characteristics of the overall population. Some were older with long standing connections to the Inala area.

Interviews were held with people who were currently living in Department of Housing accommodation in Inala; homeless people with no address but a shelter in a local park; women in short term emergency housing, families in long term emergency housing and people who had managed to obtain private rentals. The range of housing circumstances of those interviewed indicates how strongly the researcher was able to tap into the experiences and views of prospective and current public housing tenants and those who are in a position of great housing need.

The database of relevant housing organisations provided to the researcher by the Department of Housing was used as the starting point for making contact with service providers. The Inala area does not have a large number of welfare and housing organisations compared to the inner areas of Brisbane. Some local housing organisations failed to respond to phone calls and messages made during working hours. All those where contact was made agreed to participate in the research. A total of 9 representatives of local organisations were interviewed. It was not possible to interview representatives from the prisons given time constraints and the elaborate process to obtain permission. The researcher, therefore, made contact with the relevant contact person in the Department of Corrective Services who commented on a range of relevant issues.

Individual interviews and interviews with service providers were audio taped and transcribed. The focus group interview was not taped but detailed notes were made during the interview. These tapes and notes provided the basis for the case study themes which are outlined in the following section.

What in general terms the Inala case study evidence suggested was that Indigenous people in housing need generally seek the same accommodation as the broader community; that is they seek housing that is safe, affordable and of a reasonable standard. We also explored the extent of Indigenous homelessness, the pervasiveness of discrimination and the range of what we refer to as ‘risk’ factors which may act to impede entry into mainstream public housing and have an adverse impact on the ability of Indigenous people to sustain tenancies. These risk factors included domestic violence, the absence of life skills among those in severe disadvantage, low literacy levels, difficulties around inter-agency coordination and the overarching issue of debt and tenant histories.

6.1 Key Themes

Respondents frequently raised in interviews the issue of long waiting lists for public housing as a key housing problem. As one young mother related:

I have been on waiting lists in probably seven different places since my daughter was born...but there is nothing available I reckon. Not emergency accommodation or something even for the night. Nothing around this area anyway. It is always the other side of town.

Another responded to a question about whether or not the Department of Housing was supportive as follows:
Not where I come from. And a lot of Aboriginal people cannot even get a Queensland Housing Commission house. And that is what I thought that Queensland Housing was there for. Supplying housing to needy families.

Another issue raised by one respondent was that some officers that visited properties had racist attitudes:

I had one bloke on my back saying my yard was too vicious (overgrown). He came around here and checked my yard. I couldn’t do anything to my yard because the painters were all out. They had their ladders and paint and everything. So I couldn’t mow the yard. And he said the yard was vicious and I questioned him more or less that ‘you are only saying that because I am Aboriginal’. He said ‘don’t bring that into it. That is not it’. I said ‘well what is it then?’ My yard wasn’t even dirty eh.

The researcher asked if there were similar examples of such attitudes shown by other housing officers who inspected properties. What came first to the mind of the respondent was:

As soon as a Murri family have a party and have one fight or something, the Housing Commission come down on that person, that family, straight away an want to evict them in a week or fourteen days notice or something. To get out.

There is this other thing too. There is this certain type of plant. The bloke that come around when they were renovating wanted me to pull out all these weeds. Something about if cows eat them it kills cows. An I say ‘what do you think- I have got a bloody paddock?’

There were also views put by youth service workers interviewed of a legacy of program failures, with one stating that none of the Indigenous-related programs instigated in the local area over the last fourteen years, in their experience, had survived, except for one Indigenous kindergarten. The economic and political difficulties surrounding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), most obviously over 2004 was seen as compounding the problem.

Another issue raised in the interviews was that of a lack of a social mix in local neighbourhoods:

What happens is that all these blocks of units down here is that you can stick all our sort of clients and sort of worst clients in the same block. So then there is a bad mix. Rather than spreading them through the community they put them in the block.

Yet some of those interviewed had a perception that there was an emerging possibility for positive change particularly with the implementation of community renewal programs. One community health worker noted that:

‘Community capacity building’ is starting to be used a lot now. The failures used to be that governments would just dictate, but now they are collaborating more with local and non-government organisations as well, and that is starting to work. The big success up here is ‘community renewal’. People are aware of that now. Community people are starting to understand what governments are trying to do.

Around here some of the houses are shockers. The perception we are getting now is that they are trying to kick us out to somewhere else, and that is why they are not selling them (houses) back to the community. Community renewal is a good thing.
Access to and the sustainability of mainstream public housing tenancies for Indigenous people in housing need is obviously a focal point of the present research. Therefore, the views of respondents as to the operation of emergency or temporary accommodation in the local area including women’s shelters, boarding houses and youth sector houses (all provided on a share basis), provide important insights into this key research question.

According to the records of one mainstream agency spoken to by the researcher some Indigenous people had been homeless (in various guises) for two years. The large number of people living in emergency and crisis accommodation in the local area was seen as being indicative of high levels of unmet housing demand on the part of local Indigenous people.

Young mothers live in emergency housing, often, but not exclusively, with their children. This is an unsuitable housing environment, especially for those mothers seeking regular access visits from their children, but only allowed to do so when other residents are not at home. More broadly, there are difficulties in making the transition from emergency accommodation and into mainstream housing. Many of the Indigenous people interviewed commented on the fact that Indigenous strangers are sometimes accommodated in their own family homes as there are no other alternatives. These homes are generally Department of Housing rental properties in the Inala area. The accommodation of visitors (many in high need) in public housing dwellings can, of course, place significant stresses on these tenancies.

The provision of permanent affordable and sustainable housing to those in housing need creates a positive virtuous circle; it helps to reduce the effect of negative social risk factors which act to impede entry to mainstream housing and which also represent a threat to the sustainability of tenancies. In contrast, it is the lack of permanent housing and the high use of emergency accommodation which helps to perpetuate the social circumstances which conspire against good housing outcomes for Indigenous people in housing need. The high use of emergency accommodation, therefore, illustrates the ‘stop gap’ housing history of unstable accommodation and homelessness.

Several respondents interviewed made note of the number of public houses lying vacant in Inala:

I always see houses that no-one is in and I know they are departmental houses and there are so many everywhere. Why have blank (sic) houses when there are so many that need houses instead of being on the street. It is pretty stupid.

When I have asked housing why there are so many houses they say that it is because they need repairs done on the house. That is what a guy has told me, that it needs repairing and like why aren’t they repairing it?

Both community service providers and other interviewees identified the lack of supply of long-term secure, low-cost housing and high levels of homelessness in Inala as major social issues facing the area. One housing provider made links between a lack of available housing, the impact that the absence of housing has on the sense of well-being of Indigenous people and the role of discrimination, in the following way:
They do find it hard. And sometimes it is image. We don’t mention discrimination. And it really affects our people; our Indigenous people. It really does. It is just the trauma that they have to go through.

When the researcher canvassed examples of Indigenous people’s experiences of attempts to procure housing she was told:

People tell you it is out there, and it is not to my experience. Availability is not always there. It is not there when you need it. That is why we have such a great need for crisis accommodation.

The extent of the housing shortage is revealed by an Aboriginal health and welfare worker:

There is nothing. All the emergency housing is gone. The caravans are full. The hostels are full; black, white and brindle. All the community housing; they go on waiting lists that are two or three years long. Housing Commission’s waiting list is over the top. So there is no sense in even applying there. They have priority housing alright. But how dead do you have to be to get into priority housing? Because those have got waiting lists also.

The quality or nature of the Department of Housing stock was an issue raised in many of the interviews with Indigenous people, most importantly in respect of safety.

…the front porch – an electrical fault there is that water comes through the light-bulb, and the security box (power board) goes off quite a few times so it is lucky that it is installed there...They told me that it is because of the trees. I have to get up on the roof and clean the gutters out of all the leaves. This has been done but when it rains the light-bulb fills with water. And they have not done anything about it.

One client, who was forced to move, provided his views on the standard of the public housing accommodation he had been living in the following way:

Bloody full of heroin addicts, full of diseases and children running around. I said to 'Rose' [24] there is a man on the veranda and he is half dead from heroin because he couldn’t even move. Look, that is what I have to live in. 'Cos I couldn’t friggin find nowhere…

Arguably the quality of housing is also measured by whether or not there are requisite white goods and other basic furnishings which are often provided by charitable organisations. It may also be judged by the initial presentation of a house to new residents. One member of the focus group recounted an appalling stench on moving in which was traced to garbage, including nappy waste, dumped in a trapdoor located near the house. Another interviewee who had three children was given a ‘renovated’ property which had incomplete painting and a sanded floor only partly varnished.

The focus group suggested that many of the houses let to Indigenous people are of a style that has downstairs outside toilets, even if it is a high-set property. Another

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[24] The name ‘Rose’ is a fictitious name and is used here to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. The same applies to all names used in this paper.
focus group member recounted having to lift his injured daughter downstairs and
outside to use the facility.

An ageing housing stock is also a problem, for although still in use, these homes
were thought to not be repaired because of the expense that would be required:

*Unfortunately the majority of the ones (houses) we get offered are the old ones or the
ones that are broken down. Costly repairing. They need to be upgraded but the state
department and the housing department are concerned with money.*

A pervading theme expressed by a range of the research respondents, both
Indigenous people and practitioners, was the impact that the use of past records has
on the lives of people seeking accommodation both in the private sector and in
public housing. While arguably an important business tool for property risk
management, the use of past tenancy records creates enormous difficulties for
Indigenous people in housing need (who often have poor housing records) accessing
housing (Cooper and Morris 2005). The Department of Housing does maintain their
list of defaulters with a housing debt and particular debt management practices to
deal with arrears as demanded by public financial accountability. There is an
inevitable tension between the practice of debt management policy and the recording
of past tenancy histories on the one hand and the need to assist those in severe
housing need on the other. It short, being marked by public housing tenancy history
records created a sense of hopelessness among affected respondents.

One of the key focal points of the present research is, of course, the question of
access to mainstream public housing of those in housing need. One form of tenuous
housing that many in housing need find themselves in is caravan park
accommodation. A number of members of the focus group told the researcher that
they had lived in caravan parks and, because they had more than one or two
children, they all stated they lied about the number of children just to obtain some
form of accommodation. It is not only the quality or standard of caravan parks that is
at issue, but also the suitability of that type of accommodation for many who find
themselves living in caravans ‘by default’.

Interestingly, all Indigenous participants in the research had lived in caravans at
some time in the past. Many had lived in them only because of the lack of access to
mainstream housing. Caravans are one high use form of accommodation for
Indigenous people. However, problems arise due to the need to accept this form of
accommodation even when unsuitable for the purpose. What may provide a
reasonable standard of accommodation for one or two people may constitute
substandard housing for families or other tenants:

Both the design and the size of homes provided in mainstream housing are key
issues for Indigenous households. ‘Bed sit’ units that do not have a separate bedroom
may be appropriate for single people but the provision of such dwellings to
Indigenous people can be problematic as it doesn’t recognise that Indigenous people
have extended families. When families come in from the remote regions, where they
have larger updated accommodation, it is difficult to live in urban areas with smaller
homes and longer waiting lists. One member of the focus group stated that it was not
only that there were insufficient bedrooms for the average Indigenous family, but
that the bedrooms were all very small. This was confirmed directly by the researcher who interviewed many people in their own dwellings in the Inala area.

A common perception held by Indigenous respondents was that people of other races gain access to houses ahead of Indigenous people.\(^{25}\) Furthermore, Indigenous respondents also considered that the standard of accommodation and housing maintenance provided to Indigenous people was below that for non-Indigenous people. One Indigenous woman, aggrieved by a differing standard applied in upgrading her home as part of a general neighbourhood housing stock renewal process, said:

\[
\text{I was happy with mine until I seen my neighbours’ houses. Bastards they are. And I seen their new fences and that and new mail boxes, all flash and that.}
\]

The claim of discrimination based on race or ethnicity is also made:

\[
\text{A lot of Aboriginal families are on the waiting list and they are on the waiting list for two or three years. And then all of a sudden some other family or some Asian family come and they seem to get a house straight away, more or less. And that family over there still waiting are saying ‘how come that mob got that house?’ And when they ask their neighbours they say ‘we got it real quick, blah, blah, blah.}
\]

Ultimately Indigenous people express the same expectations of housing as non-Indigenous people. When asked what they sought in accommodation interviewees responded that it was:

\[
\text{Nice houses like the next door neighbours.}
\text{Spend as much on us as they do the non-Aboriginal people.}
\text{Making sure there is no mouldy carpet or stuff that will make her sick. (A house) that is not falling down. Just make sure that it is clean.}
\]

\section*{6.2 Discrimination}

We now discuss some of these key themes in greater detail particularly that of discrimination. Discrimination can be expressed across a range of dimensions including gender, age, disabilities, race, and sexuality. In the case of Indigenous people, all forms of discrimination are exacerbated by that of the race dimension. This points to the inevitable difficulties for Indigenous people in seeking affordable and sustainable mainstream housing. For instance, responses from a focus group, consulted by the interviewer, encapsulated the extent of discrimination experienced by Indigenous people:

\[
\text{Aboriginals are used and abused. They (white people) don’t want to see you or hear from you.}
\text{Once they see your black face, you are out the door.}
\text{The discrimination is part of everyday life and you get use to it.}
\]

To indicate the impact of different forms of discrimination, especially in low socio-economic environments, one respondent stated:

\(^{25}\) As noted previously the evidence for those who are successful in gaining entry to mainstream public housing is that median entry times into public housing for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was roughly equal. What these experiences may indicate is the problems faced by those not successful, difficulties in being priority access listed or perhaps movement in and out of waiting lists for one reason or another.
Well I think for the young people in Inala – the fact that you are from Inala, you are treated even worse than if they were white from Inala. So just coming from Inala itself is a barrier to service.

The apparent geographical segregation of Indigenous people to certain areas was also commented on by respondents. One Indigenous man contended that:

Queensland Housing should be making more homes available. And also in different areas too. The seem to pick a suburb out that that is where all the Murris have to go. It should be across the board…If there are houses available somewhere we should be able to go into them. They seem to put us all in the same area.

One group of Indigenous women reflected on more specific aspects of this wide-ranging discrimination, saying:

They think we are all dirty and lazy.
We can’t keep our house I suppose.
Or we can’t keep our rent up and things like that.
Or blacks just drink and have parties.
Stereotyping.

As one accommodation worker also stated:

There is just so much racism in our community. Also from young Indigenous people because of the way society treats them. I can understand their racism towards white-fellies. But I think mainstream Australians are so racist that they just can’t acknowledge it.

The perception is therefore that ‘looks are deceiving but other people come first.’

The difficulties for all prisoners on release are compounded if they are Indigenous. A Prison Chaplain explains:

It is a barrier. Especially if you are dealing with real estates it is really difficult. If you are a prisoner it doesn’t really matter if you are black, white or brindle you are a criminal…They just don’t want to have anything to do with them.

A correctional services officer claimed that a history of being in prison had an impact on employment opportunities, even more than on housing. It is employment that will inevitably be a positive factor in gaining the independence and financial security to promote better housing options for Indigenous people. This is also linked to education. He maintains:

There are very, very rigid screening processes and criteria for jobs these days. Even with education, if they have achieved any studies inside a correctional centre it is just a certificate.

Some prisoners leave gaol with no formal identity, a loss of life skills and a dysfunctional relationship with society. There is also a high level of debt for many. While these are not necessarily always race-related problems, arguably they are more severe for many Indigenous people.

Discrimination against Indigenous people in the private rental sector was a re-occurring theme and explained by one Indigenous man in an interview in the following terms:
I filled in an application there and every day for three months they would ring me at work to come and look at a property for rent. I would do all that but I never got a place. In the fourth month the real estate at Inala offered me a place. And I took that.

This point was also illustrated by a community health worker:

There is this Murri girl, and her partner is a white guy and when they go for a house she sends him instead of her. When the neighbours see that she is Aboriginal then the complaints start.

When an Indigenous man and his white partner were asked by the interviewer why they were unable to secure housing, the response was:

The look of us. Honestly that is the only reason. They say it is our dog. They say it is our kids; too many kids. You are not allowed to have a pet. Today I have no pets so I’ll see if that gets taken off the list – about the pets.

Private rental housing offered to the white woman became ‘unavailable’ when her Indigenous partner went to collect the keys. She said with resignation:

Dave’s black and I have lots of tattoos and they think we are wild people and, like I know we sometimes look a bit… Looks are deceiving as far as I am concerned, ‘cos we are good parents and good people.

I honestly think the government should pull their finger out their butt and do something. There is too many suicides and a lot of suicides is due to people and their colour. And I have lost a lot of people now that are Aboriginal due to suicide. And now putting up with Dave (her partner); the amount of problems we’ve had helping him fit into this white, racist world, to be honest.

Discrimination, whether conscious or unconscious, and a lack of understanding of Indigenous issues may even arise in agencies with a mandate to assist Indigenous people. As one agency worker mused on the issue of Indigenous financial management:

A few hundred years ago they did not have currency. I think there may be some genetic thing, but in fifty years time they will be able to. I think that there is a genetic thing about the currency and how to manage that and all those things.

The researcher noted that this particular agency, funded by the Department of Housing, locked the doors for the duration of the interview, yet the worker complained, ironically, of the failure to make sufficient contact with Indigenous people.

The extent of discrimination creates a high emotional toll on those affected, as illustrated by the story from one service provider who was interviewed. It is an example of a woman’s anger and challenging behaviours that resulted from ongoing discriminatory behaviour:

One was the most aggressive young woman; early thirties, with quite a large family. She was so aggressive, so aggressive and she kept getting knocked back. And I said ‘you have to back off a bit. You are biting my head off and I am trying to help you. You have got to change how you are speaking or people will think you are aggressive.’ And she had another go and I said ‘you are aggressive.’ My hunch is that the aggression is developed because of the way she has been treated. She is pissed off and letting the whole world have it.
The interviewer asked ‘So does discrimination exist?’

Oh my God yes. Oh my goodness gracious yes. Absolutely.

Neighbourhood inter-racial conflict is another disturbing reality that was raised in the Inala interviews. For instance, service providers indicated that there are some streets in Inala where white families are just waiting to see how long Indigenous people will stay, and are quick to lay complaints against their Indigenous neighbours. A member of the focus group described her move into a flat owned by the Department of Housing. Most of the tenants were white. Not long after she moved in she was visited by the Department of Families (now the Department of Child Safety) who told her that a white neighbour complained about the way she treated her children and that they were there to investigate child abuse. The complainant told the Department of Families that the mother had locked her children in a cupboard and disciplined them inappropriately. This complaint had never been raised before and she concluded that it must be racist behaviour and a deliberate attempt to get her to leave the neighbourhood.

An older man also described the difficulties of living in a white neighbourhood even in public housing. ‘KKK’ was painted on his fence, his house was fire-bombed and his fence was run over. Likewise, a man married to an Aboriginal woman said that a sign ‘nigger lover’ had been painted on his fence.

Being under eighteen years of age is a specific barrier to gaining a tenancy, as housing is not available under the age of legal responsibility. Even when young people are parents, housing is not seen as a priority for this particular cohort who are simply placed on waiting lists. One youth worker sums up the predicament:

You can put in the application but it actually won’t come into play until they are eighteen. So even if you wanted to be really organised and get in, in the beginning they still get told that there is a three year wait, or it doesn’t mean that they have started going up the list.

Creative inter-agency collaboration is required to avoid the situation where young people become homeless. However, this cannot be guaranteed. A youth worker explained one tactic employed to prevent a young person with a child becoming homeless:

I’ll give you an example of … we had one of our units down here, where we have an Indigenous young girl whom we had previously accommodated, but then she had a child, even though we were not supposed to accommodate a single mum in our unit. There was nowhere else for her to go. And when we wrote to the department saying she could stay in the same place and they would become the landlord, soon as she had her child they said ‘Oh she shouldn’t be in there.’ Well we said ‘where do you think we should put her?’

Anyway the good thing was that they found her a two bedroom unit in a few weeks. So that was like a back door way of getting into Queensland Housing, otherwise if she had just been on the list, she would still be on the list.

The intersection of Indigenous youth and parenthood, therefore, leads to discrimination in housing provision. Sometimes this is obvious to the young person seeking accommodation, but sometimes discrimination is covert, with one young
mother reflecting on the possible reasons for experiencing difficulty in securing housing in the following way:

It is probably because I am single and have a kid and they probably think I am a bad mum. Or it could be that I am Aboriginal. Because every time I go into housing or, if I do ring up shelters they ask if I am Aboriginal. I don’t know whether they ask me that to help me, or if they ask me that to see what sort I am.

The interviewer asked if being an Aboriginal person was a help or a hindrance and the woman was not sure. Yet the discrimination first arose during pregnancy:

It was hard. First I was pregnant and they would not take me because I was due soon and there was no point in me moving again. It was very hard because they just take single youths not parents.

As a mother of a newborn the problem was then exacerbated by finding herself on the streets:

It was the only choice we had. It was to go and sleep in the street. It is not the best place but it is something. I didn’t have money for ringing shelters because they are not easy to ring. And they expected me to go all the way to them so I could fill in and sign some papers. And that is not a guarantee that you will be in for the night. So it has been very hard.

Young people and their families believe that they are subject to discrimination because of their race. The pervasiveness of this discrimination is illustrated by the following example. A member of the focus group described how her children are constantly pulled over by the police when they are walking to school or to the shop. This also applies when they drive cars. Police will pull them over just because they have a black face.

The intersection of youth, Aboriginality, and a housing location determined by low economic status compounds experiences of discrimination. How it can manifest itself was related by a youth service worker as follows:

Well I think for the young people in Inala – the fact that you are from Inala you are treated even worse than if they were white from Inala. So just coming from Inala itself is a barrier to any service.

Indigenous youth often do not have a family or support network and rely on agencies that only work between 8.30-5.00 Monday to Friday. For cultural reasons young people may also have difficulty with extended kin networks who may use their accommodation as a base for drinking and parties. This poses a risk to the young person’s tenancy.

6.3 Indigenous, Cultural and Historical Forces

Homelessness is both visible and invisible. A tenant advice and advocacy service acknowledges the extent of homelessness and its various hidden forms:

I have a hunch that we have a lot of couch surfing happening out here. I have a hunch that we have a lot of families living in garages of friends and families. We have the hidden homelessness.
One respondent described his accommodation in a standard three bedroom home which was housing four adults and six children. Understandably the impact of overcrowding and constant moves affects education and truancy levels. A housing service provider estimates that there have been thousands of phone calls to their agency over the year, and that 70 per cent of Indigenous people in the Inala area are homeless or living with friends.

An Indigenous man explained:

_That is just our culture, Indigenous culture. You get an aunt or an uncle come and stay. We don’t say after two or three days that you have to move on. That is why there is overcrowding in Aboriginal families because people are waiting for houses but they have to stay with families until they get one._

An Aboriginal Elder sometimes offers even strangers accommodation in his own home because there are no other options. However, he claims he is not the only one and other families do the same thing.

Discrimination leads to negative outcomes including a lack of dignity, self-worth and feelings of shame. This shame may relate to the need to ‘front’ an agency asking for assistance for housing, or get help in completing application forms due to illiteracy. There is the shame young girls and women feel from the need to ask strangers in an agency for personal hygiene products. Young people are reluctant to get their driving licence because they have to get their Learners Permit which requires a written examination; a barrier due to literacy levels. Yet as one of the kids remarked ‘it is not that we can’t drive.’ There is also shame associated with being recorded on the TICA list.

### 6.4 Risk Factors

Discrimination and a wide range of other risk factors impact negatively on Indigenous tenancies. These should be understood both as the stand-alone problems that they are, but also for the ways they may act negatively in conjunction with one another.

Domestic violence is both a precursor to tenancy risk, but also a result of the tensions around gaining sustainable and affordable mainstream housing. It also includes child and sexual abuse which one worker says is ‘rife out there’:

_I have worked in child care and I have done domestic violence also. I have been working for both those situations. And the sexual abuse out there, be it on children, or be it on the adults, that is another problem. Some will say ‘don’t talk about it. We don’t want anyone outside the family to talk about it and we’ll sort out our own problems here.’ There could be one person in the family who will say ‘I’m not going to sort it out here, we are going to take it to court. We are going to make sure that these things come to the fore.’ That person then gets beaten up, thrown out of the home, and these things go on._

A recurring issue throughout the case study research is the dilemma facing women experiencing domestic violence. Often the house they have been forced to flee has been provided in their own name, and they are legally responsible for the rental payments and ensuring good management of the property. Yet these women
may have no other choice but to flee the violent situation while retaining responsibility for the premises.

As one young Indigenous mother explained:

I get in tricky situations all the time where I have to get out of the house…I am going through court at the moment for different things and sometimes I can’t stay in the one house because someone may find out where I live.

I have a restraining order and I have had people try and take my daughter off me.

The pervasive nature of domestic violence not only takes a high emotional and health toll but also serves to further negate the opportunity for accessing housing due to debts incurred from rent in arrears and damage to property.

Drug and alcohol abuse is also a precursor to tenancy risk. An Aboriginal welfare worker stated that the drug and alcohol issue is ‘getting out of hand’. Alcohol is seen as a greater problem because it is not illegal:

People will have something that is not illegal and have abundance of it rather than go to something that is illegal, and having that fear.

The welfare worker described how the older Indigenous generation tends to maintain links with clan so that ‘someone else’s pain is their pain’. However, younger Indigenous people are less likely to have strong clan bonds and seek substitutes for emotional and psychological needs. The welfare worker was aware of three deaths in twelve months from drug and substance abuse.

One service provider points to the difficulty facing young Indigenous women leaving prison, especially with newborn babies. They have nowhere to go and do not qualify for any particular occupation. However, they would benefit from parenting and life skills programs that need expansion:

Because if we get these girls when they first come out, there is less chance of re-offending. And as we get our mandate a lot more of these girls will come to us. It is specific to girls who have been in detention. We want them to come.

For both women and men who have been imprisoned there is difficulty in securing accommodation. One elder described the dilemma in the following terms:

There is no housing for them here. They either stop with relations and then they get judged by their own relations about their faults. So there is a bit of a problem.

A Prison Chaplain explains the negative affects of institutionalisation through incarceration:

Prison seems to have a great effect on people. It is like they get brainwashed. A lot of guys get out and they have no skills at all because they have been so ingrained in what the system is that they have no idea of how the outside world functions. And pretty much it is the case that they are pretty dysfunctional with the outside world in the first place before they went to gaol.

The issue of teenage pregnancy was seen as not being handled well either in public housing or in the community housing sector. For example, with respect to the latter, some accommodation providers interviewed as part of this research said that some providers only take single young people and not parents. Discrimination first
arises during pregnancy: One service provider recounted the unsuitability of the practice of housing young mothers with survivors of domestic violence due to the lack of suitable housing. There is also the inherent difficulty of moving from agency to agency seeking accommodation while caring for a child. The constraints of parenthood also make it more difficult to continue with education or secure employment.

Low levels of literacy and numeracy and the general lack of education have both social and economic precursors and outcomes:

One of the main factors is that a lot of them leave early or are kicked out of school system because they may not have the space at home to do homework. They may not even have a pencil. All those financial barriers as well. It means they are going to fail in the system.

Low levels of literacy also result in shame:

They do not want to go and get their driver’s licence because they have to get their ‘Learners’. Soon as they walk in it is the way they are looked at. These kids crumble. They are twenty one and twenty two. And as one of the kids remarked ‘it is not that we can’t drive.’

There are also implications for Indigenous people being able to become more aware of their rights and responsibilities and navigate the range of information necessary to be informed citizens.

Debt is an overarching problem for Indigenous people, which compounds the difficulty in securing and then maintaining affordable tenancies both in public housing and in the private rental market. A Prison Chaplain, assisting in the transition of prisoners to the community, stated that between 80 and 90 per cent of prisoners had a debt to the Department of Housing. He then asks,

*how is it possible to access mainstream housing?*

Debts are seen as a barrier to accessing both public and private housing. This was a re-occurring view presented by both the Indigenous people interviewed and by service providers. The question of debt went beyond the confines of housing access but had wider ramifications. Debt means you are not worthy or deserving and as such debtors may be regarded as the undeserving poor.

Barriers to access are also highlighted by the size and extent of indebtedness. One respondent had a debt of over $1500 to which she was making occasional payments of $20. Other amounts of $1200 and $800 were also cited. Debts were assumed to prohibit people from accessing public housing and there was little awareness of mechanisms through which this debt could be managed so as to still gain entry.

Indigenous people from more remote areas come to Brisbane for medical treatment. If they do not come with their family they may face social disintegration. Moving from rural and remote to urban areas was seen as creating an enormous toll on many Indigenous people. When separated from family newly arrived Indigenous people may turn to a familial substitute found in alcohol and drugs. There can also be a reduction in housing size and longer waiting lists on moving to an urban
environment. A ‘clash of cultures’ between traditional and more urbanised Indigenous people was also an issue that arose in the case study interviews.

In order to effectively access and sustain mainstream housing, many Indigenous people, coming from a position of severe housing need with a range of complex problems, have to develop the appropriate life skills. It is often assumed, wrongly, that tenants know how to budget, pay the bills, cook using the infrastructure in dwellings, and maintain the house, clean floors and care for children. The wide ranging lack of ‘life skills’ of those coming from a position of severe need was seen as leading to negative outcomes in a range of social and economic areas:

Maybe they haven’t had a role model from when they were young, that taught them how to cook and clean and all those things. And then when we come in as youth support workers, we are trying to help them learn all these things when they are sixteen or seventeen years of age. Lots of other people have the opportunity of learning those things as they are growing up, from when they are quite young. So that impacts on everything, because if they can’t live independently the options for us are very limited. It takes a long time for them to show that they can live on their own and don’t need supported accommodation.

Youth support workers aim to bridge these gaps from those from a depressed background by offering a wide range of life skills training from cooking, cleaning and budgeting to personal care:

For young women hygiene is an issue, for if they can’t go and buy tampons and pads because they have got no money, what do they do? We supply them. Like things for women we just buy a whole stack and have them in the cupboard. Lots of young people, particularly Indigenous young women just grab me or other female workers on the side and ask if they can grab whatever they need. It is terrible. They should be free. That is one of the things; it seems to be easy for services to get free condoms from organisations. Well you just try to get free tampons or pads. There is no way.

I think sometimes with hygiene, like even having a shower, or washing your hair…is a tricky thing you have to do as a youth worker. To tell a young person in a nice way that they need to have a shower or whatever.

For new mothers:

Life skills, thinking for two. And the recognition that we all make mistakes. And babies don’t come with a manual.

Prisoners upon release also often need access to life skills training for independent living after living within an institutional setting. As a Prison Chaplain notes:

Prison seems to have a great effect on people. It is like they get brainwashed. A lot of guys get out and they have no skills at all because they are ingrained in what the system is that they have no idea of how the outside world functions.

The crucial issue arising from the lack of life skills is the inability to secure and then live successfully within mainstream housing.

Gambling is a risk factor to Indigenous tenancies in the mainstream housing sector as it is in the wider housing market. As one agency worker noted:

Gambling seems to be an issue for younger Indigenous women. ‘Kara’s’ (a local woman) grand-daughter had six children and the week after she got her $2600 cheque
she was down here the next week for assistance with food. I said to ‘Kara’ ‘where is the money going?’ She said the pokies.

There are obvious threats to tenancies when there is insufficient money for rent.

There is a link between transport access and the ability to sustain tenancies. Financial difficulties result in a low level of private car ownership for Indigenous people in need who are largely reliant on public transport. The location of housing options away from public transport is a barrier to the ‘leg work’ required to visit a range of agencies including Centrelink, housing and welfare agencies, as well as accessing employment opportunities, shopping and socialising. As one Indigenous client related:

*There is generally public transport in certain areas of these communities but usually a long way from where they are housed and it impacts on the whole way of living.*

6.5 **Coordination Difficulties between Agencies**

Access and sustainability in mainstream housing for Indigenous people demands successful coordination between government departments and the non-government sector who are the main providers of housing and other support for those without long-term tenancies. How these bodies work together will influence access and tenancy sustainability outcomes for those Indigenous people in need.

A Youth Service worker interviewed suggested that a barrier faced by Indigenous people to securing tenancies is the lack of formal identification which is difficult to obtain, especially for people under eighteen years of age. Applications for housing cannot be completed without this. Also a certificate is required to confirm that a child is Indigenous and this requires inter-agency advice and coordination.²⁶

A community health worker also related the difficulty of people leaving prison who face barriers with Centrelink and housing authorities because of a lack of formal identification. A Prison Chaplain explains that he has a dedicated role, based on criteria from the Department of Corrective Services, to help obtain accommodation and establish formal identification papers for Indigenous people leaving prison.

The need for agency coordination is also illustrated in re-integrating prisoners into the community. Housing is only one issue, as there is the need for placements for employment and education. Proposals for positive collaboration are sometimes put forward. A corrections officer argues:

*What would be ideal for us is that we have community groups engaged with housing companies directly, and the referral agencies. The ones that do the leg work and are well versed in terms of how these guys can get assistance and how they can refer them on to appropriate housing. I think that would be ideal.*

In addition he maintains:

²⁶ Although this is a perception of youth workers, this perception is incorrect. This is not a requirement for Indigenous applicants for mainstream housing, only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. Applicants must supply proof of Aboriginality to ensure the targeted program is used to house Indigenous people or non-Indigenous people with Indigenous children.
You can imagine how difficult it is for a prisoner who has been four or five years in gaol. They wouldn’t have an idea of who to approach. We don’t have any one central point for a prisoner in terms of getting advice and referrals. Nothing in terms of community engagement or discussions with community groups.

The direct payment of rent through Centrelink is an important factor in maintaining tenancies. It is a facility valued by both participants and service providers. It is, therefore, important to overcome coordination difficulties between agencies for optimal use of this facility. Just how important this is was revealed by a Prison Chaplain as follows:

I had a young guy who sustained head injuries in prison. He was due to be released and I negotiated with housing to get him a house…The only mistake was they did not organise with Centrelink for his housing payments to come out and without this mechanism in place, things fall to bits. That was a process that was quite good but the difficulty is in sustaining it. Since I left there it has all fallen apart.

A Prison Chaplain argued that the main barrier to Indigenous people securing mainstream housing is misinformation and a lack of information on available supports. This points to not only inter-agency coordination problems, but also the need for clarifying roles and government policies. It was the view of the chaplain that there is a need to ‘walk people through’ the complex processes involved in gaining formal identification and coordinating the many services required to facilitate Indigenous housing access. The chaplain did not explain what he meant by this term, ‘walk people through’ but the researcher concluded that many Indigenous people did not have the skills or confidence to deal with the system alone.

6.6 Government Policy

Government policy is also another area which has great influence over both access to, and the sustainability of, mainstream housing for Indigenous people. This is in respect to the policies themselves and the extent to which these are understood by agencies and individuals seeking accommodation.

One barrier to accessing community housing is the lack of understanding or false perceptions that some Indigenous people have concerning Department of Housing policies. This has been noted in a survey conducted by the Department of Housing in respect to Indigenous access to mainstream housing. For instance people with prior debts can still apply and list for housing assistance despite the widespread understanding (expressed by Indigenous people) that they can not. Although the researcher was familiar with the stated government position regarding debt, not one Indigenous person or group interviewed were aware that this was the current policy. Indigenous people believe that they will not be provided with a house until they have repaid all their debts to the Department of Housing.

6.7 Case study

The complexity of factors described above, and the ways in which they have a negative and cumulative impact on a particular individual is best described by a case study of one Indigenous woman. Far from being a unique experience, this example is typical of other women in the sample.
The woman has four children. She was living in a Department of Housing house in Inala and this was in her name. Her partner was violent and assaulted her from time to time. During these episodes of violence, he damaged the internal structure of the house. He finally stabbed her, resulting in his imprisonment. Every time he assaulted her she was forced to leave her home and find safe shelter for herself and her children. This shelter was with family or friends who lived in a variety of locations across Brisbane. Her partner would eventually find her. Sometimes she would return to their house and at other times she would move on with the children. Her partner remained at the house while leaving the rent unpaid. When the final separation occurred, she was required to pay for back rent and damages to the house as the house was in her name.

The Queensland Department with responsibility for the care and protection of children was concerned about the children given the woman’s difficult circumstances. Her own family were also concerned about the care of the children. The constant moving of mother and children from place to place suggested to all that they were being neglected. The children were finally removed from the mother and placed in the care of an aunt in Inala. After the children had left her care, she still had no accommodation and was not able to acquire it because she could not afford private rental, nor could she get Department of Housing accommodation because of an outstanding debt. Not only has she lost her children but also she has lost shelter and a partner.

She is currently in a share house provided by a youth agency. This is emergency accommodation provided on a short term basis with a rent of $260 per fortnight. Three young people share this small ex-housing commission home. As this woman has regular access to her children, they visit her at this home. She is concerned about this as she is meant to get permission to have more than two visitors, and can only have the access visits when other householders are absent.

Now that her partner is in gaol and with some stability of accommodation, she is seeking to get her children returned to her. However, the Department of Families are stating that they will not allow this to happen until she has permanent accommodation and attends a parenting course. This parenting course costs money both for the course and travel to the centre as an attendance requirement. In an effort to get her children back, the woman has approached the Department of Housing to get her name back on the waiting list. This Indigenous woman stated that the Department of Housing is adamant that she will not get a house until she has repaid the whole debt. Although the researcher assumes that the current policy will allow some leeway with a partial repayment, this has not been conveyed to her. She remains depressed about her current circumstances.

7. CONCLUSION

In May 2001, Federal, State and Territory Governments made a commitment to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people through the landmark Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010 (BBF) agreement. An integral component of BBF is the strategy of improving Indigenous access to mainstream public housing
Access to mainstream public housing and the sustainability of tenancies needs to improve if we are to reduce the prevalence of homelessness, overcrowding, and poor living conditions among Indigenous people.

This study provides an assessment of the extent to which the BBF strategy of improving Indigenous access to mainstream public housing for those in housing need is being realised. The evidence presented in this study indicates that Indigenous people now comprise a larger share of those entering mainstream public housing than they did when governments made their BBF commitment in 2001. Indigenous access to mainstream public housing has improved in an environment where the mainstream public housing sector is shrinking. Furthermore, Indigenous people, who are successful in accessing mainstream public housing, experience waiting times no longer than non-Indigenous public housing applicants.

Nevertheless, the quantitative evidence also indicates that significant problems remain in respect to the sustainability of tenancies. Indigenous people exhibit shorter tenancies and, at least on the one available set of relevant data we have available to us from Western Australia (WA), are significantly more likely to be served termination and final eviction notices than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Furthermore, Indigenous overcrowding rates, within mainstream public housing, lie well above corresponding rates for the non-Indigenous tenant population. Most importantly, the level of severe housing need among Indigenous people, the factor that drives much of the interest in public housing access and tenancy sustainability issues, remain at very high levels.

The continued existence of high levels of unmet housing need in the Indigenous population suggests that a strong focus of policy must be on reducing supply-side impediments to Indigenous access. There is an urgent need to arrest recent declines in the overall supply of mainstream public housing dwellings if levels of housing need among Indigenous people and in the non-Indigenous population are to be reduced.

Better targeting of the existing public housing stock must also be high on the agenda if the present tightening of public housing supply continues. Priority access now represents the dominant form of entry to public housing in most jurisdictions, but consideration must be given to further increasing its role. In a similar vein, the issue of developing mechanisms that facilitate higher rates of exit from public housing for those who can adequately cope in the private market must be further considered. Any reform agenda in terms of increasing tenant turnover in public housing must, of course, be very carefully managed so that only those with a sufficiently strong income position and with necessary tenancy management capabilities to cope with a transition to the private sector are considered in any transition program.

The introduction of appropriately resourced priority access entry mechanisms into mainstream community housing must also be high on the reform agenda but such changes must be introduced in a collaborative manner to retain the unique independent, community-based features of community housing and to ensure that relatively small community housing organisations are able to absorb such changes.
Better integration of the mainstream public housing sector with the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) and other elements of the crisis and emergency accommodation sector are also critical elements in integrated program to reduce housing need levels in the Indigenous population. Again, however, there is a need to ensure that the further development of integrated responses does not reduce the independence of community housing organisations.

State/Territory Housing Authorities have taken a number of important steps to improve Indigenous access and tenancy sustainability outcomes for Indigenous people and to reduce levels of unmet housing need in the Indigenous population. Those Indigenous people in greatest housing need are the homeless. A number of jurisdictions (most notably Victoria and WA) have developed Homelessness Strategies that bring together support services in an integrated fashion at points of greatest stress. These programs offer the greatest hope for improved outcomes for Indigenous homeless people. Mainstream public housing agencies can play a fundamental role in helping to prevent homelessness and in providing a long-term accommodation exit point for those in various forms of crisis or emergency accommodation.

Access to mainstream public housing can be denied to households on the basis of breaches of the terms of a prior public housing tenancy or the non-repayment of Housing Authority debts. Jurisdictions differ with respect to the strictness with which this condition is applied. However, when strictly applied, such eligibility criteria can act to prevent some of the neediest households from re-entering public housing and securing long-term low-cost accommodation. Developing ways in which past histories do not act as a bar to re-entry must be one of the key points of focus of policy makers in improving access to mainstream public housing among Indigenous households. Such a reform agenda recognises that a focus on traditional landlord-tenant housing relationships, which may have been a fundamental part of a larger public housing system, may now be increasingly inappropriate for a smaller system which is not so much concerned with housing those on low incomes but is more focussed on meeting the need for secure shelter for those in severe housing need.

The issue of the sustainability of public housing tenancies of those who would otherwise be in housing need is also one of fundamental concern. As noted previously, the average duration of Indigenous tenancies in mainstream public housing lies well below that for non-Indigenous tenancies and yet Indigenous tenants are more likely to be drawn from greatest need categories. The maintenance of long-term secure accommodation is a key objective for those in such categories. These findings underline the need for Housing Authorities to develop supported tenancy programs to assist households that may prematurely exit from public housing or face eviction. A number of jurisdictions have well-developed but still relatively small supported tenancy programs for those tenants at risk of tenancy termination (e.g., the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) in WA) while others are developing pilot programs (e.g., the Indigenous Tenants at Risk of Eviction Pilot in Victoria). These programs appear to work best when a model of collaboration between public housing providers and non-government community
agencies applies to service provision, intervention is not left to late but the rights of the tenants are upheld.

Increasing the representation of Indigenous people in mainstream public housing offices and in decision-making roles in mainstream public housing provides a positive environment for improved Indigenous access and sustainability outcomes. It is important in this regard that increased Indigenous representation is not simply confined to Indigenous-specific public directorates or Authorities but is evident throughout the administrative arm of mainstream public housing. At a broader level, public housing authorities need to recognise a history of disadvantage and discrimination in housing affecting Indigenous people and the deep need for reconciliation. For example, the Queensland Department of Housing’s Statement of Reconciliation provides an overarching commitment to address the concerns and issues of Indigenous people and commitments in a number of areas to create a positive environment for existing and prospective Indigenous tenants. Such statements provide an important foundation stone for future progress.

Jurisdictions have increased efforts to better match households to the appropriate dwelling type. But a boost to the stock of larger dwellings is required if we are to reduce overcrowding outcomes for Indigenous households. The existing housing stock is more structured to meet the needs of a non-Indigenous public housing population where single person households dominate. This issue is now being addressed by some State/Territory Housing Authorities through the judicious selling of smaller units and the purchase or building of larger dwellings.

A major component of this research project was the examination of the mainstream public housing experiences of Indigenous people themselves and those who provide services to Indigenous households in need. Our findings from the administrative data and from a review of State/Territory Housing Authority programs and policies suggest that significant gains are being made in terms of an increasing access of Indigenous people to mainstream public housing and the development of new programs designed to support Indigenous people access and sustain tenancies. However, the three case studies (Inala, Geraldton and North-West Adelaide) point to the need to push the reform process much further in order to find solutions to the problems confronting Indigenous people in housing need accessing sustainable and affordable mainstream housing.

The greatest frustration expressed in case study interviews of Indigenous people and those working in housing-related support agencies was simply the lack of available housing for those in need wishing to secure long-term accommodation. Additionally, there was a strong view presented in our case study interviews that houses need to be better designed to meet the needs of larger Indigenous households. The case studies point to widespread perceptions that non-Indigenous people get access to houses ahead of Indigenous people but even more so that the standard of accommodation and housing maintenance provided to Indigenous people is lower than for the non-Indigenous population. A greater level of support and outreach which persists through the duration of the tenancy for those at risk of later evictions was also a theme that arose from the case studies.
The case studies reveal a great deal of compassion and understanding of the complex needs of Indigenous people in severe need accessing public housing on the part of those providing housing services both within and outside Housing Authorities. However, translating this into supportive practice is not always easy. The case of Indigenous women who have leases in their name, suffer domestic and family violence and are required to pay the bill for damage to the house done by her partner because she is incapable of reporting him and filling out a form highlights this point. The system as a whole, including all government departments and non-government agencies must find flexible means to work with cases such as this. The crucial insight arising from the case studies, through the voices of those interviewed, are that the multiplicity of factors around race, discrimination, lack of housing stock and supports and a wide range of risk factors all conspire to deny many Indigenous people access to mainstream housing.

In summary, this study shows that gains have been made in improving access outcomes in mainstream public housing for Indigenous people in housing need. The high levels of continuing unmet housing need in the Indigenous population indicate, however, that more needs to be done to improve housing outcomes in this area. We also need to continue to develop programs designed to ensure that vulnerable households in public housing at risk of losing their tenancy are supported through difficult times so that a cycle of eviction/vacant possession and churning through crisis and emergency housing and other tenuous accommodation options can be avoided. Australian governments have made a landmark commitment to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people in the Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010 (BBF) agreement. It is through the implementation strategies in BBF that a co-ordinated response to Indigenous housing outcomes can be maintained and enhanced and it is in terms of the success in achieving better housing-related outcomes for Indigenous Australians that Australian governments can be judged over the remaining five years of the agreement.
APPENDIX A: LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

Responses to the State/Territory Housing Authority Survey were received from the following organisations:

Submission 1. Community Housing Federation of Australia (March 2005)
Submission 3. Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs, NT, (October 2004)
Submission 4. Department of Housing, NSW (November 2004)
Submission 5. Department of Housing, Queensland, (October 2004 plus supplementary material provided at a later date)
Submission 6. Department of Housing and Works, WA (September 2004)
Submission 7. Department of Disability, Housing Services, Housing Services, ACT (October 2004)
Submission 8. Department of Human Services, Housing Building, VIC (April 2005)
Submission 9. 
Submission 10. NSW Federation of Housing Associations (March 2005)
Submission 11. South Australian Housing Trust, (September 2004)
Submission 12. Tenants Advice Shelter, SA (September 2004)
Submission 13. Tenants Union of Victoria (September 2005)
APPENDIX B: CSHA DATA QUALIFICATIONS

The following Appendix outlines some of the issues that need to be borne in mind when interpreting the CSHA data included in this report. This Appendix was compiled by David Wilson of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

CSHA data may be compiled differently between states and territories or differently by a jurisdiction over time. As such, it is important that these data quality and methodological variations are understood.

Details of these areas are contained in the AIHW data collection reports27 and in the Department of Family Services (FaCS) Housing Assistance Act annual reports for each year.28

Due to different data collection methodologies there is significant variation in the basic counts of public rental housing between ABS surveys and censuses and the actual counts found in administrative data. The difference in regard to the most recent ABS Census for public housing is shown in Table B.1 (Table 5.39 from AIHW’s (2003g) Australia’s Welfare) presented below.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has indicated a number of reasons for this variation including a high level of non-response or non-contact from persons in public rental housing.

Prior to the 2002-03 data collections the National Housing Assistance Data Dictionary Version 1 was the authoritative source of data definitions and standards for CSHA collections.

From 2002-03 the National Housing Assistance Data Dictionary Version 2 (NHADD V2) was the authoritative source of data definitions and standards for this collection (AIHW 2003a).

Caution should be exercised when interpreting changes between years in CSHA public housing data to ensure data are comparable. For example, due to data reliability issues, commencing in the 2002–03 data collection the measure of the number of rebated households was amended from a year ending to a point in time measure (i.e., at 30 June). As such, data are not comparable to previous years.

Table B.1  Households in Public Rental Housing and the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP) (State And Territory Owned And Managed Indigenous Housing): Comparison of Census 2001 and National Housing Data Repository Figures, 2001 (Table 5.39 From AIHW *Australia’s Welfare* 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
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<th>WA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
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<td><strong>Census 2001</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of households renting from state or territory housing authority</td>
<td>114,130</td>
<td>54,805</td>
<td>47,286</td>
<td>44,686</td>
<td>29,399</td>
<td>11,617</td>
<td>9,858</td>
<td>316,942</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative data</strong></td>
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<td>Total number of all households at 30 June 2001 in:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public housing</td>
<td>126,214</td>
<td>62,522</td>
<td>48,942</td>
<td>48,539</td>
<td>30,883</td>
<td>12,428</td>
<td>5,759</td>
<td>11,016</td>
<td>346,055</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARHP (STOMIH)</td>
<td>3,794</td>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>1,708</td>
<td>2,299</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>11,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>130,008</td>
<td>63,554</td>
<td>51,533</td>
<td>50,247</td>
<td>33,182</td>
<td>12,726</td>
<td>5,759</td>
<td>11,016</td>
<td>357,777</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Per cent difference between Census and administrative data</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Based on public housing administrative data only</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
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<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Census 2001 (Basic Community Profiles, Table B19); CSHA Public Housing and ARHP (ARHP) 2000–2001, L18 (see AIHW (2005d)).

**Note:** ARHP (STOMIH) tenants would be expected to indicate ‘Dept of Housing’ as the landlord, not community housing.

Also further clarification of existing definitions can impact on comparability over time. An example is in 2002-03 the counting rules for the total number of new households assisted for the year was clarified such that all new households, regardless of whether they subsequently transferred in the financial year, should be included. Moreover in that year data on transfers was clarified such that:

- All transfer households are counted regardless of whether they were also a new household in the financial year; and
- Households with multiple transfers in the financial year are counted only once.

As such, data may not be comparable to previous years.
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