



---

To the NT Government

# 2016/17 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

From NT Shelter



*NT Shelter is the peak non-government housing body working towards a just and fairer housing system in the NT. We advocate appropriate and affordable housing for everyone, especially disadvantaged groups and those on low incomes.*

December 2015

---

*Inquiries about this submission should be directed to: Tammy White Executive Officer, NT Shelter - [eo@ntshelter.org.au](mailto:eo@ntshelter.org.au)*

---

## *CONTENTS*

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>4 - 5</b>
NT Shelter Recommendation (1)	
NT Shelter Recommendation (2)	
NT Shelter Recommendation (3)	
NT Shelter Recommendation (4)	
NT Shelter Recommendation (5)	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6 - 7</b>
NT Shelter Organisation Chart	
<b>Two Key Reforms</b>	<b>8 - 9</b>
Reform of the Federation	
NT Government review of Housing Programs	
<b>2016 – 2017 PBS Topics</b>	<b>10 – 14</b>
Needs Analysis - NTS Rec (1)	
Homelessness Policy Framework - NTS Rec (2)	
Develop a Sustainable Community Housing sector - NTS Rec (3)	
Funding Arrangements with Service Providers - NTS Rec (4)	
Cyclical Maintenance Program for Social Housing - NTS Rec (5)	
<b>Acknowledgement – NTCOSS recommendations</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>15</b>

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The NT Department of Housing's reported wait times, Anglicare Australia's 'Rental Affordability Snapshot'<sup>i</sup>, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 'Specialist homelessness services 2013 –14' report<sup>ii</sup>, and the ABS's severe crowding data reflect the inability of the current NT housing system to address the burgeoning demand for housing for low income households and supported accommodation.

NT Shelter's Pre-Budget identifies the development of a sustainable 'community housing growth provider' sector, providing supported accommodation, social housing and affordable housing in response to need and must be a key priority area for the pending NT Government Housing Strategy.

Through its own broad consultation, NT Shelter has particularly identified the critical need for 'whole of system' responses to address the accommodation needs of the following groups where they are at risk of experiencing homelessness: Single females over 35, with no domestic and family violence or alcohol and other drugs issues; Single parents with dependent children; Youth, with/without dependent children; People with disabilities with dependent children; Aged; People with health issues, including with mental health; and, People in remote areas.

A new Housing Strategy Framework must be developed to provide holistic responses to address the Northern Territory's housing needs. This Pre-Budget Submission's recommendations detail a series of considered components that should be requisite to this Framework.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***NT Shelter Recommendation (1):***

*The NT Government implement ongoing needs analyses of housing assistance and homelessness services provision throughout the NT to provide baseline data for measuring performance against the NT Government's pending Housing Strategy, and to measure outcomes.*

### ***NT Shelter Recommendation (2):***

- a) The NT Government - working in conjunction with non-government organisations, develop a Homelessness Policy Framework with action plans and specific targets for reducing the rates of homelessness across the regions in the NT within a set timeframe.*
- b) The NT Government - working in conjunction with non-government organisations support the implementation of a 'Housing First/Safe Shelter First' approach to ensure that people's basic needs for safe shelter/housing are met. First steps to be provided are 'wrap around trauma-informed' support through a case management approach to address any issues that may impact on maintaining stable housing, such as alcohol and other drug issues, domestic and family violence, disability, mental health and trauma history.*
- c) The NT Government - exploring housing options that enable women to remain at home if they choose and develop practical and deliverable 'safe at home' approaches that maintain the safety of women and their children. Solutions such as upgrading security at home, collaboration with police and the courts, providing emotional support and importantly perpetrators must be held accountable and removed to minimise disruption to the household.*
- d) The NT Government commit funding to an Action Innovation Project Fund that will allow the Community Services sector to drive innovation in designing and delivering services based on the sector's specialist knowledge and experience in delivering services to address homelessness.*

### ***NT Shelter Recommendation (3):***

- a) The NT Government establish a Housing Authority which acts as an affordable housing provider involved in land development, housing construction and property management.*
- b) The NT Government should examine the option to redevelop the Don Dale Centre and old Berrimah prison site as a potential multipurpose youth hostel complex.*

***NT Shelter Recommendation (4):***

- a) *The NT Government fund the NT Community Services sector and peak organisations, such as NT Shelter, through longer funding terms, preferably 3 years minimum, to allow services the financial security to innovate and collaborate in meaningful ways.*
- b) *The NT Treasury set aside allocations each financial year, for at least 5 consecutive years, from the NT Infrastructure Development Fund to:*
  - i. *finance affordable housing provision through support to our fledgling community housing sector in urban and regional centres;*
  - ii. *finance the establishment of a number of regional Aboriginal community housing organisations to grow and meet demands to maintain and manage social housing beyond the Remote Indigenous Housing Strategy; and*
  - iii. *support Aboriginal Housing NT to ensure Aboriginal community leaders can contribute to improving housing options.*

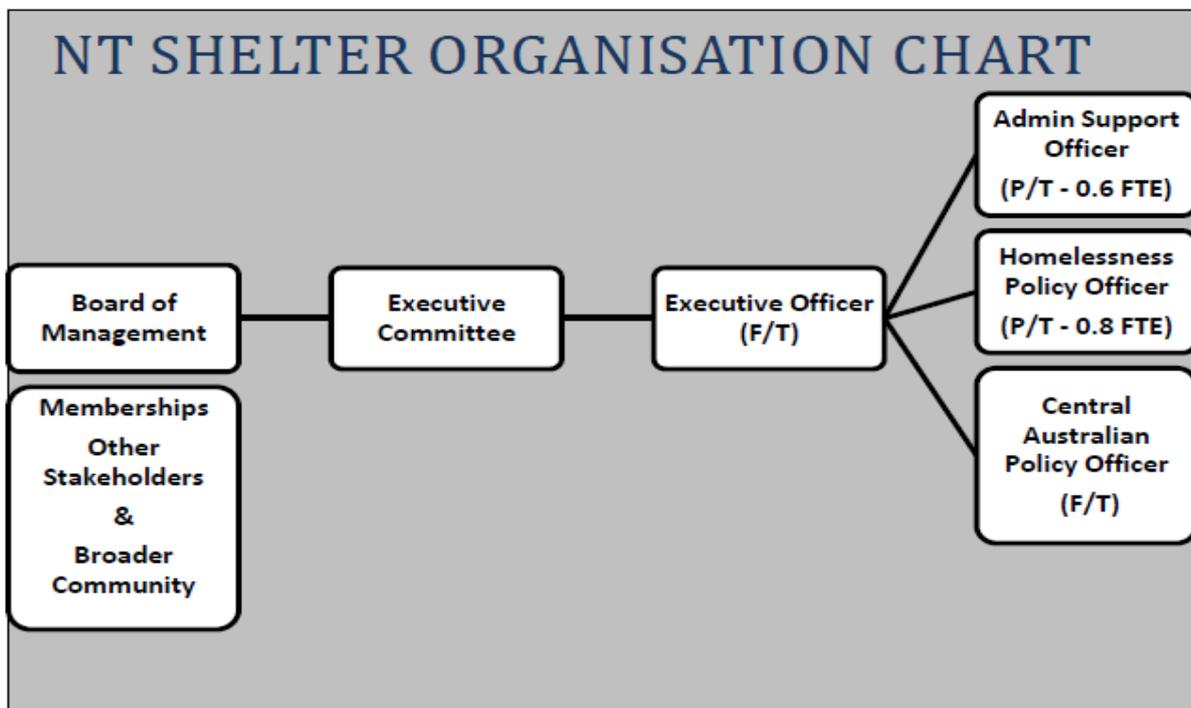
***NT Shelter Recommendation (5):***

*Roll out a cyclical maintenance program linked to local Aboriginal community workforces throughout the NT to extend the longevity of the NT's social housing stock, at the same time lessening social housing vacancy periods.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1996 NT Shelter was incorporated under the NT Associations Act and formally established as the peak non-government housing advocacy body for the NT. NT Shelter is accountable to its members and other stakeholders through an elected Board of Management (BOM) made up of community representatives from each region of the NT.

NT Shelter is staffed by a full time Executive Officer, a part time Homelessness Policy Officer and a part time Administrative Officer located in Darwin and a full time policy Officer located in Central Australia as identified in the following organisational chart.



As a Territory wide organisation we have a focus on the regions and Aboriginal communities of the NT and we strive to work collaboratively with all our key stakeholders. Our vision is - Appropriate and Affordable housing for ALL Territorians.

Our Mission is - NT Shelter works towards a just and fairer housing system in the NT.

Our key principles are:

- Housing is a human right;
- NT Shelter works collaboratively with all stakeholders;
- As a Territory wide organisation we have a focus on the regions and Aboriginal communities of the NT;
- NT Shelter promotes consumer rights; and
- Aboriginal housing disadvantage must be addressed.

As the peak NT housing body, NT Shelter advocates for appropriate and affordable housing for all members of the community - particularly disadvantaged groups and those on low incomes.

NT Shelter is funded by the NT Department of Housing to carry out our peak housing body role. Primarily we advocate for those who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or on very low or low to moderate incomes and who are disadvantaged in a market based housing system.

NT Shelter's previous policy advice to the NT Government has covered a range of areas, with a particular focus on:

- Public and affordable housing for low income and disadvantaged households;
- Aboriginal housing in both urban and remote areas;
- The need for not-for-profit housing providers to be supported to play a greater role in housing provision and management, filling the gap in our housing system between public housing and the high rents in the private rental market;
- Input into the NT Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment on a range of issues regarding the supply of affordable residential land for a variety of household types (mix) as well as providing long term leases to non-profit housing providers for social and affordable housing development; and
- The development of responses to assist people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

NT Shelter has previously recommended that the NT Government provide support or subsidies to enable the growth and development of the not-for-profit (NFP) housing sector in the NT. This resulted in funding support being provided to NT Shelter in 2015 to resource the emerging NFP housing sector with expertise, training and support.

NT Shelter has played a vital role as a member of the former Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA) on the development of initiatives at a national level. In December 2014 the Federal Government made the decision to cease funding to CHFA along with National Shelter and Homelessness Australia. In response to this decision, a single national industry body for community housing, called the Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) was established.

CHIA has established itself as a single national industry body for community housing and as the voice for the industry will:

- Provide more effective national representation;
- Deliver increased services to members;
- Foster effective branch offices in every State and Territory;
- Better connect the sector; and
- Create a more resilient and independent organisation.

NT Shelter looks forward to developing a formal relationship with CHIA as its role in the Northern Territory evolves.

## TWO KEY REFORMS

This 2016-2017 Pre-Budget Submission (PBS) seeks to acknowledge the significance of two key policy reforms that are currently under review and NT Shelter's position in reference to these.

### REFORM OF THE FEDERATION

The most significant and far reaching of these reforms is the pending Australian Government's Reform of the Federation and specifically its identification of funding of housing assistance and homelessness services for revision. National Shelter provided a broad response to the Australian Government's June 2015 Discussion Paper about the nature of the Federation reform and issues relating to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and federal financial relations.

Outlined in the submission are the following summary points:

- Australia faces a number of significant housing issues, including an unacceptable level of homelessness, high levels of housing stress amongst low income households and especially renters, and declining affordability of home purchase in major cities;
- These various issues are closely interlinked and require coordinated intervention on a number of levels. Current government efforts are fragmented, split between various agencies at Commonwealth, State and Local Government levels. This fragmentation is a greater issue than overlap or duplication, and requires greater cross-government collaboration to make a genuine impact;
- In housing assistance, the greatest issue is the inadequacy of levels of assistance. This inadequacy shows itself on social housing in the form of long waiting lists for assistance, while in Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) it shows itself in the high proportion of households who are in housing stress despite receiving assistance. This inadequacy in both forms of support is a significant contributor to levels of homelessness;
- None of the three alternatives canvassed in the Discussion Paper offers any clear way of alleviating this inadequacy. Option 2 is essentially a "status quo" option, while Options 1 and 3 offer significant rearrangements of responsibilities. Both the reform options appear to have significant problems and drawbacks without appearing to solve any of the significant problems facing housing assistance; and
- Housing programs present particular challenges both in relation to responses to Vertical Fiscal Imbalance (VFI) and approaches to Horizontal Fiscal Equalisation (HFE).

In the Northern Territory these issues are exacerbated by our vast geographic spread and remoteness, the cost of construction, extreme overcrowding (particularly in remote and other Aboriginal communities), low populations resulting in lack of scale and a relative lack of community housing organisations.



### **NT GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF HOUSING PROGRAMS**

The second important review currently underway is the NT Government Review of Housing Programs. NT Shelter met with KPMG, the consultants engaged to undertake the review on behalf of the NT Government, in September 2015. NT Shelter provided a copy of our 2015/16 PBS at this meeting.

NT Shelter participated in the Review consultations in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, and provided an initial response with recommendations to KPMG in October 2015. A Consultation Draft was released 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015 which seeks final responses by 5 February 2016, after which a final Housing Strategy with supporting implementation plans will be released.

## 2016 - 2017 PBS TOPICS

NT Shelter submits these recommendations, including some which have been made in response to the Housing Review consultations to form the basis of our 2016-2017 PBS.

### NEEDS ANALYSIS

The NT Government should implement thorough, ongoing needs analyses of housing assistance and homelessness services provision throughout the NT to provide baseline data for measuring performance against the NT Government's pending Housing Strategy, and to measure outcomes. This is particularly critical for identified 'vulnerable' population groups.

#### ***NT Shelter Recommendation (1):***

*The NT Government implement ongoing needs analyses of housing assistance and homelessness services provision throughout the NT to provide baseline data for measuring performance against the NT Government's pending Housing Strategy, and to measure outcomes.*

### HOMELESSNESS POLICY FRAMEWORK

In the Northern Territory homelessness has many causes including lack of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse. People can experience homelessness as an isolated event, for long periods of time or in cycles which are difficult to break from. Homelessness causes social exclusion and further disadvantage.

The ABS definition of homelessness counts people as homeless if they are in improvised dwellings or sleeping out, in supported accommodation, temporarily staying with other households, in boarding houses, in other temporary lodging or in 'severely' crowded dwellings. The ABS defines severe crowding as when a dwelling requires 4 or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the people who usually live there.

The NT has an unacceptable rate of 731 people experiencing homelessness per 10,000 populations which is 15 times the national average rate. The NT had 3 times the national rate of people in supported accommodation on Census night reflecting the high demand for supported accommodation and a strong response of services in the NT. However, the huge rate of homelessness in the NT means Territorians needing accommodation and other supports are much more likely to go without than other Australians. The NT had 13 times the national rate of people sleeping rough.

The NT's homelessness population is younger, poorer and more disadvantaged than the national average homeless population. 90% of the homeless population in the NT is Aboriginal.

Approximately, 38% of all Territorians experiencing homelessness are children under the age of 18. The majority of these children and young people are in severely crowded housing where they have little or no personal space. The problem of severely crowded housing has broad social and economic consequence for the NT, having a negative impact on childhood development, educational achievement, family violence, preventable and endemic diseases, participation in the workforce, and family and community well-being. An

alarming ten percent of all people sleeping rough in the NT are under the age of 18. Many children and young people experiencing homelessness are escaping domestic and family violence with their mothers.<sup>iii</sup>

To address a homelessness rate 15 times the national average requires a systemic response which recognises the inherent right of all Territorians to housing / safe shelter. The NT Government must commit to a Homelessness Policy Framework with an objective of ending homelessness. Action plans and specific targets for this will need to be established and reported against.

**NT and national comparisons of people experiencing homelessness by homelessness category**

No. of people in every 10,000	Rough sleeping	Supported accommodation	Staying with other households	Other temporary lodging	Severely crowded dwellings	All people experiencing homelessness	% of all people experiencing homelessness
<b>Northern Territory</b>	40	27	20	22	622	731	7.3
<b>Australia</b>	3	9	8	7	18	49	0.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 2049.0 Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011

Domestic and family violence

It is well established that domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and their children and as a consequence women should/must be removed from a violent situation. The focus of the majority of state and territory housing/homelessness policies is on providing accommodation for women and their children fleeing domestic and family violence. However, research suggests that this may not always be the best model for women and their children. Removing a perpetrator and providing additional safety measures to ensure that a woman and her children can remain safe in their own home minimises disruption and reduces the risk of revictimisation. In Australia, 'safe at home' initiatives are supported by victims, however, they remain underutilised as a response.

Exploring housing options that enable women to remain at home if they choose to requires the provision of 'safe at home' schemes to be multifaceted in approach. Issues such as upgrading security at home, collaboration with police and the courts, providing emotional support and advocacy are all necessary measures and importantly perpetrators must be held accountable and removed to minimise disruption to the household.<sup>iv</sup>

Support innovation and collaboration in the homelessness sector

In Victoria, the state government has committed funds that allow the sector to drive innovation in designing and delivering services based on the sector's specialist knowledge and experience in delivering services to address homelessness. NT Shelter recommends that the NT Government commit funding to an 'Action Innovation Project Fund'.<sup>v</sup>

**NT Shelter Recommendation (2):**

- e) *The NT Government - working in conjunction with non-government organisations, develop a Homelessness Policy Framework with action plans and specific targets for reducing the rates of homelessness across the regions in the NT within a set timeframe.*
- f) *The NT Government - working in conjunction with non-government organisations support the implementation of a 'Housing First/Safe Shelter First' approach to ensure*

*that people's basic needs for safe shelter/housing are met. First steps to be provided are 'wrap around trauma-informed' support through a case management approach to address any issues that may impact on maintaining stable housing, such as alcohol and other drug issues, domestic and family violence, disability, mental health and trauma history.*

- g) The NT Government - exploring housing options that enable women to remain at home if they choose and develop practical and deliverable 'safe at home' approaches that maintain the safety of women and their children. Solutions such as upgrading security at home, collaboration with police and the courts, providing emotional support and importantly perpetrators must be held accountable and removed to minimise disruption to the household.*
- h) The NT Government commit funding to an Action Innovation Project Fund that will allow the Community Services sector to drive innovation in designing and delivering services based on the sector's specialist knowledge and experience in delivering services to address homelessness.*

## **DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY HOUSING SECTOR**

This is a critical time for the Department of Housing to partner with the small number of identified NGOs who have the capacity to develop as community housing providers. It also provides an ideal opportunity to build capacity in the NT's NFP sector to prepare for accreditation as community housing providers under the newly established regulatory framework of the *Community Housing Providers (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2013*.

NT Shelter's previous submissions have identified opportunities for the NT Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment on a range of issues regarding the supply of affordable residential land for a variety of household types (mix), as well as providing long term leases to non-profit housing providers for social and affordable housing development. Such opportunities could assist the development of an NT community housing sector.

Increasing affordable and appropriate youth hostel accommodation must be a priority for our youth who experience homelessness (10% in the NT under the age 18) at some stage in their lives. The NT Government should examine the option to redevelop the Don Dale Centre and old Berrimah prison site as a potential multipurpose youth hostel complex.

NT Shelter recommends that the Northern Territory Government investigate the model used in Western Australia, to establish a Housing Authority which acts as an affordable housing provider involved in land development, housing construction and property management.<sup>vi</sup>

### ***NT Shelter Recommendation (3):***

- c) The NT Government establish a Housing Authority which acts as an affordable housing provider involved in land development, housing construction and property management.*
- d) The NT Government should examine the option to redevelop the Don Dale Centre and old Berrimah prison site as a potential multipurpose youth hostel complex.*

## **FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS**

The NT Government is urged to commit to longer funding terms, preferably a minimum of 3 years, to allow NGO services the financial security to innovate and collaborate in meaningful ways.

NT Shelter acknowledges and fully supports the Statement of Principles under the NTG/NGO Partnership Group (NNPG), sponsored by the Department of the Chief Minister. In particular the areas relating to 'Accountability', 'Provider diversity' and 'Program and Service Design' should be the focus of both the sector and of Government. The latter identifies joined-up services, program flexibility and the longer term benefits for the individual, community group or region.

NT Shelter acknowledges that reporting systems must measure and report on client complexity and focus on client success and outcomes, reflecting Housing's long recognised role as a key social determinant of health outcomes.

Affordable, appropriate and adequate housing is demonstrated to have, among many other things, a marked impact on people's health, their access to labour markets and an array of other benefits.<sup>vii</sup>

The recent shift to annual contract funding arrangements by the Department of Housing provides limited incentive for NGOs to commit to longer term strategic outcomes.

### NT Infrastructure Development Fund

The recently announced NT Infrastructure Development Fund, with the creation of a \$1b investment pool, provides an ideal vehicle for financing affordable housing provision through support to the community housing sector. Considerable investment is required to strengthen the NT's nascent community housing sector so as to address unmet demand in urban, regional and remote locations. Projects such as the Central Australian Affordable Housing Company's Bloomfield Street unit complex in Alice Springs demonstrate the ability of the community housing sector to use seed capital to successfully develop housing infrastructure projects.

### Regional Indigenous community housing sector

While the revised Remote Indigenous Housing Strategy continues to 2018, this partnership agreement will not address the growing housing needs of people, and associated overcrowding, in many of the NT's 600+ Aboriginal communities, including to urban centres.

As noted to NT Shelter's 2015-16 Pre-Budget Submission, 12,373 of the NT's 15,476 people<sup>viii</sup> recorded as homeless in the 2011 Census were those living in severe crowding – these were predominantly Aboriginal people living in social housing to urban areas and remote communities. The continued levels of overcrowding have broad social and economic consequence for the NT, having a negative impact on childhood development, educational achievement, family violence, preventable and endemic diseases, participation in the workforce, and family and community well-being.

Government assistance to support the development of a number of regional Aboriginal community housing organisations is essential to grow supply to meet these demands, and to maintain and manage social housing beyond the Remote Indigenous Housing Strategy.

This replicates the key role played by the mainstream community housing sector elsewhere in Australia to effectively supply and manage social housing stock through economies of scale. This also aligns with proposed future directions in the report from the Aboriginal Remote Housing Forum held in Darwin in March 2015<sup>ix</sup>, which identify a 'community housing approach' as the approach best suited to the NT for housing provision utilising: collaborative action; integrated management systems; place-based approach; capacity building; engagement with local communities; and, financial transparency.

NT Shelter recommends that additional adequate resourcing and support is provided to Aboriginal Housing NT to ensure Aboriginal community leaders can contribute to improving housing options.

***NT Shelter Recommendation (4):***

- c) The NT Government fund the NT Community Services sector and peak organisations, such as NT Shelter, through longer funding terms, preferably 3 years minimum, to allow services the financial security to innovate and collaborate in meaningful ways.*
- d) The NT Treasury set aside allocations each financial year, for at least 5 consecutive years, from the NT Infrastructure Development Fund to:*
  - i. finance affordable housing provision through support to our fledgling community housing sector in urban and regional centres;*
  - ii. finance the establishment of a number of regional Aboriginal community housing organisations to grow and meet demands to maintain and manage social housing beyond the Remote Indigenous Housing Strategy; and*
  - iii. support Aboriginal Housing NT to ensure Aboriginal community leaders can contribute to improving housing options.*

**CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM FOR SOCIAL HOUSING**

The repairs and maintenance budget for urban, regional and remote social housing (including outstations) remains an ongoing and costly expenditure item for the NT Government. The roll out of a cyclical maintenance program linked to a local Aboriginal community workforce throughout the NT will extend the longevity of the NT's social housing stock, at the same time lessening social housing vacancy periods.

Importantly a cyclical maintenance program will provide employment opportunities for local community workforce, and increase householders' engagement with the day-to-day maintenance of their housing, in turn ensuring safer and healthier living conditions. Long-term cost savings provided through the implementation of a cyclical maintenance program can then be redirected to other housing programs, including new capital works.

***NT Shelter Recommendation (5):***

- Roll out a cyclical maintenance program linked to local Aboriginal community workforces throughout the NT to extend the longevity of the NT's social housing stock, at the same time lessening social housing vacancy periods.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In addition to NT Shelter's recommendations above, NT Shelter fully supports the NTCOSS Pre Budget Submission 2016 – 2017 recommendations.

---

## REFERENCES

- i p.59-61, 2015 Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot. Anglicare Australia, Canberra, 2015. Refer: [http://www.anglicare.asn.au/userfiles/Anglicare%20RAS%202015%20report%2030\\_04\\_15%20.pdf](http://www.anglicare.asn.au/userfiles/Anglicare%20RAS%202015%20report%2030_04_15%20.pdf)
- ii 'Table NT2.13: Clients, by reasons for seeking assistance, 2013-14, adjusted for non-response', Supplementary tables – Northern Territory, Specialist homelessness services 2013–14. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, 2014. Refer: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129549889>
- iii Information on ABS Census and homelessness count can be found on the ABS website at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ViewContent?readform&view=ProductsbyTopic&Action=Expand&Num=5.8.4>.
- iv Briefing paper from COAG roundtable – Women's Housing, Building towards a mainstream practice of 'Safe at Home' (not for public release)
- v <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/funding,-grants-and-tenders/homelessness-innovation-action-projects>.
- vi <http://www.dhw.wa.gov.au/aboutus/thehousingauthority/Pages/default.aspx>
- vii <http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/ctgc-rs25.pdf>
- viii 'Table 1: Homeless Operational Groups and Other Marginal Housing, Remoteness by State and Territory of usual residence 2011' from ABS 2049.0 Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness. ABS, Canberra, 2011.
- ix p.50, Report from March 2015 Aboriginal Remote Housing Forum. Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the NT, Darwin, 2015.