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Understanding and Responding to Indigenous Homelessness



SUPPORT FROM THE HEART

Sharing the Space: Northern Territory Housing Peak Bodies Are Working Together to Make an Impact on Aboriginal Housing

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The Northern Territory (NT) accounts for just one per cent of the Australian population but has 12 times its homeless population. Aboriginal people are overrepresented amongst the NT's homeless population, making up 88 per cent (this figure is 20 per cent nationally). Twenty per cent of

the NT's Aboriginal population are defined as homeless.

Given the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in homelessness statistics, Aboriginal organisations must be key players in developing and implementing the response.

In a move to ensure Aboriginal voices are at the forefront of discussions on Aboriginal housing reform in the NT, the Territory's two housing peak bodies, NT Shelter and Aboriginal Housing NT (AHNT), have signed an historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).



Lawson Broad (President of NT Shelter and CEO of Somerville Community Services), The Hon Chansey Paech (Minister for Local Government; Minister for Central Australian Economic Reconstruction; Minister for Remote Housing and Town Camps; Minister for Indigenous Essential Services; Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage) and Leeanne Caton (Chairperson of Aboriginal Housing NT and CEO of Yilli Housing).

The first between an Aboriginal and a mainstream peak body in Australia, the MoU enables the two peaks to work constructively together to tackle the Northern Territory's many housing challenges.

AHNT was established in 2015, following the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) Aboriginal Housing Forum and officially launched in August 2019 as the first Aboriginal housing peak body for Aboriginal housing issues in the NT. The peak's vision is clear, Aboriginal housing in Aboriginal hands, and this is reflected in their membership of Aboriginal organisations representing town camps, outstations, homelands, and remote communities across the Territory.

To AHNT, safe, secure, and culturally appropriate housing is the first step in closing the gap in all areas of life and NT Shelter agrees, without housing, efforts to improve the health, employment, and educational outcomes of Aboriginal Territorians cannot succeed in the long-term.

Since 2007, national Indigenous housing policy in Australia has been informed by the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). The NTER marked a shift in the right of Indigenous people to self-determination. A 2013 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report, *Housing conditionality, Indigenous lifeworlds and policy outcomes: towards a model for culturally responsive housing provision*, found that when Australia attempts to position Indigenous people according to mainstream norms, it leaves a legacy of distrust and cynicism.

The report highlights how positive housing outcomes are enhanced when Indigenous and state governance organisations establish cooperative relationships in a way that attempts to balance their respective cultural and organisational constraints.

This view is supported by a recent inquiry into homelessness in Australia, released in July 2021 by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on



Social Policy and Legal Affairs. Of the 35 recommendations made, several call for the increased inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives with a view to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Maria Thompson, AHNT and Ingerkerke Services Director, has described the signing of the MoU as real progress towards better housing outcomes for Aboriginal people. Moving forward, AHNT intends to develop an effective Aboriginal housing system that will allow for local control over services, generates local employment and meets the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people.

NT Shelter has long been the Northern Territory's only peak body for affordable housing and homelessness. NT Shelter's vision is appropriate and affordable housing for all people of the NT. The peak focuses on four key areas: engagement and advocacy, sector consultation (alignment), collaboration and

coordination, research and information gathering and growing the capacity of the sector.

For NT Shelter, the MoU is not just a symbolic representation of goodwill but a deep commitment to partnership and outcomes. Peter McMillan, NT Shelter's Executive Officer, sees this as an opportunity for the peak to grow a strong, lasting partnership that will result in effective advocacy and the identification of solutions to address housing need.

With two voices advocating for change, improved housing outcomes for Territorians is looking more likely. The journey of the two peaks, their role in representing their respective members and their determination to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal people across the NT, will be explored on a national stage during the AHURI National Housing Conference in March 2022.

The MoU was signed on July 13, 2021 at Parliament House in Darwin.