



STRONG FAMILY, STRONG COMMUNITIES

A strategic framework for
Aboriginal social housing in NSW

2018 - 2028



Message from the Minister

Since the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) twenty years ago, the AHO has focussed on delivering more and better quality social housing for Aboriginal people, strengthening the Aboriginal Community Housing Sector and enhancing the lives of vulnerable Aboriginal people across NSW.

Despite these achievements, it is clear that challenges remain for us all. We know that inequality between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people continues to persist across multiple socioeconomic indicators including health, education, justice and out of home care. We know that the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage continues to persist for Aboriginal families residing in social housing. We also know that the Aboriginal population in need of housing assistance continues to grow.

Now is the time to reflect on these challenges and to embrace new strategies that create a stronger and more independent future for Aboriginal people across NSW. There is good evidence that housing can provide the foundation for reducing inequality by using it as a lever to link people into services that can change their lives.

Social housing should be a point along a path for vulnerable people, not an end point. The more Aboriginal people who can leverage stable housing for its non-housing benefits (including access to education and employment opportunities, safety and security for families, increased health and wellbeing) the more Aboriginal families and communities will be empowered to move along the path to housing independence.

That is why I am pleased to launch *Strong Family, Strong Communities*, the strategic framework that will guide the AHO over the next 10 years. The Framework outlines the areas the AHO will focus on to deliver better housing outcomes for Aboriginal families, while acknowledging the unique challenges in Aboriginal housing, and the great strengths and resilience of Aboriginal communities.

I look forward to continuing our consultation with Aboriginal communities across NSW as we develop and implement policies and programs under the Framework, and to seeing the results that *Strong Family, Strong Communities* will have in improving the lives of Aboriginal people right across NSW.



Pru Goward MP

Minister for Family and Community Services
Minister for Social Housing
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Message from the Chief Executive and Chair

Our vision at the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) is that every Aboriginal person in NSW has equal access to, and choice in, affordable housing.

The AHO has accomplished a lot since being established in 1998, particularly over the last ten years. The AHO now delivers stable housing to over 5,800 Aboriginal families in NSW and we continue to build or acquire houses for more Aboriginal families. Moreover, the AHO has funded and completed repairs and maintenance on many community owned homes. During this period, the AHO has also far exceeded the government targets for Aboriginal participation in construction, and partnered with Aboriginal organisations to deliver tenant support programs. While these achievements are noteworthy, we have a long way to go.

Over the last 12 months the AHO, in partnership with our stakeholders, has developed a strategic framework which will be the foundation of our strategic direction over the next 10 years. The AHO will work with tenants, the Aboriginal community housing sector and new partners to co-create housing and non-housing solutions for Aboriginal communities. There will be a focus on the strengths of the sector and on co-designing solutions to overcome the challenges Aboriginal community housing providers face.

Strong Family, Strong Communities will recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal communities and will seek to support greater self-determination for Aboriginal people. The knowledge and experiences of tenants, their families and communities will underpin localised initiatives focussed on improving tenancy stability, access to culturally appropriate services and health and well-being.

On behalf of the AHO and the NSW Government, we invite all Aboriginal communities in NSW to have their voices heard in the development and implementation of policy and programs under *Strong Family, Strong Communities*. The more voices we hear, the better the opportunities and solutions we co-create for our future generations will be.



Shane Hamilton

Chief Executive, AHO



Robynne Quiggin

Chair, AHO Board

Why a new strategic direction?

THE CHALLENGE:

With 33% of Australia's Aboriginal population living in NSW and a forecast increase in population of 31% by 2026 (well above population projections for non-Aboriginal people), the demand for social and affordable housing for Aboriginal people continues to grow.

In order to continue to provide housing for Aboriginal people who need it most and to utilise the benefits that stable housing provides, a new approach is needed. This new approach can't just focus on new supply, it should also deliver solutions that use Aboriginal housing as a means of improving the lives and housing independence of Aboriginal families and their communities.

We need to do things differently in order to:

- provide more opportunities for people in AHO houses to engage with employment and education support that enables housing independence,
- ensure that those most in need living in AHO housing are able to access the services they need in order to sustain their tenancies, and
- build the capacity of well performing Aboriginal community housing providers to ensure that all Aboriginal people living in AHO houses are receiving culturally appropriate services.

OUR WORK SO FAR:

The AHO has engaged with community stakeholders to develop a strategic framework that will guide the vision of the AHO over the next 10 years. The AHO held a sector conference in September 2017 where community leaders and the Aboriginal community housing sector were able to express their thoughts on how to create real change for Aboriginal families by working together. These ideas then formed the basis of the Minister's Roundtable on Aboriginal Housing in October 2017 where the strategic pillars that underpin the Framework were refined through conversations with the AHO's key stakeholders, including Aboriginal community housing providers, peak bodies, tenant advisory services and NSW Government agencies.

The resulting framework, *Strong Family, Strong Communities* seeks partnerships and new models of service delivery informed by Aboriginal communities to deliver lasting change. The AHO will work with the Aboriginal community housing sector, other Aboriginal organisations, our tenants and other government agencies to design and deliver programs under the new Strategic Framework.

The AHO will hold a number of consultations across NSW to ensure that our tenants and stakeholders can have their say. This document forms the basis for discussion and feedback for the development of policies and programs under the Strategic Framework to ensure *Strong Family, Strong Communities* is designed by, and delivers outcomes for, Aboriginal people across NSW.



Building stronger families and communities

Over the next 10 years the AHO will work within the following four pillars to design and deliver programs that respond to the challenges faced by Aboriginal communities across NSW. The pillars are aligned with specific outcomes that will be achieved by 2028.

PILLARS

OUTCOMES

1.

Deliver housing solutions with Aboriginal people informed by evidence of demand for social and affordable housing.



AHO tenants have greater access to opportunities through secure housing and a better social housing experience.

The AHO continues to provide housing when and where needed, and has clear evidence of the housing needs of Aboriginal people.

2.

Achieve better outcomes with Aboriginal tenants by facilitating partnerships across human services agencies, Aboriginal organisations and creating opportunities for economic participation.



AHO tenants have improved health, education, justice and employment outcomes.

AHO tenants have greater access to prevention and early intervention support services where and when needed.

3.

Strengthen and grow Aboriginal Community Housing Providers through capacity building, regulation and transfer of housing and asset management.



A diverse Sector working with tenants to achieve positive client outcomes and able to realise efficiencies through economies of scale.

The Sector is strong, viable, well governed and provides high quality tenancy services to Aboriginal tenants and their families.

4.

Enhance data collection, evaluation and analysis functions to ensure planning is robust and resources are targeted where they are needed most.



Improved data and evaluation results in better outcomes from Aboriginal service programs delivered by other NSW agencies, ACHPs and the AHO.

The AHO is able to measure tenant satisfaction and identify ways to improve the social housing experience.

1. Deliver housing solutions with Aboriginal people informed by evidence of demand for social and affordable housing

The demand for social and affordable housing due to population growth continues to place pressure on the AHO to deliver more housing for Aboriginal people across NSW, particularly in metropolitan and regional areas where the majority (95%) of Aboriginal people live. Additionally, changing demographics within the Aboriginal population means that different types of housing are required to meet community needs.

Ensuring housing meets the needs of community

The AHO is committed to understanding where the Aboriginal population will grow and where opportunities exist to provide social, affordable and fit-for-purpose housing, as well as private rental and private ownership opportunities.

In meeting expected demand, it is important to gain a deeper knowledge of our tenants and those seeking housing in order to ensure AHO delivers housing based on need. The AHO will work to ensure that there is a strong understanding of demand through modelling and community consultation in order to deliver innovative and culturally appropriate housing for Aboriginal people.

This includes consideration of the way Aboriginal people come together and how houses can be flexible as families change.

Building more houses

The AHO will work to increase housing stock through its capital building program. New housing will be located where there are employment and education opportunities, and close to the services Aboriginal people need so that their families can thrive.

Additionally, the AHO will conduct a portfolio review of the AHO's housing stock to consider opportunities to maximise the social housing delivered from within this portfolio, including the potential to partner with the private sector to boost housing supply.

2. Achieve better outcomes with Aboriginal tenants by facilitating partnerships across human services agencies, Aboriginal organisations and creating opportunities for economic participation

Stable housing provides the foundation for Aboriginal people and their families to access the services they need to not only maintain their tenancies, but also improve their work and study options, keep their families safe and healthy, and continue along the path to housing independence.

The AHO realises that government and non-government organisations need to work together to provide the most effective and appropriate services to Aboriginal families. These partnerships will deliver culturally appropriate

services and programs developed with the Aboriginal communities they service. The AHO will be listening to and talking with tenants, communities, Aboriginal organisations and government agencies to understand where the greatest needs are and to co-create the local solutions that communities need.

Better access to services

The AHO will work with NSW Government agencies, including Health, Education, Justice and Family and Community Services, to provide better access to services for Aboriginal people in partnership with the Aboriginal community housing sector. Through co-creation with local Aboriginal communities, the AHO will identify a location and pilot a model of service delivery focussed on sustaining tenancies and supporting people to achieve their housing and non-housing aspirations over the long-term.

As demand for social housing grows, the AHO wants to ensure that the process for applying for housing is as easy as possible and that the AHO is able to provide appropriate housing assistance as soon as possible. The AHO will therefore work with housing agencies to develop better systems and processes, together with new products that meet people's needs.

Supporting tenants

While it is important to test and try new ideas, it is also important to improve the experience of tenants who live in AHO houses and the way housing support services are delivered. The AHO commits to improving services that support Aboriginal people to sustain their tenancies and reach their housing aspirations, and continuing the programs that communities value. This includes:

- Delivering a range of services to assist vulnerable Aboriginal people and families who are experiencing tenancy instability, at risk of family breakdown or have other challenges impacting their health and wellbeing.
- Funding innovative ways to deliver Aboriginal tenancy management services that are based on the needs of Aboriginal people. For example, providing access to services via community days where people and families come together to have a yarn about housing, renting and bills, and to listen and watch music and dancing, thereby providing an opportunity to connect with community.
- Supporting single people and families who require access to accommodation for work or education in regional centres. Providing access to stable accommodation for people who want to move closer to work or education opportunities is one way the AHO can make sure that its social and affordable houses are the basis for people and families to move toward housing independence.

3. Strengthen and grow Aboriginal community housing providers through capacity building, regulation and transfer of housing and asset management

A strong and diverse Aboriginal community housing sector is crucial to the success of *Strong Family, Strong Communities*, recognising that Aboriginal community housing providers are best placed to deliver culturally appropriate services to their communities.

The AHO's vision is for a strong and diverse Aboriginal community housing sector that operates under the same regulatory requirements as mainstream community housing providers. This will mean that Aboriginal community housing providers will have access to the same State and Commonwealth social and affordable housing funding opportunities as mainstream community housing providers. This will also mean that the AHO can continue transfers of management of AHO properties to the Aboriginal community housing sector. This will benefit everyone in the community, through increased employment, self-determination and culturally appropriate service provision for Aboriginal communities.

Capacity building support

The AHO's new registration policy requires Aboriginal community housing providers to operate under the same regulatory requirements as mainstream community housing providers (that is, the National Regulatory System for Community Housing or, for Local Aboriginal Land Councils, the NSW Local Scheme). However, the AHO acknowledges that there has been historic under-investment in building capacity of the sector and that providers require additional support in order to reach the standards required under the new regulatory scheme.

The AHO will work with well-performing Aboriginal community housing providers to enhance their organisational capacity and scale through targeted capacity building designed with the sector. This support will be tailored to the individual needs of the provider.

Opportunities for Aboriginal community housing providers

In addition to the AHO's commitment to management transfers, the AHO will also work closely with Aboriginal community housing providers and other Aboriginal organisations to co-create business opportunities, infrastructure and industry initiatives and partnerships to build stronger and more diverse organisations. This includes setting ambitious Aboriginal participation targets and requirements in all building projects conducted by the AHO.

4. Enhance data collection, evaluation and analysis functions to ensure planning is robust and resources are targeted where they are needed most

The AHO is committed to measuring its activities and building its evidence base. The AHO recognises that good data is essential for informing and reviewing policy, providing evidence to government on the housing needs of Aboriginal people and to drive continuous improvement.

Developing new Aboriginal service initiatives and new models for interacting with government agencies will only succeed if the AHO partners with Aboriginal community housing providers to build a strong evidence base to measure impact of policies and programs implemented under the *Strong Family, Strong Communities*.

Evaluation

Over the next ten years a strong evaluation framework is needed to deliver successful programs and services, and to define successful pathways for assisting families to achieve their housing goals.

The AHO is committed to a process of continuous improvement through evaluating services and programs, which will be conducted in alignment with the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework. Additionally, the AHO will gather strong evidence about how contracted partners deliver services, outcomes being achieved and the views of both our tenants and community on each program.

Working with stakeholders and community

The AHO recognises that the key to collaboration between community, tenants, Aboriginal community housing providers, Aboriginal organisations and government agencies is to share and communicate the outcomes we wish to achieve with each other.

By working together and encouraging community participation, the AHO has the greatest chance of gathering the information needed to understand how we can continue to adapt service delivery in order to meet the needs of Aboriginal people and families. It will also ensure that the benefits of the AHO's strategic aims extend beyond AHO tenants into the wider community.

What's Next?

Jul – Nov

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

Pillar 1

Listen and yarn with AHO tenants and the Aboriginal community housing sector about current and future housing needs.

Informed by our conversations, undertake a strategic review of the AHO's asset portfolio and develop innovative housing solutions.

Implement asset portfolio review: deliver housing when and where it's needed to meet the current and future needs of Aboriginal families and communities.

Pillar 2

Listen and yarn with community and stakeholders about program needs and how these can benefit tenants.

Co-create and implement with community: programs that support a better social housing experience for AHO tenants and make accessing housing a more straightforward process; a pilot which facilitates partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and NSW Government agencies to create culturally appropriate wrap-around support services. Continue the AHO programs that community value.

Pillar 3

Listen and yarn with the Aboriginal community housing sector about organisational strengths and challenges.

Work with the sector to deliver programs and tools that support good governance, business sustainability and strong tenancy management, designed with and for Aboriginal community housing providers. This includes supporting the Aboriginal community housing sector during the transition to the new AHO Registration Policy.

Pillar 4

Listen and yarn with community and stakeholders about what works, what doesn't work and how we can best measure impact.

Undertake ongoing evaluation of our programs to identify service improvements to ensure programs are positively impacting tenants and supporting better outcomes and find out where changes are needed. Ask AHO tenants about their experience of social housing and how it can be improved.

The AHO commits to putting community at the centre of everything we do. The AHO will communicate respectfully to build trust, listen and yarn, act and deliver on what we say we will, and we will partner with Aboriginal communities to co-create opportunities and solutions.

The Aboriginal community housing sector and other Aboriginal organisations will be partners of the AHO in co-designing initiatives to help strengthen service delivery to Aboriginal people. Just as Aboriginal families will have varying needs, the AHO recognises that service delivery will need local approaches in order to meet the needs of individual communities.

The AHO is inviting Aboriginal communities to be involved in the development of the policies and programs to be delivered under the Strategic Framework. This document is designed to facilitate discussion and engagement with community and is to be read in conjunction with *Your Story Starts at Home*, a document which introduces the AHO's commitment to and principles for stakeholder engagement and outlines how the AHO will engage and co-design the policies and programs under *Strong Family, Strong Communities* with community and stakeholders.

Further feedback or queries can be directed to: AboriginalHousingStrategy@facns.nsw.gov.au.

www.aho.nsw.gov.au