



Family &
Community
Services



Aboriginal
Housing
Office

Minister's Roundtable on Aboriginal Housing

4 October 2017

Primus Hotel Sydney

Report of Proceedings

Attendees

Jason Ardler	NSW Aboriginal Affairs
Chris Bird	Twofold Aboriginal Corporation
Caine Carroll	Services Our Way
James Christian	NSW Aboriginal Land Council
Kate Connors	NSW Department of Justice
Michelle Curran	NSW Land and Housing Corporation
Natalie Ducki	Aboriginal Housing Office
Deborah Giorgio	NSW Federation of Housing Associations
Monique Hitter	Legal Aid NSW
Suzanne Ingram	Aboriginal Housing Office
Guy Jones	Many Rivers Aboriginal Corporation
Karen Jones	NSW Department of Education
Caryn Kakas	FACS
Craig Kerlake	Aboriginal Housing Office
Beverly Manton	Aboriginal Housing Office
Peter Moore	Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation
Nathan Moran	Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council
Suzanne Naden	Interim Aboriginal Community Housing Peak
Ruth Simon	Dtarawarra Aboriginal Resource Unit
Seth Toomey	Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Management Corporation
Charlie Trindall	Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Management Corporation
Karen Walsh	Shelter NSW
Jessie White	SEARMS Aboriginal Corporation
Geraldine Wilson	NSW Health
Mandy Young	FACS

Background

The Minister's Roundtable on Aboriginal Housing was held in Sydney on 4 October. The Roundtable was convened to gain input from the Aboriginal housing sector and aligned service agencies on the proposed Aboriginal Housing Strategy to be developed by the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office. The Roundtable also sought the commitment of Aboriginal Community Housing Providers, government and non-government agencies in supporting the development and implementation of the strategy. Discussions at the roundtable were facilitated by Origin Communications.

The following report records the agenda and the points raised by participants.

1. Welcome to Country.

A 'Welcome to Country' was given by Anne Weldon from Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council.

2. Welcome to participants

Shane Hamilton, Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Housing Office, welcomed attendees.

3. Official opening - The Hon. Pru Goward MP

The Hon. Pru Goward MP, Minister for Social Housing, officially opened the Roundtable.

The Minister spoke about how social housing can be used as an enabler for change by linking with other government services to provide opportunities to address disadvantage. The Minister spoke further about how the provision of stable housing can provide the environment for better outcomes in education, health and employment.

The Minister stressed, however that this can only be effectively achieved through government agencies working together.

The Minister asked participants what they do that provides the right services to Aboriginal people.

Bungree Aboriginal Association outlined their model of multi-service provision as a good model. Bungree is a multi-purpose provider and well established ACHP with housing no longer there only business. They are a wrap-around service provision and submit for funding for services that complement existing services. They provide services such as home care for the aged, homelessness services, education, transport and NDIS services. As a result there is a high level of tenant sustainability.

The Minister then asked the participants what barriers they faced in providing services.

Dtarawarra Aboriginal Resource Unit commented that adequate resourcing of their tenant support services was the main barrier to effective service provision. The organisation is under resourced. They provide advice but most of their work turns into case management which they are under resourced to deliver to meet demand.

A lack of access to services and programs was also noted by participants. Services funded for Aboriginal people are not always adequately delivered.

4. Aboriginal Housing Office – toward a new strategy

Shane Hamilton, Chief Executive AHO, presented on the background of the AHO and requirement for a new strategy. The key points are described below.

The AHO plans and administers the policies, programs and asset base for Aboriginal housing in NSW, including State owned Aboriginal housing and funding for community owned assets. This is achieved under the NSW Aboriginal Housing Act 1998.

Why a new strategy?

- Historically there has been under-investment leading to minimal growth in social housing and housing support for Aboriginal people and a lack of housing choice.
- Limitations due to size, level of resources and capability are significant constraints on the sustainability and capacity of ACHPs.
- AHO Build and Grow Strategy is due for completion in 2018. A new Strategy is necessary to provide a strategic direction and a more certain future for the Aboriginal Housing Sector over the next ten years.

The AHO is seeking a commitment from government partners and stakeholders to support the Strategy. An Aboriginal Housing Strategy for NSW will not be effective without a whole of government commitment and, crucially, the support of the Aboriginal Housing Sector working in partnership with the AHO to achieve better outcomes for AHO tenants.

5. Agreeing on shared principles

Participants discussed proposed shared principles, including the need for whole of government responses as well as responses based on need and consultation with Aboriginal communities. The broad principles discussed were:

- Understanding demand for housing and setting strategic priorities through consultation with Aboriginal people and communities.
- Housing provided by AHO and housing services provided by ACHPs meet the needs of Aboriginal people and improves tenant outcomes.
- Housing is linked with key whole of government initiatives to ensure a consistent approach by the NSW government.
- Actions ensure tenants are provided with similar opportunities to the broader social, affordable and home ownership housing sectors and markets.
- Strategy recognises the need for flexible policy that meets the housing aspirations of Aboriginal people in NSW, is unique by location and market conditions and is undertaken in partnership with human services agencies for better outcomes.

There was broad agreement that these statements captured the principles which should underpin an Aboriginal Housing Strategy.

6. Presentation - Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Dr Michael Fotheringham presented the findings on the research to date on how housing can provide opportunity for Aboriginal people. The key points are described below.

The AHO commissioned the Australian Urban and Housing Institute (AHURI) to develop an evidence base to understand how housing can provide the best opportunity for Aboriginal people. This was undertaken through desktop research and field consultations. Key themes and opportunities identified in relation to the ACHP sector include:

- Capacity building. There was strong feedback that the AHO should provide assistance to ACHPs to build organisational and management capabilities in alignment with mainstream practices. The report also considered that transfer of property management and consolidation of the sector would achieve efficiencies and sustainability through economies of scale. Further, capacity building was also recommended to strengthen ACHPs to more effectively collaborate with local services to provide wrap around services.
- Social housing design and management. New housing should be designed to meet cultural needs, usage patterns and climactic conditions. In general, the maintenance and repair of housing could be improved.
- Home ownership. Consultations noted the importance of home ownership options for tenants. The AHO could consider home loan schemes such as rent to buy, shared equity.
- Sustaining tenancies. The AHO should build on and expand existing tenancy support programs and support the development of new models.

Participants in the AHURI consultations highlighted the need for the AHO to redefine its role. Key themes and opportunities identified in relation to the role of the AHO include:

- AHO as a strong leader and advocate for the sector: this includes the need for a clearly articulated strategy developed in consultation with the sector. In relation to advocacy, the AHO's role was seen as fostering partnerships and providing liaison with government agencies and non- government organisations.
- AHO as a sector capacity building and training organisation.
- The need for improved consultation and communication with the sector, particularly at a local level. There was also support for the RACHs, however their role need to be clarified.
- The AHO to advocate to government to hold non-Aboriginal, non-local, non-government organisations funded to deliver services to Aboriginal people accountable to ensure that services are delivered. The report also highlighted the lack of comprehensive sector wide data and the need for rigorous evaluation of programs and services. There is an identified need for the AHO to develop its capacity to harness data and improve its data collection systems.

7. Proposed strategic pillars

The final session concentrated on discussion around the AHO's proposed 4 strategic pillars. There was endorsement of the AHO's proposed strategic pillars and, in general, the need for a clearly articulated Aboriginal Housing Strategy developed in consultation with the sector.

The key points raised by participants for each strategic pillar are listed below.

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

- Housing supply needs to be targeted to economic and social outcomes as well.
- Modelling demand and supply is not an exact science. Need to ensure demand and supply data is validated. Consider validation with providers, fact checking with local organisations on the ground and utilisation of LALC networks to ensure local needs are understood.
- Find out how to get data from the community. Consider an anecdotal evidence overlay.
- Need more quality housing stock; centralised waiting list; increased Aboriginal employment opportunities and increased decision-making role for repairs and upgrades.
- Build housing where the opportunities are (e.g. employment, education).
- Ensure cultural considerations are taken into account.
- Changing asset base – larger housing to smaller.
- Affordable housing options to be included.
- Need supply funding. New housing and repairs and maintenance upgrades are critical.
- What can we provide instead of the house to meet demand?
- Consultations with tenants required. What do tenants actually want? Do we have the evidence to understand this and how do we get it?
- Consider using LALC land to build affordable housing noting approval of various government agencies required to achieve this.
- Set up a Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) for ACHPs.

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

- There is a need for growth and consolidation to ensure the viability of the Sector.
- There is a fundamental need for organisational capacity building, including building capacity to undertake partnerships, particularly with Community Housing Providers.
- The AHO should be a strong leader and advocate, with responsibilities for capacity building and training the sector.
- ACHPs need to also work in partnership with CHPs.
- Need an intervention approach with services working together.
- Support provided for ACHPs to work with Community Housing Providers.
- AHO to facilitate partnerships to take away stress from organisations.

- Increase resourcing of tenancy support centres.
- Early intervention to prevent NCAT/court appearances.
- Access an issue – accountability of mainstream service delivery to Aboriginal community needs to be strengthened.
- We need to build trust between government, ACHPs and tenants to achieve desired outcomes.
- Need to change tenant culture, change culture of non-rent paying, mistreatment of property.
- Capture good practice to provide models.
- Aboriginal organisations have links with services but not fully developed.
- Mapping services to ensure right concentration. For example there is an over concentration of services in some areas.
- Consider involving other agencies such as Fair Trading, Services NSW, RMS, Dept. of Industry.
- AHO should develop a market analysis and identify support services to direct better access for Aboriginal people.
- Rental arrears programs and strategies should be implemented e.g. work off debt in flexible ways to avoid legal actions, consider income management schemes and payment plans.

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

- Consolidation of sector is required but there should be support and recognition for smaller providers as we need to preserve a local presence and knowledge in particular areas.
- Organisational capacity building required but also capacity building to form partnerships and bid/tender for funding.
- Consider transfer of title as capacity building.
- Build also tenants capacity through education and support and awareness of responsibilities.
- Need mapping of services, assets, resources, skills.
- Thinly spread services in rural and remote – need to address this.

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

- Fundamental agreement by all participants on the need for a sound evidence base for the Sector to inform funding proposals and ensure proper resource allocation.
- While there are successful programs, services and organisations, the lack of quality data, and therefore evaluation, make it difficult to rigorously identify best-practice.
- Support ACHPs to enhance their data collections as well.
- Establish a data base line.
- Evidence is required to lead the argument, have the conversation.
- What data do we need? This must be determined before progressing.

Other points raised

The following are points raised by participants during the course of the day.

- Access to housing is a human right and plays a key role in a person's ability to access services to facilitate change.
- Ensure cultural considerations are taken into account at all levels of service delivery.
- A new Aboriginal Housing Strategy is needed to set future direction for the Sector and should be co-developed with the Sector.
- Reforms and programs need to be locally tailored, flexible and co-designed with the community.
- A successful provider has sound governance structures and an integrated service approach to tenant management.
- When planning need to take into account metro, regional and remote differences.
- Often it is a small group, e.g. 10 families, accessing multiple services and may not necessarily need them. This needs to be addressed.
- There is a major issue with the system of confirmation of Aboriginality, in particular people self-identifying, which has led to an increase in the Aboriginal population and a strain on services. The issue of self-identification needs to be addressed.
- Need to change culture and view of social housing as a last resort. Need to encourage behavioural change, break level of dependence, use/see social housing as an enabler to provide social and economic incentives. Move away from deficit approach. Need to connect with hearts and minds. Consider including tenant's obligations in contracts. Need to understand social housing is a contract between an ACHP and tenant – understand mutual obligations and responsibilities.
- Consider changing terminology – all social housing should be renamed as affordable housing. Need to get rid of stigma of social housing.
- What fundamentally is the outcome to be achieved – should be economic and social independence.
- Note the priority for Aboriginal people is family and community and policies should reflect this.

Next Steps and Close

- Shane Hamilton outlined next steps for the development of the Aboriginal Housing Strategy. Based on consultation and results from the Minister's Roundtable, the AHO will develop a Cabinet Submission for approval of the proposed strategic directions for submission in December 2017.
- Shane closed the proceedings and thanked all participants for their valuable input.