



Aboriginal  
Housing  
Office

# Sector Investment Plan

Strong Family, Strong Communities





## Foreword by AHO Chief Executive Jody Broun

**On behalf of the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) I am pleased to present the Sector Investment Plan for *Strong Family, Strong Communities* 2019–2022 that will underpin the delivery of the AHO’s goal to ensure that every Aboriginal person in NSW has equal access to, and choice in affordable housing.**

Housing is more than just bricks and mortar as it provides the secure foundation to improving health and education outcomes and employment opportunities for Aboriginal families.

The work between the Aboriginal Housing Strategy Peaks Reference Group (PRG) and the implementation of the *Strong Family, Strong Communities* (SFSC) strategy has produced a Sector Investment Plan that will provide the framework for further work within Aboriginal communities delivered by the Aboriginal organisations who work toward the shared vision of a viable Aboriginal housing sector.

The development of this plan builds on the extensive engagement and learnings from the ‘Listen and Yarn’ roadshow and ‘What We Heard’ sessions throughout NSW to better understand the voice of our community. From these sessions we have focused on placing Aboriginal Culture at the centre of all that we do and providing clarification about the role of the AHO.

I would like to thank the AHO Board for their direction and all the Peaks Reference Group members and AHO staff for their commitment and leadership in delivering outcomes for the Aboriginal community housing sector.

I am pleased to endorse the AHO’s Sector Investment Plan that outlines the way forward for the development of sector-wide capabilities amongst ACHPs, as well as new market entrants seeking to manage housing assets on behalf of the AHO for Aboriginal tenants and communities.

**Jody Broun**  
Chief Executive  
Aboriginal Housing Office

## Foreword by Peaks Reference Group Chair Charlie Trindall

**The Aboriginal Housing Strategy Peaks Reference Group (PRG) has been established in September 2018 to support the development and implementation of *Strong Family, Strong Communities* (SFSC).**

The Sector Investment Plan outlines AHO’s commitment to work with our Aboriginal community housing sector to strengthen the sector and improve the lives of Aboriginal people across NSW whilst recognising the strength and resilience of our Aboriginal communities. It is an important roadmap that informs future capability activities that will support sector viability and growth opportunities for the sector as it moves to registration and compliance under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing or NSW Local Scheme.

The PRG had a key role in co-designing priorities for sector investment and to ensure resources for capability activities for Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs) are targeted to where they are needed most and as identified by ACHPs themselves. I would also like to thank all PRG members and AHO staff for their commitment and leadership in delivering outcomes for the Aboriginal community housing sector to improve outcomes for Aboriginal tenants and their families and promote self-determination, culturally appropriate services and workforce development opportunities.

As the Chair of the PRG I am pleased to endorse the AHO’s Sector Investment Plan.

**Charlie Trindall**  
Chair  
Peaks Reference Group

# Definitions

## In this plan:

- **Registration/Registered ACHP** — refers solely to registration under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) or New South Wales Local Scheme (NSWLS)
- **ACHP** — refers solely to New South Wales Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs) that manage or intend to manage Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) properties
- **Scheduled** — refers to where an ACHP has a scheduled registration date agreed with the NSW Registrar of Community Housing (RCH)
- **Growth Providers** — refer to ACHPs that have been successful in the AHO Expression of Interest (EOI) for Growth Providers. Growth Providers will have a formal agreement with the AHO
- **Social Housing Rent** — refers to AHO's rent setting model to be applied by registered ACHPs that are managing AHO properties
- **Emerging Providers** — refer to Aboriginal organisations that currently do not provide housing but may wish to become an ACHP (new players in the housing market)

## Focus Area 1 — Tenancy management

- Deliver best practice models of tenancy management that are responsive to tenant needs
- Support tenants to understand their rights and responsibilities
- Support Registered ACHPs to become Housing Pathways providers

## Focus Area 2 — Community Housing Regulation

- Support ACHPs to register for and comply with the NRSCH/NSWLS

## Focus Area 3 — Growth Providers

- Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of ACHPs

## Focus Area 4 — Fair rent, collected reliably

- Increase tenant awareness of how rent is calculated and collected
- Work with ACHPs to support the timely collection of rent
- Assist and require registered ACHPs and Growth Providers to apply social housing rent

## Colour Code

- Current AHO work expanded or enhanced
- New work included in Strategy Implementation Plan
- New work in this plan

# Focus Area 1 — Tenancy Management

## Outcome

- ACHPs have access to a suite of social housing management tools and resources to provide tenants with best practice housing services.

What we will deliver	Description
<b>Tenancy Management Toolkit</b>	<p>The toolkit will build on/enhance current sector resources including Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) toolkit and will consist of the policies, procedures, guidelines, forms and templates that respond to the specific needs and support best practice in the delivery of culturally appropriate tenancy management for Aboriginal social housing.</p> <p>The tool kit will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenant Handbook (customisable to ACHP/tenant needs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standardised resource that meets legislative and compliance requirements</li> <li>- Information about tenant rights and responsibilities under NSW Residential Tenancies Act 2010</li> <li>- Guide on income eligibility assessment for applicants on social housing waiting list</li> <li>- Clear information about rent setting and housing allocation processes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Templates and forms that meet the needs of Aboriginal clients, are culturally appropriate and can be customised by the ACHP</li> <li>• Legislative requirements</li> <li>• AHO social housing policies and guidelines</li> <li>• Strategies for sustaining tenancies</li> <li>• Best practice on rent collection and rent arrears management</li> <li>• Advice on effective use of data for planning and evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>An annual calendar of professional/workforce development focusing on aspects of social housing tenancy management</b>	<p>AHO will fund a rolling calendar of professional/workforce development activities to support tenancy management.</p> <p>Activities will be designed based on what we have heard in all our engagement activities for the Strategy</p> <p>Activities will include, but not be limited to, the following areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustaining tenancies</li> <li>• Trauma informed practice model</li> <li>• Rent collection and rent management, including managing rent arrears</li> <li>• NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) processes (NCAT Masterclasses)</li> </ul>
<b>Transfer of management of AHO properties from non-registered ACHPs</b>	<p>AHO will facilitate a smooth transition of AHO properties managed by non-registered ACHPs to registered ACHPs to support registered ACHPs to become Housing Pathways providers.</p> <p>Noting that under the Housing Pathways Strategic Framework, to be eligible to become a Housing Pathways provider, an ACHP needs to be registered under the NRSCH or NSWLS and manage at least 500 properties.</p>

## Barkuma Case Study

### Connecting with Community Through Cultural Respect

### Forming a cultural connection with the Aboriginal community living in a unit complex in the NSW Hunter Region was the key to successfully turning around a number of ongoing tenant challenges.

Barkuma Neighbourhood Centre, a registered not for profit Aboriginal community housing provider offers affordable housing options for Aboriginal communities in the Hunter and Upper Hunter regions.

Two years ago, the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) transferred management of the unit complex to Barkuma which was previously managed by the then Department of Family and Community Services.

The first step Barkuma took after being awarded the management of the property was to work closely with AHO staff to eliminate many of the challenging tenant issues.

Barkuma Housing Manager, Jess said the key to success was approaching the communication holistically with tenants.

“At Barkuma, we put in the hard yards to ensure community has access to a range of services such as financial, health and education to support their individual and family needs,” she said.

“We work to better understand the issues the tenants may face and assist them to seek the support of wrap-around services which then leads them to having long term successful tenancies.

“There is often a background story as to why tenants fall behind in their rent or are struggling within the home. When you take the time to build a rapport with the tenants they feel connected which means tenants are comfortable communicating and we are able to better understand not just their housing issues but the issues within the home that affect the family dynamic.”

When the units had been managed by government, tenants weren't connected with the staff and this led to additional costs for repairs and rents not being paid as people didn't have a sense of place or ownership. Now that the units are managed by an Aboriginal organisation for Aboriginal people we have been able to show how people's lives can be improved through taking the time to listen and act. We now have a unit block that is thriving, with rent paid, additional costs minimized and a community that is connected.

Barkuma was able to encourage a respectful community dialogue and create an environment where all of the tenants within the complex were able to live independently within 18 months, resulting in good tenant retention rates.

By building cultural respect and understanding with others, the unit complex now take pride in their units and live in harmony with each other.

## Focus Area 2 – Community Housing Regulation

### Outcome

- ACHPs who intend to register under the NRSCH or NSWLS have the knowledge, skills and resources to prepare for and achieve registration.
- ACHPs who are registered have the support to maintain compliance.

What we will deliver	Description	Stakeholder group
<b>An annual calendar of professional/workforce development focusing on performance areas under the NSW NRS</b>	<p>AHO will fund a rolling calendar of professional/workforce development activities (as identified by providers) to support registration and compliance.</p> <p>Activities will be designed to address the performance requirements under the NRSCH/NSWLS and are based on what we heard in our engagement for the Strategy.</p> <p>Activities will include, but not be limited to, the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asset Management (including planned, preventative and responsive repairs and maintenance)</li> <li>• Risk Management</li> <li>• Business Planning</li> <li>• Financial literacy and financial planning</li> <li>• Governance</li> </ul> <p>Activities will be offered in a variety of modes such as group workshops, small group training and provision of online resources.</p>	ACHPs who are registered, scheduled to register or likely to register by 2022. Growth Providers.
<b>Capability Grants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capability grants are grants designed to support ACHPs to achieve or maintain registration as well as support Growth Providers to build capacity to take on additional property management (see Focus Area 3)</li> <li>• Under these grants, activities to be funded for registration will be identified through a needs analysis conducted jointly with the ACHPs, the AHO and the NSW RCH.</li> <li>• Activities to be funded may include measures such as access to hardware, software or consultancy to support registration and/or continued compliance based on recommendations made by the NSW RCH at the time of registration assessment or which will need to be addressed at the ACHP's first compliance review.</li> </ul>	Registered ACHPs or scheduled ACHPs. Growth Providers.
<b>Yarn Ups</b>	Peer to peer support between registered ACHPs and CHPs or ACHPs for registration and compliance preparation, cultural capacity building, culturally safe and responsive tenancy management practices.	ACHPs who are registered, scheduled to register or likely to register by 2022.
<b>Develop a strategy for ACHPs that do not register under the NRSCH or NSWLS</b>	<p>Provision will be made for the transfer of AHO properties currently managed by non-registering ACHPs to registered ACHPs. This may require repairs and maintenance to these properties depending on the condition at transfer.</p> <p>There is a clear wish from the sector for non-registered ACHPs to maintain a relationship with the AHO and other ACHPs. They remain part of the landscape of Aboriginal Community Housing.</p>	ACHPs who chose not to register or are predicted not to register by 2022.



# Trangie Case Study

## Simplified Registration

### Becoming the first Local Aboriginal Land Council in NSW to become registered under the NSW Local Scheme (NSWLS) was a process easier than anticipated for Trangie Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Trangie CEO, Terrie Milgate said the first step is ensuring strict governance measures are in place for your organisation and being prepared to seek support from the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) and other organisations such as Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA). These organisations have a vast amount of information, fact sheets and templates for policies and asset management plans that are valuable resources when registering to become a Housing Provider. They are also able to supply guidelines and checklists that will help you through the registration process.

“It is to your organisation’s advantage to make sure you make the time to check your documents such as policies, financial and housing reports and minutes of meetings. These are all documents that you are required to produce when registering to become a NSWLS provider. Contracting a consultant to check your policies and business plans prior to commencing the registration process is also helpful. The process went smoothly for Trangie as we were already registered under the AHO Provider Assessment and Registration System (PARS) and had existing data, which was similar to that required for NSWLS” Terrie said.

The Aboriginal Housing Office supports training workshops and forums to assist organisations to build their capabilities and participation in the registration process.

These workshops and forums assist by outlining the evidence that is required for the application and encourages organisations to think about the ‘pros and cons’ of becoming registered under the options available to them through NSWLS or New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council Community Benefits Scheme for Social Housing.

According to Terrie, the benefits to becoming a NSWLS registered housing provider include:

- Future growth opportunities and potential for the creation of job opportunities for Aboriginal community
- Being part of change that helps Aboriginal tenants have access to good and affordable housing
- Partnering with the AHO to strengthen and grow the organisation

“There is a lot of support available and we all need to remember that if it helps organisations, it helps tenants,” she said.

## Focus Area 3 – Growth Providers

### Outcome

- Registered ACHPs are growing and expanding (or diversifying) their asset portfolio and tenancy services.

What we will deliver	Description
<b>Transfer the management of 1,500 properties to identified Growth Providers</b>	<p>The AHO will identify NRSCH/NSWLS and AHO registered ACHPs who have the potential for growth and can demonstrate a commitment to work with the AHO to become high performing ACHPs.</p> <p>Property transfer packages will be subject to financial modelling to ascertain the impact on the ACHP, the tenants, the AHO and the Government more broadly.</p> <p>All properties transferred will be in a safe, habitable and good condition having had recent maintenance to bring it up to the AHO standard.</p> <p>Risk identification and mitigation will be a priority. The AHO will work closely with each ACHP to ensure a smooth transition for the management of the transferred properties and tenants.</p>
<b>An Aboriginal Community Housing Innovation Fund (ACHIF) to support Growth Providers to access alternative funding opportunities or partnerships to increase the supply of Aboriginal social housing</b>	<p>This fund will allow ACHPs to access mainstream funding. The AHO will support ACHPs to provide the matching funds required for large scale funding bids.</p> <p>The fund will also support ACHPs to enter into partnerships with large Community Housing Providers (CHPs) and with Local Government to unlock land and increase supply.</p>
<b>An annual calendar of professional/workforce development focusing specifically designed for Growth Providers</b>	<p>AHO will fund a rolling calendar of professional/workforce development activities to support Growth Providers.</p> <p>Content for activities will be co-designed with Growth Providers. Topics may include but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to leverage funding opportunities from government and other sources</li> <li>• People management (e.g. efficient and effective Human Resources processes)</li> <li>• Marketing and diversification (e.g., new service provision, wrap around service planning)</li> <li>• Potential for ACHP staff to receive formal qualifications or accreditation (subject to available funding)</li> <li>• Business diversification and business planning</li> </ul>
<b>Capability Grants</b>	<p>Capability grants are grants designed to support ACHPs to achieve or maintain registration (see Focus Area 2) as well as support Growth Providers to build capacity to take on additional property management through the AHO’s Property Management Transfer (PMT) program.</p> <p>Activities to be funded will be based on identified need and may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal advice and/or support</li> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Organisational infrastructure development</li> <li>• Build or strengthening business enablers</li> <li>• Financial modelling</li> <li>• Tenancy management systems and processes</li> <li>• Sustainable housing outcomes.</li> </ul>

# Tharawal Case Study

## Becoming an ACHP

### A desire to support Aboriginal communities through housing solutions was the motivation for Tharawal to undertake the process to become an Aboriginal Community Housing Provider (ACHP).

Becoming a Growth Provider was a natural progression for Tharawal Housing who has extensive experience in wellbeing and welfare management through its medical service, aged care facility and associated wrap around services.

“We were already working with Aboriginal families and had a strong understanding of their needs and how to access wrap around services so we thought that managing properties was a way to extend our service delivery and achieve a more holistic approach to community support,” Alison Croall, Tharawal Housing Manager said.

The first step for Tharawal Housing to become a Growth Provider was to demonstrate a number of capabilities in the Expression of Interest (EOI) process including questions about financial, operational and asset management planning skills.

“The process was fairly straight forward. We were also lucky that we could springboard off the experience of a number of our staff who have worked in the NSW Department of Family and Community Services and other organisations so they were familiar with government process,” Alison said.

“The EOI process was also a good way for us to build new skills which we have also applied across our business practices.”

For the team at Tharawal, the opportunity to grow their knowledge of the sector was made easier through access to the broader Growth Provider network.

“Once Tharawal was officially registered it opened the door networking and learning from other Growth Providers which has been very empowering for our team,” she said.

“Being a Growth Provider is more than a job. It’s an honour to help our community.”

AHO Chief Executive, Jody Broun said growing the sector is vital in developing the long term sustainability of an important Aboriginal community resource.

“The sector is still in its infancy and for those Growth Providers who are now offering and managing good quality housing management services, the tenant response has been very positive.”

“Our Growth Providers have positive relationships with their tenants which means the can resolve any tenant challenges swiftly as they come from a place of cultural connection and understanding,” she said.

By undertaking the **National Regulatory System for Community Housing Provider (NRSCH)**, the AHO has been able to allocate properties to Tharawal with confidence as they demonstrated capabilities through the process.

# Focus Area 4 – Rent, Collected, Reliably

## Outcomes

- All AHO registered ACHPs are applying social housing rent.
- All ACHPs have reduced levels of rental arrears and are financially viable.
- Tenants know how rent is calculated.

What we will deliver	Description
<b>Support for registered ACHPs managing AHO properties to apply social housing rent</b>	The AHO will work with ACHP staff and tenants to ensure a smooth transition to the social housing rent model. The AHO will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training to registered ACHPs on implementing the social housing rent model, including maximising Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) payments.</li> <li>• Provide a social housing rent calculator and training in its use including developing a User Guide.</li> <li>• Explore a digital solution to embed the rent calculator into existing software (e.g. Chintaro, AHO Portal)</li> <li>• Develop ACHP resources for tenant education on the new rent setting including the benefits of accessing CRA payments.</li> <li>• Facilitate training and support to ACHP’s in the delivery of tenant education and workshops</li> <li>• Provide professional development activities to support ACHPs in best practice for rent collection and rent management, including managing rent arrears (see Focus Area 1)</li> </ul>

## Enabling activities to support the Four Focus Areas

What we will deliver	Description
<b>Continue to develop ACHIA</b>	Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA) will play a key role in advocating for the sector. As ACHIA develops it will take a key role in supporting the sector.
<b>Funding for AHO to run Aboriginal housing conferences, caucuses and networking between ACHPs and CHPs</b>	Funding conferences and caucuses will allow ACHPs and other organisations to share best practice and learning experiences. Potential to have some events targeted at ACHPs working with the AHO and others targeted at the whole Aboriginal Community Housing Sector and also emerging providers. Networking between ACHPs and CHPs will provide a framework by which all can benefit by placing Culture at the Centre.
<b>AHO to continue to support ACHPs through relationship management</b>	AHO staff will continue to work one on one with ACHPs to develop and build relationships between ACHPs, CHPs, NSW RCH and wider NSW Government.
<b>AHO to continue to work with NSW RCH</b>	The AHO will work with the NSW RCH to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure ACHPs are making progress toward registration</li> <li>• Ensure ACHPs understand registration requirements</li> <li>• Ensure NRSCH/NSWLS registered ACHPs maintain registration compliance</li> <li>• Enhance understanding of the ACHP model and the benefits of Aboriginal led service delivery to Aboriginal people.</li> </ul>
<b>Pricing model to support the financial viability of sector</b>	The AHO will commission work to understand the cost to deliver housing and housing related services across NSW. Understanding cost will enable the AHO to better target future funding.
<b>AHO to develop online portal</b>	To provide single point of access for AHO digital services, resources etc.



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