

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members

Date of consultation:	6 September 2017
Group consulted with:	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members
Number of attendees:	8
Name of organisations:	Beryl Women, COTA ACT, ACT Council of Social Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

Key themes arising from the consultation

- The key to building an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing organisation is skills development, strong governance, capacity building, support from Housing ACT (HACT) and using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. It could be established initially as a unit in HACT, with a plan for independence and growth, or it could be established independently but with significant government support. Both options were supported by participants.
- The community needs a hub that is about coming together and not about crisis. Boomanulla Oval is needed back again to develop connection and community.
- A focus on housing first is needed, so that people can achieve outcomes from case management and in health, education and employment.
- Reduce the amount of information and identification that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to provide in order to get access to services, especially through OneLink.
- People sleeping rough may sometimes not want housing but do want a safe shelter offered within the right locations, such as a hostel in Civic, and it would need to be pet friendly.
- Some women experiencing domestic or family violence who do not want to escape only require a shelter for a very short period of time. They may only engage with an overnight shelter for women or may benefit from a brokerage service.

Key quotes

- “The biggest contribution to homelessness is a loss of connection to mob and place.”
- “Racism exists – it leads to homelessness and trauma.”
- “For many of our women – life is dangerous!”
- “Ensure you house the homeless and their pets.”

- “I shouldn’t have to tell a service the last 10 years of my life for them to take what I’m telling them seriously.”
- “For some mob in the ACT using an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific service is not appropriate or not wanted because of the close family links – people don’t want the whole community to know their business and so there needs to be more choice – don’t force Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. Others are more comfortable using mainstream services so it’s about educating everyone to be culturally aware.”
- “There needs to be a couple of places where it’s safe to sleep rough. Some people are happy sleeping rough but they just want to be safe.”
- “OneLink/Housing ACT need male and female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officers – both senior and entry level positions are needed to provide a pathway for our young people.”
- “We need single/share housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to come to Canberra to pursue opportunities.”

What is working well?

- Safe Shelter in Civic, this program could be expanded or replicated.
- Northside Community Service has good social workers.
- A Place to Call Home was an excellent program, where families could be provided support in brand new properties for a period of up to 12 months, paid through Social Housing and Homelessness Services. People took pride in their properties because of this, and there were many positive stories and outcomes of people achieving employment and education because of the Program – it should be brought back.
- Fast response from Housing ACT and provision of housing outcomes in some cases where the service user clearly meets the criteria and has been connected with the right social worker.
- The existing crisis and homelessness sector is good however there is not enough funding of services to meet demand.
- The flexibility that people can choose to use either a specialist service or a mainstream service.

What could be improved?

- OneLink: reduce amount of information/identification that Aboriginal people need to produce and the number of times they need to tell their story, especially if it is traumatic.
- Introduce a system where if someone has told their story once to a 'trusted' third party (i.e. social worker) that information can be made available to all the agencies who need to know it to undertake their processes.
- More appropriate public housing stock for Aboriginal families – they often need larger indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Improve intensive outreach services.
- More accommodation for women who are homeless/sleeping in cars.
- Brokerage or an overnight shelter for women experiencing domestic or family violence who don't want to engage with other services. More specialist services for women experiencing violence.
- Update bus routes or fund the community mini bus program to help people get to Aboriginal services like Winnunga, given the increase in Aboriginal people living in north-side suburbs.
- A halfway house for people leaving AMC, funded by Through Care.
- More student housing for Aboriginal students who have travelled to Canberra to obtain education.
- Improve uptake of Government bond loan programs.

- Introduce a rental guarantee or a rental subsidy like Start Safely in NSW for women experiencing family violence. Many landlords won't rent to Aboriginal people which reduces private options

New ideas

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing provider

- Could establish it initially as a unit within HACT with the aim of becoming independent – or outside of HACT but with government support - both with a long term plan from start up to independence and incentives to grow as an independent organisation.
- Good condition of initial stock is vital.
- Ensure strong governance structures, e.g. board reflects both community understanding and real estate knowledge. At least two HACT members.
- Could provide dual streams of social housing & affordable housing.

Other ideas

- A dedicated unit in HACT of Aboriginal workers (at ASO6 and SOGC levels).
- Re-use of empty buildings for services.
- More group-share supported accommodation, to encourage older people to move out of public housing, or allow older people to take on a boarder in exchange for reduced rent.
- The HomeShare model could also be adapted for single males.
- Support Aboriginal people to work in the real estate business.
- Organise for service users to subsidise their accommodation costs through grounds maintenance or cleaning work.
- Diversify housing options, e.g. mobile homes, retirement village style with shared facilities, tiny houses.
- Developer access to land at cheap rates to provide sustained low cost housing.
- A retirement village model for Aboriginal people where there are common areas and individual private spaces but also staff to support residents.