

Discussion Paper:

Australian Approaches to Accommodating Visitors from Remote Communities to Regional Towns

September 2006



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Introduction: Relationship of Remote Communities and Regional Centres

*The loss of land meant the destruction of the Aboriginal economy, which everywhere was based upon hunting and foraging. And the land use adopted by the settlers drastically reduced the population of animals to be hunted and plants to be foraged. And the loss of the land threatened the Aboriginal culture, which all over Australia was based upon land and relationship to the land. These were the most dramatic effects of European colonisation supplemented by the decimating effects of introduced disease to which the Aboriginal people had no resistance.*¹

Commencing in the 1920's, Australian governments and religious missions supplied the land and basic administrative infrastructure for what have become Australia's remote Indigenous communities. The first missions and reserves were established as part of the post-settlement process "that attempted variously to displace, convert, isolate and eventually assimilate"² Indigenous peoples. From the late 1960's onwards, Commonwealth Government policy on Indigenous communities purported to be advancing "new fully serviced townships from which the population would seek employment on surrounding stations, in craft industries, community enterprises and in domestic duties."³

Over time, however, "services, and especially those of private sector institutions, such as banks, bypassed [these communities], not solely because of their remote location and perceived inadequate market potential, but also because of their institutional status as essentially state-sponsored settlements."⁴ The majority of remote Indigenous communities and settlements in Australia remain reliant to some degree upon government funding. In the face of the very poor social and economic status of Indigenous peoples', criticism continues to be levied at governments for the "failure of many mainstream agencies to provide access and equity to their services (including electricity, water, sewerage, housing, roads and health services) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."⁵

The ABS CHINS Survey⁶ (1999) identified a total of 1 291 remote Indigenous communities in Australia with a total population of 109 994 (about 28% of the Indigenous population). Of these communities, 1 055 were not only classified as 'very remote' (on the Australian Standard Geographical Classification) but as 'physically distant' from services (eg 53% of people living in discrete Indigenous communities did not have a hospital within 100km of their community⁷). This suggests that 80 000

¹ (3 October 2005)

http://www.atsic.gov.au/issues/law_and_justice/rciadic/overview_and_recommendations/importance.asp

² ATSIAC (1998) 'As a Matter of Fact: Answering the myths and misconceptions about Indigenous Australians' Commonwealth of Australia, ACT, 10

³ Sullivan, P (1996) All Free Man Now: Culture, Community & Politics in the Kimberley Region, North-Western Australia. AIATSIS, Canberra, ACT 25

⁴ Taylor, J (2002) 'The spatial context of Aboriginal service delivery' CAPER Working Paper No 16, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research' 6

⁵ ATSIAC (1998) 12

⁶ ABS (2000) 'Housing and Infrastructure in Aboriginal & Torres Trait Islander Communities 1999', Australia, Cat No. 4710.0, Canberra

⁷ ABS (2000) *ibid*

Indigenous people⁸ live without ready access to basic social and economic infrastructure, compared with barely 3% of the non-Indigenous population.⁹

Regional towns such as Alice Springs, Broome, Katherine and Kununurra act as service ‘hubs’ for the populations of remote Indigenous communities across Australia. For example, an estimated 2 777 people from 61 remote Aboriginal communities utilise Broome as a service centre,¹⁰ while 1 676 people from remote communities utilise Derby as a service centre. People travel for between one hour and one day to access banking, health, education and family services and to visit friends and relations. Mobility within defined areas is also a fundamental part of Australian Indigenous cultures relating to land use practices, kinship relations and spiritual and ceremonial activities. Seasonal variables such as the wet season in the Kimberley can also mean that access between town and home communities is cut off completely, stranding visitors in town for long periods.

Together, the impact of these movements can increase town populations dramatically. A calculation based on ABS Census data indicated that as a baseline measure, up to 10% of Indigenous populations in regional centres is made up of temporary residents from smaller remote communities.¹¹ In Derby, for example, anecdotal suggestions are that the town population triples during the wet season.

Due to a range of reasons, including: lack of suitable accommodation, lack of funds, lack of transport services and personal choice, visitors from remote communities often stay in public areas in town or with family and friends in already overcrowded housing. In some cases, the town’s lack of preparation for these visitors contributes to intractable social, health and environmental problems and generates animosity between residents and visitors and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous town dwellers. This need for local, coordinated responses to this situation has been highlighted by DIA regional offices and by Service Mapping and Gap Analysis reports¹² in relation to Port Hedland, Derby and Kalgoorlie.

Due to the similarities in their situations, this discussion considers the issues around people living in public places in regional centres and people who are visitors to regional centres from remote communities in tandem.

⁸ Taylor, J (2002) 6

⁹ Taylor, J (2002) 2

¹⁰ Taylor, J (2002) 11

¹¹ Taylor, J (1998) cited (2002) 9

¹² www.dia.wa.gov.au/publications

Culture, Concepts and Constructs

Homelessness, Transience & Public Place Dwellers

“In terms of cultural politics, the struggle for space is crucial, both in terms of real space (for instance land rights) and the more metaphorical space of representation (whose ‘image’ will count?).”¹³

Government classifications of and responses to Indigenous homelessness, transience and public place dwellers are largely shaped by non-Indigenous interpretations of the notions of ‘public’, ‘space’ and ‘home’. Successful government strategies to support people living outside mainstream homes will reflect this fact i.e. “the needs of many Indigenous Australians will not be met by applying a community standard drawn from the broader community.”¹⁴

The ‘National Analysis of Strategies used to respond to Indigenous Itinerants and Public Place Dwellers’¹⁵ reiterated that ‘homelessness’ is “not always simply created by a lack of ‘housing’ nor simply addressed by its provision.”¹⁶ It was shown that some Indigenous people living in public places “see themselves as being both ‘placed’ and ‘homed’ and prefer to refer to themselves with such labels as ‘parkies’, ‘goomies’, ‘long grassers’, or ‘river campers.’”¹⁷ This is illustrated by the story of a woman living in Fish Camp in Darwin:

Dulcie Malimara's Story¹⁸

Anyway, we had a Housing Commission house and we was in a house for nearly 19 years. And my people come along making a lot of noise so I get kicked out. But I was in the hospital when my kids got kicked out. My kids was staying in the house. I had injury neck, I had injury leg. My kids was in the house but no-one didn't look after them. Somebody came along I mean my people, they came along, and making a lot of noise. My kids got kicked out. And I was in the hospital, and when I came out it wasn't there.

And that's my big problem. Didn't want to go back in the Housing Commission. I'm happy staying outside so I can sing, dance, cry whatever I like. So I'm free enough to stay here. The Housing Commission, it's really hard. You can't even take your family. It's really hard for us to go back in a Housing Commission, cause I tried that a lot of times. I told my people not to make noise cause that house, it wasn't mine. Neighbours complaining, it was really hard for me and my kids.

¹³ Muecke, S (1992) Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies. NSW Uni Press

¹⁴ Memmot, P et al (2003) Categories of Indigenous ‘Homeless’ People and Good Responses to Their Needs, AHURI iii

¹⁵ Memmot, P et al (2002) A National Analysis of Strategies used to Respond to Indigenous Itinerants and Public Place Dwellers (Prepared for the Commonwealth National Homelessness Strategy) Commonwealth of Australia

¹⁶ Memmot, P et al (2003) i

¹⁷ Memmot P et al (2003) 21

¹⁸ (25 August 2005) <http://longgrass.tripod.com/>

But I had all my kids in Darwin, and I've been in Darwin when I was 17. Even my brother... and my other brother he's blind, he can't see... they was walking when they was young boys, walking from Maningrida to Darwin, and we've been staying in Darwin all our lives. And we're still here. That's my story.

Census data indicate that Indigenous people make up a disproportionate number of all homeless people in Australia:

While 2% of the population identified as Indigenous at the 2001 census, 9% of homeless people were Indigenous. Indigenous people made up 19% of those sleeping rough, 11% of those in supported accommodation, 7% of those in boarding houses and 3% of those staying with friends or relatives.¹⁹

Beyond the generic census information, however, there is little empirical data available to delineate between the ways that people live other than in housing, supported accommodation or sleeping rough (in “improvised dwellings”²⁰). This “comprises a significant gap that makes the implementation of related public policy seriously deficient.”²¹ Qualitative research has identified five categories of Indigenous public place dwellers²²:

- People with a lack of access to any stable shelter, accommodation or housing – living in public places that they consider to be their home. Includes:
 - People visiting to socialise but intending to return home
 - People living permanently in a public place, have cut off ties with home communities long ago, and accept that their lifestyle will remain consistent (core group).
- Transient homelessness: people experiencing temporary, intermittent patterns of homelessness due to transient and mobile lifestyles, living in temporary arrangements without secure tenure.
- Spiritual forms of homelessness deriving from: separation from traditional land; separation from family or kinship networks; crisis of personal identity caused by confusion of relationships to country, family and Aboriginality.
- Crowding, where this causes stress to families and communities.
- Individuals escaping an unsafe or unstable family circumstance.

¹⁹ (29 October 2004) www.abs.gov.au Australia Now: 2004 - Australian Social Trends: Housing:& Homelessness

²⁰ ABS (2004) *ibid*

²¹ Memmot P et al (2003) iii

²² Memmot, P et al (2003) 29-31

Concerns of and about Public Place Dwellers

The documented concerns of Indigenous people who live in public places (both temporarily or permanently) include: constantly being 'moved on' by Police, violence and crime amongst families and communities, poor health, a lack of access to government services, alcoholism and a loss of family or community connections²³. These concerns may be exacerbated by a lack of suitable accommodation, funds and transport services.

The reported concerns of non-Indigenous people about Indigenous public place dwellers include: fear, crime, public annoyance and public health infringements.²⁴ Research shows that these concerns are not limited to public place dwellers and may extend to Indigenous people occupying public spaces for other reasons.

In mid 2006, on the basis of anecdotal information provided by agency staff, the Western Australian Aboriginal Town Based Communities Committee (comprising the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the WA Departments of Housing and Works, Indigenous Affairs and Planning and Infrastructure) identified Broome, Wyndham, Halls Creek, Derby, Kununurra, Fitzroy Crossing and Roebourne as locations in which there are urgent concerns about visitors from remote communities and public place dwellers. Regional DIA offices have raised similar concerns over Kalgoorlie, Laverton and Newman. The Committee is supporting ongoing inter-governmental activity to review and improve accommodation and infrastructure in Aboriginal town-based communities in WA.

Strategic Government Response to Indigenous Visitors and Public Place Dwellers: What helps make strategies effective?

Research by Memmot et al (2003) shows that Australian government approaches to Indigenous public place dwellers range from reactive legislation and policing to diversionary strategies involving facilities such as sobering up shelters. The most advanced and sustainable approaches have been shown to be around holistic, coordinated service and accommodation provision targeted to social and cultural needs.

The impact of government responses to Indigenous homelessness is dependant upon the level of 'policy clarity' and the designation of appropriate resources. A review of Australian policy relating to Indigenous homelessness "reveals a number of weaknesses in conceptualisation of the problem, policy derivation and breadth of program response. Not only is there a degree to which policy objectives and strategies fail to embrace the complex nature of the issue at hand, but while some objectives are clearly and ambitiously stated, they are not accompanied by tangible, practical strategies that have been designed to realise them."²⁵ This suggests a requirement for

²³ (25 August 2005) <http://longgrass.tripod.com/>

²⁴ See: Mickler, S (1988) 'The Myth of Privilege: Aboriginal status, Media visions, Public ideas', Fremantle Arts Centre Press and Mickler, S (1992) *Gambling on the First Race: A Comment on Racism and Talk-Back Radio* at <http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/CRCC/gambling.html>

²⁵ Memmot, P et al (July 2003), i

education and training amongst policy makers, public planning and design officers and the raising of public awareness through cross-cultural education “on the circumstances, history and background of Aboriginal itinerants.”²⁶

Equally, the successful implementation of services and support for public place dwellers requires early and effective engagement with the population at whom strategies are targeted. Strategies that gain their status through the involvement of traditional/historical owners and Indigenous cultural laws and protocols have been found to be highly successful (eg the Larrakia Nation protocols utilised in the Darwin ‘Long Grassers Strategy’.)

In general, a partnership approach to service planning and delivery, which is holistic in its attempts to improve accessibility for clients and invests ownership in local Indigenous stakeholders, increases the sustainability of the response.

The existence of partnerships between those agencies providing services for Indigenous homeless people or public place dwellers is critical to developing holistic approaches that address the needs of these people. The benefits of such partnerships can be improved information exchange, protocols for cooperation between organizations, and culturally appropriate staff training. A holistic approach to Indigenous homelessness addresses the immediate problems, as well as other underlying issues and causal factors, which may not be necessarily identified by the clients themselves. It involves reactive and proactive components that, according to the nature of the problem, must be both short-term and long-term in their duration.

Important design principles for a holistic strategy are: (a) the need for Indigenous public place dwellers to be involved with the design and the development of any proposed service response in a community development approach; (b) recognition and respect for the strong ties which Indigenous public place dwellers have with public places; (c) the need for Indigenous ownership (empowerment) or shared ownership in the case of a partnership, over the strategy; and (d) the need to attempt to design capacity-building goals for the public place dwellers into the strategy.

*Holistic approaches optimally require funding pooled from a number of agencies and the employment of a coordinator to ensure the integration of several parallel strategies or program components. Such components ideally incorporate intervention in anti-social behavior and crisis situations, short and long-term ways of addressing alcohol addiction and accommodation related problems, transport to home communities, and public education to establish or maintain tolerant values and cross-cultural respect in local communities and across regions.*²⁷

²⁶ Memmot, P et al (July 2003) 9

²⁷ Memmot, P et al (2003) 9-10

Strategies Accommodating and Caring for Visitors and Public Place Dwellers

The programs and strategies summarised below range from holistic accommodation and service delivery strategies to services that play a preventative role in family and public violence. The common thread is that they are each strongly driven or managed by the Indigenous communities that are the target of the programs. It appears that programs are most effective when staffed by local Aboriginal staff and reflect the specific requirements and cultures of clients.

Darwin/Palmerston

The 'Community Harmony Strategy', developed over three years on the basis of the 'Long Grassers'²⁸ report is recognised as a successful Australian example of a comprehensive response to public place dwellers. The report strongly identified the need for government to look beyond reactive and diversionary approaches and to work in support of Aboriginal solutions to the circumstances of itinerants and park dwellers. The report recommended:

- Councils and Governments to take leadership in reconciling inequity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and not fuel racism by a 'blame-the-victim' stereotyping of itinerants.
- Change the systems that perpetuate inequality and discrimination, rather than focus change upon those itinerants who are then branded as deviant or deficient in some way.
- Require a long-term commitment to change the life circumstances of itinerant people, rather than a 'law and order' response.
- Require a Community Development approach that emphasises empowerment and self-determination whereby the itinerants define their problems, needs and solutions.

Partners on the Project Management Committee established in response to the Report include:

- Larrakia Nation
- North Australian Aboriginal Legal Service
- ATSIC Northern Territory
- Darwin City Council
- Palmerston City Council
- Northern Land Council
- NT Government Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs
- Commonwealth Department of Health & Community Services
- Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services
- Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT
- Chamber of Commerce & Industry

²⁸ Memmot, P et al & The Aboriginal Environments Research Centre UQ (2001) The Long Grassers: A Strategic Report on Indigenous 'Itinerants' in the Darwin and Palmerston Areas

The Community Harmony Strategy has two central objectives:

- a significant reduction of the incidence of anti-social behaviour by 'itinerants' in all major Territory centres; and
- the delivery of infrastructure, intervention programs and health services responding to identified needs of 'itinerant' groups.²⁹

The budget allocation of \$5.25M for the Strategy includes \$2.5M in capital outlays. There are three major strategies spread across five urban centres that form the nucleus of the project. They are:

- intervention strategies to reduce anti-social behaviour;
- provision of adequate infrastructure including the provision of shelters, day and community facilities, accommodation; and
- provision of health and treatment services including expansion of Sobering Up Shelters and outreach and withdrawal services.

The Strategy has a strong focus on outreach, withdrawal and rehabilitation services for those affected by substance abuse and mental illness. Intervention strategies include proactive and positive approaches where day patrols and other service providers are able to reach out and refer, and the promotion of protocols and appropriate behaviour for 'itinerants' by traditional owners.³⁰

The Committees through which regional consultations are guiding priorities for regional initiatives are:

- Darwin & Palmerston - Project Management Committee, Community Harmony Project (formerly 'Itinerants' Project in Darwin and Palmerston)
- Katherine - Katherine Regional Harmony Group
- Tennant Creek - Barkly Region Safer Community Committee
- Nhulunbuy - Nhulunbuy Harmony Djamamirri Mala Working Group
- Alice Springs - Quality of Life & Alice in The 'Itinerants' and Visitors Sub-Committee.

Alice Springs

Alice Springs has recently received national media attention (e.g. Four Corners, ABC, 26 May 2006) highlighting some of the social and functional problems in town camps. While drawing attention to both dramatic incidents and long-term dysfunction, media coverage generally simplifies the complex relationships between permanent town resident, town camp residents, visitors from remote communities and service delivery agencies that underlies the problems alluded to, not just in Alice Springs, but throughout Australia.

²⁹ (12 September 2005) http://www.dcdsca.nt.gov.au/dcdsca/intranet.nsf/pages/harmony_strategy

³⁰ Ibid

The Tangentyere Council was established in 1977 in Alice Springs to assist Aboriginal people, who had been living for a great many years in areas on the outskirts of Alice Springs, to gain some form of legal ownership in order that they could obtain services in the form of water, electricity and housing. This was successfully achieved, with 18 parcels of land ('town camps') now owned as Leases in Perpetuity by individual resident based incorporated bodies, each of which is represented on Tangentyere Council. The Council is the primary service provider (providing services including housing, aged care, injury prevention, CDEP programs and education) for the residents of town camps in Alice Springs³¹. A mobility study of town camp occupants conducted in 2006, found that "at any time, one quarter of the population in town camps consists of visitors from remote communities."³²

One approach the Council employs to address the needs of visitors and town camp occupants is from the perspective of prevention. For example, the Council's Day and Night Patrols programs were set up in the 1990's to address anti-social behaviour due to drinking and lack of stable living arrangements in Alice Springs.³³

The Patrols include an emphasis on a range of tactics from self-help and problem solving to mediation and leadership. "The rationale for the approach was anchored in two premises: finding an Aboriginal approach to problem-solving, one which involved maintaining Aboriginal control; and making a concerted effort to revitalize traditional Law as a guiding force behind Tangentyere's decision-making."

In addition, the Council established the Remote Area Night Patrols (RANP) program specifically to support the activities of the Patrol staff through training, assistance with funding applications and networking.

The Tangentyere website indicates that the Patrols and the RANP work together to deal with some of the issues relating to working 'in-between' community, and government:

The Tangentyere Patrol (which runs day and night in Alice Springs and in remote communities) arose from the Aboriginal community and exists in that uneasy space between the Aboriginal domain and the whitefella domain. The social engineering performed by Night Patrols is still at its most effective when based in the Aboriginal domain of family roles and relationships, with whitefella sanctions such as Police and courts used as a negotiating tool. However, the resources required by Night Patrols come from the whitefella domain, giving Night Patrols a more formal role and profile, but also extending the reach of the whitefella domain into Night Patrol agendas through accountability requirements for funding and resources.

Aboriginal cultural imperatives are very different to those assumed and imposed by whitefella organisations. What this means in practice is that Night Patrols' actions are sometimes in conflict with whitefella laws, and that Night Patrols are locked out.

³¹ (2000) Tangentyere Council & Central Australian Division of Primary Health Care Centre for Remote Health "The Tangentyere Protocols"

³² Vadiveloo, J (April, 2006) Town Camps and Alice Springs: A Background Paper

³³ (12 September 2005) <http://www.tangentyere.org.au/npindex.htm>

*RANP is a Territory Health Department funded project that works with the remote communities in the southern half of the Northern Territory (approximately 20 communities) to help Aboriginal people in the region to address issues of substance misuse and violence. The RANP service is unique in Australia. There is no other agency that provides regional systematic support for Patrols.*³⁴

Ceduna

The Ceduna Transitional Accommodation Program ('Town Camp'), funded by the South Australian Aboriginal Housing Authority, is a successful example of the capacity to house both visitors and longer-term residents within a secure environment that is managed and run by Aboriginal staff.³⁵

'Town Camp' was established to:

- Provide safe, affordable housing and suitable temporary and transitional housing;
- Provide opportunities for access to on site health, community and recreational services and activities; and
- Facilitate return to country or transition to regional centre housing.

The facility caters for individuals and families (70 residents maximum) who are visitors to Ceduna or residents of Ceduna with urgent housing needs. The accommodation includes 10 double unit huts (accommodate up to 4 people at \$60 per week/\$5 per day) and campsites for wiltjas (\$8 per week/\$2 per day). Residents access communal ablution facilities.

'Town Camp' is currently run by a Ceduna based manager, 9 accommodation workers and a cook who runs a nutrition program and provides in home support in the form of shopping and cooking training to residents two days per week. Staff liaises regularly with a variety of Ceduna service providers to bring services to the camp residents, as required. Local Government provides rubbish collection and other basic services.

Services provided onsite include:

- Breakfast
- Housing information, support and resources
- Public telephone
- Wood for campfires
- Assistance with access to health, well being and other services, including transport
- Laundry

The Program Manager³⁶ in Ceduna indicated that long-term 'Town Camp' residents live in permanent units while visitors stay in wiltjas on campsites. The visitor population of the camp fluctuates daily (ie there might be five people in camp at the end of dayshift at 5pm and 50 at the commencement of nightshift at 1am) and there are busy and quiet times of year, depending on ceremonial and family commitments.

³⁴ (12 September 2005) <http://www.tangentyere.org.au/npindex.htm>

³⁵ South Australia Aboriginal Housing Authority (2003) Ceduna Accommodation Program Prospectus

³⁶ 13 September 2005 telephone discussion

Special arrangements are made to allow residents to keep their accommodation during these periods if required.

There is a set of resident's rights and responsibilities and rules governing eligibility, conduct (eg it is an offence to consume alcohol and other illegal substances) and removal from the site. The rules were developed in consultation with residents and balance the necessity to maintain peace and ensure the camp runs effectively with a commitment to equity, consideration and support for all residents.

The Program Manager indicated that some negativity persists towards the camp amongst non-Indigenous townspeople, though the operation has been running effectively since 2003. 'Town Camp' has become a model, and staff training site, for similar AHA programs planned for Port Augusta and Coober Pedy. The Program Manager believes a core group of well-trained workers to be critical to the success and sustainability of the Ceduna operation.³⁷

Kalgoorlie

In 2002, the City of Kalgoorlie Boulder made application to the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation in Kalgoorlie for a Short Stay Facility in Boulder for Aboriginal people of Tjuntjuntjarra and Coonana. The application was made following a consultation process on the basis that visitors from the Ngaanyatjarra lands (with whom people of the eastern communities "generally do not mix"³⁸) are well catered for in hostels, while visitors from the Tjuntjuntjarra and Coonana "come to town and use public parks and the streets of Boulder with deleterious consequences for health and safety, public order, crime and public perception. This also prevents them from accessing essential services and reduces opportunities to address alcohol and other drug issues and reduce the harmful consequences of their use."³⁹

The AERF agreed that a short-term accommodation facility was "a critical part of a strategy" to improve the situation of visitors but that that its success would require "a whole of community approach". The AERF have agreed to fund the project for a total of \$450 000 (\$300 000 towards the purchase of the facility and \$150 000 towards the first year of operational costs).

Preliminary discussions took place with Aboriginal Hostels Limited and other church-based stakeholders in mid 2004 regarding the management of the facility. The site was is yet to be determined but Coonana community recommended that the facility be located on Anzac Drive near the airport. Negotiations are ongoing.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited⁴⁰

Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) provides temporary accommodation to Indigenous people across Australia. AHL run 48 hostels and fund 83 community hostels. Each night over 3,000 beds are available in the following categories⁴¹:

³⁷ Carol Shard AHA (mob 0438 896 963) September 2005.

³⁸ 27 June 2005 CKB Agenda

³⁹ 27 June 2005 CKB Agenda

⁴⁰ (13 September 2005) http://www.ahl.gov.au/html/sl_fs_accom.html

- Transient
- Medical Transient (including renal dialysis)
- Homeless
- Substance Misuse Rehabilitation
- Prison Release and Diversion
- Tertiary Education
- Secondary Education
- Aged Care

AHL also provides Community Hostel Grants (CHG), primarily to subsidise agreed operating deficits of hostels. The CHG program enables organisations to meet the temporary accommodation needs of their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The CHG program is operated in line with the company statement of purpose to ensure temporary accommodation is provided that assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people improve their standard of living and achieve health, educational and employment related goals.

AHL has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Career Development Policy that is reflected in its workforce. At present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees make up 80% of all company staff - making it one of the largest single employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. The Commonwealth Government funds AHL.⁴²

Pilbara Community Visitors Strategy

The Pilbara Community Visitors Strategy (CVS) has been developed by a reference group under the auspices of the Pilbara Government Managers Indigenous Forum (PGMIF). The Strategy is underwritten by an interagency service agreement.

This is in response to the recommendations of the DIA 'Port Hedland Service Mapping & Gap Analysis Report' and the identified increase in transient lifestyles and migratory shifts of Indigenous people from remote communities into regional centres, particularly South Hedland and Newman.

The CVS has five distinct areas of development.

1. Managed Camping Area
2. Community Patrols
3. Student Support
4. Transport
5. Cultural Protocols & Remote Community Engagement

⁴¹ 16 September 2005 www.ahl.gov.au

⁴² DIA is seeking to obtain information from AHL on whether it is or has been involved with setting up or running transient or other 'camps'.

The CVS will:

- Provide assistance to a pathway out of a transient lifestyle by provision of existing support programs and outreach services via agency agreements and collaboration;
- Support appropriate accommodation to meet the short-term needs of community visitors from remote communities and crisis needs of current campers and homeless on the CBD fringes;
- Recognise that the trend has impacted upon student attendance at remote independent and government schools, and results in non-attendance while students are in regional centre;
- Develop and implement new support services to deal with identified issues of intoxication through increased support to community patrols;
- Recognise that Indigenous people are in towns for various reasons and can become stranded, particularly after being discharged from systems (medical, courts), and that transport is a considerable factor in an effective CVS; and
- Recognise that the TLO's speak for this country and that agreed cultural protocols for visiting town-based country need to be developed.

The Strategy is in various stages of development and negotiation. A draft model of the CVS is attached in Appendix One.

Ways Forward

At the present time in WA, town based responses to the needs of people from remote Indigenous communities visiting regional towns are developed on an ad-hoc basis, without adequate resources or support. There is a lack of coordination amongst service providers to support visitors and to address their needs, which is underlined by an absence of acknowledgement of these requirements as fundamental, long-term components of public infrastructure. There is also the potential for considerable duplication of effort as different local governments and other government and non-government stakeholders grapple with similar problems and search for potential solutions.

The example of the Port Hedland Community Visitors Strategy illustrates a willingness to develop a strategic and coordinated approach that utilises public and private sector support to achieve community objectives for the development of better resourced and better informed approaches to visitors from remote communities.

This Discussion Paper has been developed to raise awareness and seek community and across-government comment on ways of expanding current approaches. This process may provide impetus for the development of a strategic Western Australian framework within which localised responses to these issues may be developed and resourced. As part of this approach, there is likely to be a need for research to identify priority locations and the resources required to accommodate visitors from remote communities to regional centres in WA.

Appendix One

Diagrammatic Representation of the Pilbara Community Visitors Association (September 2005)

Appendix Two

Australian Institute of Housing and Welfare (AIHW) Indigenous Housing Indicators 2003/04 - Summary (16 June 2006 <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/hou/ih0304/ih0304.pdf>)

Nearly two-thirds of Indigenous households in Australia were in some form of rental housing with 14.8% in housing provided by Indigenous or community organisations, 22.8% renting from state or territory housing authorities and 28.2% renting from private or other landlords. Just over 30% of Indigenous households were homeowners (Indicator 19).

At 30 June 2004 there were 34,442 dwellings provided through the Indigenous specific housing programs—State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SOMIH) and Indigenous Community Housing (ICH) (Indicator 1). There were 12,725 SOMIH dwellings and 21,717 ICH dwellings (of which 18,735 were state administered and 2,982 administered by the Commonwealth through the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs).

In addition to the Indigenous specific programs, Indigenous households can also access mainstream housing programs. At 30 June 2004, 5.9% of households (19,787) in public housing and 5.4% of households (1,316) in mainstream community housing had one Indigenous member or more. A lower proportion of Indigenous households (2.4% or 25,102 households) were receiving assistance through the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Program (Indicator 20).

On Census night (2001 Census) some 5.5% of Indigenous households lived in overcrowded conditions (Indicator 23). The proportion of overcrowded households was highest for those renting from Indigenous or community organisations (25.7%). Among the jurisdictions, the proportion of overcrowded households was highest in the Northern Territory (23.7%), which has a large Indigenous community housing sector, followed by Western Australia (7.5%).

There were 43.2% of low income Indigenous households who paid 25% or more of their income in rent (Indicator 24). The proportion of low income households paying 25% or more of their income in rent varied by jurisdiction ranging from 19.4% in the Northern Territory to 58.3% in the Australian Capital Territory.

Indigenous Community Housing

The Northern Territory (6,456) had the largest number of ICH dwellings, followed by Queensland (6,079), New South Wales (4,616) and Western Australia (2,837) (Indicator 1).

There were 551 Indigenous community housing organisations in Australia (excluding Western Australia that could not provide data) that were responsible for managing ICH programs (Indicator 26). New South Wales (284) had the largest number of organisations followed by Queensland (108). These organisations range in size and can be managing five or six dwellings to several hundred.

Appendix Three

Summary of Government Funded Supported and Temporary Accommodation Programs

The following information was provided by the Western Australian Department of Housing and Works (DHW) in April 2006:

Housing and Infrastructure Policy and Guidelines (HIG) Funding for Temporary Shelters (Short Term Accommodation) and Visitors Accommodation

The following policies and guidelines apply when considering funding under the HIG. The following rating system has been developed to identify the priority for funding consideration.

- Priority 1- high priority – work associated with the core function of providing housing and infrastructure.
- Priority 2 – medium priority – work directly related to the core functions but may be in conjunction with another agency or service provider.
- Priority 3 – low priority – where responsibility lies with other agencies. Joint funding arrangements may be considered.

Temporary Shelters (Short Term Accommodation)

There is scope in DHW programs funding for temporary/visitor accommodation, however it is identified as a Priority 3. Funding is not available for the provision of temporary shelters in established homeland communities, small permanent communities or larger permanent communities except in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances might include instances where houses are being refurbished, natural disasters, houses destroyed by fire and other.

The funding Guidelines identify that temporary shelters can also include provision of ablution blocks and communal kitchens.

Funding for the purchase of caravans may be considered for short-term use as temporary accommodation where major refurbishment or repairs to existing houses requires the tenant to vacate and no other suitable accommodation options are available in the community. The intention is that once the job is completed the building company carrying out the works will relocate the caravans to another community to be used for the same purpose. Under no circumstances are these caravans to be used for the staff of the building company

Funding may be considered for shelters from the funding pool for new homeland communities (consistent with the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) National Homelands Policy). Funding is only available for homelands where Regional Councils have a nationally endorsed Homelands Policy and meet the following basic eligibility criteria i.e. secure land tenure, the community is the principal place of residence for existing or planned residents or potable water is

adequate to sustain the number of people expected to eventually live at the community.

Visitors Accommodation

Aboriginal Communities

There is scope in DHW programs funding for visitors accommodation, again this is identified as a Priority 3. Funding for visitors accommodation is limited to low scale camping facilities and will only be considered in larger permanent communities with a greater than 50 population in accordance with the Community Layout Plan.

Visitors accommodation includes basic camping ground facilities and includes ablution block and communal kitchen. Funding will not be provided for the provision of motels, hotels or visitors hostels.

Visitors accommodation is provided for people who arrive in the community as the result of a cultural event or family crisis and may stay in the community for some period of time. Exceptional circumstances include smaller permanent communities may be given consideration for visitors' accommodation where they can demonstrate justification for the facilities, eg regular overcrowding due to cultural events, family crisis.

Perth Metropolitan and Major Regional Centres

Funding can be considered for an Indigenous Visitors Temporary Accommodation (IVTA) service to meet the accommodation needs of Indigenous people, including medical escorts, visiting the Perth metropolitan and major regional centres for medical, cultural and family reasons. The accommodation service provides for basic unit accommodation in Caravan Parks (including camping facilities), motels, hotels, and other suitable options. A contract for management is required with an appropriate Indigenous organisation.

Current Funding for Temporary Accommodation

DHW is currently funding an Indigenous IVTA facility in the metropolitan area, (specifically in Frederick Road, Hamilton Hill) for Indigenous people visiting Perth for medical reasons who may be "at risk" of becoming homeless due to lack of access to culturally appropriate and suitable accommodation. The capital costs of the home are to be funded by the Australian Housing and Infrastructure Council on land currently held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT). The Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) has agreed in principle to provide the operational and management resources, and AHL or its agent will manage the IVTA. It is intended that the construction of the facility will be completed in 2007/08.

Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP)

The DHW provides for a Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP). CAP provides capital funds to build and buy crisis service residential premises such as women's refuges, night shelters, and emergency accommodation for youth. CAP

accommodation is temporary, providing housing for people who are homeless or in immediate housing crisis.

Community organisations must have support service funding to enable them to effectively manage an appropriate level of crisis service (most commonly the source of support funds is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) administered by the Department for Community Development (DCD)). DHW and DCD have developed a protocol for the delivery of CAP/SAAP services to ensure improved outcomes for people requiring crisis assistance. Properties are leased to community organisations at a peppercorn rent.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) (Information provided by DHW, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and SAAP Data Sources).

The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments jointly fund SAAP. In WA, program management and funding is provided via the Department for Community Development. The overall aim of the program is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. SAAP is one of very few national programs directed specifically at homeless people. As the major government safety net for people who are homeless, SAAP accommodation is often the last resort for people who find themselves without, or at risk of being without, safe, secure or adequate housing. (AIHW Bulletin 34 March 2006: 'Demand for SAAP Accommodation by Homeless People 2003-2004).

National SAAP statistics indicate that in 2003-04:

- 1 300 Community, non-government and local government agencies were funded nationally under SAAP.
- There were 100,200 SAAP clients.
- People who made a valid unmet request (potential clients) for immediate SAAP accommodation were more likely to be female, born in Australia, and not of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

In Western Australia 119 services provide support and temporary (transitional) accommodation including:

- crisis and temporary accommodation for young people
- support and counselling for young people at risk
- refuges and outreach support services—for women who are single or have children who are victims of domestic violence
- crisis and temporary accommodation and support for homeless single adults and families.

SAAP statistics show that in WA, in 2004-05:

- The majority of SAAP clients were women (5 950 compared with men, 2 850) aged between 15 and 39 years.

- 3 330 or 3% of all SAAP clients in WA were Indigenous Australians.
- More than half all clients received support for a period of a week or less, with 25 % of this group receiving SAAP support for one day or less.
- Around one third of all women in SAAP accommodation were accompanied by children under the age of 18 years.
- Over one quarter of all women in SAAP accommodation indicated that they were escaping from domestic violence.

(Data taken from SAAP NDCA Support Series 10: SAAP National Data Collection Report 2004-05: Western Australian Supplementary Tables).