

Healthabitat Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

This submission outlines 7 critical recommendations to address housing and health-related issues in urban, regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. These recommendations focus on improving housing conditions, maintenance, and the health of residents. These are all recommendations that the Commonwealth Government has the power to implement.

The authors of these recommendations include key figures from across Australia with decades of experience in Indigenous housing. These recommendations are informed by data collected on the performance of the health hardware in the 10,000 houses Healthabitat has surveyed and fixed across urban, regional and remote Australia over the past 25 years.

1. **Thermal Control:** Both new *and* existing houses to meet a minimum 7-star energy efficiency rating. In addition to all new houses, a plan must also be implemented for upgrading all existing houses in remote communities to meet a minimum 7-star energy efficiency rating to cope with rising temperatures due to climate change.
2. **Major House Upgrades:** Ensure that capital funding is allocated not only for new house construction but also for major upgrades of existing houses. Simultaneously upgrading existing houses is essential to prevent crowding and stress on new homes, which will not be designed for the increased number of occupants from neighbouring houses desperate for a working toilet or shower.
3. **Planned Scheduled Preventative Maintenance Programs:** Stress the importance of preventative maintenance in remote communities and fund jurisdictions to implement such programs. Commonwealth funding should be tied to the presentation and approval of preventative maintenance plans, with ongoing support contingent on evidence of program implementation and success.
4. **Housing for Health (Fixing Houses for Better Health):** Utilise sentinel site surveys to independently assess and monitor change in housing conditions. These surveys, using the survey-and-fix methodology, can help in evidence-based policy decisions for maintaining existing housing assets in remote Indigenous communities.
5. **Review of the National Indigenous Housing Guide (NIHG):** The Commonwealth Government to commit to reviewing and publishing a 4th edition of the NIHG. Funding to State and Territory Governments should be tied to the implementation of recommendations from the guide.
6. **National Technical Advisory Panel:** Establish a National Technical Advisory panel, comprising housing experts from across Australia. This panel would facilitate the sharing of initiatives, analysis of successes and failures in health hardware, and make recommendations for improving remote housing design and delivery programs.
7. **Lack of Serviced Allotments:** Address the shortage of serviced allotments in remote communities. Existing houses that are suitable for upgrading should not be demolished and replaced due to the lack of available serviced land. This issue needs to be addressed through infrastructure upgrades and new subdivisions in areas with limited capacity for additional house builds.

These recommendations emphasize the urgent need for improving housing conditions and maintenance in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, with a focus on energy efficiency, preventative maintenance, improving the quality of housing design and specification, and addressing the shortage of serviced allotments. The submission highlights the importance of proactive, evidence-based solutions to enhance the living conditions and overall health of residents in Communities across Australia.

