

Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales

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Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales

Jacek Anderst

A thesis in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The George Institute for Global Health

Faculty of Medicine and Health

UNSW

May 2025

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Full Title:	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home: a systematic scoping review
Authors:	Anderst Jacek, Hunter Kate, Coombes Julieann, Trindall Alinta, Porykali Bobby, Kairuz Santos Camila, Mackean Tamara.
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The Candidate's Contribution to the Work:	I am the primary author of this published work and was responsible for executing it from start to finish, including developing the research question, search strategy, screening of eligible papers and grey literature at title, abstract and full text stage, data extraction, quality assessment of included documents, data analysis, and write up of the article.
Location of the work in the thesis and/or how the work is incorporated in the thesis:	My thesis includes one published peer-reviewed journal article, in Chapter 3 of the thesis. The paper and the chapter are titled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home: a systematic scoping review. I have included a short paragraph at the start of Chapter 3 contextualising the published paper within the overall body of work. The publication citation is as follows: Anderst J, Hunter K, Coombes J, Trindall A, Porykali B, Kairuz Santos C, Mackean T. (2024) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home: a systematic scoping review. Housing Studies. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2024.2389984

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACHO	Aboriginal Community Housing Organisation
ACHP	Aboriginal Community Housing Provider
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AHO	Aboriginal Housing Office
AH&MRC	Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales
ASEN	Australian Student Environment Network
ATAAS	Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
CHP	Community housing provider
CSO	Client Service Officer
CSV	Client Service Visit
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice
FACSIAR	Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research
LAHC	Land and Housing Corporation
MPH	Master of Public Health
NCAT	NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal
NGO	Non-government organisation
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NoT	Notice of Termination
NT	Northern Territory
NSW	New South Wales
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SEWB	Social and emotional wellbeing
TGI	The George Institute for Global Health
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WA	Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organisation

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¹ Figure 1 here is the first figure in the published systematic scoping review in Chapter 3 and appears out of chronological order in this table because it must match exactly as it appears in the peer-reviewed published copy.

Abstract

Set within Indigenous health research and housing studies this PhD used multiple methods and Indigenous, decolonising and third space methodologies to understand the meanings of home and housing priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and social housing tenants in urban Sydney. The study identified communication gaps between housing providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and developed housing information resources with the aim to support tenants meeting their housing priorities.

Housing is a social and cultural determinant of health. Colonisation is an ongoing force that drives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to continue to experience housing disadvantage in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are overrepresented in public and community housing in NSW. Public and community housing, while a stable form of tenure, can cause health and wellbeing issues in poor housing conditions and an overwhelming and culturally unsafe housing provider system.

This research arose from the community priorities of Dharawal and Bidjgal people and Aboriginal Health Workers concerned about unhealthy housing experienced by Aboriginal clients and tenants of public and community housing in South-East Sydney. I am a white, non-Aboriginal health researcher who worked closely with and was guided by Dharawal and Bidjgal community members. The study was nestled within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure and conducted within an Indigenous research paradigm. I applied critical reflexivity as a tool to support ethical practice, accountability, transparency and change (Chapter 9).

The research involved multiple methods, including a systematic scoping review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home (Chapter 3), yarns, interviews, storying and the design and quality improvement of a housing information resource. I applied Indigenous and Western research methods of yarning and semi-structured interviewing, respectively, to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' meanings of home, housing priorities (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) and ideas for a housing information resource (Chapter 8). Sixty-two people - 16 Aboriginal social housing tenants, five Aboriginal community members connected to La Perouse, 17 tenant support workers and 26 staff of public and community housing - took part in yarns and semi-structured interviews. Of the 62 people, 30 were involved in the development of a quality-

improved housing information resource, a useful contribution to local tenant advocacy and tailored communication.

This thesis identified home as relational to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, highlighting the importance of connection to family, community, culture, Country and spirituality. This is the first research to identify the housing and home needs of some members of the La Perouse Aboriginal community who are tenants in public and community housing, emphasizing the social, cultural and spiritual need to live in or around La Perouse, and the need for good quality and culturally appropriate housing. It identified that while Aboriginal tenants make great efforts to meet their housing needs to support health and wellbeing, multiple systemic barriers - such as racism and housing shortages - make healthy and culturally appropriate housing difficult to achieve. The lived experience of people across this thesis show that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' social, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing are negatively impacted by the social housing experience.

The research provided critical insight into how the mainstream (i.e., not Aboriginal community-controlled and run) social housing system is experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. It found communication gaps and a power imbalance between tenants and housing providers, with tenant support workers acting as a culturally safe buffer and translator in an overwhelming system. The research identified that while there are some housing provider policies and practices that specifically support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, they are not necessarily applied due to systemic barriers. The public and community housing system largely takes a one-size-fits all approach, with limited tailored, culturally appropriate support.

The research identified an overall disconnect between tenants' housing and home needs and the lived experience of social housing. Unactioned maintenance, poor housing conditions and culturally unsafe treatment are normalised practice, disconnecting people from home. These issues require change at multiple levels of the housing provider system to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' housing needs and support holistic health and wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

The work in this thesis came about on the stolen lands of the Gadigal Wangal people, Dharawal people and Bidjigal people. I acknowledge and hold deep respect for the unbroken connection that Aboriginal people, Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Owners have to these lands, seas and skies. Sovereignty was never ceded.

I consider myself very lucky to have been held by an incredible collective of people who made my PhD process possible. My understanding of what ‘knowledge’ and what ‘learning’ are has stretched far beyond what I could’ve imagined thanks to the relational, interconnected way we worked together over the four years.

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Publications

Publications arising from work presented in this thesis

Anderst J, Hunter K, Coombes J, Trindall A, Porykali B, Kairuz Santos C, Mackean T. (2024) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home: a systematic scoping review. *Housing Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2024.2389984>

Additional relevant publications during PhD candidature

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-054338>

Conference presentations

Anderst J and Ryan L. 'Bundi: A housing tool for mob. Insights and process developing resources with Aboriginal social housing tenants, advocates and housing providers.' Accepted 30 April 2025. Presentation scheduled as part of session titled "Delivering culturally responsive housing". National Housing Conference. Perth. October 2025.

Anderst J and Ryan L. "Decent homes and healthy housing for our mob": Aboriginal social housing tenant perspectives from Dharawal Country at La Perouse, South-East Sydney.' Australasian Housing Researchers Conference 2025: Housing at a Crossroad: Wealth, Inequality and Housing Futures. Sydney. February 2025.

Anderst J and Ryan L. What Data Can't Hear workshop, Data Justice Research Network and Media Futures Hub, UNSW. Sydney. December 2024

Anderst J. 'The housing needs and desires of urban Aboriginal social housing tenants and implications for the social housing system' presented at the Generations and Housing Symposium, Perth/online, November 2024.

Bennett-Brook K, Barnier B and **Anderst J**. 'Case studies on best practice in data management and application of data sovereignty principles' presented at the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Committee Ethics Forum, Sydney, June 2024.

Anderst J and Ryan L, 'Strength in relationality and collaboration: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal people working together on housing justice in urban Sydney, Australia' presented at the 15th Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Conference, Rotorua, March 2024.

Anderst J. 'Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban Sydney. Translating urban health research into policy.' Presented at the UNSW Cities Institute Korea Healthy Cities Study Tour, UNSW, Sydney, February 2024.

Anderst J. 'Applying interface methodology with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in Sydney' presented at a symposium on Housing precarity: Migrants, minoritised ethnic and marginalised communities in times of polycrisis, University of Sydney, Sydney, February 2024.

Anderst J. 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home: a systematic scoping review' presented at the National IRNet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Showcase on Day 1 as part of Abstract Presentations: Abstract Session B, Sydney, September 2022.

Ryan L and **Anderst J.** 'Indigenous Insights. Examining a series of insights into the delivery of housing and support services to Indigenous Australians' presented at the National Housing Conference, Melbourne/online, March 2022.

Conference posters

Anderst J and Ryan L. "Decent homes and healthy housing for our mob": Aboriginal social housing tenant priorities and workforce opportunities to improve tenants' wellbeing.' Accepted 19 March 2025. The Lowitja Institute's 4th International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference. Kurna Country, Adelaide. June 2025.

Anderst J and Ryan L. 'Bundi: A housing tool for mob. Development of housing information resources with Aboriginal social housing tenants, advocates and housing providers.' Accepted 19 March 2025. The Lowitja Institute's 4th International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference. Kurna Country, Adelaide. June 2025.

Thesis structure

The aim of this PhD is to explore the meanings of home, priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people² living in social housing³ in urban Sydney. The research additionally involved the development of a tailored communication pathway in the form of a housing information resource with and for Aboriginal people living in social housing in South-East Sydney, based on a major communication gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and housing providers.

This research project applies Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies and third space methodologies. I have worked flexibly, intuitively and responsively across Indigenous and Western worldviews and knowledge systems purposefully and when appropriate and relevant. As such, the style and tone of each chapter and section is different, to align with the methodological grounding of the thesis. For example, the introductory chapter is information-laden and written in a neutral tone typical of Western research because in this chapter I aim to relay key pieces of information to you, the reader. The methodology chapter switches to active voice as I situate myself and the story of the research, beginning to bring the reader on the relational journey. Chapters 4 to 6 are purposefully written with each chapter being a composite story from one of three groups - Aboriginal social housing tenants, tenant advocates and social service workers, and social housing provider workers - and as such are expressive as I actively voice the stories of the three groups. Chapter 7, a synthesis chapter, returns to a neutral tone, as again I relay information clearly. In weaving between styles and tones, as appropriate, I am inviting you on a journey of actively valuing Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. In doing so, I hope to open up in you a sense of curiosity, vastness, possibility and letting go of default, pre-determined modes of knowing. This is the third space that otherwise would not exist if the project had drawn from only one knowledge system.

² The study eligibility criteria for tenants included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, however only Aboriginal people took part. The La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance noted early in the project that there are few, if any, Torres Strait Islander people who live in the La Perouse area and surrounds and none who are traditionally connected to La Perouse. Therefore 'Aboriginal social housing tenants' is used when referring to tenants taking part in this research, and 'Aboriginal people' is used when referring to people connected to La Perouse. The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' is used when describing the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing population of NSW or Australia, as housing policy and practice relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The term 'First Nations' people is used in the thesis when discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous people internationally, with some exceptions in the systematic scoping review.

³ Social housing is an umbrella term for rental housing that is subsidised for low-income households provided by either government or not for profit housing providers.

The thesis is separated into three distinct sections.

Section A: Introduction, methodology and the foundations of home

Section A lays the foundation for the research, presenting the context and key concepts, and describes the methodology. I situate myself as a non-Aboriginal person, telling the story of how the research came to be, the governance structure of the project, the overall research design and how this project applies third space methodologies across multiple standpoints and Indigenous and Western worldviews. This is followed by the foundational paper for the thesis - a published systematic scoping review on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home - delving into the concept of home from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lived experience.

Section B: Storying yarns and interviews with Aboriginal social housing tenants, tenant support workers and social housing providers

Section B uses story to share the lived experience of Aboriginal social housing tenants and community members, tenant support workers and social housing provider workers across three distinct chapters - Chapters 4 to 6. Story is a powerful way of knowing and sharing in Indigenous cultures and is central to the Indigenous methodology of the thesis. Story brings to life and humanises the people at the heart of this project. Chapters 4 to 6 story the voices of members of the research⁴ based on yarns and interviews conducted with 62 people. The three chapters are deliberately split into the three groups as part of third space methodology. This methodology actively supports deep listening and the holding of space for each group's truth, before moving to hear a different worldview and standpoint. The story chapters are separated by interludes to allow appropriate pause between hearing each group's standpoint. They are followed by Chapter 7, synthesising the standpoints and considering implications, and Chapter 8 outlining the way forward with the development of a housing resource. Section B concludes with a reflexivity chapter.

Section C: Bringing it all together

Section C summarises the thesis and is followed by the appendices which includes the housing information resource, study materials (e.g., participant information and consent forms), supplementary tables and a reference list.

⁴ The research involved yarns and interviews with who I describe as 'members of the research' or 'members'. The notion of 'membership' indicates a collective nature of contribution.

Section A: Introduction, methodology and the foundations of home

Chapter 1: Introducing the context and key concepts

This chapter provides a brief overview of the relevant contexts and concepts of the research. I do not aim to provide an extensive history, rather, to provide the context of colonisation and its detrimental impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to resources and effects on health, wellbeing, housing and sense of home. I provide the local context of Dharawal Country and La Perouse where the research takes place, and where the La Perouse Aboriginal community thrives today. I present the concepts of home and housing, highlighting major disjuncts in understandings of housing and home from the worldviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australian people. I outline housing as a social and cultural determinant of health and provide relevant information on housing tenure, social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. I also introduce the social housing system and tenant advocacy sphere.

Context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived in this place known as Australia for over 65,000 years and are sovereign to this land (Clarkson, Jacobs et al. 2017). Before the settlement of British people in 1788, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cared for the lands and waterways, spoke many languages, and practiced culture in over 600 nations. The impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is enormous and cannot be understated. Colonisation caused and continues to cause dispossession and dehumanisation, forcing a loss of connection to land, language, spirituality, culture and community (Purdie, Dudgeon et al. 2010). Experiences of forced child removal (the Stolen Generations), the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, racism and social, economic and political exclusion have caused and continue to cause intergenerational trauma. Disconnection from culture, land, and spirituality continues to have a detrimental impact on wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people experience poor health and wellbeing because of the cumulative and intergenerational impacts of colonisation (Sherwood 2013). Before invasion, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thrived on their homelands, caring for land in a sustainable way (Kennedy, Thorpe et al. 2022). People lived in a range of physical structures and spaces that reflected social and cultural structures, relationships, climatic conditions and available resources (Memmott 2007, Page and Memmott 2021). The concept of 'homelessness' did not exist, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were at home among community and on Country⁵ (Pickett 2022). The settlement of British people imposed a foreign value system, including the nuclear household as the default form of living, and intentionally disconnected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from traditional ways of life (Kennedy, Thorpe et al. 2022). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were forced off Country and made to live in rudimentary housing on missions, reserves and stations (Australian Museum 2021). Children were separated from families and placed into dormitories and 'homes' as part of indoctrination into British people's ways of living (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). From 1883 to 1940, the NSW Government Aborigines Protection Board controlled where Aboriginal people lived, as well as daily movements, employment and education opportunities through the management of missions and reserves (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). The missions were one tool of settler colonialism, used to control Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and purposefully disconnect them from family and culture (Rix, Wilson et al. 2019). Missions were used to assimilate them to Western concepts of space through housing and Western concepts of time, for example, the ringing of church bells (Memmott 2012, Habibis, Memmott et al. 2013, Marnane 2022).

Racist, colonial policies have severely restricted economic opportunity and access to resources, including housing (Indigenous Business Australia 2024). Policies and legislation have excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from accessing financial services, education, employment, and thus wealth, creating barriers to accessing stable, quality housing (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2023, Indigenous Business Australia 2024). Access to public housing was also restricted. In 1945, the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement led to the establishment of

⁵ Country is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concept and belief system that acknowledges that everything – earth, water, air, beneath earth, plants, people, all living things - is interrelated and connected. Source: van Neerven, E. (2024). Wounds in place: Football as a manual for survival in ongoing colonization. [*Their Borders, Our World. Building New Solidarities with Palestine*](#). M. Sabbagh.

Australia's public housing program, funding houses built largely for returned servicemen and low-income families (Hayward 1996). In NSW, Aboriginal people were eligible to apply for public housing (then known as the NSW Housing Commission) however in practice very few applied because of illiteracy and if they did apply, were obstructed by the Aborigines Welfare Board (Morgan 1999). In 1969 the *Housing for Aborigines* program was established, two years after the 1967 Referendum that changed the Australian Constitution to officially count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian population (Morgan 2000). The *Housing for Aborigines* program allocated housing funds specifically for Aboriginal people and in NSW was governed by the Housing Commission. A greater number of Aboriginal people applied for and entered public housing, however were subject to monitoring by the Housing Commission to align behaviour with Western 'ideals' of suburban lifestyles, including living as a nuclear family and according to normative gender roles (Morgan 1999).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience housing inequality in Australia (James, Daniel et al. 2022). It is important to situate their experiences of housing inequality within the broader context of ongoing colonisation. Housing inequality stems from the systemic forces of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, racism in private housing markets (Memmott and Chambers 2008, Carmody 2018, Shelter WA 2018, Stone, Rowley et al. 2020, Convery 2022, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022), and poverty (Flatau, Cooper et al. 2005, Gee, Dudgeon et al. 2014, Stone, Rowley et al. 2020). Systemic racism in the private rental market and in homeownership is a barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing housing (Memmott and Chambers 2008, Stone, Rowley et al. 2020, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). Homeownership in Australia increasingly relies on intergenerational wealth (Ong ViforJ and Phelps 2023). Dispossession and policies restricting access to financial services means some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not have access to the same degree of wealth as non-Aboriginal people (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2023, Indigenous Business Australia 2024).

Housing inequality among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is evidenced across population surveys such as the national Census and housing research. One in eight (or almost 13% of) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households experience unmet housing needs i.e., unaffordable or insufficiently-sized or inadequate housing (Moskos, Milligan et al. 2025). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3.8% of the

population and are overrepresented across housing inequality data. They experience disproportionate rates of homelessness, housing instability, poor quality housing and rental stress (Lawson-Te Aho, Fariu-Ariki et al. 2019, Pickett 2022, Nikolof, Brown et al. 2024, Moskos, Milligan et al. 2025). They are disproportionately homeless, estimated at 20% of the Australian homeless population in 2021 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023) and experience higher rates of poor housing conditions than the broader Australian population (Baker, Lester et al. 2016), particularly in social housing (Andersen, Williamson et al. 2017). A very high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households (81%) experience rental stress in the private rental market (Moskos, Milligan et al. 2025).

Through ongoing impacts of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rely heavily on social housing and are overrepresented in the Australian social housing population. Eighteen percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households rent from either a government or community housing provider in contrast to 3.8% of other Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023). In NSW, 15.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households live in social housing yet make up 3.4% of the NSW population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). The majority of Aboriginal households (approximately 60%) live in social housing properties managed by non-Aboriginal housing providers rather than Aboriginal housing providers (NSW Government 2024). Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisations are critical players in the housing sector to deliver culturally appropriate housing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Aboriginal Housing Office 2025). The non-Aboriginal housing sector is designed to deliver on the housing needs of the entire population, rather than the culturally specific housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In NSW there has been a shift to transfer the properties of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households from non-Aboriginal providers to Aboriginal community housing providers, in recognition of Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisations' role in delivering appropriate housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Aboriginal Housing Office 2025). However, most Aboriginal social housing households remain under the management of non-Aboriginal housing providers, with potential negative impacts on culturally safe service delivery and thus, housing outcomes.

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the overall social housing population would not be an issue if social housing properties were in good quality

condition, sustained health and wellbeing, and if the provider system was accessible and easy to navigate. However, social housing properties are often of poor structural condition and tenants experience poor health and wellbeing from unhealthy housing (Andersen, Williamson et al. 2017, Shelter NSW 2019). In NSW, public housing stock is particularly of poor quality because of ageing and poorly maintained properties since the decline of investment into public housing (Shelter NSW 2019). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in social housing experience disproportionate rates of living in properties in poor condition (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2024). Major structural problems with housing are reported more frequently by tenants living in social housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022). Structural problems reported include major plumbing issues, cracks in walls or floors, and the foundations of the property sinking or moving (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022).

There is a major shortage of social housing in Australia, with 169,000 people on public housing waitlists across the continent (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024). People registered on the social housing waitlist in NSW wait a median of 5 and a half years and in some cases decades before accessing social housing, with some people dying while waiting for housing (Kelly 2024). Scarcity in social housing means people have limited choice of properties if they are eventually offered housing and must consider accepting offers that don't meet their needs in terms of size, location, accessibility and quality. Furthermore, the social housing system is challenging to navigate, with multiple layers of providers, landlords and services tenants and clients must interface with to meet their needs (NSW Government 2024).

The local context: La Perouse, Dharawal Country

It is important to set the scene of the local context. The research takes place on Dharawal Country in the Sydney suburb of La Perouse, alongside Dharawal and Bidjigal⁶ people who have ancient, unbroken ties to the northern headland of Kamay or Gamay (Gujaga Foundation 2023, National Museum of Australia 2024). Kamay is commonly known as Botany Bay, the landing place of British explorer Captain James Cook (National Museum Australia 2023). The traditional people of La Perouse and Kamay identify either by clan group, (Gadigal, Gweagal or Bidjigal), by region (Kamayngal or Gamayngal, i.e., the people

⁶ Bidjigal or Bidiagal is spelled differently throughout this thesis to reflect the preferred spelling used at different times throughout the project.

of Kamay), by the environment (Gadhungal, i.e., saltwater people), or by language spoken, e.g., Dharawal (Gujaga Foundation 2022).

Aboriginal people have lived and thrived in coastal Sydney for thousands of years before Captain James Cook invaded the land (La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council 2023, National Museum Australia 2023). In 1770, Cook landed at Botany Bay on the ship *Endeavour*, claiming supposed ‘discovery’ of a new land. Two men from the Gweagal clan of the Dharawal nation opposed Cook’s landing. This moment is commonly known as ‘first contact’ between Aboriginal people and British people (Heiss 2013). Aboriginal people from Kamay are a ‘first contact’ community (National Museum Australia 2023). Cook’s ‘discovery’ spurred interest by British settlers, and in 1788, the First Fleet came to Botany Bay to establish a British penal colony. This marked the start of colonisation and devastation for Aboriginal people.

The La Perouse Aboriginal community is a discreet group of Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse. It is a thriving community, connected to culture, language, Country and one another through self-determined community-driven priorities and action. In 1883, the La Perouse Aboriginal community was established as a permanent settlement at Kamay by the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (Walker 2020, Gujaga Foundation 2023). The late 1800s and into the 1900s saw eleven missions established in NSW, run by church or missionary groups (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2022). The mission at La Perouse was one of the first of these missions, forcing Aboriginal people from around what is today known as Sydney to be displaced and forcibly relocated there as part of colonial practice (NSW Government 2023). La Perouse is a place of great political significance for Aboriginal people. La Perouse hosted the 1988 bicentenary convergence of Aboriginal people from across Australia to protest celebrations of British invasion (National Archives of Australia 2010). As a symbolic gesture of mourning, Aboriginal people released funeral wreaths into the sea at La Perouse (Darian-Smith and Schlunke 2020).

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people⁷ make up 32.2% of the total population of the La Perouse suburb (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). The La Perouse Aboriginal

⁷ The Census data generally groups both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people together in the data, hence described here as “Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people”. There are no data that show how many Torres Strait Islander people live in La Perouse. Census data shows that Torres Strait Islander people make up 1.8% of the Aboriginal

community is connected to the area delineated by the Sydney suburb of La Perouse as well as the area surrounding it (personal communication, La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance meeting, 7 August 2024). People with traditional ties to the area are represented by The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council (hereafter, the Land Council) which was established in 1984. The Land Council was successfully given title to Yarra Bay House and the La Perouse Aboriginal Reserve and Mission in 1984 and in 2012 was given title to the Malabar Police Station. The Land Council delivers culturally appropriate services for the La Perouse Aboriginal community. The community enjoys Aboriginal community-controlled services such as childcare, healthcare and cultural and heritage programs. The Land Council owns residential housing where the Reserve or the mission used to be, housing Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse. While Aboriginal-controlled, this residential housing is talked about in the community as ‘the mission’. The Land Council has a member base of 620 Aboriginal adults (The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council 2024). Its boundary stretches from the Sutherland Shire Council, through La Perouse, Botany Bay, across the Eastern suburbs to Sydney Harbour, see Figure 1.

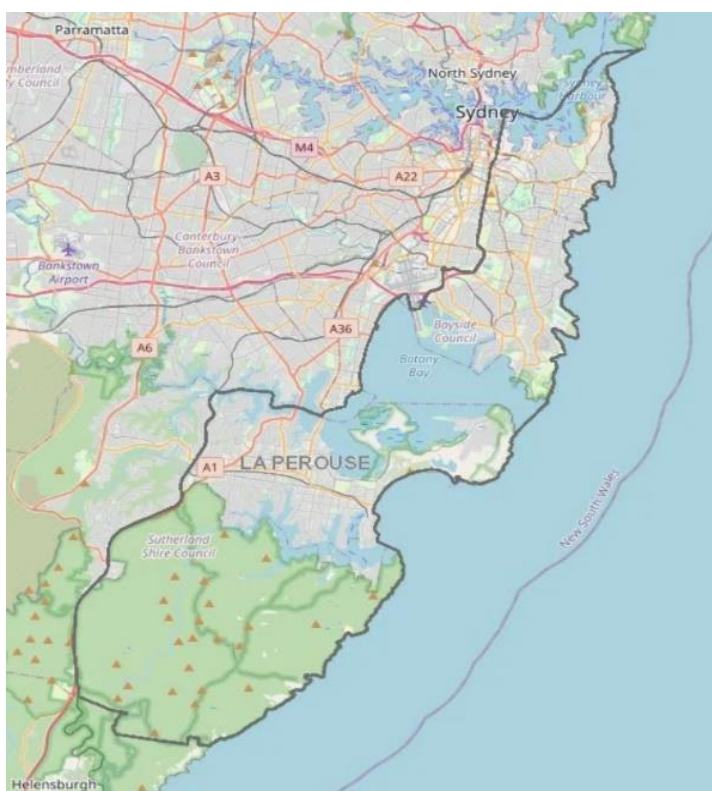


Figure 1 The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council statutory boundary
Image source (La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council 2023)

and/or Torres Strait Islander population of NSW. Aboriginal people make up 96.1% and people who are both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander make up 2.1%.

The Land Council is a member of a broader network of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations called the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance (hereafter, referred to as the Alliance). The La Perouse Aboriginal community is well-respected by the broader community across Sydney and NSW. In March 2023, the La Perouse Aboriginal Reserve and Mission was recognised by the NSW Government as an Aboriginal place and granted legislative protections (NSW Government 2023). La Perouse's Gooriwal Cultural Landscape, including Frenchmans Bay and Yarra Bay reserves, is now listed on the NSW State Heritage Register to recognise its cultural significance (NSW Government 2024).

Home and housing

Home is an English word originating from the Old English *ham* and derived from the Germanic word *haimaz*, defined as “dwelling place, house, abode, fixed residence” (Online Etymology Dictionary 2022). Understandings of home are not universal and depend on one's experience, worldview, gender, age, class and culture (Saunders and Williams 1988, Veness 1993, Dupuis and Thorns 1998, Easthope 2004). There is a disjunct between Indigenous and Western ideas of home (Keys Young 1999, Mallett 2004, Cooper and Morris 2005, Memmott 2015, Penfold, Waite et al. 2020), rooted in diverging ontologies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' concepts of home are informed by sovereignty and ontologies that foreground relationality and care for Country, as opposed to settler-state ontologies that drive the possession of land, resources and property (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's sense of home is rooted in Country; people are not separate from land and land is not an entity to possess (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Sense of home is derived from the interdependent relationship experienced between peoples, ancestral beings and land (Moreton-Robinson 2020, Penfold, Waite et al. 2020). Colonial dispossession has had a detrimental impact on relationships to land, culture and peoples, separating people from home. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, caring for Country and connecting to land are integral to social and emotional wellbeing (Rigby, Rosen et al. 2011).

Dominant Australian concepts of home come from Anglo-Saxon ontologies and emphasise home as property (Saunders and Williams 1988, Moreton-Robinson 2015), and a physical dwelling for the nuclear family unit (Blunt 2006). In contemporary Australia, the dominant form of housing tenure is owner-occupation, with 'home' achieved through the acquisition of property (Cook, Davison et al. 2016). Home is often tied up in the legal ideal of owner-occupation where one has autonomy over one's household (Saunders and

Williams 1988). This idea is rooted in the logic of settler-colonialism, where British people illegitimately took possession of land, claiming sovereignty and justifying it through the myth of *terra nullius* – land belonging to no one (Moreton-Robinson 2015). The concept of Australia as ‘home’ is thus developed through the processes of land acquisition and establishment of legal frameworks based on British values and colonisation (Moreton-Robinson 2015).

Housing is a term for the buildings where people live or stay (Almusaed and Almssad 2018). It is the physical structure of housing that encompasses building materials and design, and can act as an investment (Howden-Chapman 2004, Radio National 2022), a place of shelter, safety, warmth, and a place to rest (Henilane 2016). The Australian Government’s Department of Social Services considers housing to be both social and economic; socially, it provides stability and influences health, education and family life, while economically it provides as an investment (Australian Government 2023). Housing is defined by the New South Wales (NSW) Government Housing Act 2001 as “any kind of dwelling” (NSW Government 2001) and by the Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 as “any form of residential accommodation” (NSW Government 1998). General population indicators for housing have been developed in NSW, with the Government’s Human Services Outcomes Framework (hereafter, the Framework) envisioning under the domain of ‘Home’ that “All people in NSW are able to have a safe and affordable place to live” (Finance Services and Innovation 2017).

The terms ‘housing’ and ‘home’ are interlinked. While common definitions of housing denote a physical dwelling for residential populations, housing is also described as “the vessel of the home” (James, Daniel et al. 2022), a third skin, and a place to perform daily rituals with social and emotional meaning for people (Easthope 2004). At the National Housing Conference in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, Sean Armistead, a Potaruwutj Padthaway man said “Housing is so much more than just four walls and a roof for many people” (Armistead 2022). Similarly, Tina Pickett, a Noongar Yorga woman says that Aboriginal people view housing as not an enclosed space shutting out the outdoors, rather, a physical and spiritual connection to one’s Country (Pickett 2022).

Housing tenure: National, NSW and La Perouse

There are two main tenure types in Australia: home ownership and rental. The dominant discourse considers home ownership as the most desirable tenure, providing stability, freedom, control and an avenue to reduce housing costs in retirement (Winter and Stone

1998, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013). Home ownership can lead to improved health and wellbeing (Munford, Fichera et al. 2020). Renting is a less secure form of tenure, whereby people rent from either a private landlord or from a social housing landlord. Private rental is considered an insecure form of housing tenure, with renters subject to legislation that allows private landlords to give short periods of notice of eviction (Morris, Hulse et al. 2017). Social housing is critical social infrastructure that affords tenants relative housing security however it is an undervalued form of tenure by the Australian public and by governments and is often of poorer quality than other forms of tenure (Andersen, Fernando et al. 2016). Social housing tenants are stigmatised in the media and treated unequally in government policies (Jacobs and Flanagan 2013, Sisson 2020).

According to Census⁸ data from 2021, 66% of all Australian households owned their home either outright (31%) or with a mortgage (35%), and one third (30.6%) of households rented, including both those renting through a real estate agent or a housing authority (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). Of those renting, 3.8% rented in social housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2022). A further 3.4% of households were in other tenure types or didn't state tenure type.

Of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in 2021, 42.3% owned a home, either outright (13.8%) or with a mortgage (28.1%), and 56.1% rented (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). Of those households that rented, 27.6% rented from a real estate agent, 14.4% rented through a state or territory housing authority, and 4% rented from a community housing provider (CHP) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander home owners is increasing with time, from 33% in 2001 and 37% in 2011 to 42% in 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). In NSW, 45.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households own a home and 28.7% rent from a real estate agent. Almost 16 per cent (15.8%) rent from a social housing provider; 12.1% rent from a state or territory housing authority and 3.7% rent from a CHP (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021).

A large proportion of Aboriginal people in La Perouse live in social housing. Of 40 households with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in La Perouse in 2021,

⁸ The Census is the primary method used to capture housing tenure. Home ownership is categorised as either owning a property outright or owning with a mortgage. For the general population, rental is categorised in the Census as either through a real estate agent or through a state or territory housing authority.

77.5% (31 households) lived in State or territory housing or community housing, eight homes were owner-occupied dwellings (four owned outright without a mortgage and four owned with a mortgage) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021).

The social housing landscape and members of the research

Social housing is an umbrella term for rental housing that is subsidised for low income households provided by either government or not for profit housing providers (Department of Communities and Justice 2019, Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2021). Of all states and territories of Australia, NSW has the largest number of social housing dwellings in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021). In NSW, there are three types of social housing: public housing, community housing and Aboriginal housing (Department of Communities and Justice 2021) with 155,905 dwellings in total (NSW Government 2025). There is one public housing entity (Homes NSW, which includes the Aboriginal Housing Office), over a hundred community housing providers and over 40 Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations. Each provider aims to deliver secure, low-cost and affordable housing to people who do not have the financial means to rent or buy in the private market. This research focuses on public and community housing rather than Aboriginal community-controlled housing run by Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations.

Public housing

Public housing is commonly known as government housing, as it is owned, leased and/or managed by States and Territories (Australian Government 2023). Public housing is leased to members of the public who meet the eligibility criteria devised by the government (NSW Government 2001). In NSW there is one public housing entity, Homes NSW, a NSW Government consultative Division bringing together the Housing and Homelessness services of the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) and the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO). It was previously known as Housing NSW or DCJ Housing.

The Aboriginal Housing Office is a NSW Government statutory body set up through the NSW Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 to ensure the planning, development and delivery of services to meet the housing needs of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people (NSW Government 1998). The vision of AHO is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access affordable and quality housing. The provision of rental housing is a key

function of the AHO, leasing property and reducing the cost of rent through rental subsidies or rebates (NSW Government 1998). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in AHO properties are included in this research as AHO properties are managed by Homes NSW, CHPs, or by Aboriginal community housing providers (ACHPs).

Community housing

Community housing is subsidised rental housing managed by CHPs, including housing co-operatives or church groups for people with very low, low or moderate incomes (Department of Communities and Justice 2021). Community housing providers may own the properties they manage, or manage properties owned by the government or private landlords (Department of Communities and Justice 2021). They are monitored by The Registrar of Community Housing through the National Regulatory System for Community Housing.

Aboriginal housing

Aboriginal housing is any housing provided by organisations registered with the AHO (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2021). Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations (ACHOs) are Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, such as Aboriginal Corporations and Local Aboriginal Land Councils, that manage housing in their communities (Aboriginal Housing Office 2024).

Members of the research: Tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers

The research involved yarns and interviews with people whom I describe as ‘members of the research’ or ‘members’. Rather than describing the people I spoke to as ‘participants of the research’, I relate to them as members. The term ‘participants’ has hierarchical connotations and does not capture how we relate while the notion of ‘membership’ indicates collective contribution. Each member is part of the collective of people who have been instrumental in the cyclical creation of stories and ideas in the research and the development of the housing resource. The three groups of members are tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers.

Tenants

Aboriginal people who are social housing tenants in public or community housing in South-East Sydney are at the centre of this research. The research focuses on the

experiences of Aboriginal people in long-term housing, rather than transitional housing or crisis accommodation. It purposefully does not include the experiences of tenants in Aboriginal community-controlled housing because Aboriginal Health Workers and community members specifically were interested in improving the conditions of Aboriginal people living in mainstream social housing, rather than housing managed and controlled by Aboriginal organisations or corporations. Aboriginal social housing tenants contributing to this research live in either public housing or community housing in La Perouse and surrounding suburbs. Public housing tenancies are managed by Homes NSW, with tenants living in properties owned by either AHO, LAHC or private landlords through head leasing agreements. Community housing tenancies are managed by CHPs.

Tenant support workers

If tenants experience issues with housing, such as poor housing conditions, delays in repairs, or rental arrears, they may approach **tenant support workers**. For the purposes of this research, 'tenant support workers' are any workers in services that support tenants, including tenant advocates, caseworkers, social workers and/or community-engaged workers. They have specific geographic and demographic scopes of practice and play a role in the community, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other members of the public, with housing, wellbeing and social needs.

Tenant advocates assist the public - primarily renters - with tenancy advice and advocacy. Tenancy advice and advocacy involves providing information on tenant's rights and legal obligations and supporting tenants with legal matters, for example, at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT and hereafter referred to as Tribunal). Advocates are employed in organisations such as tenancy advice and advocacy services, community legal centres, resourcing bodies and not-for-profit organisations and cooperatives. Tenants can approach advocate services directly through phone, e-mail or in person, or tenants can be referred by other services. The geographic scope of tenant advocates varies widely, with some advocates supporting tenants across New South Wales, others only in one large region, for example, the Greater Sydney metropolitan area, and others in specific local council areas. They support renters living in boarding houses, social housing and private rental properties. Some advocates work in organisations dedicated to exclusively supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, for example the

Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (ATAAS) network across NSW, while other advocates assist all people.

Caseworkers are employed in not-for-profit organisations to assist members of the public, primarily economically and socially disadvantaged people, with information, advice and action relating to a range of social issues. These may include, but are not limited to, food insecurity, housing insecurity, financial stress, domestic and family violence, mental health issues, criminal justice, and issues with alcohol and other drugs. They may offer case support, helping clients apply for government support services and referral to legal support and other services, as well as offer access to financial brokerage, food or electricity vouchers, free children's playgroups and senior's support groups. In South-East Sydney there are multiple not-for-profit organisations supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal people, with varying geographic and demographic scope. Some organisations exclusively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, while other services support anyone who requires assistance. Clients can approach not-for-profit organisations directly or tenants can be referred by other services. In some cases, social housing providers refer clients to caseworkers.

Community-engaged government workers are government staff who directly engage with the community and public. This includes roles that entail building partnerships between the government and community members and liaising between government, community organisations, government agencies and constituents. It is less common for tenants to approach government offices for support with housing issues, as this is not a known support pathway. Some Federal, State and local government offices are open to liaising with constituents about housing and refer them to local services. Some members of the research confirmed that some government staff have a line of communication with Homes NSW and in some instances can escalate housing issues for the benefit of local constituents.

Social housing workers

Social housing workers are people employed at social housing providers, in public housing or at community housing providers (CHPs). Social housing providers are entities – whether government or non-government – that aim to deliver secure, low-cost and affordable housing for people who do not have the financial means to rent or buy in the

private market (Department of Communities and Justice 2019, Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2020). Workers at social housing providers facilitate client access to housing and housing products, within the scope of housing provider eligibility criteria, policies, law and within the limits of available housing stock.

In NSW there is one public housing entity, Homes NSW, a NSW Government consultative Division bringing together the Housing and Homelessness services of the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) and the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) (NSW Government 2024). There are also over one hundred community housing providers managed by not-for-profit non-government organisations across NSW (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2020). There are 46 community housing members, and 56 Aboriginal housing providers registered under the Community Housing Industry Association NSW, the state's peak body for community housing (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2024).

At Homes NSW, there are several tiers of frontline workers. Client Service Officers (CSOs) are entry-level workers who have direct contact with clients and are based in either frontline offices or at the Housing Contact Centre, the Homes NSW's call centre. Senior Client Service Officers are more experienced workers who guide Client Service Officers in the application of policies and procedures. CSOs and Senior CSOs are in either the access and demand team, or the tenancy team. The access and demand team assess, review and process clients' applications for social housing, and support clients with accessing housing products, such as rental assistance. CSOs in access and demand teams may be based at Homes NSW offices or in the Housing Contact Centre, providing clients with information through in-person, phone, e-mail and e-platform communications, and assistance with access to housing options and assessing eligibility for housing products (Department of Communities and Justice 2024).

The tenancy team manage existing tenants. Tenancy management involves conducting annual client service visits (CSVs) at tenants' homes, monitoring rental accounts, recovering debt from tenants, investigating reported anti-social behaviour, and supporting property maintenance (Department of Communities and Justice 2024). CSOs and Senior CSOs manage large portfolios of 300 to 400 tenancies⁹ per CSO in one geographic area. They are supported by Team Leaders, Senior CSO Specialists and Senior CSO Aboriginal

⁹ Tenancy load varies. The figure 300-400 is indicative of the tenancy load anecdotally shared in yarns and interviews with staff included in this research. One tenancy refers to one household.

Specialists. The Specialist workers provide specialist advice and refer tenants with complex support and housing needs to appropriate services. They work with CSOs, Senior CSOs and external services to tailor support to clients. The Senior Client Service Officer Aboriginal Specialist (hereafter, Aboriginal Specialist) role is an identified role open only to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The Aboriginal Specialist provide specialist advice and referrals specifically to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants with complex needs.

Homes NSW employ workers to develop the strategy and policies and manage operations of the frontline offices. Homes NSW manage tenancies of people in properties owned by either the Land and Housing Corporation, the Aboriginal Housing Office, or by private owners under head leasing agreements. Tenants of public housing in both LAHC and AHO interface with Homes NSW workers, however in some instance tenants may directly contact AHO, and some AHO workers are tasked with engaging with tenants.

Community housing providers function similarly to Homes NSW, with workers in frontline roles and varying operational, policy and management roles at each provider. CHPs manage tenancies of people either in properties owned by the CHP, or by Homes NSW, or Aboriginal Local Land Councils and Aboriginal Corporations.

Complexity of the social housing and service landscape

The social housing landscape is complex with multiple parties operating across several layers of government legislation and governance, and tenants living in social housing properties owned and managed by different landowners and multiple housing providers (NSW Government 2024). Applying for social housing and navigating the housing provider system as a tenant within this complex system is not straightforward, particularly for people on low incomes without access to internet, mobile data and phone credit, mobile phones or computers, and people living with chronic illness, mental health issues, experiences of trauma and/or disability. Tenants must contact their housing provider for all matters relating to their tenancy, such as rental payments, maintenance and repairs, and changes to the people living in the property. They are required to fill out paper and online forms with extensive evidence requirements to enact necessary changes. Maintenance systems in social housing are particularly complicated, as housing providers either outsource maintenance to private contractors or manage the maintenance of their own properties internally, causing tenants to have multiple competing points of contact to enact maintenance.

The tenant advocacy and social services landscape is also complex, with services offering different support depending on funding, capacity and scope. Tenant support and social service organisations are under-resourced, often lacking the capacity to advertise services broadly and conduct community-wide in-person outreach. Some tenants thus have no knowledge of tenant advocacy and social services that exist in their local community. Tenants who know of services may not reach out due to shame or embarrassment. If they do ask for support, they take the risk of not being adequately supported due to services being under-resourced, or not being resourced to support tenants with their specific housing issue, for example, some services do not support tenants with neighbour disputes.

The complexity of these systems is challenging for tenants. Aboriginal tenants, Aboriginal Health Workers and community members connected to La Perouse have for many years voiced frustration with navigating the social housing system and expressed limited knowledge of the scope of local services in South-East Sydney. There is a need for tailored support pathways and resources designed with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants.

Connecting housing and home with health and wellbeing

Safe and secure housing is a basic human right (Australian Human Rights Commission 2008). Housing is a social and cultural determinant of health, with housing conditions, housing security and surrounding environments impacting health and connection to culture (Marsh, Gordon et al. 2000, Dedman, Gunnell et al. 2001, Wilkinson and Marmot 2003, Howden-Chapman 2004, Baker, McDonald et al. 2013, Baker, Lester et al. 2016, Mok, Webb et al. 2016, Taylor 2018, Australian Government 2021, Howden-Chapman, Fyfe et al. 2021, Mansour, Bentley et al. 2022). Poor dwelling conditions, overcrowding¹⁰ and housing instability lead to health problems including infectious diseases (Howden-Chapman 2004, Baker, Das et al. 2008, Howden-Chapman, Pierse et al. 2008, Baker, McDonald et al. 2013, Bowie, Pearson et al. 2014, Webster 2015, Andersen, Williamson et al. 2017, Shahmir, Tim et al. 2018) and poor mental health (Fantuzzo, Leboeuf et al. 2012,

¹⁰ I approach the terms ‘crowding’ and ‘overcrowding’ critically. Large Aboriginal families living in small households has been framed by governments and housing studies as a problem for decades. The idea of ‘crowding’ imposes Western ideals of how to live. While health issues may arise from ‘overcrowded’ housing, Aboriginal people may feel most at home living together. The framing of overcrowding blames Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for housing insecurity rather than highlighting structural forces, such as high rents and racism in private rental and low social housing stock, as the cause of difficulty in securing multi-bedroom, larger housing. Housing is shared as a critical resource within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities; this is a strength of culture, community and intergenerational support.

Webster 2015, Bottino, Fleegler et al. 2019). According to the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, living in housing that requires repairs negatively impacts children's eye, gastrointestinal and respiratory health (Department of Social Services 2016). Poor housing conditions lead to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experiencing higher prevalence in health issues such as gastrointestinal infection (Andersen, Skinner et al. 2018), otitis media (DeLacy, Dune et al. 2020) and respiratory illness (Bailie, Stevens et al. 2010). The 2018 Housing and Health Guidelines identify crowding, low and high indoor temperatures, injury hazards, housing accessibility, water, air quality, tobacco smoke, noise, asbestos, lead, and radon as health risks in housing environments (World Health Organization 2018).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's concept of health and wellbeing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's concept of health differs from dominant Australian concepts of health. Health does not refer only to physical health and the absence of bodily disease, rather, it is a holistic and relational concept (Gee, Dudgeon et al. 2014, Calma, Dudgeon et al. 2017, Dudgeon, Walker et al. 2025). It encapsulates social and emotional wellbeing, as well as cultural and spiritual wellbeing of individuals, families and the community (Gee, Dudgeon et al. 2014). Self-determination, cultural continuity, connection to and caring for Country, spirituality and kinship networks are all protective factors to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's social and emotional wellbeing (Rigby, Rosen et al. 2011, Gee, Dudgeon et al. 2014). This research applies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concept of health and wellbeing (Gee, Dudgeon et al. 2014), as is appropriate within the context of research exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lived experience on housing and home.

First Nations peoples: Housing and home, health and wellbeing

Good quality, affordable, secure and stable housing are known to support the physical, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing of First Nations peoples internationally (Stats NZ 2021) and in Australia (NSW Department of Health 2010, Rigby, Rosen et al. 2011, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, Commonwealth of Australia 2017, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023). International, national and local agreements and policies outline strategies and targets for the improvement of First Nations people's housing and home environments to

directly support health and wellbeing. Internationally, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) resolution identifies housing as a part of improving the economic and social conditions of First Nations peoples. Article 21 states that “Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security” (United Nations 2007). Article 23 stipulates First Nations’ peoples’ right to develop and determine priorities and strategies relating to health, housing and social programmes programs that affect them (United Nations 2007).

In Australia in 2020, eighty Aboriginal peak organisations (the Coalition of Peaks) and the Australian government formed a new agreement on Closing the Gap across seventeen areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s life outcomes. Housing was the highest priority, according to Pat Turner, lead convenor of the Coalition of Peaks (Allam 2020). The 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap’s Outcome Nine aims to ensure appropriate and affordable housing that is aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s priorities and need (Australian Government 2020). Target 9A of Closing the Gap’s Outcome Nine aims to increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing¹¹ by 2031, up to 88% from 78.9% at the time the target was set (Australian Government 2020). Target 9B aims for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households “within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a “town camp” or “town based reserve”). (Australian Government 2020).

The housing target is monitored by the Productivity Commission and measured by data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 2021, 81.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were living in appropriately sized housing nationally (Australian

¹¹ Appropriately sized housing is defined as dwellings that are not overcrowded, using the criteria of the Canadian National Occupancy Standard, which specifies that “There should be no more than 2 persons per bedroom; Children less than 5 years of age of different sexes may reasonably share a bedroom; Children 5 years of age or older of opposite sex should have separate bedrooms; Children less than 18 years of age and of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom; and Single household members 18 years or older should have a separate bedroom, as should parents or couples.” Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). Closing the gap target – Appropriately sized housing - persons. Housing Statistics for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2021. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Canberra.

Institute of Health and Welfare 2023). Aside from Target 9A, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's specific housing priorities and needs are not stated.

At the state level, the NSW Government's Housing 2041 strategy is committed to supporting appropriately sized and affordable housing for Aboriginal people, as well as improving rights to land and water (NSW Government 2023). The NSW government's Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy (2017-2021) outlined targets to improve economic and social outcomes for Aboriginal social housing clients, aiming for a 20% increase in positive exits from social housing by 2021. The strategy was abandoned, however, and never reported on (NSW Ombudsman 2023). A new Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy has not been announced for NSW and it is unclear how the NSW government is currently measuring changes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's social housing outcomes and how they are responding to any issues.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's priorities and needs

Given the impacts of colonialism and systemic policies leading to housing inequality, it is important to understand the housing priorities and needs¹² of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Loosemore, Drake et al. 2022), particularly social housing tenants in urban areas whose voices are rarely centred in social housing policy and research.

A settler-colonial housing agenda

What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prioritise and need in housing is not necessarily at the forefront of social housing policy, government agendas and the housing research discourse (Morgan 2000, Loosemore, Drake et al. 2022). Rather, housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has for two decades been framed as 'a problem to manage' (Burke 2004, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). The housing agenda has been set from a Western worldview, rather than priorities and needs determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A key example of the deficit-framed agenda is an emphasis on 'sustainable tenancies' (Milligan, Phillips et al. 2011, Habibis, Phillips et al. 2015) and reducing 'tenancy failure' among Aboriginal people (Brackertz, Davison et al. 2017, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). Brackertz et al. report that "Aboriginal households in both social and private rental have higher rates of tenancy failure than non-Aboriginal

¹² The terms 'priorities', 'needs', and at times, 'desired outcomes' are used in this thesis, to connote *need* rather than simply a preference. The housing literature uses various terms that are distinct from priorities and needs, such as, housing aspirations, expectations, preferences, and choices. Source: Preece, J., J. Crawford, K. McKee, J. Flint and D. Robinson (2020). "Understanding changing housing aspirations: a review of the evidence." *Housing studies* 35(1): 87-106.

tenants. Better management of Aboriginal tenancies in social housing is a key opportunity to sustain tenancies” (Brackertz, Davison et al. 2017). The discourse around management of Aboriginal tenancies frames Aboriginal people in a deficit light. It is disempowering and lacks the tenets of self-determination.

Similar ideas are outlined by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services’ guide, *Foundations for Success – A guide for social housing providers working with Aboriginal people and communities* (2015). *Foundations for Success* aims to support social housing providers to reduce ‘negative exits’ and ‘unplanned exits’ that may lead Aboriginal people to housing instability and homelessness (Department of Family and Community Services 2015). While striving for housing stability is positive, sustainable tenancy as a goal requires problematisation, as it is often defined within the discourse of settler-colonial property rights and tenancy agreements that do not necessarily align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s needs in housing. For example, a sustainable tenancy is defined by one community housing industry body as “meeting the obligations of the tenancy agreement” (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2021). This agenda has primarily been developed and set from the perspective of non-Aboriginal people and sheds more light on what non-Aboriginal want for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and housing, rather than housing priorities and needs being determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The majority of housing research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people focuses on those living in rural and remote areas (Long, Memmot et al. 2007, Milligan, Phillips et al. 2011, Nikolof, Brown et al. 2024), reflective of the false imaginary that a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live outside of major urban centres (Behrendt 2006). Yet, a large proportion - 65.6% - live in major cities (40.8%) or inner regional areas (24.8%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021).

Housing priorities: Evidence from government priorities and research

Some research and government policy provide insight into housing priorities from the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For some Indigenous tenants, a ‘successful tenancy’ is a healthy home, stability of tenure, owning one’s own home, properties of an appropriate size and located in a safe area (Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). The Queensland Government’s Housing Action Plan 2019-2023 provides several ideas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s desires in housing, such as security, opportunities to purchase a home, connection to community, culture, land and Country, a

place for family to stay were considered important when yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about housing (Queensland Government 2019). Stone studied the housing aspirations of 7,343 Australians across the life course, finding that the majority of participants aspired to safety, security, and a long-term home, regardless of their background (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020). Of the 45 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, several wished to live on the land where their ancestors are from, highlighting the priority to be on Country (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020). Similarly, Penfold (2020) found it to be a priority for Jerrinja people of Orient Point, NSW, to return to Country. Indigenous women living in temporary accommodation in Brisbane and Darwin stated they wished for their own house, built-in cupboards and furniture, and wanted to live in housing that wasn't overcrowded (Cooper and Morris 2005).

A need for research

There is limited existing research voicing the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to housing and home within the urban social housing context, from the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Of the evidence that does exist, there are very few studies conducted within an Indigenous research paradigm, using Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies and there are none explicitly applying third space methodologies. Furthermore, there is a need to develop tailored support pathways and resources with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants to align with their needs.

Through a culturally appropriate and innovative methodology, this thesis centres the meanings of home and priorities, needs and lived experiences of Aboriginal people in social housing living on Dharawal Country in urban Sydney, and developed housing resources with and for tenants, based on needs voiced on the research journey. The research sits at the juncture of housing and home, health and wellbeing, moving between multiple worlds and applying multiple methodologies and methods, depicted in Figure 2 below and described in Chapter 2: Methodology.

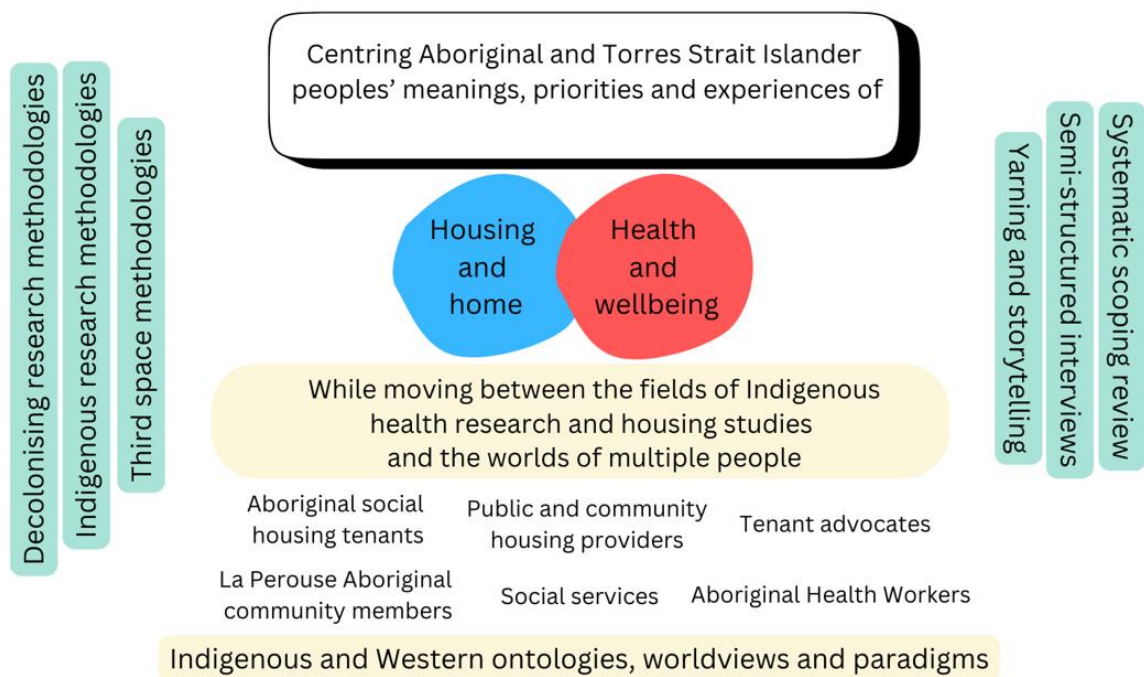


Figure 2 Research at the intersection of housing, health and multiple worlds, methodologies and methods

Chapter 2: Methodology

Methodology is the process of the research, and includes an articulation of how knowledge is developed, as well as the values, philosophies, paradigms and belief systems underpinning the process of creating new knowledge (Wilson 2008, Chilisa 2012, Rix, Wilson et al. 2019). In this chapter I firstly situate myself as an individual within a set of relationships because my ontology, or what I consider to be reality, has influenced the methodology (Wilson 2008). I then describe how the project came to be, situating the research. I describe how the research was developed and changed in response to ongoing feedback from people in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure. I discuss Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies and third space methodologies, which are the underlying philosophical frameworks and paradigms of this research. I describe how I worked very flexibly, intuitively and responsively, with deep respect for people's lived experiences and truths, and with critical reflexivity and considerations of power. I outlined the research methods, such as, a systematic scoping review, yarning and storytelling as Indigenous research methods, and semi-structured interviews as a Western qualitative research method. The way this chapter is written is not linear, as per tenets of an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson 2008, Behrendt 2019), and, where relevant, I return to the concepts outlined here throughout the thesis.

Situating the 'researcher', or who am I and how did I come to the research?

"We cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it" – Shawn Wilson, 2008, p. 14 (Wilson 2008)

I begin with my standpoint. I situate myself because my standpoint influences the research methodology. Who I am is made up of my life experiences, my relations, my social, cultural and political position and my values and worldview, all of which impact the knowledge produced in this research. When working with Indigenous people in research, whether the researcher is Indigenous or non-Indigenous, it is essential to make transparent one's standpoint (Wilson 2008) and examine how positionality influences the research (Rix, Wilson et al. 2019). I recognise as a foundational tenet of feminist and Indigenous standpoint theories that all knowledge is socially situated and thus partial

(Haraway 1988, Smith 1999, Moreton-Robinson 2013). Recognising that knowledge is situated in and influenced by one's social and cultural position is an admission that there are multiple possible truths depending on one's standpoint. It is a rejection of positivism and objectivity in knowledge production, which historically has been the tradition of Western research paradigms and patriarchal ways of knowing (Smith 1999, Moreton-Robinson 2013). Locating myself supports in building trusting relationships between myself and the people most affected by the research - in this case, Aboriginal social housing tenants (Wilson 2008) and also to challenge me (Land 2015). Social situation underlies the entire thesis and applies to me and all the people involved in the work.

I am a white, Polish person and first-generation migrant to Australia. I was born in Poland in 1988 at the end of the Communist era and migrated as a child with my family in 1991. We are economic migrants, part of a major wave of migration after Poland's independence in 1989. I grew up on Noongar Country in urban Perth. Growing up, my siblings and I were surrounded by Polish people, language and culture; my family and family friends were almost all Polish migrants. My extended family and many of my parent's friends all live in Poland. As a child and adolescent, I visited Poland every few years. It was important to my parents that my siblings and I were connected to our language, culture and extended family and friends and I'm so grateful to still speak Polish and be connected to my cultural background today thanks to their efforts. While my parents were not particularly religious, we were brought up Polish Catholic. I attended Polish Saturday School, Polish summer camp and Polish Sunday church throughout my childhood. I attended mainstream Australian Catholic school during the week. My friendships from school, and later, university, were mostly with other first-generation migrants from Asia (Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, China, India, Pakistan) and Europe (Poland, Greece, Italy, Croatia). The dominant Anglo-Australian culture, while present through my Australian schooling and popular culture, largely was not my immediate cultural experience. My cultural and social position, as an Eastern European migrant not of the mainstream Anglo-Australian culture, informs how I approach people and how I relate to people. In Polish culture, it is appropriate to communicate directly, however outside of my culture, Polish people are considered excessively frank and blunt. Formal education, oral storytelling, and intellectual pursuits such as Western science and written prose and poetry are highly valued in my culture. My formal Australian schooling and my upbringing in Polish culture means I am influenced by Western education and traditions that uphold Western philosophies and a positivist single-truth outlook on the world.

I am a queer, non-binary and transmasculine person. Being queer, to me, means living outside of heteronormative and patriarchal ways of 'doing' sexuality, gender, and relationships. My queer, non-binary and trans subjectivities are integral to my standpoint. For me, being queer is a political position as much as an indication of non-heteronormative desires and styles of relationship. It is about not fitting into a standard of relationships and way of relating; it is a lived reality and position that critiques dominant social norms. My experience of being non-binary is a political position on gender, rejecting the categorisation of 'man' and 'woman', for myself, and being 'not-man, not-woman'. It is an everyday lived experience of not fitting into the gender binary. Living as a non-binary person is an embodied critique of gender norms. My gender is separate to my political position on gender. I am a boy, not a binary trans man. I live out queer masculinity in ways that only those with a trained eye can see. These gendered subjectivities make me highly attuned to the nuances of everyday social interactions and support me in seeing people as who they say they are, not who dominant constructs perceive them to be.

I grew up with housing stability in the private market. When my family moved to Australia in the early 1990s, we initially rented privately. Within several years my parents bought a house in the outer suburbs of Perth. From 2009 onwards I rented privately, for the most part living in large communal share houses with queer friends. During the entirety of the PhD project (2021-2025), I have lived alone in the same private rental studio apartment in the inner west of Sydney on Gadigal Wangal Country.

My understanding of and connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture in my childhood and adolescence was limited to what I learned in formal schooling and Western media representation. This changed dramatically in my undergraduate university years when I became active in the Australian Student Environment Network (ASEN), a national student group committed to environmental social justice and solidarity with Aboriginal peoples. I attended and organised workshops, training camps and conferences, developing skills in facilitation, consensus organising, and built a foundational understanding of solidarity and campaigning with Aboriginal people. My most profound and painful initial learnings came from listening to Elders at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 2009. Through Elders' stories, I learned about the injustices they experienced and continue to experience first-hand. This was the beginning of my journey in appreciating how colonisation, whiteness, and the Western culture I come from negatively impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This was and

continues to be a very painful learning for me. I began unpacking my whiteness and challenging my white fragility (DiAngelo 2018) to reduce the harms of racism and (re)production of colonial culture through my thoughts and behaviours.

I was involved in anti-nuclear campaigns from 2006 to 2012 through ASEN, working in solidarity with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people lead anti-nuclear campaigns throughout Australia, from the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta's *Irati Wanti* campaign to the Yeelirrie uranium mine campaign on the lands of the Tjiwarl Traditional Owners. The leadership of Aboriginal people in these struggles are paramount, as uranium mines, nuclear waste dump proposals and nuclear bomb tests have and continue to directly impact their lands, waters, cultures, and peoples. Non-Aboriginal supporters are guided by the needs of Traditional Owners of the lands affected by nuclear activities. Non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people form strong, decades-long relationships, working together towards Aboriginal-led goals. I take these lessons of trust and long-term relationship-building in activism into my daily life and my research.

I was involved for several years at 3CR Community Radio station in Naarm (Melbourne), a progressive broadcaster, where I produced radio for The Radioactive Show and The Tuesday Breakfast Show. As a volunteer, I was part of a community of hundreds of people who believe in the power of voicing the lived experiences of people across many progressive struggles to pave the way for social change. At the same time I worked a paid job coordinating the Melbourne University Food Co-op, a long-standing hub for students to access healthy, affordable food on campus. Being actively involved in these community spaces, run democratically and by consensus shaped my belief in ground-up organising, and built my trust in people working together for common good.

I left Naarm in 2016 and began working in public health, motivated by an interest in social (in)justice and (in)equities in health. I worked in Jakarta for two years at an Indonesian not-for-profit public health organisation. This was an important period of growth learning to work outside Australia alongside Indonesian colleagues and within Indonesian culture. In 2018 I returned to Australia, living in Sydney where I was engaged in various LGBTQI+ community-based positions and research roles while undertaking a Master of Public Health (MPH). My key takeaway from the MPH was the alarming realisation that most public health initiatives and research are designed by and for the dominant population group, and engagement with community members is the exception, and not the rule. This realisation was deeply troubling to me, and significant. I did not agree with this approach

as it naturally would not serve people outside the dominant culture. I experience this exclusion first-hand as a queer and trans person attempting to access healthcare. I hoped to work in programs and research that highly valued the lived experience and priorities of community members. My desire to address social injustice and inequity in health grew.

In 2019, I was a Research Associate on the project *Healthy Housing: improving communication pathways between housing, health and social services that work with and non-Aboriginal families in South-East and South-West Sydney*¹³ (hereafter referred to as *Healthy Housing*) at The George Institute for Global Health (TGI), a not-for-profit independent health research institute. *Healthy Housing* is about improving communication and advocacy pathways between healthcare, social services and social housing in South-East and South-West Sydney, with a focus on working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families living in social housing. Through the stories of Aboriginal Health Workers on this project, I became acutely aware of the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in South-East Sydney. Families were (and still are) seeking advocacy from healthcare and social service workers to action housing repairs and maintenance, improve housing conditions, and facilitate appropriate housing allocation. While social housing providers are committed to service delivery that is fair, accessible, and appropriate to client needs (Department of Communities and Justice 2023, Bridge Housing 2024), power imbalances and systemic inequities remain, to the detriment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These power imbalances and inequities are one of many manifestations of colonisation. I began seriously reflecting on what I'd heard and what might alleviate families' housing distress. I started to build relationships with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who would become my friends and colleagues in the struggle for housing justice.

Situating the research, or how the project came to be

The research came about as a reaction to the ongoing systemic health and wellbeing challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in Sydney. Dharawal and Bidjigal people, Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse know what is best for their community and determine their own family and community needs and priorities. They have for many years voiced frustrations to local government and to social housing providers about the social housing systems' limitations

¹³ This project was initially titled *Healthy Housing: improving communication pathways between housing, health and social services that work with Aboriginal in South-East Sydney*.

in meeting the health and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South-East Sydney. They particularly have voiced concerns about the safety and the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children and families, and the negative impact of delayed and unactioned maintenance and repairs.

In 2018, these concerns and frustrations were voiced at a Community Health Forum held at La Perouse. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, health workers and social services staff listened. Together with community members they developed a consortium to address housing issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, leading to the research project *Healthy Housing* as a direct response to community concerns.

Relationship-building

This PhD project, *Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales* stems from, but is separate to, the *Healthy Housing* project. In my role as a Research Associate on *Healthy Housing*, I conducted semi-structured interviews with healthcare, social service and housing provider staff in South-East and South-West Sydney to understand communication pathways between different organisations. These interviews informed the development of a housing screening tool and pathway for staff to use to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients or patients of their services. Together with Aboriginal Health Workers we developed a housing screening tool that was circulated among health practitioners to ask patients about housing and facilitate housing advocacy.

Through *Healthy Housing*, I built relationships with three Aboriginal women in particular who guided the project, Dharawal Elder Lola Ryan, Dharawal woman Melinda Moore, and Bidjigal Traditional Owner Lee Timbery. We worked closely together during the data collection process and in developing the housing screening tool and analysis of the interviews. This was the beginning of an important set of relationships built on trust, mutual respect and a shared passion for housing and health justice in the La Perouse Aboriginal community.

Establishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance

Appropriate governance in Aboriginal health research is fundamental to principles of Indigenous self-determination. Research must be directly relevant, beneficial, and a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018). I developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure to ground the research, in the first nine months of the PhD, see Figure 3.

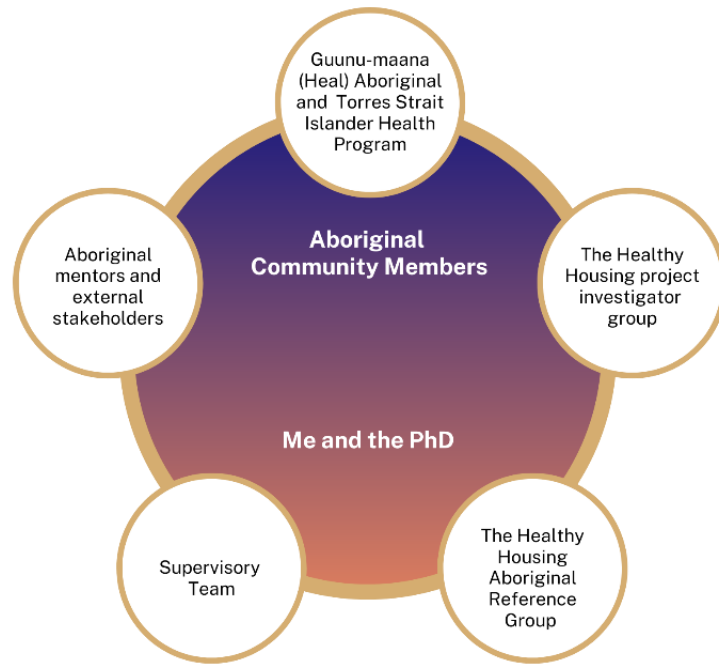


Figure 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure

Six groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up the governance structure, including cultural leaders, mentors, Aboriginal Health Workers, community members who are traditionally connected to Dharawal Country, and Aboriginal people with experience living in social housing. All governance group members held paid positions either within the healthcare system or in health research organisations or universities that explicitly allowed for some time to be dedicated towards research beyond their core roles. Their time on the PhD project was offered in-kind and with appropriate agreements in place with their managers, where required. Group members' expertise was also acknowledged in conference presentations. Governance is supported by an Engagement Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1) that explicitly states each person's roles

and responsibilities, functioning as a negotiated agreement between myself, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people guiding and supporting the research.

Lola Ryan, Melinda Moore and Lee Timbery are Aboriginal community members whose community priorities drove the PhD research questions, aims, study design, methods and study materials. Lola Ryan is a Dharawal Elder traditionally connected to La Perouse. She was born on the La Perouse Aboriginal mission and is the ninth child of ten children. She lived in social housing for many years of her life. She's a mother of three children and has three granddaughters. Lola served the La Perouse Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal Health Worker for the Child & Family Health Team at the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District for twenty years (2004-2024). She was instrumental in building relationships within the healthcare system to improve service delivery for Aboriginal families at La Perouse. She established the Ngala Nanga Mai pARenT group, a weekly community health parent group at the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre (hereafter, the Health Centre). Melinda Moore is a Dharawal woman and Aboriginal Health Worker. Lee Timbery is a Bidjigal woman and Aboriginal Health Worker with strong traditional ties to La Perouse. Their involvement spans culturally appropriate recruitment, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of findings, development of a resource with and for Aboriginal social housing tenants, development of findings and recommendations, strategies for dissemination, knowledge translation and sharing of findings. They have genuine decision-making power, as the research has a direct impact on their lives and the lives of people in their local community.

Five other groups make up the structure. The PhD is conducted within the Guunu-maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program at TGI, supporting culturally appropriate and ethical research through internal policies and procedures, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research policy, standard operating procedures and Committee that oversees activities, and alignment with national frameworks and ethical standards. I am supported by three supervisors from the Guunu-maana (Heal) Program, two of whom are Aboriginal researchers, and one non-Aboriginal researcher, all of whom have a wealth of knowledge and experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, cultural safety, Indigenous and decolonising methodologies and interface methodology. The research is also supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff of Guunu-maana (Heal) who have shared their time, expertise and cultural knowledge and worldviews. They specifically supported the systematic scoping review through data

extraction and interpretation of findings, and in collective listening sessions of the yarns and interviews, generously sharing reflections and supporting data analysis. They have ensured the research is an accurate reflection of Indigenous worldviews and values and supported community engagement at La Perouse. I was additionally supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are members of the Healthy Housing Aboriginal Reference Group. Two Aboriginal researchers, Courtney Ryder and Kathleen Clapham, provided cultural advice and mentorship. I was especially supported by Courtney, meeting with her bimonthly between 2021 and 2024 to yarn about all aspects of my research journey and the methodology.

The research methodology and methods

The research methodology applies the scholarship of Indigenous people and non-Indigenous allies they work with in Indigenist research (Rigney 1999), Indigenous research methodologies, decolonising research methodologies (Smith 1999, Wilson 2008, Sherwood 2010, Rix, Wilson et al. 2019), and third space methodologies (Durie 2004, Chilisa 2012). There is not one single way of applying these methodologies as each project is influenced by context and sets of standpoints and relationships. In this section I describe my understanding of the interrelated principles, practices and intentions of these methodologies and how I have worked to practice them as a non-Aboriginal person within the unique relationships, standpoints and context of this project on Dharawal Country. The principles, practices and intentions of these methodologies underlie the research process. Where possible I have cited relevant scholarship, however there are instances with no citations as I describe plainly the tailored way I worked to the context and in relation with the ideas and people directly connected to this project.

The context behind Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies

“Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” –
Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 5 (Smith 1999)

Research is not a neutral practice (Sherwood 2010). Much research is deeply rooted in Western institutions of knowledge production, known as universities and academic institutions, such as the institutions where I have conducted this PhD. Researchers often

default to Western paradigms of knowledge production because their research is situated within these institutions. Research within Western paradigms are heavily influenced by positivist, modernist philosophies and considered the only way to 'know' (Smith 1999). This way of knowing disregards First Nations' peoples knowledge systems and cultures, invalidating First Nations' peoples ways of knowing (Smith 1999).

Research has been used by colonizers to reinforce power over First Nations peoples (Rigney 1999, Smith 1999). Research has been done 'on' First Nations peoples globally, for the benefit of the ongoing domination of the colonizer over the colonized (Smith 1999). Colonizers have used scientific observation and collection of information about the colonized to claim they 'know' First Nations people, as a domination tactic (Smith 1999). Western research claims to be neutral as a way to retain power and control (Behrendt 2019). Research is thus a dirty word and practice from the perspective of many First Nations peoples (Smith 1999, Humphery 2001). In the colonial context of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been, and continue to be, excluded from research about them, providing no benefit for their communities (Rigney 1999, Humphery 2001). In health research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are blamed for poorer health outcomes they experience, a framing that fuels the colonial project in its false assertion of First Nations peoples as inherently deficient (Walter and Suina 2019, Watego 2021). It is only recently that research is acknowledging colonisation as a driver of poor health, while cultural practices such as caring for and connecting to Country, knowledge and family are acknowledged as protective factors for health and wellbeing (Sherwood 2013, Bourke, Wright et al. 2018, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, Wright, Yap et al. 2021).

Given the past and ongoing harms of research conducted within Western paradigms, it is paramount that research does not cause further harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Sherwood 2013). Applying the principles and practices of Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies when conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may lead to research supporting wellbeing, however researchers must remain vigilant of the potential for harm to be caused through their actions. Relational accountability, reciprocity, respect, rights and the intention to create beneficial change are some key interrelated principles and practices of these methodologies (Bagele 2020).

Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies¹⁴

“All things are related and therefore relevant” – Shawn Wilson, 2008, p. 58 (Wilson 2008)

Relational accountability

Indigenous research methodologies are ways of creating, maintaining and sharing knowledge relationally, with respect and integrity. Indigenous research is grounded in relationships, whereby relationality, relational accountability, mutual benefit and reciprocity are upheld (Wilson 2008). Indigenous knowledge systems and ontologies are relational thus it makes sense to actively practice relationality in Indigenous research (Wilson 2008). Relational accountability in research means all aspects of the process are related (Bagele 2020) and we are all accountable to our relations, including our relationships with ideas, people, animals and plants (Weber-Pillwax 2001, Wilson 2001, Bagele 2020).

Working relationally requires a person to know themselves, know their belief system, and situate themselves within the relationships, environment and context in which they are working (Wilson 2008). When discussing relational accountability, Cree scholars Wilson and Weber-Pillwax ask researchers - specifically Indigenous researchers - to act from their morals and belief systems and to fulfill their role as researchers within a set of relationships rather than trying to ‘find out something’ in an objective, removed way (Wilson 2001). Knowledge is developed collectively and owned by the collective involved (Wilson 2008). Research within a relational ontology is thus not an extractive exercise but a co-creation of knowledge that is shared (Tynan 2021). A relational way of working recognises multiplicity of truth, as all beings contribute their truth and co-create story and knowledge together (Tynan 2021). Listening and being open to many truths is part of respectful practice when working with people who may not share your worldview, and supports decolonising health research (Sherwood 2010).

trawlulwuy woman Lauren Tynan describes relationality as a practice, with responsibility to Country and kin central to practicing relationality (Tynan 2021). She stresses that relationality is not an abstract concept to understand but a way of being, doing and *feeling* the connection between people and land, and among people, and about responsibility to

¹⁴ There is not one single understanding of what Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies are, thus I have used plural to discuss these methodologies.

all interrelated entities, human and non-human (Tynan 2021). Researchers have a responsibility to care for Country, for community and for the people they conduct research with. Researchers are not the experts; participants are the experts. Researchers rely on the stories, knowledges and intellectual property of Indigenous people and must hold these knowledges with great care and responsibility (Tynan 2021). Knowledge co-creation is part of decolonising research methodologies and enacted through active, deep listening and two-way learning (Sherwood 2010).

Reciprocity and respect

Reciprocity is connected to relationality, relational accountability, respect, and responsibility, and impacts power relations. In Indigenous research, all beings involved in the research engage in reciprocity, as they all share something of themselves with each other (West, Stewart et al. 2012). Bringing something of oneself can mean introducing oneself and offering personal information that allows people to get to know who you are more deeply. For example, an Aboriginal researcher may introduce themselves with who their mob and family are and connect people to their Country. Reciprocity creates a feeling of connectedness between everyone involved, dissolves distance between the researcher and participants, which in turn equalises power (Bagele 2020). It is about connecting as humans and the research having shared benefit. Practicing reciprocity manifests differently from project to project. It could look like listening to people's lived experience, sharing stories, co-authoring research, keeping knowledge within the community where research has taken place, and respecting cultural protocols (Ellis and Earley 2006). For Sherwood (2010) "listening is considered by Indigenous people as an essential value of ethical and respectful praxis". Non-Indigenous researchers and institutions being unable to listen to Indigenous people was a key finding in her doctoral thesis on why health research has not improved Aboriginal people's health.

Change, benefit, self-determination and rights

Research applying an Indigenous research paradigm aims to create change, to benefit First Nations communities and work towards First Nations peoples' liberation and self-determination (Rigney 1999, Smith 1999, Weber-Pillwax 2001). First Nations people have the right to make decisions about all that relates to them as part of self-determination, thus Indigenous research should be defined and controlled by First Nations people (Rigney 1999). A fundamental principle of Indigenist research is political integrity through Indigenous people setting the political agenda (Rigney 1999). Similarly, the central tenet of

decolonisation in research is to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as defined by them (Sherwood 2010, Sherwood and Kendall 2013).

Centring lived experience

Privileging First Nations people's voices, values, knowledge systems and lived experiences at every opportunity is part of Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies (Rigney 1999, Battiste 2000, Denzin, Lincoln et al. 2008, Wilson 2008, Sherwood 2010, Behrendt 2019). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' strength, resilience, wisdom and knowledge systems should be recognised in applying these methodologies (Sherwood 2010). This approach contrasts with dominant, Western models of creating knowledge that centres and benefit Western ideas, realities and agendas.

Renegotiating power

There are inherent power imbalances between those who are positioned as 'researchers' and those who are positioned as 'the researched'. Researchers working within colonial paradigms bring a positivist worldview and extractive practices to research, devised to dominate (Sherwood 2010). The process of conducting research relationally, with respect and accountability to those relations, centring lived experience and acting towards beneficial change and self-determination means there are opportunities to renegotiate power between 'the researcher' and 'the researched'.

Applying Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies

I applied Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies by practicing several central tenets of these methodologies, namely relationality, relational accountability, reciprocity, respect, centring lived experience, listening, sharing, and de-centring power away from myself as much as possible. Reflexivity, yarning as an Indigenous research method, and my intuition, responsiveness and openness to critique supported my practice.

Every step of my research journey I was guided Smith's (1999) p. 10 questions:

"Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?"

These questions, and attempts at answering them, are fundamental to conducting research critically and genuinely with collective, relational and decolonial intent. At the

heart of these questions are considerations of relational accountability, respect, reciprocity, power, rights, self-determination and change.

Aboriginal social housing tenants and community members connected to La Perouse are the experts who have defined the research agenda. I do not own the research; it belongs to the people and community directly impacted by it. Because the research belongs to the community, rather than to me as an individual researcher, I hold a great deal of responsibility, which includes ensuring the purpose of the project, how it's conducted, and its potential outcomes are beneficial and do not cause harm. I am responsible for the project aligning with community needs and for the project to have a positive and lasting impact beyond the PhD timeframe. Relationality, relational accountability, respect and reciprocity are some of the Indigenous and decolonising research methodological practices supporting the realisation of these responsibilities.

I have genuine relationships with Aboriginal people in La Perouse, having spent countless hours at the Health Centre, listening to the concerns and stories of Aboriginal staff, patients and their families, and being consistently present in the community for over four years. The Health Centre is one of several hubs for the La Perouse Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people visit the Centre for health appointments and are connected to Aboriginal people who work there, some who have worked there for decades and are trusted in the community. On a busy day the Health Centre is bustling with activity. On a quiet day staff sit and drink cups of tea in the staff tearoom. I've enjoyed many cups of tea with Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal staff of the Centre on these quieter days, spending time together with no agenda. I was invited to the Ngala Nanga Mai pARenT Program at the Health Centre, sharing the space with Aboriginal parents, getting to know each other and listening.

I brought myself to these relationships, sharing who I am rather than presenting myself as a distant 'researcher' who has come to 'explore something' about the community. I did not hide the fact that I am a researcher, rather I came in my multiplicity, first and foremost as a person, a friend of Lola and Lee, a colleague in the Aboriginal health space, and as a non-Aboriginal person from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program (the Guunu-maana (Heal) team) who is open to hear about the housing experiences of the community. I connected with people in their multiplicity, too, as mothers, aunties, daughters, fathers, uncles, sons, cousins, and friends, as Aboriginal people connected to each other, to the land and sea through cultural, sporting and school communities, as

professionals and as tenants of social housing. When meeting new people at the Health Centre, I introduced myself by foregrounding my relationship with known and trusted community members such as Lola and Lee, allowing people to place me in the collective. Often, I met people alongside Lola. As time went on, clients at the Health Centre began to approach me when they heard I was doing something about housing. I spent time with people, listening to their stories and if they raised questions about housing issues they were experiencing, I provided information to the best of my knowledge. I practiced reciprocity through sharing who I am, by listening to people's lived experiences, respecting them, taking them seriously, and, where appropriate, offering information based on what I was learning of the social housing and tenant advocacy system through my research.

The research is thus a collective, relational process. Every time I speak about the research, I speak about Lola, Lee and my relationship to the La Perouse Aboriginal community. This is because we are connected through the work and the relationships are what hold the project together as a collective endeavour rather than a single individual's PhD project. I am and continue to be on a collective journey alongside Aboriginal community members, friends and colleagues, and broader community, as we learn together.

Relational accountability to me means that I am part of a set of relationships that influence the research process, I am accountable to those people. It is easy to say, "I am accountable to my relations", but what does this mean in practice and in the context of this research? To be specific, I am directly accountable to Dharawal and Bidjigal people Lola Ryan, Lee Timbery and Melinda Moore as the key community members driving the research agenda. I'm especially accountable to Dharawal Elder and friend, Lola, with whom I have worked very closely for over four years. What this means is that every action I've taken has been with the priorities of Lola, Lee and Melinda at the forefront. Being accountable means firstly, I have had to continually listen very carefully to the priorities of community members, building trust and relating genuinely in the process, and, secondly, work hard to ensure those priorities remain central to the project. In practice this involved having regular contact with Lola and Lee through phone calls, online and in person meetings and over e-mail to discuss the research aims and design, community engagement activities, recruitment process, data collection, data analysis, the narrative of thesis chapters and journal articles arising from the research, developing abstracts and presentations for conferences and presenting together. This ensured the project remained

aligned to community priorities. Lola and Lee are busy people with many community and professional responsibilities, so we met as frequently as was needed and within their capacity. Lola often entrusted me to progress the work without her because she trusted I had the community's interests at heart as I had listened to her concerns for many years and showed commitment to supporting her community. I kept her abreast of project progress and shared my reflections and any useful information about the housing system with her over the phone or over a cup of tea at the Health Centre.

I'm accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues of the Guunu-maana (Heal) Program, especially Keziah Bennett-Brook, Tamara Mackean and Julieann Coombes who have provided intellectual and cultural guidance and ongoing support and belief in the project. I am accountable to my non-Aboriginal colleague Kate Hunter who provided countless hours of guidance and support as I learn and unlearn on the research journey. I am additionally accountable to Aboriginal people who are cultural mentors. These accountabilities are upheld by respect, honest communication, listening and sharing. I am also accountable to the institutions within which I am conducting this research; TGI, UNSW, and the ethics bodies that have reviewed and approved the research.

As the project progressed, I met more people, so my accountability broadened. I met members of the Alliance and am accountable to them to ensure the project aligns with broader community priorities. I uphold this accountability by updating the Alliance on project progress and discussing drafts of thesis chapters and papers for feedback. I am accountable to each of the Aboriginal social housing tenants I have come to know in this process, to each of the parents and families I have interacted with at the Health Centre, and to tenant support workers and social housing workers I've met. I've made every effort to connect with the people I yarned with, sending them their transcripts, offering Aboriginal tenants raw audio on USB sticks as part of data sovereignty, and talking through thesis chapters and papers with tenants and incorporating suggested changes. I e-mailed transcripts and draft chapters to tenant advocates and social housing workers and incorporated their feedback.

I regularly considered my own power as a white, non-Aboriginal researcher from a resourced health research institute, working closely with Aboriginal people from a community experiencing housing disadvantage borne of colonisation. I hoped that by designing the project with Aboriginal people, centring their agenda and lived experience, I would come closer to de-centring my own power. I worked with decolonising intent, i.e., I

worked to do no harm, was aware that because of my standpoint I had blind spots and was constantly aware of how I might unintentionally be doing harm through systemic and individual colonial ways of doing. I was aware of my ‘outsider’ status, not being from the community. There are things I can’t and may never understand about the community and I never pushed to understand things that weren’t my business to know.

Reflexivity

Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies are supported by reflexive practice, a tool for researchers to examine their motivations working with First Nations people and mitigate power imbalances (Rix, Wilson et al. 2019). Reflexivity is a skill in noticing our responses to people, events and the world, and using those reflections to change how we communicate and behave (Etherington 2004).

In early 2021, I began practicing self-reflexivity, writing down my observations, impressions, reflections, and ideas, including anxieties, concerns, confusions, discomforts, and uncertainties, and my excitements and hopes for the research (Jootun, McGhee et al. 2009). By naming my reflections, I could examine my conduct, consider my blind spots and how I might be causing harm, discuss this with supervisors and change my approach if necessary (West, Stewart et al. 2012). Reflexivity is an important process as a non-Aboriginal person of the dominant culture aiming to do culturally safe, ethical and respectful research with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Wilson 2014). Reflexivity keeps me accountable and transparent, tracking how I intentionally or unintentionally influence the research at all stages (Etherington 2004, Wilson 2014). It also supports my understanding of how I came to ‘know’ what has been discovered in the research (Etherington 2004). Learnings from my reflexivity are discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Yarning and storytelling

Yarning and storytelling are First Nations peoples’ means of creating, sharing and maintaining knowledge (Archibald, Lee-Morgan et al. 2019). Bessarab describes yarning as “an Indigenous cultural form of conversation” and honours Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ ways of communicating and knowing (Bessarab and Ng’andu 2010). Yarning depends on relationships between the people communicating and requires deep listening and active listening, not only to the words people say but non-verbal communication (Bobongie-Harris and O’Brien 2021). Storytelling is an Indigenous method that involves the organic gathering of knowledge (Archibald, Lee-Morgan et al. 2019).

Yarning and storytelling allow for feeling, intuition and one's subjectivity and self, to be part of knowledge development (Wilson 2008).

Lola and I used yarning to support culturally appropriate sharing of knowledge between us and the people we spoke to for the research. Yarning supported the Indigenous research methodology, as we wanted to hear Aboriginal people's lived experiences about housing and home. Using yarning centres Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, and Indigenous knowledge constructs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal colleagues in the Guunu-maana (Heal) team and I used storying as a data analysis method. Storying to us meant creating story together by listening to yarns and interviews with members of the research and sharing our sense of what was heard in a circular and iterative process. This method was in contrast to Western qualitative research methods of developing themes. Instead, we centred Indigenous ways of knowing, where story became the central node and focal point, rather than developing themes and categories. The yarning, interviewing and storying and data analysis process is described further in this chapter.

Third space methodologies

"The third space represents a radically hybrid space - unstable, changing, tenuous, neither here nor there" - Pat Dudgeon and John Fielder, 2006, p. 401 (Dudgeon and Fielder 2006)

Critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha describes the third space as the "space in between" (Bhabha 1994), a liminal and hybrid space beyond dichotomies and beyond binaries of either/or (Bagele 2020). There is a tendency to conceptualise the positions of 'the coloniser' and 'the colonized' as fixed, dual positions and for cultural identities, such as Indigenous or Western identities, to similarly be conceptualised as fixed, pure and essential. However, to Bhabha these binaries are a social construct, and he invites us into a third space where culture is not essentialised, there are no pre-determined hierarchies, and there is possibility to be in-between identity constructs.

Applying third space methodologies

The third space is highly relevant to this research because it focuses on constructions of people's lived experience. It was necessary for me to fluidly navigate between multiple worlds, spaces and standpoints to hear the lived experiences, outside of pre-conceived categories and constructions of identity. The third space allows people to inhabit a

multiplicity of standpoints at once and to shift standpoints, as standpoints are not static. Importantly, the third space opens up to the possibility of multiple truths, for both *this* and *that* to be true at the same time. In this opening up, social transformation can occur as we communicate and interact between worlds.

Applying the third space in my experience was an act of intuition, a suspension of my own beliefs, and an intangible space where I simultaneously held open, deeply respectful, light space for all the multiple truths and lived experiences of the people in the world of my research. This was not a space of neutrality, rather a space of *possibility*. I was present with the people with whom I was sharing space and allowed for their truth to unfold. Applying third space methodology meant I was able to truly listen and hear the lived experience of people with divergent views and standpoints to me and to each other. It allowed me to hear the views of Aboriginal people who supported the storying of the three results chapters of this thesis, and it allowed the space for the development of the housing resource.

I was nimble, flexible, intuitive and responsive, moving between worlds with a levity and lightness, similar to how air moves through space. The movement was between people; Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, tenants, non-tenants, tenant advocates, social housing workers, community members and non-community members, working class and middle-class people, researchers and non-researchers, people of differing genders and ages. It was also movement between physical spaces; moving across Dharawal Country, La Perouse, the Health Centre, the office spaces of public and community housing, not-for-profit social services, tenant advocacy organisations and government across Sydney, and in online Zoom calls from my home and TGI offices in Newtown and Barangaroo.

What did this look like in practice? It looked like sitting with someone, listening to them seriously, reserving judgement and affirming their truth, and holding that truth while simultaneously holding the different truths of others among the members of the collective. It was not as simple as listening. The holding of space to hear lived experience and suspend my own belief was the enactment of the third space. As I began to connect with more people from different standpoints, experiences and worlds, people's stories seemed to 'contradict' each other. Sometimes, privately I found myself doubting the truths of one, both or all groups. I felt confused and could not see how *both* could be true. Reflexivity in the moment of doubt, and through journaling and discussing with supervisors, was a critical practice allowing me to stay open and curious. It allowed me to

seriously consider the possibility that both truths could absolutely be true. I began to take my learnings from reflexivity into my interactions with people. If I felt surprised or doubted what a person was sharing, I reminded myself there is no single truth and to believe the truth of the person in front of me, regardless of anything anybody else had said. I learned that one truth does not negate another truth. I reminded myself that my role is not to find out a single truth within the complexity of relationships across members of the research collective. Rather, the task was to listen, be respectful and hold space for the very real possibility of multiple truths. When I grounded myself in the belief that each person's lived experience is true and that multiple truths do exist, I could relax, listen and once again stay open to truth. This staying open and holding space to each person's truth, across different groups and from individual to individual, was my experience of the third space. Chapters 4 to 6 of the thesis invite readers to hold space for the different truths of Aboriginal social housing tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers, with each chapter focusing on one group at a time.

I experienced the third space as both light and heavy. At times, it was a light reverence, feeling a strong sense of integrity, sitting with truths and reserving judgement, and at other times deeply uncomfortable and heavy as I witnessed the lived experiences and impacts of colonisation within the social housing system. I was very often unsettled, uncertain and felt the absence of an anchor, because the familiarity of my own place of belonging was temporarily left behind (Dudgeon and Fielder 2006). With practice, holding space for people across worlds, I found myself letting go of categorisation, of seeing people as from *this group* or *that group*, as one group being *right* which must mean another must be *wrong*. Rather, all voices were valid and true at once. The third space opened a deep sense of integrity. It was from this space of integrity that I could develop the tangible, visible aspects of the project.

Together shaping the research questions

Aboriginal social housing tenants, Bidjigal and Dharawal community members and Aboriginal Health Workers identified research priorities that shaped the research questions. The project was supported by the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance.

Listening to the priorities of Aboriginal Health Workers and the community

In early 2021, I approached Lola Ryan, Melinda Moore, Lee Timbery to discuss potential research ideas around the themes of social housing, health and wellbeing. I asked Lola, Melinda and Lee what kind of project would be useful. I said I was considering starting a

PhD and was interested in a project developed with community interests and benefit at the heart.

I listened to Lola, Melinda and Lee and heard that it was important to focus on the experiences of Aboriginal families living in social housing, particularly people living in the La Perouse Aboriginal community and people who were their clients and patients. Lola, Melinda and Lee spoke about the need to address the poor treatment of Aboriginal clients in the social housing system. They stressed that Aboriginal clients of social housing providers in South-East Sydney needed advocacy and in-person support when interacting with the social housing system. Lola, Melinda and Lee said clients often complained that urgent repairs and maintenance were not being completed by social housing providers and people were living in unhealthy and unsafe conditions. They emphasised the need to improve client service delivery at social housing providers and the need for greater respect towards Aboriginal clients. From their standpoint, housing providers lacked understanding of Aboriginal clients' housing needs. They supported me to start a research project that could tangibly support Aboriginal social housing tenants with these issues.

These conversations were the grounding for the PhD concepts, research aims, methods and design and directly fed into a PhD scholarship I submitted in April 2021. At that time, the research questions were focused on determining how the social housing delivery system could embed cultural safety into client service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. I began the PhD in late May 2021, and continued to consider whether these were the 'right' research questions throughout 2021 and early 2022 in the lead-up to submitting ethics applications (see Chapter 9: Reflexivity for further detail).

While shaping the questions and project design, I continued to meet with Lola and Lee to ensure questions and design were culturally appropriate and aligned with the priorities of the community. I particularly spent time with Lola, whose perspective as a Dharawal Elder and Aboriginal Health Worker at the Health Centre trusted to work closely with Aboriginal families meant she was appropriately positioned to drive research priorities. I organically spent more time with Lola over other Aboriginal Health Workers because of our strong relationship, her interest in meeting frequently and the fact that she had more time and support within her role to conduct research. Her key role in the project was formalised through ethics and governance structures; she was the site coordinator for the project at the Health Centre, providing in-kind research support as an Aboriginal Health Worker.

Aligning the project to community priorities - support from the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance

Lola and I sought support and alignment of the project to broader community priorities through engagement with the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance, a network of local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations providing services to the La Perouse Aboriginal Community. The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council is a member organisation of the Alliance. Lola and I first met with the Alliance in October 2021, online. This meeting occurred in the first six months of the PhD journey when research questions were under development. Lola and I shared initial ideas for the research and asked the Alliance whether our ideas were priorities for the La Perouse Aboriginal community. This meeting provided a vital opportunity to gauge the priorities of the La Perouse Aboriginal community and ensure our research aligns with them as the peak body bringing together Aboriginal community-controlled organisations across the La Perouse area. It was also a time to discuss the Alliance's data sovereignty needs. The Alliance offered general support for the project and provided some feedback on methods. Importantly, the Alliance asked that we ensure Lola lead any group community-facing activities such as at local mother's groups where we planned to discuss the research with Aboriginal community members. The Alliance asked to be sent updates of major milestones, such as beginning of data collection, end of data collection and any related community events. They indicated their needs around data ownership. Alliance members did not have a need to own the transcripts or audio from yarns and interviews with Aboriginal social housing tenants and wished to receive a summary of key themes arising from these yarns. Alliance members expressed no concerns with TGI storing the data on password-protected servers. They noted that there are no Torres Strait Islander people in the La Perouse Aboriginal community and that my aim to yarn with Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in South-East Sydney could be amended.

Throughout the PhD I updated the Alliance via e-mail. In mid-2024, after completing data collection and data analysis, it was time to meet with the Alliance again. This second meeting was in September 2024, in person at Yarra Bay house, Dharawal Country. It was a major juncture in the project. Alliance members and I¹⁵ yarned about the main stories from the research for an hour and a half. Alliance members expressed great interest in the stories and 'findings' of the research, discussing each story at length. I carefully listened to

¹⁵ Lola Ryan was unwell on the day and unfortunately could not attend.

Alliance members' reactions to and reflections on the stories, with the aim to embed community priorities into the stories and discussion of the research. A key message from this meeting was that the Alliance wants to reduce housing distress and to facilitate safe homes for the La Perouse Aboriginal community. They said housing distress creates barriers to Aboriginal community members passing down cultural knowledge. Alliance members' priority is to meet the housing needs of future generations of Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse, including the need to live in La Perouse. This meeting was also an opportunity to revisit data sovereignty, and to discuss de-identification of the yarns with Aboriginal social housing tenants. The Alliance re-iterated their support for TGI storing the data. They expressed wanting to see drafts of thesis chapters that directly relate to the La Perouse Aboriginal community, to ensure de-identification of community members and for the community to be described appropriately. The group invited Lola and I to present the final findings of the research to the Alliance in 2025. Everything shared with me during this meeting was carefully listened to, considered and embedded into the narrative of the research story, as the local Aboriginal community controlling the research, and a continuation of data sovereignty principles.

Exploring the literature

Conversations with people in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure, and reflexive journalling led me to the next stage of developing research questions: exploring the literature. In my reading in 2021 and 2022 about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, service delivery and social housing in Australia, I identified that the housing literature does not provide clarity on what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants would like in housing. The literature was often written from a social housing provider perspective, with positive outcomes being 'sustainable tenancy', prevention of eviction and homelessness, reduced rental arrears, and improved living conditions through repairs and maintenance (Flatau, Cooper et al. 2005, Habibis, Phillips et al. 2015, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). This discourse did not account for the ontologically unique way First Nations peoples might understand home (Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020, Bowra and Mashford-Pringle 2021). I returned to Lola, Lee and my supervisors with the notion that while we wish to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants by embedding cultural safety into social housing service delivery, we required further information about what tenants wanted and needed. Community members agreed to explore what they want and need in housing from an Aboriginal social housing tenant perspective. It was also noted it would be useful to

understand how stakeholders supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants perceive their priorities. The team recognised the importance of grounding the study in what is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in South-East Sydney.

Research questions

The scoping and guidance led to two of three PhD questions and aims:

1. What does home mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
2. What are the meanings of home and priorities and needs of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander¹⁶ social housing tenants living in urban NSW, specifically in South-East Sydney, from the perspective of tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers?

Aboriginal community members and tenants voiced that the pathways to meet their housing needs within the social housing system were complicated and confusing. Thus, the PhD additionally aimed to develop a tailored housing resource to attempt to address this issue and ensure tangible benefit to the community, reflected in a third aim:

3. To develop a housing resource that facilitates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's wants and needs in housing and home.

The rationale to focus a study with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Members of the governance structure and I additionally discussed whether the research should focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or be a comparative study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal people. As a non-Aboriginal person, I felt uncomfortable focusing my PhD on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I strongly believe in the ethical and political importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as lead researchers in studies that directly impact their lives, as part of the political movement for self-determination. I was concerned that being an outsider researcher and my Western worldview would be a hindrance to meaningful, beneficial research. I asked members of the governance structure whether it would be appropriate for me to conduct a PhD that focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in social housing. The responses were positive, and I was explicitly invited to conduct research with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Based on these

¹⁶ While the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance noted that there would be no Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants living in the South-East Sydney area, the research included Torres Strait Islander people in eligibility criteria, in case Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants did present themselves as interested in participating.

conversations, I solely focused the project on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants.

This approach was considered a strength, allowing a true centring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experiences, worldviews, cultures and ontologies, as well as an acknowledgement of the unique experiences of dispossession, dehumanization and displacement in the context of colonisation. Had the project explored Aboriginal *and* non-Aboriginal people's experiences of social housing, the unique meanings and quality of experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be lost, and potentially lead to deficit narratives, as is common with comparative studies of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups (Wilson 2008, Walter and Suina 2019).

Ethical and external approval

Ethics applications were submitted to the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales (AH&MRC) and to South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, and approved in 2022. The research followed principles and ways of working outlined in the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2020), AH&MRC Ethical Guidelines: Key Principles (2020) V2.0 (Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW 2020) and the NHMRC Keeping Research on Track II guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018). Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR) requires for external parties interested in accessing DCJ staff for the purposes of research to form a Research Agreement between DCJ and the external party, thus, a Research Agreement was formalised in June 2023 between DCJ and TGI.

Data sovereignty, data storage and management

Control over Indigenous data by Indigenous people is pertinent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research. As per data sovereignty principles, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to exercise control over their data (Lowitja Institute 2024). It should be contextualised and disaggregated appropriately and accessible at individual, community and national levels. It should be relevant and uphold self-determination. There should be mechanisms to ensure data respects individual and collective interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and data structures should be accountable (Lowitja Institute 2024).

My project produced Indigenous data. Indigenous data is defined as any data “that [are] about Indigenous people and that impacts Indigenous lives at the collective and/or individual level” (Lowitja Institute 2024). The data produced by this project include consent forms with people’s names, e-mails, addresses, and signatures, audio recordings of yarns and interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members speaking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s lives, transcripts containing the content from audio recordings, meeting notes with supervisors, my reflexive journal, recordings of myself reflecting after yarns and interviews, and all documents relating to ethics submissions and approvals.

As my project included and produced Indigenous data, I have a responsibility, alongside my supervisors, to appropriately manage data collection, data storage, and produce any necessary agreements with Aboriginal people who have rights over the intellectual and cultural property created in the research process.

Lola and I met with the Alliance to discuss the project and needs around data control. The Alliance was supportive of data arising from this project being stored on a password-protected server at TGI (Alliance meeting, 7 August 2024). Data were additionally stored and managed beyond the password-protected server, with paper versions of consent forms stored in locked cupboards at TGI. Access to TGI requires a swipe card. Data are being kept for 7 years after completion of the PhD project, after which it will be destroyed.

The research design and methods

The research involved three phases applying multiple methods, see Figure 4.

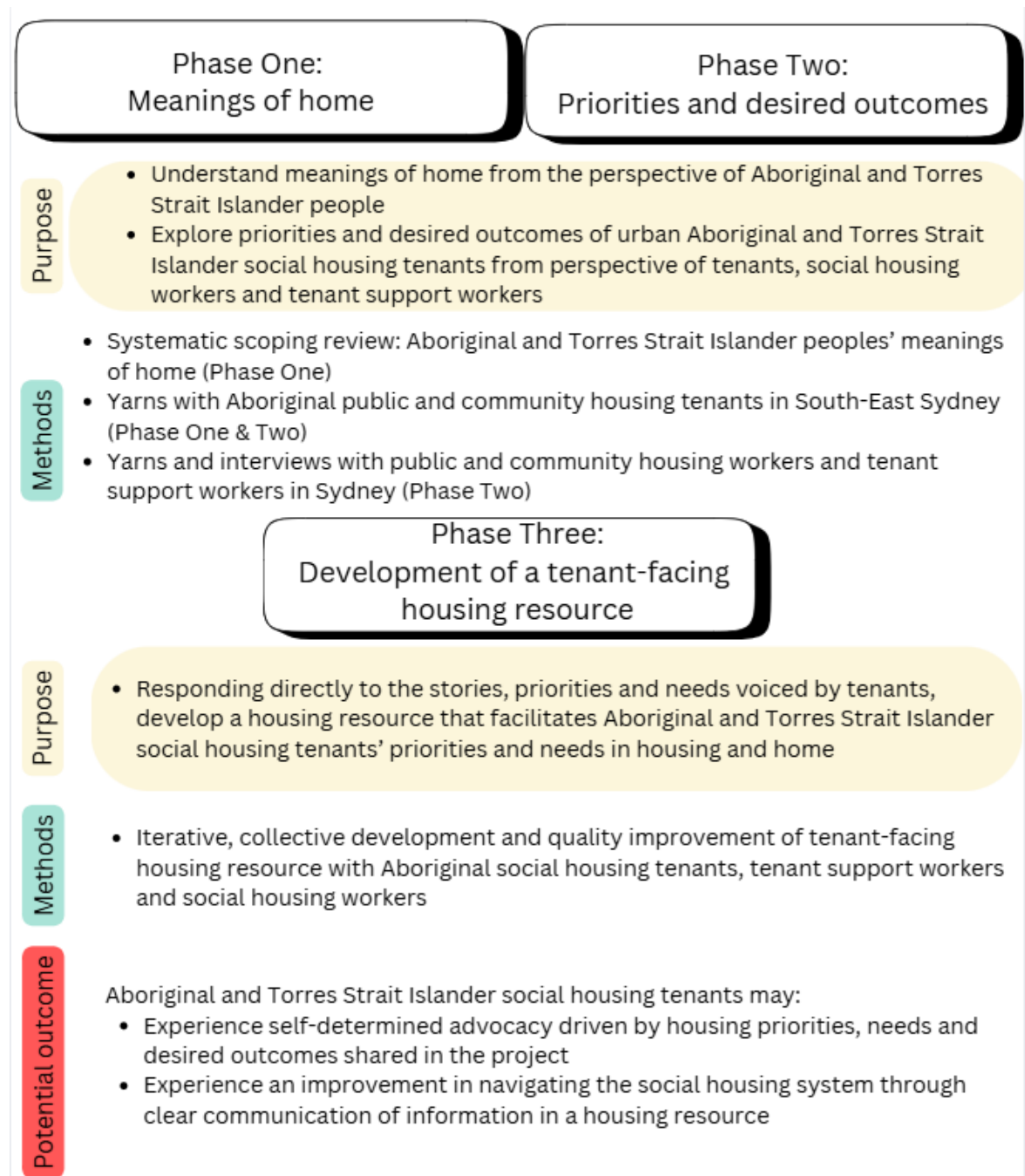


Figure 4 The research design

Phase One: Meanings of home

Systematic scoping review

A systematic scoping review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home was conducted to ground the thesis (see Chapter 3).

Yarns with tenants about meanings of home: Eligibility, recruitment strategy and reimbursement

I used yarnning as a method of understanding meanings of home with Aboriginal social housing tenants. Inclusion criteria for social housing tenants were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, current social housing tenants aged 18 years of age or older, and people willing to give written informed consent and willing to participate. There were no exclusion criteria in terms of location, however as the study was guided heavily by Aboriginal Health Workers connected to La Perouse, it was expected that this group would largely be tenants living in South-East Sydney. Aboriginal people living in Aboriginal Land Council housing at La Perouse were excluded because this study focuses on mainstream social housing providers rather than Aboriginal-specific providers. Tenants living in Aboriginal Housing Office properties were included because these properties are managed by mainstream housing providers.

Purposive and snowball recruitment of tenants was led by Aboriginal Health Workers Lola Ryan and Charmaine Moran and supported by activities at the Health Centre. Lola and Charmaine identified potential members and organised a time for them to meet with me and/or Lola for a yarn at the Health Centre. Lola and I held a free community barbecue at the Health Centre in February 2023 to raise awareness about the study in the local community. Throughout the study, Lola, Charmaine and I attended the Ngala Nanga Mai (We Dream) pARent Program, sharing information about the study, inviting participation. A poster about the study was pinned to the notice board at the Health Centre, inviting people to contact me directly. Tenants were reimbursed \$40 for their time and sharing of story, in the form of an Eftpos gift card.

Yarns with social housing tenants: Consent process and data collection

Consent with the tenant group was an ongoing process. Members of this group had limited experience with research, with most having never participated in research before. As such, consent was treated sensitively and carefully and was an ongoing process of trust- and relationship-building. Lola, Charmaine and I discussed the study with potential people in advance. Lola and Charmaine spoke to people first, particularly those with whom they

have pre-existing relationships. Once they expressed interest in being part of the study, we organised a time for Lola and I to meet with them. Occasionally, I approached people who I met at the Health Centre and talked broadly about the study. In a second or third meeting I would invite them to the study if they were interested. At the time of yarning, I gauged what tenants' understanding of the research project was and again gauged their interest in participating. These were often long discussions about what research is, the purpose of research and what happens to information after the yarn. Once it was clear they understood the research project and showed a desire to be a part of it, they signed a consent form in person, see Appendix 1. I engaged in an ongoing conversation about consent with tenants at every touch point – checking of transcripts, sharing of draft chapters that included data from our yarns and discussing de-identification.

Lola and I provided a comfortable, quiet space at the Health Centre for the yarns. We provided snacks, tea and water. Lola led the initial yarns, and as the project progressed I yarned with people who I'd met several times at the Health Centre, without Lola present. As a community Elder, Lola leading the initial yarns was an important choice grounded in the relational nature of Indigenous ways of knowing (Kennedy, Maddox et al. 2022). Yarning research quality is supported by some pre-existing relationship and trust formed between people (Atkinson, Baird et al. 2021). Lola's leading of the first yarns was both a way for Aboriginal tenants and community members to truly be heard by a community Elder and for Lola to introduce me and support my building of relationship with the community. Lola and I used a yarning guide in group yarns of more than 3 people, see Figure 5.

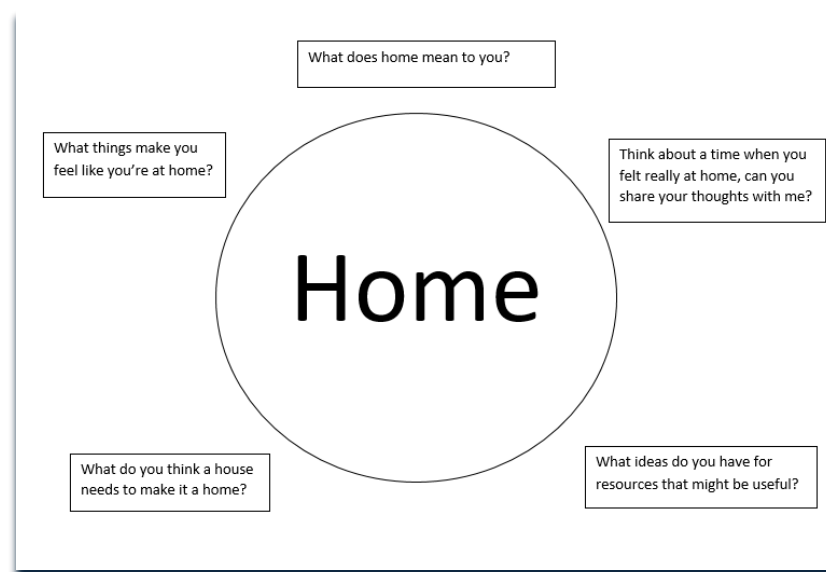


Figure 5 Yarning guide

The guide was an indication of what tenants may like to talk about and honoured the flow of yarns. I also used yarning with tenant support workers and social housing workers when it was considered appropriate, guided by an intuitive feeling of when to be more relaxed and when to move into a semi-structured interview style.

Phase Two: Priorities and needs in housing

Phase Two explored the priorities and needs in housing from the perspective of Aboriginal social housing tenants, social housing workers and tenant support workers, and applied multi-methods of yarning and semi-structured interviews across groups.

Yarns with tenants about needs in housing

Yarning was used to understand housing priorities and needs of Aboriginal social housing tenants. The same tenants in Phase One were part of Phase Two, with yarns about meanings of home and priorities and needs occurring in the one yarn, rather than split into two yarns. Yarns would often begin by talking about meanings of home and flowed naturally into yarning about housing priorities and needs.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a Western qualitative research method rooted in Western social sciences and educational evaluation (Tesch 2013). Interviews involve open-ended questioning between researchers and participants to understand a topic (Tesch 2013). The aim of semi-structured interviews is to systematically discover information, often through a direct line of inquiry and are supported by a semi-structured interview guide (Jamshed 2014). Their application is diverse, with some more rigid in structure than others, and some researchers aiming for objectivity and others acknowledging their subjectivity. Alongside yarning, a semi-structured interview method was used with social housing and tenant support workers, as there were specific questions that needed to be answered.

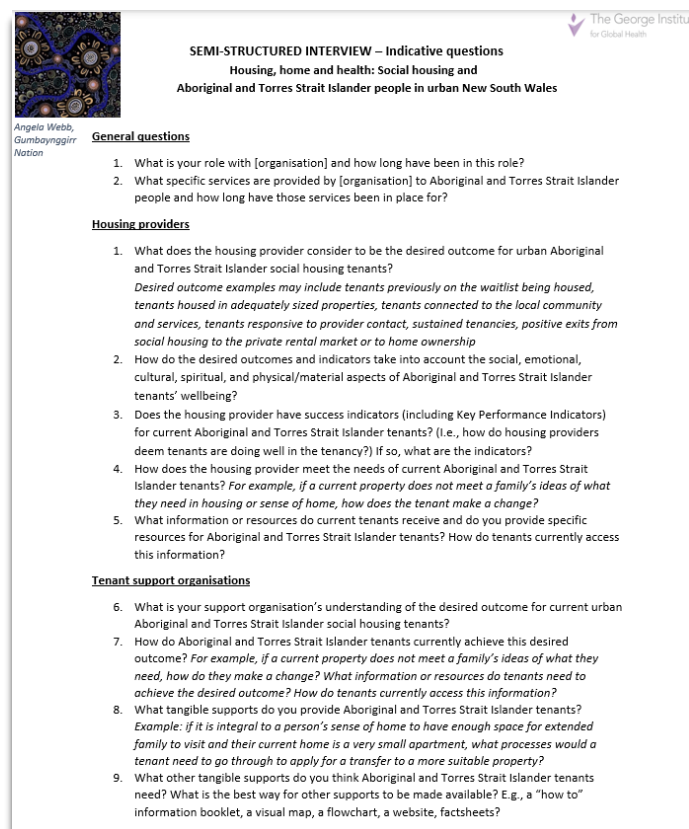
Yarns and interviews with social housing workers: Eligibility and recruitment strategy

Inclusion criteria for social housing workers were people employed at a mainstream social housing provider in Greater Sydney, aged 18 years or older, willing to give written informed consent and to participate and comply with the study. Workers of public housing and mainstream community housing providers, and the Aboriginal Housing Office, were included. The study was designed to elicit responses from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal social housing workers whose remit is to develop policies that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

Members of DCJ and the AHO were recruited through FACSIAR channels within DCJ. After the formalisation of the Research Agreement between DCJ and TGI, FACSIAR staff liaised with their staff internally and invited participation. I was provided a list of a dozen staff names and emails nominated by DCJ and invited to contact them and encouraged to ask them for further contacts within DCJ, typical of snowball sampling. I ensured anonymity of workers by not disclosing the names of other workers I had previously contacted. CHP members were recruited by contacting CHPs in South-East Sydney, by phone and e-mail.

Yarns and interviews with tenant support workers: Eligibility and recruitment strategy

Inclusion criteria for tenant support workers were people employed at tenant advocacy, legal services or social services in Greater Sydney, aged 18 years or older, willing to give written informed consent and to participate and comply with the study. Members of this group were approached by phone and e-mail. Social services that supported tenants in South-East Sydney were particularly targeted for recruitment, as well as tenant advocacy services working locally, and in the Greater Sydney area. Interviews with workers were supported by a semi-structured interview guide, see Figure 6.



SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW – Indicative questions
Housing, home and health: Social housing and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales

General questions

1. What is your role [organisation] and how long have been in this role?
2. What specific services are provided by [organisation] to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how long have those services been in place for?

Housing providers

1. What does the housing provider consider to be the desired outcome for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants?
Desired outcome examples may include tenants previously on the waitlist being housed, tenants housed in adequately sized properties, tenants connected to the local community and services, tenants responsive to provider contact, sustained tenancies, positive exits from social housing to the private rental market or to home ownership
2. How do the desired outcomes and indicators take into account the social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and physical/material aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' wellbeing?
3. Does the housing provider have success indicators (including Key Performance Indicators) for current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants? (I.e., how do housing providers deem tenants are doing well in the tenancy?) If so, what are the indicators?
4. How does the housing provider meet the needs of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants? *For example, if a current property does not meet a family's ideas of what they need in housing or sense of home, how does the tenant make a change?*
5. What information or resources do current tenants receive and do you provide specific resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants? How do tenants currently access this information?

Tenant support organisations

6. What is your support organisation's understanding of the desired outcome for current urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants?
7. How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants currently achieve this desired outcome? *For example, if a current property does not meet a family's ideas of what they need, how do they make a change? What information or resources do tenants need to achieve the desired outcome? How do tenants currently access this information?*
8. What tangible supports do you provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants?
Example: if it is integral to a person's sense of home to have enough space for extended family to visit and their current home is a very small apartment, what processes would a tenant need to go through to apply for a transfer to a more suitable property?
9. What other tangible supports do you think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants need? What is the best way for other supports to be made available? E.g., a "how to" information booklet, a visual map, a flowchart, a website, factsheets?

Figure 6 Semi-structured interview guide

Consent process and data collection with social housing and tenant support workers

For social housing workers and tenant support workers, I discussed the aims of the study prior to each yarn and interview and provided details about their right to withdraw at any time. Members then signed a consent form, either sent online via e-mail prior to the yarn or interview, or in person at the time of data collection. Members could withdraw from the study using the consent form.

All interviews and yarns were audio recorded. Recordings were transcribed by an independent external third party. I de-identified all transcripts and returned them to each member via e-mail or printing out and handing to them in person. This allowed the redaction of identifiable information and ensure accuracy of the transcript. All members were sent draft thesis chapters that included quotes from yarns and interviews. They were asked to indicate whether the story of the thesis, particularly in sections that included their voices, aligned with their experiences. In this process they suggested changes and provided additional input. At the culmination of the project, all members will be sent a summary of the thesis in an appropriate format. For example, Aboriginal social housing tenants will be provided a verbal and written summary at a community barbecue, while others will be sent an e-mail summary.

Data collection at the interface of worldviews: yarning and semi-structured interviews

Yarning is a culturally appropriate way of creating, sharing and maintaining knowledge among and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010). While yarning is often categorised as a method within qualitative health research because the data is made up of words rather than numbers (Geia, Hayes et al. 2013, Lin, Green et al. 2016, Byrne, McLellan et al. 2021, Kennedy, Maddox et al. 2022), it is also understood as a method distinct from Western qualitative research and ways of knowing (Coombes 2020). As Coombes states in her doctoral thesis, yarning “is very different from Western models of narrative inquiry” (Coombes 2020). Semi-structured interviews are distinct from yarning as a data collection method; they are more rigid, with less emphasis on relationship building and aim to discover information based on pre-determined questions (Tesch 2013).

I used both yarning and semi-structured interviews in data collection with social housing and tenant support workers, whether they were Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. This was

applied organically and intuitively. Prior to each interview or yarn, I did not know which method would naturally emerge, or whether both would emerge fluidly throughout the data collection process. I allowed for the emergence of whichever 'mode' felt right, leading me to enter a state of openness, known as the 'third space' (Chilisa 2012). In some instances, yarning was organically appropriate, notably with Aboriginal members who explicitly noted prior to meeting that they had time to meet for longer than the allotted time. Some members, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, indicated they had contained, time-bound one-hour meetings to speak with me, which facilitated the appropriateness of a semi-structured interview approach where many questions were asked in a traditionally Western, deductive approach. In some cases, I intuitively felt whether to take one approach or another, and in some instances the feel of the conversation moved from a semi-structured interview method towards yarning as we became more familiar with each other. This familiarity was aided by building trust quickly through declaring my positionality as a non-Aboriginal person within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, the description of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure of my project and me disclosing the relationship I have to the Aboriginal community at La Perouse. This approach to data collection was research at the interface in action. It was fluid and produced a hybrid method where two knowledge systems existed side by side, in and out, flowing between one and another. For this reason, the terms 'yarn and interview' are the preferred dual terms used in this thesis, reflecting the reality of the fluid data collection approach.

I approached data collection with Aboriginal social housing tenants differently to other members. The research design was set up for yarning to be the method of understanding Aboriginal tenants' meanings of home and priorities and needs in housing. When talking with Aboriginal tenants, I always began by yarning. To me, this meant being casual, relaxed and open, being myself, dressing casually when visiting the Health Centre, offering a cup of tea and asking people about their day. I relaxed into a dynamic where I was vulnerable with what I shared as part of shifting the power dynamic between us. I was careful with how much space I took up, my body language and how I was sitting. Everything I did during these visits for yarns with tenants was about shifting power away from myself and being a human being in relation with another human being. Yarning alongside Lola as a respected community leader with whom I have a strong relationship also supported a relaxed dynamic. The aim of using this method was to hear knowledge in a culturally appropriate

way, with Aboriginal tenants more likely to be comfortable to share what home meant to them and what they'd like in housing using yarning rather than interviewing.

Collecting data using these two methods, at the interface of worldviews, produced new knowledge, that of the third space. This new knowledge was developed through a process of moving between worldviews, seeing things from one perspective when appropriate, and then another perspective when suitable (Bartlett, Marshall et al. 2012, Ryder, Mackean et al. 2020).

Storying: Data analysis at the interface of worldviews

Analysis began during the data collection process. I practiced reflexive journalling from the first yarn. This involved writing or recording myself directly after each interview or yarn. I noted my mood, any major revelations and surprises, and impressions of the dynamic between myself and the members, particularly with regards to power, gender, race, class and age. Once all data collection was completed, I coded transcripts manually in Microsoft Word, writing comments in the document while listening to the audio. While I am familiar with NVivo as a tool that supports coding, I preferred a manual approach to create a more natural flow, connection to the data, and honouring the stories. This approach allowed for large sections of text to be coded and treated appropriately rather than categorising sentences within transcripts. Each comment within the transcript Word document was added to a 'Summary' document, for ease of seeing the 'birds eye view' of the data.

The next step began the collective and circular process of storying the data. Four members of the Guunu-maana (Heal) Program - two Aboriginal people, one Torres Strait Islander person and one non-Aboriginal person - and I listened to the audio from the yarns and interviews. Together we discussed what we heard and what struck us the most. As we listened to audio of the interviews or yarns together, pausing to discuss impressions, I took notes and shared my own reflections. Collective listening with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues ensured I was hearing the audio from the standpoint of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Themes began to emerge throughout this analytic process and a theme list was developed and built upon through discussions with the supervisory team and the Guunu-maana (Heal) team. After development of these broad themes, I came back to story as the central unit of analysis and began to draft stories based on the multiple voices and positionality of the members. The stories present in this thesis are thus not told through the sole standpoint of myself nor of single members. They reflect a

collective and fluid process of interfacing and integrating different stories and knowledges, honouring First Nations lived realities, standpoint, voices, multiplicity of truth and relationality. The storying process was circular, with each step and story building on another, creating more and more layered stories. The effect of this process is the creation of new understandings and knowledges. It is a direct application of third space methodology, whereby different knowledge systems come together to develop new knowledge (Durie 2004).

The stories from the data were story-checked with the members to ensure rigor and adherence to members' own truth. Story-checking involved sending early and final drafts of relevant chapters to members via e-mail and a follow-up call, with the sections of the text that were directly attributed to them highlighted in colour. All members were given a pseudonym to protect anonymity. Members were asked whether they believed the story told in their chapter reflected what they had said, with particular focus on the quotes attributed to them. It was also an opportunity to ask members whether they were comfortable with how they were described, if their pseudonym was appropriate and ensure any potentially identifiable information was deleted or amended. This process spanned three months across the member groups. Every effort was made to contact members, however in some instances it was not possible, as they had moved on from their roles and an alternate contact could not be retrieved.

Early drafts of thesis chapters were circulated to the Alliance. As part of the Research Agreement between DCJ and TGI, the final thesis draft was circulated to FACSIAR to ensure accurate representation of DCJ's policies and procedures as well as deidentification.

Phase Three: Development of a tenant-facing housing resource

Phase Three was designed to directly respond to the findings in Phases One and Two. It involved the development of a housing resource to facilitate the meeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' housing needs by clarifying support pathways and social housing system processes. Yarns and interviews involved conversations about support pathways - e.g., tenant advocacy and repairs processes - available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and gauged tenants' knowledge of those pathways. It involved discussing ideas for a housing resource and further supports. The housing information resource developed as part of this PhD includes five information pamphlets (see Chapter 8), and the pamphlets can be found in Appendix 2: The housing information resources.

Chapter 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home: a systematic scoping review

This chapter is the foundational piece to the thesis, providing key evidence on meanings of home to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a systematic scoping review. It foregrounds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home and provides the background to divergences in Indigenous and Western scholarship on home. This is the first systematic scoping review to evidence meanings of home drawn directly from the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is methodologically innovative, using the Western method of a systematic scoping review alongside centring of Indigenous worldviews and data analysis conducted in an iterative cycle, collectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and within an Indigenous research paradigm and governance structure, thus applying interface methodology. It was published in *Housing Studies* in September 2024. Please note the spelling in this chapter is American, according to *Housing Studies*' journal style.

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Abstract

Meanings of home differ across cultures, ontologies, and geographies. Housing literature predominantly applies a Western worldview to home, with home meaning a dwelling and a site of belonging, economic value and social reproduction. First Peoples' meanings of home are largely rendered invisible and undervalued within this discourse. A systematic scoping review explored meanings of home from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. Applying Indigenous research methodology, only records that privileged the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were

included. A non-Aboriginal researcher was guided by the knowledges and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to develop a culturally appropriate overview on home. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home are relational. Home is about relationships to family, community, culture, Country, spirituality, and a sense of ontological belonging and safety. This review expands the housing studies mindset on home, centring First Peoples' meanings of home within an Indigenous framing and methodology.

Keywords

Home; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; meanings of home; social and emotional wellbeing

Abbreviations

ACT - Australian Capital Territory; CASP - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme; NGO - Non-government organisation; NSW - New South Wales; NT - Northern Territory; QLD - Queensland; SA - South Australia; SAAP - Supported Accommodation Assistance Program; SEWB - Social and emotional wellbeing; WA - Western Australia

Introduction

Meanings of home are not universal nor are they static (Meers 2023). Home is societally and contextually constructed, subject to differences in worldview, gender, age, class and cultural background (Saunders and Williams 1988, Veness 1993, Dupuis and Thorns 1998, Easthope 2004, Parsell 2012, Meers 2023). An understanding of what home means provides the ideological and ontological backdrop to numerous fields of research (Heywood 2005, Lashewicz, Noshin et al. 2021, Pohl, Genz et al. 2022). These explorations of home are beneficial to understand the relationship between individuals, communities, place, environment and society (Blunt 2006). However, theoretical debate and empirical research exploring home has primarily been from the lens of people from the settler-colonial countries of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the USA, the colonizing country of Britain and European nations (hereafter we use the term 'Western' to indicate these states), limiting the understanding of home among groups who hold non-Western worldviews, such as First Peoples of settler-colonial countries.

Recognizing that there is not one single universal Western perspective on home, it is nevertheless important to consider how meanings of home have been narrated in the Western literature. Similarly, First People's perspectives on home are not universal, as

First Peoples are not one homogenous group. However there are key divergences from the Western perspective on home, based on the literature. From a Western perspective, home has been described in a multitude of ways that underlie its importance as a socio-spatial place. Home is a physical shelter for people to live in, historically depicted as a dwelling for the heterosexual, nuclear family unit in a suburban area (Blunt 2006, Cook, Davison et al. 2016, Merriam-Webster 2022), as well as ‘an idea and an imaginary imbued with feelings... a spatial imaginary’ (Blunt 2006). Rich debate building on Western philosophical theories of people’s attachment to place explored by Heidegger (1971) and Bourdieu (1979), emphasize the social - including class and gender relations – and emotional as integral to home. Home has been explored as a site where social relations and institutions are reproduced (Giddens 1984), and the coming together of physical housing and the social unit of the household as a social-spatial system and site of ontological security (Saunders and Williams 1988, Somerville 1992). Scholars of geography, psychology and housing studies have debated meanings of home as a feeling, sense of belonging and social emplacement, with the physical dwelling as the place where these feelings, belongings and social dynamics are generally emplaced (Mallett 2004).

First People’s meanings of home are imbued with connection to land and place, culturally-specific ontologies, knowledges, histories and practices that tie people to land.

Underpinning First People’s knowledge systems is the inseparability between people and land that is intrinsic to cultural identity and belonging. Māori people of Aotearoa describe themselves as *tangata whenua* or ‘people of the land’, with caring for land an integral part of home and belonging (Hay 1998, Stats NZ 2021). In Australia, the term Country describes the lands, waterways and skies that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are connected to, and the energy, knowledges, life-giving force, and familial, cultural, spiritual and ancestral ties that relate to being on Country (Taylor-Bragge, Whyman et al. 2021, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2022). Relationship to Country comes from the Dreaming, which is an understanding of how life originally came to be, forming the rules of how to relate with Country and knowledge systems (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Country is everywhere; relationship to Country is not an experience solely of First Nations people who live in rural, regional or remote communities, it is also experienced by those who live on Country in urban areas and major centres in Australia (Behrendt 2006). Colonization has had a profoundly detrimental and demoralizing impact on First Peoples’ connection to Country, shaping what home means (Moreton-Robinson 2015, McGuire and Murdoch 2022). First Peoples’ have been continually excluded from

Country and property rights in settler-colonial states to the benefit of White people (Norris and Nandedkar 2022). In Australia, racist colonial legislation, policies and practices have forcibly separated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from Country and moved to reserves, missions and stations. Child removal from families and communities, known as the Stolen Generations, dislocated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from home (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). The Policy of Assimilation (1961) imposed British settler's norms through housing, employment and welfare to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into 'the same manner of living as other Australians' (Commonwealth Government 1961). Similarly, in Canada, assimilationist policies led to First Nations children being removed from their families and placed in residential schools in the 1940s, and with non-Indigenous families from the 1960s in what is known as the Sixties Scoop (McKenzie, Varcoe et al. 2016). For Inuvik people of Yellowknife, Canada, the context of settler colonialism informs what home means, with home as not necessarily a house, but the security provided from living independently of the colonial state and leading a way of life on one's land according to cultural traditions (Christensen 2013).

Internationally, there has been some explicit exploration in the literature into First Peoples' meanings of home – for example, scholars in Canada researching the connection between First Peoples' meanings of home and wellbeing (Christensen 2013, Bowra and Mashford-Pringle 2021) and one study in Australia about Jerrinja people's relational meanings of home (Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020). Two of these three studies provide a rich exploration of home from the perspective of three groups of First Nations people – Indigenous people of Inuvik and Yellowknife, Canada, and Jerrinja people, Australia. A systematic scoping review was undertaken to explore any further available evidence pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home and identify the types of evidence available in Australia. It was conducted at the interface of two worldviews, Indigenous worldviews and Western worldviews – interface methodology – harnessing the strength of Indigenous and Western methods and methodologies of research to develop new knowledge, with neither system of knowledge considered superior over the other (Durie 2004). We followed a Western systematic scoping review process, a Western method of research, and conducted the review within an Indigenous research paradigm and Indigenous governance structure (Wilson 2008, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW 2020). Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ontologies and lived experience through an Indigenous research paradigm expands the narrative on home with and for First Peoples in Australia. Given the similarities between First Peoples'

experiences of ongoing colonization in other settler-colonial states, this review is of benefit to First People's globally. The review was undertaken as part of a broader research project exploring the meanings of home for, and priorities and needs of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants on Dharawal and Bidiagal Country (South-East Sydney), with the aim to respectfully learn from this knowledge to develop resources for, and with, tenants.

Materials and methods

A systematic scoping review was deemed an appropriate method, as the objectives and review questions are broad, the review aims to map information relating to a concept, i.e., in this case, the concept of home, and provides an overview of evidence that is heterogenous in both method and discipline (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, Tricco, Lillie et al. 2018). This review applies interface methodology, using the strengths of Western and Indigenous research methods and worldviews (Durie 2005). Indigenous worldviews, and thus ways of knowing, being and doing, are grounded in relationships, emphasizing a way of seeing that is holistic and relational and a belief in multiple truths (Wilson 2008). Western worldviews, particularly in Western sciences, emphasize objectivity and positivism, aiming to capture a singular truth, and is a way of knowing that dominates research institutions worldwide (Smith 1999). Western social sciences have moved away from objectivism and towards subjectivism, through an interpretivist research paradigm, for example. However interpretivism is distinct from Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous and Western ways of knowing are weaved throughout this review, producing new knowledge by bringing together the strengths of both knowledge systems as per interface methodology (Durie 2005). In terms of Western ways of knowing, this review was conducted in the traditional Western method of a systematic scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley 2005), and it was led by a non-Aboriginal researcher. Indigenous ways of knowing were applied to the review by grounding it within an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson 2008). This means it was situated within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure, the team acknowledged ongoing colonization, actively privileged First People's lived experiences and worldviews, took a strengths-based approach, appropriately positioned the lead author, and data analysis occurred in a cyclical, iterative and collective cycle of with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Smith 1999, Wilson 2008, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW 2020). The review was conducted within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure that

underpins the broader research project. Three Dharawal and Bidiagal community members with lived experience as social housing tenants guide the overall project and are in control of decisions relating to the research, including idea generation, question development, and ways of working in a culturally appropriate and beneficial way (Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW 2020). The non-Aboriginal first author and the three Dharawal and Bidiagal community members have a strong relationship built through trust, listening and respect for one another, a relational way of working that facilitates genuine partnership and community engagement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers within the Guunu-maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program at The George Institute for Global Health, Aboriginal supervisors (JC & TM) and cultural mentors provide additional guidance. The governance structure is the backbone for how the broader research project and this scoping review are conducted. Scoping review questions were developed under the direction of three Dharawal and Bidiagal community members (LR, MM and LT). Exploring meanings of home was considered a foundational element to the broader research project and aligned with community priorities, namely improved housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban Sydney (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2020). Question development was also supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers (JC, TM, BP and AT) and a non-Aboriginal researcher (KH).

An Indigenous research paradigm is crucial grounding for a study relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as colonization facilitates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia to be ‘researched on’ by non-Aboriginal people, causing harm through ongoing disempowerment and deficit-based representations and narratives (Sherwood 2010, Geia, Hayes et al. 2013). The authors of this review acknowledge the negative impacts of the continual colonization of Australia and purposefully designed the research to counteract colonial narratives. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ lived experiences, ways of knowing, voices and knowledges are privileged (Smith 1999, Wilson 2008) and the review is purposefully strengths-based (Geia, Hayes et al. 2013, Fogarty, Bulloch et al. 2018).

The review applies Indigenous standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson 2013) and reflexivity (Etherington 2004). The lead author (JA) is a non-Aboriginal queer, non-binary trans person who acknowledges their socially, culturally and politically privileged standpoint as a

White, Eastern European settler living on Gadigal Country, Sydney (Moreton-Robinson 2013). Throughout the research process JA engaged in reflexivity, keeping a journal to note how their standpoint as a White settler with a Western upbringing impacted the search strategy, record selection, data extraction, interpretation of data and analysis, quality assessment and write-up, and discussed their reflections in bimonthly yarns with senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal researchers to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's views were centred (Jootun, McGhee et al. 2009, Meers 2023).

The review purposefully privileged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices in its eligibility criteria, a choice made as the study was underpinned theoretically within an Indigenous research methodology and paradigm. Eligibility criteria were records that included information on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home, derived from the voices of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, and set in Australia in any urban, rural or remote location. Records were limited to those with direct firsthand quotes from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, were written by, or the information was clearly derived from, the voices of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. A flow on effect of the criteria was that yarning, storytelling and interviews would likely be the methods used. This also aligned with an Indigenous research methodology, as yarning and storytelling are Indigenous methods and methodologies that honour First People's ways of knowing (Archibald, Lee-Morgan et al. 2019). For example, yarning is a relaxed, informal conversation, a culturally appropriate way to pass on knowledge, and a learning process (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010, Geia, Hayes et al. 2013). Storytelling is also an Indigenous method used to gather knowledge organically, a way of knowing that aligns with Indigenous ontologies (Kovach 2009).

The search strategy was developed by all authors, and supported by a non-Aboriginal university librarian, see Table 1 Search Strategy. The search was conducted in seven databases; ProQuest, PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, Google (Advanced search), Australian Indigenous Health/*InfoNet* and The Lowitja Institute (Australia's national institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research). Search results from PubMed, Scopus and Proquest were imported into EndNote and screened in Covidence, a systematic review management website. The searches in Google Advanced and Google Scholar included "Aboriginal", "Torres Strait Islander" in the field 'All these words' and included the phrases "meaning of home", "notion of home", "idea of home" and "concept

of home”, in separate searches. The Australian Indigenous Health/*InfoNet* is a database that generates content on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. This search involved searching within ‘titles and abstracts’ and used the term “home*” in the field ‘contains some’.

ProQuest, PubMed and Scopus database results were imported to EndNote, and duplicates removed. The results of each separate Google search were copied to a spreadsheet and duplicates identified manually. The number of search results and removal of duplicates was documented methodically in a spreadsheet with the exception of results from Health/*InfoNet*. Due to the high volume of search results and limited capabilities of the Health/*InfoNet* search engine, only potentially eligible results were documented in a spreadsheet and duplicates were manually identified against the existing list of all search results. The search was restricted to texts published in the previous fifty-year period. Each Google Scholar and Google (Advanced search) search was limited to the first 20 pages.

Three researchers (JA, CK and AT) screened titles and abstracts, full texts, and extracted data from the final eligible records. The titles and abstracts, and full texts, of all search results were screened by JA, and a separate independent screen took place by a second researcher (CK and AT) on a random sample (10%) of results. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Any record type, research design or method was considered. Records were limited to the English language.

Data from the final records were extracted by JA, and a second researcher (CK) conducted data extraction of 10% of the records to ensure consistency. Disagreements were resolved through consensus. The final extracted data were coded in Nvivo version 12 and thematically analysed by the first author. Initial themes were discussed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers (JC, TM, BP, AT), and a non-Aboriginal researcher (KH).

All records were quality assessed. The purpose of quality assessment generally is to indicate the methodological rigor of papers included in a review. This allows for readers to situate the findings and ascertain their methodological strength. Quality assessment of all records ascertained the extent that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and ethics were applied to the included records. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Quality Appraisal Tool was used to assesses all records from an Indigenous perspective (Harfield, Pearson et al. 2020). Records on this topic were primarily conducted within a Western

research paradigm and thus it is particularly important to ascertain their strength according to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research principles. Records were quality assessed by three authors (JA, JC and AT). The tool requires researchers to answer fourteen questions, across topics of community consultation, Indigenous governance, leadership, respect for community protocols, two-way learning and benefit, with the option to answer 'Yes', 'No', 'Partially' or 'Unclear'. For this review, a 'Yes' response indicated explicit evidence, and 'No' indicated sufficient evidence that the record did not apply the related principles or actions. As there are varied interpretations of benefit, a 'Yes' response indicated explicit statement of benefit to communities, either as reimbursement of participants or a tangible outcome resulting from the research, or a statement was made about the research providing benefit.

Given that the data in this review relies heavily on the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generated from qualitative, Indigenous and multi methods research, journalism, NGO program work, and a government plan, it is crucial to assess methodological rigor to appropriately situate the findings of this review. Qualitative studies were assessed against the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Studies Checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme 2022), a tool endorsed by the Cochrane Qualitative and Implementation Methods Group (Long, French et al. 2020). The CASP checklist was only used to assess studies that explicitly applied qualitative methodologies. Mixed methods studies were assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal tool 2018 (Hong, Pluye et al. 2018). News articles and content produced by NGOs were considered separately.

Table 1 Search Strategy

1. <i>noft(Aborigin* OR "Torres Strait Island*" OR Indigen* OR "First Nations")</i>
2. <i>(noft(meaning* NEAR/2 home*) OR noft(concept* NEAR/2 home*) OR noft(idea* NEAR/2 home*) OR noft(perspective* NEAR/2 home*) OR noft(notion* NEAR/2 home*))</i>
3. 1 AND 2

Note: Table 1 shows the ProQuest search conducted 12 January 2022. Search strategies for remaining databases are the same or similar in structure and search terms.

Results

The search was conducted in January 2022. A total of 1710 results were generated. At title and abstract screening stage, 1,449 records were screened, and 1,408 were excluded. Forty-one (n = 41) records remained for full text screening. These 41 records were assessed for eligibility and 20 were excluded. Twenty-one (n=21) records met the inclusion criteria. See Figure 1 for the search flowchart.

Types of evidence

Of the 21 included records, there were eight reports, four research journal articles, two news articles, two theses, one article published on an NGO website, one book chapter, one essay published in a peer-reviewed journal, one government discussion paper, and one government housing action plan, see Table 2 for a full list of included records and their characteristics. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were the primary focus of 18 of 21 records. Fourteen of 21 records were developed for the purposes of research and ten were peer-reviewed. Qualitative and Indigenous methodologies and methods were mainly used across the records. One article used a household survey with quantitative and qualitative components, however only the qualitative data were used in this review. Direct quotes were available in 19 of 21 records. Of the two records that did not include quotes, one involved semi-structured discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about concepts of 'home' and 'homelessness', with authors reporting they 'endeavoured to report the information as heard without bias' (Commonwealth of Australia 2013). Another record provided a narrative summary of a household survey on home ownership on communal title lands in four Aboriginal community settlements in Queensland (Moran, Memmott et al. 2002).

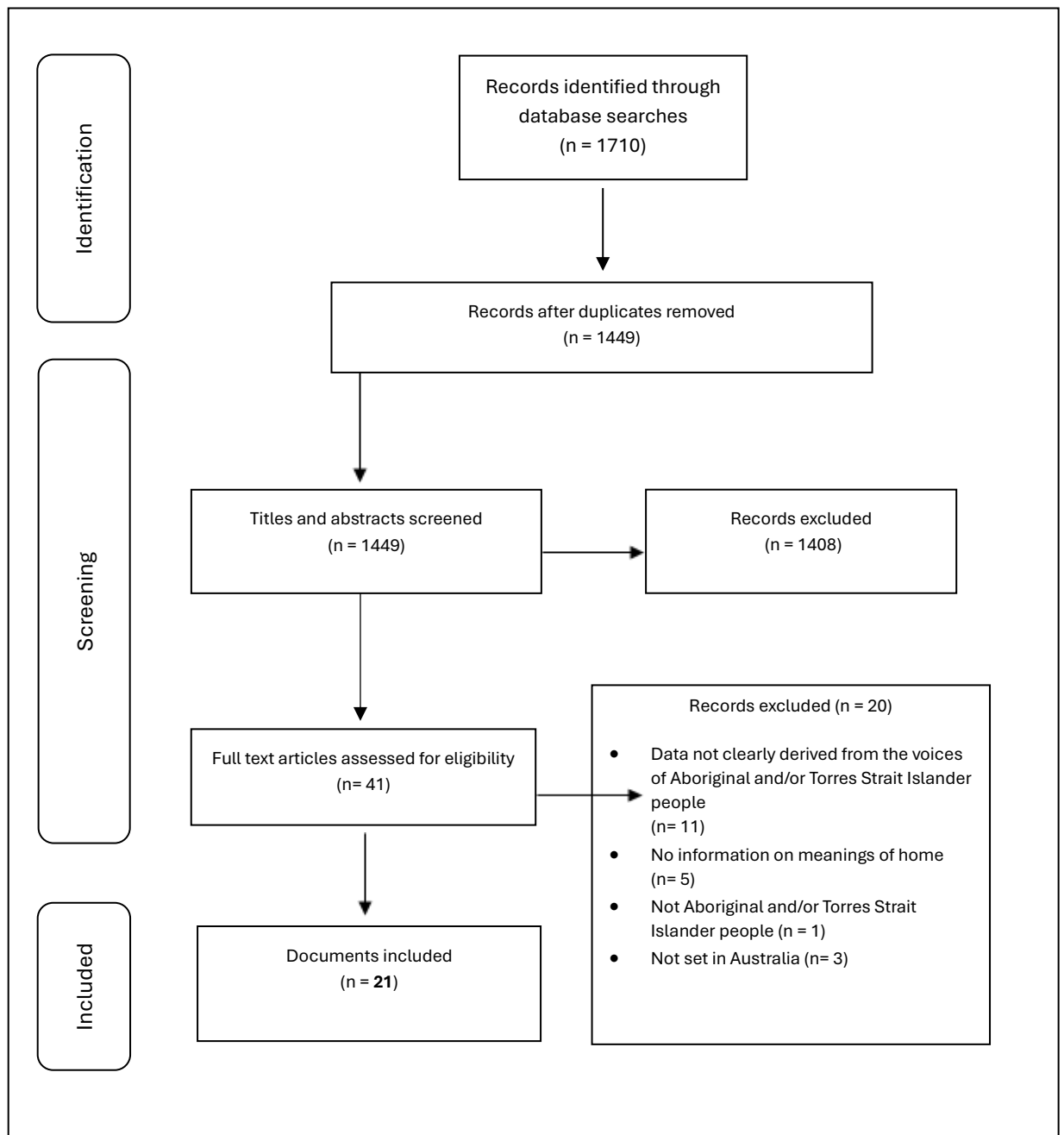


Figure 1. Search flowchart

Table 2. Included record characteristics

Author, Year	Title	Type of record	Peer-reviewed	Record developed for the purpose of research	Location; rural, remote or metropolitan	Aim	Are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people centred?	Method/s (as described in each record)	Sample size	Participants or sources of information
Anglicare Australia, 2017	The Meaning of Home State of the Family Report 2017	Report	No	No	NT; remote. WA; unspecified	Provide reflections and portraits from Anglicare network members across Australia	No	Public survey on the meaning of home and interviews	NA	A young man from Gunbalanya, Northern Territory, and a mother living in Western Australia
Behrendt, 2009	Home: The importance of place to the dispossessed	Essay published in journal	Yes	No	Unspecified	Personal reflections and analysis on the concept of home and place, and future implications for Australian government policy in relation to Aboriginal people	Yes	First-person account	NA	Kamilaroi and Yualawuy woman
Birdsall-Jones, 2008	The housing careers of Indigenous urban households	Report	Yes	Yes	Perth, Broome and Carnarvon WA; rural and metropolitan WA	An analysis of the Indigenous housing experience conceptualised as 'housing careers'	Yes	Ethnographic unstructured interviews	51	Indigenous Western Australians
Bryce, 2019	The Aboriginal women who fought homelessness and stereotypes to take control of their money	News article	No	No	Perth, Broome and Carnarvon WA; rural and metropolitan WA	Depict the story of one Aboriginal woman's journey from homelessness to home ownership	Yes	Interview for news	1	Ngoonooru-Wadjari woman
Clark, 2012	Beyond Political Ideology – The Mainstreaming of Aboriginal Public Housing Policy	Report	No	Yes	Adelaide and Southern Region SA; metropolitan and rural	Reignite discussion on the impacts of mainstreaming public housing policies and service delivery and illustrate that mainstreaming is a poor fit with evidence-based, culturally appropriate knowledge relating to Aboriginal housing needs and aspirations	Yes	Qualitative; Focus groups and interviews	800	Aboriginal people
Commonwealth of Australia, 2013	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Perspectives on Homelessness	Discussion Paper	No	Yes	NSW, NT, QLD	To understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's concepts of home and homelessness	Yes	Qualitative; Semi-structured discussions	Unspecified	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Cooper, 2005	Sustainable tenancy for Indigenous families	Report	No	Yes	Brisbane and Darwin and surrounds QLD; metropolitan and remote	To examine pathways into and between homelessness and sustainable tenancy	Yes	Qualitative; Semi-structured interviews	104	Indigenous women and their children in temporary housing, camps, or staying with family and friends
Greenop & Memmott, 2016	"We are good-hearted people, we like to share": Definitional dilemmas of crowding and homelessness in urban Indigenous Australia	Book chapter	Yes	Yes	Mount Isa and Inala, QLD; rural	To understand the factors determining crowding as an experience of stress in Indigenous communities	Yes	Qualitative; Interviews	351; 210 people in Mount Isa; 141 people in Inala	Indigenous household residents
Judd, 2004	Housing options and independent living: sustainable outcomes for older people who are homeless	Report	No	Yes	NSW, VIC, SA; metropolitan, rural	To understand older homeless people	No	Qualitative; Questionnaire survey (self-administered), and semi-structured interviews	114; 40 agency workers, 15 managers, 59 clients	Agency workers, managers and clients of the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) program, of which 7 were described as Indigenous
Keys Young, 1999	Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context and its possible implications for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)	Report	No	Yes	Sydney, NSW, Townsville, QLD, Alice Springs, NT, Kununurra and Wyndham, WA, Brisbane and Normanton, QLD; metropolitan, rural and remote	To identify the cultural context of homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	Yes	Qualitative; In-depth semi-structured interviews	Unspecified	A total of 120 agencies (Indigenous community organisations, Indigenous service providers and policy-makers in health, welfare, housing and accommodation, services funded by SAAP, and homeless people)
Knox, 2006	Designing and developing Aboriginal service organisations: a journey of consciousness	Thesis (PhD)	Yes	Yes	Mount Druitt, Sydney, NSW; metropolitan	To explore how a service for homeless Aboriginal youth should be designed and developed	Yes	Qualitative; Group interviews	33	Aboriginal young people aged 16-20 living in Mount Druitt, NSW
Lowell, 2018	The 'invisible homeless' - challenges faced by families bringing up their children in a remote Australian Aboriginal community	Research article	Yes	Yes	NT; remote (described as 500kms from nearest city)	To explore the strengths and challenges related to early childhood in a remote community in the Northern Territory	Yes	Qualitative; video ethnography, in-depth interviews with 6 families and participant observation of other community members	6 families and 30 community members	Yolngu community members

Moran, 2002	Indigenous Home Ownership and Community Title Land: A Preliminary Household Survey	Research article	Yes	Yes	Palm Island, Cherbourg, Kowanyama and Lockhart River, QLD; remote	To inform the development a Queensland government home ownership schemes	Yes	Household survey, both qualitative and quantitative questions	75	Aboriginal householders living in four remote community settlements
Memmott et al., 2009	Indigenous homeownership on communal title lands	Report	Yes	Yes	Nguiu, NT, Cherbourg and Dajarra, QLD, Carnavon (Mungallah), WA, and Sydney, NSW; metropolitan, rural and remote	To investigate the applicability of home ownership to Indigenous people living on communal title lands, and understanding differences between understandings of home ownership among Aboriginal people on communal vs non-communal title land	Yes	Survey questionnaire	86	Aboriginal people living on communal or non-communal title lands in Australia
Penfold, 2017	Indigenous Geographies of Home at Orient Point, NSW	Thesis (Honours)	Yes	Yes	Jerrinja Country (Orient Point), NSW; rural	To contribute to understandings of Indigenous senses of house-as-home	Yes	Indigenous research methods and methodology; Situated conversation, talking circle, follow-up conversation, audio-photographic diaries and semi-structured interviews	Unspecified	Jerrinja people
Penfold, 2020	Indigenous relational understandings of the house-as-home: embodied co-becoming with Jerrinja Country	Research article	Yes	Yes	Jerrinja Country (Orient Point), NSW; rural	To better understand Jerrinja people's experiences and meanings of house-as-home to support architectural design to align with Jerrinja ontology	Yes	Indigenous research methods and methodology; Storytelling, veranda yarning sessions and talking circles	30	Elderly Jerrinja people living on and off Country
Queensland government, 2019	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019-2023	Government housing action plan	No	No	Mt Isa, Cherbourg, Brisbane, Ipswich, Cairns, Yarrabah, Palm Island and Townsville, QLD; metropolitan, rural and remote	To create a shared vision, principles and approach to improving housing outcomes for First Nations Queenslanders	Yes	Indigenous research methods and methodology; Yarning circles	>200	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders
Sadik, 2014	Canberra Close Up: John Paul Janke - AIATSIS	News article	No	No	Unspecified	Interview profiling an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man	Yes	Interview for news	1	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man

The Australian Centre for Housing Innovation, 2019	Summary of Lived Experience Workshops	Report	No	No	SA;	To share the experience and knowledge of people with lived experience of housing challenges to inform the South Australian Housing Authority's Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy.	No	Lived experience workshops	93	People with the experience of housing and homelessness, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Salvation Army, 2021	Art reflects Tanita's heart for Country	NGO website article	No	No	SA	Interview telling an Anangu woman's story of Country and art	Yes	Interview	1	Anangu woman
Watkin, 2012	My island home representing identities for Torres Strait Islanders living outside the Torres Strait	Research article	Yes	Yes	Torres Strait Islands and the mainland	To explore how Torres Strait Islanders negotiate and understand the contemporary Mainlander experience	Yes	Qualitative; Narrative inquiry	25	Three generations of Torres Strait Islander people

Quality assessment

Assessing against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Quality Appraisal Tool, two studies exemplified evidence on all 14 questions and seven scored moderately (4-8 'Yes'), see Supplementary Table 1. Nine records scored poorly (1-3 'Yes'), as they did not provide sufficient evidence on priorities, community engagement, management and control of intellectual and cultural property, learning opportunities, capacity building, and benefit. Three records showed no evidence on any of the 14 questions. Overall, records scored highly on a strengths-based approach, with 17 records acknowledging colonization and imposition of Western value systems and/or used positive images and language about people and culture. An Indigenous research paradigm underlay five records. Eight records engaged a diverse range of stakeholders for community consultation, or clearly demonstrated appropriate inclusivity through consultation with representative organisations. Seven records were led or co-led by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, demonstrating leadership, and First Nations research governance was clear in six records, evident in the establishment of Aboriginal Reference Groups or Steering Committees.

Ten qualitative research records were identified and appraised, see Supplementary Table 2. Studies were of moderate quality according to CASP criteria. Aims and findings were stated clearly and qualitative methodology was appropriate in all records, and eight of nine studies were valuable in terms of the contribution made to existing knowledge. Six studies provided sufficient evidence of appropriate research design and considered the relationship between researchers and participants. However, few studies (3 of 9) reported consideration of ethical issues and five lacked rigor in data analysis. The two mixed methods studies both had clear research questions, and their data allowed the questions to be adequately addressed. There was not, however, adequate rationale provided for use of mixed methods. Different components of the data were sufficiently integrated to address the research questions, but it was unclear whether outputs were adequately interpreted, and divergences between qualitative and quantitative data were not addressed.

Considering the quality of news articles and content produced by NGOs requires looking beyond pre-determined tools and instead considering authors' standpoint and values. Two news articles were published in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, a public service broadcaster with a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) that commits to respecting Indigenous people and culture in its content. Both articles were strengths-based, with positive stories and imagery, and notably, the Bryce article (2019) was by a journalist descending from the Barkindji

people. The Anglicare Australia article did not perpetuate harmful views and their RAP commitments include building respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Context

The voices of people included in this review are varied and are indicative of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. Meanings of home are informed by people's cultures, gender, age, tenure, geographies, experiences of homelessness, experiences of Stolen Generations survivors, and connections to family, culture, Country, and spirituality. Experiences span across public and community housing, private rental, and/or private home ownership in urban, rural and remote locations across States and Territories of Australia. Records include the voices of people in NSW (n=5), QLD (n=8), WA (n=4), NT (n=4), SA (n=3), ACT (n=1) and nationally (n=2). It was not feasible to map the findings according to geographic area and Country as some quotes were from people who did not specify their location.

Meanings of home

Based on the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 21 records, meanings of home were found to be relational, culturally-specific and more than a shelter. Connection to family, community, culture, land and Country, and spirituality were what made home. With these connections, home was imbued with a sense of belonging, security, identity and permanence.

Home as family and community connection

Home was overwhelmingly described as family and community, evident in 19 of 21 records. Being with family or with loved ones was consistently considered to be home by multiple people. Hosting family and being together with people and community were integral to home. Home as family was further evidenced through descriptions of home as connection to one's bloodline. The following quotes are examples of home meaning family, togetherness and being with people:

Aboriginal people, it's more to do with togetherness and people, there's not so much value placed on material things, on having a TV or a bed – Indigenous SAAP worker (Keys Young 1999).

Home for me is family. But I have to call housing to report if I have family staying. They don't understand our ways – First Nations person, Kurna Country (The Australian

Centre for Housing Innovation 2019).

Home is not necessarily a physical structure, but an attachment to a home area or a home group – Indigenous government officer (Keys Young 1999).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare survey (2019) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives on home and homelessness found that home is family and kinship which provide a connection to culture and access to resources. Greenop and Memmott (2016), Judd (2003) and Penfold (2020) show the importance of multiple generations living together as intergenerational family connection is a part of continuing culture. In Queensland, a study of Indigenous home ownership on communal title lands described how First People's preferred to own a house in Cherbourg – a former mission, today under Aboriginal community control – because of family and community connection:

Community – it's home, family and culture; tried living outside [of Cherbourg] – not the same – First Nations person, Queensland (Memmott, Moran et al. 2009).

Being able to host family or community was an important aspect of home, at times described as a cultural obligation, with sharing of resources being a source of pride, and a part of making a house a home. Community connection in the urban context was evident in Behrendt's (2009) description of Aboriginal Sydney's community organisations – women's legal services, a First Nations radio station and childcare centres – as political, cultural and spiritual homes and sites of collective identity and pride.

Home as connection to Country, culture and spirituality

Thirteen records evidenced home to mean Country, which in turn connected people to culture and spirituality. The term 'home' was often used interchangeably with Country or traditional land or seas. One Jerrinja Elder voiced that he would "love to come back home" (Penfold 2017), referring to Jerrinja Country. Connection to Country was described by Jerrinja people as an ancestral tie to the land, with one Jerrinja Elder voicing that connection to Country was a spiritual feeling that provided a sense of home:

Wherever we live we've got to have this freedom of our spirit. And it's a strong spiritual feeling but it's also a physical feeling. We have to have that space [that is the connection that comprises Country]" – Jerrinja Elder (Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in four other records described Country as a connection to ancestors and spirituality, with one woman saying:

I feel a spiritual connection to this place [island of origin] because of my ancestor's connection, especially out the back here, you can feel it – Torres Strait Islander woman (Watkin Lui 2012).

Clark (2012) and Penfold (2017, 2020) described traditional lands and community as inseparable. In consultations with First People's for Shelter South Australia, home was described to mean:

...traditional lands where community and landscape come together to create an unqualified sense of union – Workshop participant, Kurna Country (Clark 2012).

Country to Jerrinja people was described as home, as Country is where one's people and knowledge are. Jerrinja people experienced Country as an entity, and a relationship was said to be fostered with not only people but also with Country, showing how relationality is about the human as well as non-human (Penfold 2017, Penfold, Waite et al. 2020).

While home was at times described as a physical place where one lives, with a bed and facilities (Cooper and Morris 2005, Knox 2006, Commonwealth of Australia 2013), home was also conceptualized as both a dwelling and as Country or traditional lands. One person living on Kurna Country said:

For me the meaning of home has many layers. There is home, which are my traditional lands, where I feel safe... But my house where I live in Adelaide is my home because it is where my family comes and it is our safe haven from a sometimes hostile world – First Nations person (Clark 2012).

A sense of belonging and safety through connection to people and Country

Connection to Country and community were said to provide a sense of belonging to place and/or people in 12 records. Home, Country and community were considered intrinsically linked to culture, cultural practices and ontologies in seven records, with an example in the following quote:

A real home for me is back to my tradition. I would like to go bush and do the traditional ways for a while. With my kids and re-teach, re-learn and then maybe come back into society – First Nations woman (Cooper and Morris 2005).

In the following excerpt, a young mother described her first visit to Jaru Country, and the deep sense of belonging and identity this visit provided:

It was an amazing feeling for me to stay on my traditional lands for the first time. I tried to absorb everything: every flower, tree, hill, termite mound, sand colour, etc. I felt a solid sense of self as I knew where I come from and what my ancestral lands look like. I can take that with me wherever I go, that I will always have a home in this land – Indigenous mother, Western Australia (Anglicare Australia 2017).

An Aboriginal woman from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands described the interconnection between Country, culture, and lore and how it links to identity and belonging:

As [an] Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, Country is the most important thing, and everything else falls into place around that. From Country comes culture and lore. It is literally part of our identity, and people have to respect and take care of our lands and waters, no matter what their race, because at the end of the day, if you are damaging Country, you are damaging people's identity – Tanita Paige, Anangu woman, South Australia (Salvation Army 2021).

Home was also said to be about safety, and associated with Country, togetherness and family. Clark (2012), Cooper and Morris (2005), Keys Young (1999) and Knox (2006) showed evidence of home described as safety from physical or emotional harm.

Fracturing of home

Colonial legislation, policies and practices, including the racist practice of assimilation resulting in the Stolen Generations, means some people are not able to return to their traditional lands or Country, and subsequently lose connection to homeland or people. These experiences were described in Watkin (2012), Penfold (2017) and Keys Young (1999) as a loss of home. A loss of home was considered in some instances to be distinct from the Western concept of homelessness, as First Peoples can lose their home, i.e., their Country, through dispossession, while homelessness often refers to the loss of a shelter (Keys Young 1999, Penfold 2017). Homelessness was the focus of one third (n=7) of the records, three of which explored spiritual homelessness, a category of homelessness that relates to a state of being when separated from traditional land, family or kinship networks (Keys Young 1999). A young Aboriginal person in Knox's study highlights the strong meaning of home tied to connection to family, identity, and place of origin, and shows how child removal policies have led to a fracturing of home:

I mean homelessness for me is not just being without a home or a house to live in. It's not having a real strong connection with your family members or with anybody who you

want to have strong connections with who know your family members, who know where you come from, who know if you're a 'stolen generation' child for instance and nobody knows where you're from, then you feel homeless because you can't get a grasp of who you are or where you are coming from or where you are going. – Aboriginal person, Dharug Country, Mt Druitt, Sydney (Knox 2006).

A Stolen Generations survivor in one study said:

I had wonderful foster parents, but there was something missing. I never felt at home. – First Nations person (Keys Young 1999).

While accounts of what home means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were commonly about positive relationships to family, community, Country, culture and spirituality, some descriptions of home were not always connected to these elements. Colonialism, housing shortages and legislation resulting in the Stolen Generations have contributed to home and family relationships having negative connotations. For example, Lowell *et al.* (2018), Birdsall-Jones & Corunna (2008) and Memmott (2009) evidenced home as wanting to be away from family. In Lowell *et al.* (2018), the urge to be away from family related to the challenge of living in households with large numbers of family members, which in rural and remote contexts may be attributed to systemic housing shortages and thus the inability to have one's own house to comfortably reside.

Discussion

This review offers an important expansion of the mindset on home by drawing from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. It highlights how home is rooted in relationships with the physical and non-physical. A focus on the positive and life-giving understandings of what makes up home provides an opportunity to value First People's lived experiences, ontologies and context that shape meanings of home. This review is an active valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's ways of living, considering what home means to the colonized, beyond the Western lens. In *Our Voices: Indigeneity and Architecture*, Palawa woman and architectural practitioner Sarah Lynn Rees states, 'We tend to assume most people live the same way we do' (Kiddle 2018). These assumptions render whole ways of being invisible. However, this review is not about inclusivity and visibility for the sake of it, rather, it is a meaningful invitation to expand the Western mindset, and to value perspectives and lived experiences that are beyond Western worldviews. This is particularly important given the

settler-colonial context whereby First Peoples have been forcibly displaced from Country (home).

This review emphasizes home as relational and the importance of culture and spiritual and ancestral connection to Country for First Peoples in Australia. Some attention has been dedicated in the housing literature to truly valuing the ontologically specific importance of family, community and Country as home, from First Peoples' perspectives (Coleman 2000, Dawson 2008, Christensen 2013, Penfold 2017, Thistle 2017, Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020, Bowra and Mashford-Pringle 2021). Our findings align with previously published literature, with Métis-Cree scholar Jesse Thistle (2017), for example, describing home to Indigenous people as 'a holistic metaphysical understanding of emplacement, rather than a built environment' and 'as a web of relationships and responsibilities involving connections to human kinship networks relationships with animals, plants, spirits and elements; relationships with the Earth, lands, animals, waters and territories; and connection to traditional stories, songs, teachings, names and ancestors'. Similarly, Country is at the centre of the relational human and non-human web for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as described by Lauren Tynan (2021), a Trawlulwuy woman: 'Country sits at the heart of coming to know and understand relationality as it is the web that connects humans to a system of Lore/Law and knowledge that can never be human-centric'. Family structures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are extended, rather than nuclear, with complex systems of kinship that structure where people belong, and family often including people who are not blood relations (Queensland Government 2019). Studies on mobility among Noongar people and Aboriginal people of Yamatji Country show that they are at home when with family - importantly, this includes extended networks - described by Penfold as 'kinship-as-home' (Birdsall 1988, Prout 2009, Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020).

The Western housing literature has extensively explored meanings of home that, upon first glance, overlap with the findings of this review. While the purpose was not to compare Western and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home, there is value in emphasizing two key differences in relation to Country and family. According to scholars from the UK (Watson and Austerberry 1986, Somerville 1989) home is understood as material condition and shelter, as the container for the heart, i.e., loving social relations and family, as emotional and physical wellbeing, or hearth, as control and privacy, and as a source of one's identity and roots. One major divergence between our findings and the overarching story of what home means according to the Western literature is that to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, home is Country, and peoples belong to Country. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are sovereign and ontologically bound to Country, a relationship and sense of

belonging that comes from the Dreaming and knowledge system (Moreton-Robinson 2015). This depth of cultural, spiritual and ancestral belonging to Country is not understood nor experienced by non-Aboriginal people; it is outside of the scope of the Western understanding and experience of home.

Family and loving relations are considered in the Western literature as an important part of home (Somerville 1989, Gurney 1990, Mallett 2004). However, digging deeper, family connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diverges beyond the emotionally positive experience of being with family and constructing home through family. Family for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is strongly linked to a source of cultural connection, knowing one's belief systems, and ultimately one's place in the ontologically specific world of one's culture. In the context of a White settler colonial society that actively disconnects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their own peoples and thus culture, one's family is a source of connection to place in the world and continuation as a peoples (Ristevski, Thompson et al. 2020). Family and togetherness is strongly tied to care, Black love, looking out for one another and survival (Watego 2021). Shelter is an important resource bringing family together however it is not just a physical sheltering but an emotional sheltering from the hostilities of White society (Clark 2012).

While connection to Country, culture, family and kinship is integral to home to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's, it is worth noting that home ownership, provision of physical shelter, preventing homelessness and reducing overcrowding continue to be the primary focus of the housing literature and policy relating to First Peoples in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, Australian Government 2020, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021). This focus on the physical dwelling is unsurprising given the emphasis of home ownership and property acquisition in Australia. It also indicates the reality of housing options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with housing shortages and racial discrimination in the private rental market (Andersen, Williamson et al. 2018, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022) leading to disproportionate rates of overcrowding and homelessness (Davidson and Livsey 2017, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023). Home ownership is the desirable form of tenure in settler-colonial states, providing stability, freedom, control, supportive of emotional, social and financial health, and an avenue to reduce housing costs in retirement and to accrue wealth (Winter and Stone 1998, Fox 2007, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, Norris and Nandedkar 2022). Owning one's own home is a material benefit that can lead to improved health and wellbeing (Munford, Fichera et al. 2020). However, it is important to challenge the centring of home ownership and property acquisition in housing scholarship, as it

is common of settler-colonial contexts where the unlawful acquisition of land and the removal of property rights is part of the Western colonial projects and White possessive logics (Moreton-Robinson 2015, Norris and Nandedkar 2022). Solely focusing on home ownership, provision of housing stock and physicality of home obfuscates relational and culturally significant aspects of home for First Peoples, such as relationship to Country, spirituality, connection to family and community, supporting sense of belonging and feeling of safety. A dual emphasis on physical shelter as well as relationality in home could be beneficial, rather than solely focusing policy efforts on the physical aspects of home. For example, Penfold's study with Jerrinja people explored how relationship to family, community and Country could be practically embedded into housing design to facilitate Jerrinja Elders moving back to Country and support wellbeing (Penfold, Waite et al. 2020).

Lastly, the findings of this review support Christensen's notion that there is a disjunct between First People's meanings of home and housing policies, and highlights the invisibility and de-valuing of First Peoples' lived experience, ontologies and context with regards to home (Christensen 2016). Christensen demonstrates how public housing policies in the Canadian north – particularly a two-week time limit for guests - clash with First Nations peoples' ways of living, with family and sharing of resources a central part of making home (Christensen 2016). Similarly, in the Australian social housing context, tenants are offered limited timeframes for visitors to stay, preventing social and cultural needs of caring for one another to be met. This review evidenced Aboriginal people voicing a disconnect between social housing providers' requirements regarding visitors' short length of stay, and cultural ways of Aboriginal people to provide a place to stay for family and community members in need (Keys Young 1999, Cooper and Morris 2005, The Australian Centre for Housing Innovation 2019, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). Christensen suggests embedding First Nations' ontologies into Canadian public housing policy to reduce First Nations homelessness (Christensen 2016). Similarly in Australia there is an opportunity to meaningfully consider how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's relational ontologies and lived experiences in relation to home could be embedded into housing policy and housing design.

Lastly, the heterogeneous nature of evidence of this review, with a substantial proportion of grey literature, shows the importance of widening the scope beyond peer-reviewed articles to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's position on a subjective and culturally-specific concept such as home. As a consequence, the rigor and quality of some records is unclear or lacking.

Strengths and Limitations

A key strength is the eligibility criteria centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices, and the research governance structure providing culturally appropriate guidance and interpretation of findings. The review is beneficial as it provides a unique perspective on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home and exemplifies housing research conducted at the interface of Indigenous and Western worldviews and research paradigms. Other strengths include the identification of records using Indigenous research methodologies and thus the quality of evidence from these records centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. Eighteen of the 21 records focused on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, a positive aspect as the evidence is largely drawn from records specific to the groups of interest. The terminology used for this scoping review, particularly the term 'home', is an English term. There may be other terms that are connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's concepts of home that may not have been captured in the search strategy. However, this systematic scoping review was not intended to be exhaustive, rather it was to identify and summarize the meanings of home, directly generated from the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Only ten of 21 records were peer-reviewed, potentially limiting the quality of the evidence.

Conclusion

Relationality and the interconnectedness between self, Country, culture and people are at the core of meanings of home to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. This review offers a positive expansion of the mindset on home, beyond colonial, Eurocentric concepts and beyond the deficit scope of homelessness to one of strengths, wholism and collectivity. The paper's strengths are aided by an Indigenous research methodology, centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and lived experience in the generation of evidence. It is crucial for housing scholarship to meaningfully consider and value relational concepts of home beyond Eurocentric norms, as these meanings are ontologically significant for First Nations people who are systemically disadvantaged in housing systems in settler-colonial states. Valuing relational meanings of home is of benefit to housing systems and peoples globally.

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Section B: Storying yarns and interviews with Aboriginal social housing tenants, tenant support workers and social housing provider workers

This research tells the story of three groups of people who are members of the research - Aboriginal social housing tenants and community members (Chapter 4), tenant support workers (Chapter 5) and social housing provider workers (Chapter 6). Through yarns and interviews I explored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' meanings of home, priorities and needs in housing and development of a tenant-facing tool from the standpoint of each person. The yarns and interviews with 62 people took place between March and November 2023 in South-East Sydney, Sydney city, Paramatta, and in instances where members could not meet in person, online.

The three storying chapters have purposefully been split into the three member groups, with one chapter dedicated to each group. This presentation is underpinned by Indigenous and third space methodologies, foregrounding voice, multiplicity of truth, standpoint and relationality. I invite the reader into the experience of sharing space, listening and hearing one group at a time, mirroring how I approached data collection with the distinct groups who hold different standpoints, lived experience and worldviews. While holding space for each group's story, it's important to also note that these groups are not neatly separated entities with completely divergent stories. The individuals in the group merge, dissolve and are interrelated. This is important to hold in the back of your mind as you read the next three chapters. Firstly, the people in each group are interrelated through the occupation of multiple positions. Some members occupy two of the three groups, for example, Aboriginal tenants employed at social housing providers or at social services. In a different example that is less obvious in how a member 'occupies' two of the three groups, some social housing staff are Aboriginal people who grew up in social housing, are no longer tenants and today have relatives who are tenants. In this second example, the connection to social housing as a lived experience is alive and immediate. There is an investment in the social housing system functioning well, as families who live in social housing are directly impacted. There is not necessarily a clear binary of 'us' the tenants and 'them' the staff when social housing and social services workers are tenants and/or are related to tenants.

Secondly, the people in each group are interrelated through the sharing of physical space, through the stories that are formed in relation to one another over time, intergenerationally, through historical and contemporary interactions, and through dependency on one another. Physical spaces shared by all three groups stretch from the broad geographical space of the South-East Sydney area, the offices of housing providers, social services and tenant advocacy, and the properties that tenants live in and that social housing workers visit and social services may visit in some circumstances. The interactions with each other form the basis of stories across time. Tenants' stories about social housing told by grandparents to their grandchildren form stories layered upon pre-existing stories. Social housing workers form stories about the broad tenant and client group and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants specifically. Social services similarly form stories about clients and their needs, the interactions of clients with social housing workers layering the social service staffs' own stories from their own interactions with social housing providers. These stories interact with one another. Social housing workers know the stories of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. Conversely, tenants know the stories social housing workers have about them. Social services witness this storying between tenants and social housing workers and they are also storied by social housing workers and by Aboriginal tenants.

Within this storying is an underlying dependence on one another. Aboriginal tenants, social housing and social services are dependent on one another for basic needs: shelter and employment. Tenants are dependent on the social housing system as they need housing and support securing housing in an inaccessible private housing market. Social housing and social services and tenant support workers are dependent on employment and require the existence of homelessness and an inaccessible private housing market to justify the need for their jobs.

Thirdly, relationality underpins the tenant-support service-social housing triangle. Workers' ability to succeed in their roles is contingent on good relationships with tenants. Social housing workers express the need for Aboriginal tenants to engage with them, otherwise they cannot succeed in sustaining tenancies for their clients. Aboriginal tenants express the frustration at social housing staff lacking communication skills, respect, cultural understanding of their housing needs. Social support services express similar frustration as tenants.

There is a multiplicity of stories and truths in the yarns and interviews with all three groups. There is not one single overarching story or truth, rather there are multiple threads that intersect and weave story, as is appropriate within an Indigenous research paradigm.

These stories do not come about in a vacuum. They exist through the worldview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues from the Guunu-maana (Heal) team, my standpoint, and a story-checking process with members.

The stories are supported by the voices of people from each group. Their voices are in the body of the text in italics with the person's name connected to their words in brackets, or as quotes.

The stories are to be read alongside each other, not apart.

The three story chapters (Chapters 4 to 6) are followed by a chapter synthesising standpoints and considers implications (Chapter 7) and a chapter that outlines the way forward in the development of a housing information resource (Chapter 8). This section concludes with a reflexivity chapter.

Chapter 4: Aboriginal social housing tenants and community members

This chapter presents two overarching stories based on yarns with sixteen Aboriginal social housing tenants connected to the La Perouse Aboriginal community. It also presents the lived experience of five Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse who are not social housing tenants but lived in social housing in the past and/or play a critical community role supporting Aboriginal tenants. Tenants live in either public housing or community housing in La Perouse and surrounding suburbs such as Maroubra, Chifley, Little Bay, Matraville and Randwick. Public housing tenancies are managed by the housing provider Homes NSW and live in properties owned by either the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) properties or the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC). Community housing tenancies are managed by CHPs and ACHPs.

As we hear the stories, truths and lived experiences of Aboriginal social housing tenants and community members, we simultaneously hold space for the truths and lived experiences of people we'll hear from in the following chapters - tenant support workers and social housing workers.

Introducing Aboriginal social housing tenants and community members

The standpoint of each person and their relationship to the La Perouse Aboriginal community is important to position the story. Some Aboriginal people are connected to La Perouse through traditional family ties, and others are connected having grown up in La Perouse over several generations and are not traditionally connected to the area.

Cathy¹⁷ is a Dharawal Elder who grew up on the mission at La Perouse and lived in social housing all her life. She has traditional family ties to La Perouse. She is a mother and grandmother. Today she lives near La Perouse and owns her own home.

¹⁷ All names are pseudonyms; some names were chosen by people themselves and others were chosen by me and checked with people. I showed a draft version of this chapter to each person, talking through the way they've been described and drawing attention sections where their voices were part of the stories. This process was critical for members to have control over stories that relate directly to their lives and community, to ensure accurate and appropriate representation, accurate spelling of place and language group names, preferred level of identifiability, and was part of ongoing consent. Some members wanted detailed descriptors and were not concerned about identification, while others chose less information shared and thus greater anonymity. As an outsider researcher I appreciate that anonymity and identifiability is complex; I cannot know if I have sufficiently de-identified members as they guided me in the de-identification process.

Nancy is a Dharawal woman and mother with very close ties to La Perouse that go back generations. She lives in a social housing property in La Perouse. She knows the public housing system well from decades of experience.

Sue is a Dharawal Elder, mother, grandmother and social housing tenant who grew up on the La Perouse mission. She lives in social housing near La Perouse and travels there frequently.

Tayla is a Dharawal woman and a mother whose children have moved out of home. She has lived in the same social housing property near La Perouse for many years.

Jason is an Aboriginal man and father. He grew up in La Perouse and has lived in social housing all his life. He doesn't have traditional family ties to La Perouse but is closely connected to people who are traditionally connected to La Perouse.

Shae and **Illana** are young Aboriginal women and mums with small children. They are connected to La Perouse and each live in a nearby suburb in social housing, travelling to La Perouse regularly to stay connected.

Eleanor is a Bidjigal woman and mother who lives in La Perouse. She has family ties to La Perouse and grew up in social housing in surrounding suburbs.

Leonie and **Sally** are two generations of Aboriginal women connected to La Perouse and live in a nearby suburb.

Cathy led a yarn with **Dennis, Anne, Maria, Skye, Sue** and I. Dennis, Anne, Maria, Sue and Cathy are all older Aboriginal community members connected to La Perouse, some of whom live in La Perouse and others who live in social housing in nearby suburbs. Skye is an Aboriginal mother of several children and has a multi-generational family connection to La Perouse.

Jessica is an older Aboriginal woman with ties to La Perouse through marrying a man connected to La Perouse Aboriginal community. She lives in the inner west of Sydney in social housing.

Danielle, Sal and Tara are La Perouse Aboriginal community members, working locally in social services and social housing, and also live in social housing.

Five people in this chapter, **Cathy, Ivy, Zac, Bonnie** and **Gemma** are not social housing tenants, however they are included here as they play an important role in the community. **Cathy, Ivy, Zac and Gemma** are La Perouse Aboriginal community members with strong ties to the area and are very active in the community. **Bonnie** is an Aboriginal woman and mother who works in social housing. She is connected to the La Perouse community and grew up in social housing in Sydney. They all shared stories of Aboriginal families experiencing hardship in social housing.

All yarns were in person and spanned thirty minutes to two hours. The yarns occurred in the lead up to, and shortly following, the Australian Indigenous Voice Referendum on 14 October 2023. This was a stressful time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia (Nilsson 2023). The Referendum opened a heated and at times vicious public debate about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's right to a voice in parliament. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal commentators across the political spectrum openly voiced their opinions for and against a voice. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced strain being exposed to non-Aboriginal people's opinions on their lives.

Some positive developments occurred for the La Perouse Aboriginal community in 2023. In March the La Perouse Aboriginal Reserve and Mission was recognised by the NSW Government as an Aboriginal place and granted legislative protections (NSW Government 2023). At the same time, it was publically announced that four Gweagal spears that had been stolen in April 1770 by Captain James Cook's HMB Endeavour crew at Kamay would be returned to their traditional owners, the Gweagal clan at La Perouse (Parkes-Hupton 2023). The Gweagal clan's campaign to retrieve the spears from the Trinity College at Cambridge spanned three decades.

Storying the tenant experience

The following two sections tell two stories, the first – **The story of home** - is about the La Perouse Aboriginal community's deep social, cultural, spiritual connection to La Perouse. Underlying this story are the meanings of home and priorities and needs of Aboriginal social housing tenants connected to La Perouse, most critically the need to stay connected to La Perouse, and to have decent and healthy homes.

The story that follows - **You can't make your house a home** - is about how this deep connection and tenants' housing needs are disrupted by individual and structural factors. The community needs to stay in La Perouse but are faced with social housing property shortages, high cost, instability, and racism in private rental. Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse are offered social housing properties in surrounding suburbs or in western Sydney and are forced travel to connect with home. Tenants' needs for safety, security and good quality housing conditions, as well as accessibility needs, are thwarted by structural problems within the housing system. An overwhelming social housing system coupled with poor treatment by housing providers and delayed action on repairs makes it difficult for tenants to make a decent home.

The story of home

Yarning about growing up in La Perouse

Several generations of tenants and Dharawal Elders generously shared stories about growing up in La Perouse and their connection to place. Connection to place, salt water, family, community and culture creates a sense of ease and belonging.

Sue, a Dharawal Elder who grew up on the La Perouse mission, said growing up at La Perouse *was lovely and it was good*. Sue is deeply connected to her culture and place on Dharawal land, describing how she used to collect bushtucker with her elders. When Sue was a young girl, she would go *looking for fivies, bush tucker, five corners of 10 corners*. She said, *it's our bush tucker*. Respect for elders was part of culture, saying that *it'd have to be older person that come with us* to collect bushtucker.

Sue, Sally and Leonie - three generations of women connected to La Perouse, Sue being the eldest of the three, followed by Sally, and Leonie the youngest - yarned about growing up by the water, being together as a community, diving for coins, and looking out for one another.

When the school bell would ring we'd run home, put our cossies¹⁸ on. Because we didn't live far from the school. And all the Koori¹⁹ kids would meet down on the beach. - Sue

That went from generation to generation. ... I remember sitting on the school bus, coming home from high school and up on Anzac Parade, you can look from where Namatjira Place is there, over to the break-wall. And the boys used to see the waves, hitting the break-wall that told them that Yarra had a wave [laughs]. So they went home, got their surf boards and went down to Yarra. But yeah, that was definitely the beach. - Leonie

We used to toss a coin in the water ... and you see all the Blak bodies jump out [laughs]. It was good to see and it was good to be part of. I could only put me head under the water and then put it back up because I was too scared I'd drown. I never caught a coin in all my life down there [laughs]. ... That was one of our summer... And that kept us all going, keeping us out of trouble. - Sally

Growing up in La Perouse, Jason, an Aboriginal man and father, enjoyed playing sport and being *surrounded by the coastline*, utilising it for *fishing, surfing, swimming*. Similarly, Tayla, an

¹⁸ Swimming costumes.

¹⁹ A demonym describing Aboriginal people from south-east Australia.

Aboriginal woman and mother, had *a really good childhood* growing up at La Perouse connected to the coastline. She said it was *really good living* because her older brother knew how to catch fish and the family *used to eat a lot of seafood growing up*. She spoke fondly of her childhood through her close relationship to her brothers and connection to salt water.

I was lucky because I had two older brothers, and my oldest brother was very, good with anything. So, whether it's sport or catching sea life at the beach, he was real good. So, when me and my cousins used to go to the beach, my brother would come down and catch fish with his bare hands. Like, the little baby school fishes, how they're real quick? He'd say, "Which one do you want?" and he'd put his hand in the pond and he'd just grab it and put it in the little container for us. So we'd be walking around at the beach with fishes and then he'd also go diving and catch a load of blue swimmers. – Tayla

Eleanor, an Aboriginal woman from Dharawal Country, grew up in social housing in a nearby suburb to La Perouse. She said she was *really lucky* because her Aboriginal *uncles* or her *grandmother would come* and get her as a child to take her to La Perouse. She said *she was always at La Perouse*, building a connection to her *Country* by going *back and forth all the time*.

At times, connection to family, culture and place was ruptured by racist assimilation policies that led to the removal of Aboriginal children from home and White society policing Aboriginal people speaking Dharawal language. Nancy, a Dharawal woman, yarned about growing up at La Perouse in the 1960s and 1970s. It was a devastating time for her family. When Nancy was very young, several of her siblings were taken away from home and put into a 'home' for Aboriginal children. Nancy recounted that when her siblings were older, *they came home*, i.e., they came back to the family at La Perouse. She said, *we got them back, but yeah*. In our yarn, Nancy said she remembered when *that black car coming in and all the kids running and hiding*. She said *it wasn't that long ago* that the Stolen Generations happened.

Another devastating impact of assimilation policies in the 1960s and 1970s was the policing of Aboriginal people speaking Aboriginal languages through threats of child removal. Nancy's grandmother could speak Dharawal language, however it was not passed down to her because of the threat of her being removed from home if her grandmother was caught speaking it.

My grandmother spoke it fluently, but she wouldn't teach us. And we were told it was because we didn't have respect for the language. ...this is what we were told when we were younger. But when I got older I found out the reason she wouldn't teach it and she wouldn't speak in front of us was because ... one of the -Aboriginal neighbours heard her

speaking to the kids. And they told the police, and the police come knocking on her front door and told her if they ever heard her speaking the language or teaching the kids, they would lock her up and take the kids away. ... and my great-grandmother lived next door, so they would sit in the back room, and they'd talk in the language. But if anybody came in, they'd just shut it down straight away. So for me trying to learn the language as an adult, it was hard because you used to speak in the way we speak, whereas - because within the language, you have to hold your tongue a certain way for different words and stuff like that. And it was hard for me to do that knowing what my grandmother went through. And the fear that she had. Because we would've been taken away. – Nancy

The experience of child removal and forced disconnection from language and culture is part of the story of the La Perouse Aboriginal community, shaping Aboriginal people's fear of police and government institutions. The fear of child removal continues to be felt today, as the out-of-home care system and over-policing and incarceration of Aboriginal people continues to disconnect family members from each other (Krakouer, Bhathal et al. 2021, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2024).

Home as connection to Country, family, community, salt water and salt air

Yarning about what home means brought up connection to Country, salt water and air, culture, spirituality, family and community. La Perouse is home to Aboriginal people connected to the area. Social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing are supported by living on Country, being close to family and community, and near services and programs that foster cultural safety and belonging. For Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse, home is about *connection to Country, connection to family, connection to community* (Ivy). *Home means a sense of place* (Ivy) and is not just about shelter.

It's the ties that bind us to the area. And that's why housing - one of the biggest, things about it is finding that connection. It's not just about having a five-bedroom house somewhere, it's about having a property that's connected to community, family, Country.
- Ivy

To Nancy, a Dharawal woman, home is *here* at La Perouse, where she's always been and where her family is traditionally connected.

I've lived here all my life. My family goes right back. My great-grandmother was born on La Pa²⁰ Beach. The beach just down here. – Nancy

²⁰ La Perouse

Home is *where Nancy's heart is*, where *all the memories are* and where Nancy has relations to care for. Home to her is a deep connection to people and place.

Cathy, a Dharawal Elder, said *home is here, La Pa's home* and that *it's not just the area of La Pa, it's the surrounding areas*. Home is about *connection to the land and history*, having grown up on the mission (Cathy).

And it's a lot of connection to the land, the history. Everybody mainly came from the mission. And we all lived on the mission, but everybody can't live on the mission now. And everybody needs to be close to that connection to it. Your heart is still there. - Cathy

Sue said *if anyone says where you're from, you say from La Pa*. Being around Aboriginal people and in a community is an important part of home for Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse, to support one another.

You want to see Kooris. It has to be Kooris – Sue

Live near your mob and with your mob, you know? For the support. – Cathy

You feel isolated too. If you're not around near your family. You need your family close by in case they get sick, you get sick, just for anything, for support. Especially if you've got younger children. – Tayla

To Sue and Sally, home is about connection to the *spiritual world*, a connection that is cultural and ties to family being buried at La Perouse.

We will always be connected to La Pa because we got our grandparents buried over there. And our siblings. ... If I moved away from here, I'd want to come back to get buried, because I belong here, you know. – Sue

We got the spiritual world too. That's part and parcel of our culture. – Sally

To Leonie, *home is where the love is, where the family is*, and the *peace of mind of being around those that can look out for you*.

We might not be blood-related and all that. But it's community. It's community's family. - Leonie

Being together in community and practicing culture on Country comes together to create a sense of home. Zac, an Aboriginal man with strong ties to La Perouse, said *community is culture*. He said that even though *culture was sort of detached back in the day 'cause we had to*

adapt to living in the city if that makes sense, or in the suburbs he said there's still culture here. Culture is practiced through diving and camping.

There's sites around here that we still go to, and so it is still here, and people still do that. And for me, myself, my father took me diving here, my kids have learnt to swim here. And so has my siblings as well, so we're all like, "This is home". - Zac

Connection to salt water and salt air is one way people connected to the La Perouse Aboriginal community experience home, *de-stress* and *rejuvenate*. Zac said it feels *unreal* being at home near the ocean.

Yeah, it's home. You feel like a relief. And for myself when I de-stress I always go in the salt water. 'Cause it's like you're – you rejuvenate yourself. - Zac

Sue says she feels *fulfilled* when she's in La Perouse because she's around the people she grew up with and where she belongs.

Tayla lives in a suburb near La Perouse and does not feel as connected to the beach where she lives as she does to La Perouse, saying *there's times where I need to come home and smell this sort of – yeah, my home*. Home to her is La Perouse.

I like to come home and just - salt. A lot of people like to take their shoes off and walk, ground themselves, I just like to smell salt. ... You just need that salt, you know, like – yeah, and I'm right. I know I'm home. ...when anything's going on, I just like to come out here and just ground myself. – Tayla

Tara, an Aboriginal tenant also connected to La Perouse, reflected a similar experience. When Tara was living in a suburb outside of La Perouse she said *every bloody day I was driving back and forwards like a dog smelling the sniff air on the salt air on the way out*. To Tara, experiencing connection through salt water is a lifeline.

We have different ways, we have different beliefs. We live off the salt water. ... As kids, I remember we'd have ... tiny little pots, the stainless-steel ones, box of matches and go and catch little crabs on La Pa beach and go over and sit underneath the pile ons and cook them and eat them, put on them with the salt water. It was magic. And the kids don't get to do that anymore because everyone's 100 miles an hour. I mean, it'll eventually come back and some of us will take the kids down. I'll go, "Boys, this is what you can eat." Just survival stuff. And if that's taken away from us and if we're put out west, what do we do? - Tara

Sally proudly identified herself and her people as belonging to place. Being a part of a collective of Aboriginal people who belong to the eastern seaboard.

Yeah, [we are] definitely eastern seaboard Blaks. I love to say that [laughs]. We all love the water [laughs]. ... But even when we went away at Christmas we camped down the coast, on the water, in Narooma and Maruya, around that area. ... We never moved from our area or what belonged to us. Yeah, the salt water. – Sally

Zac said being salt water people is about connection to culture.

And that's another thing that connects us with our culture is ocean. We're saltwater people. And that's a big thing. ... Saltwater people. You've got to be near the ocean. – Zac

This connection to the ocean is part of Zac's people's Songlines.

But we were just in Sydney in the Harbour. ... Like our family, we travelled from like, we were from Sydney Cove all the way down to the Illawarra, so we just travelled up and down, then all the way out to the Georges River. Yeah. So our families were always close to the ocean. - Zac

Eleanor, a Dharawal woman and tenant, reflected on her connection to La Perouse as more than a shelter. While she feels like other places she has lived throughout her life are her home, La Perouse is *different* because she's *culturally connected to it*.

...home at La Pa doesn't have to be in the building. Like, the structure. All of La Pa, the beach was my home. La Pa, that's my whole home. The whole suburb. – Eleanor

Eleanor said she has *three homes*. One is connected to her childhood sense of safety with loved ones and the house she spent her childhood days. She said *that was my home* where she *felt safe* and where she experienced *nurturing safety* being with *family* and *grandparents*. Her mother's house and her home at La Perouse are two other places she considers as home. For Shae, safety, security and being with family at La Perouse is what makes home.

What makes things feel like home? Security. Just feeling safe and secure. ... I grew up in La Perouse with my mum. We were in [public] housing pretty much my whole life. ... that did feel like home just because it was more secure. Where I am [now] it's like on the bottom floor. And because of the mould, I have to keep the windows open, so obviously I don't feel safe being there by myself on the bottom floor having the windows open. So, yeah, that was probably the safest I felt was living there [with mum at La Perouse] because we had a fence around us. - Shae

La Perouse is home to Sally, *no matter which house* in La Perouse she's visiting, and no matter where she actually lives. Home is made from family and community connection, the centre of which is lived out at La Perouse.

We could live out [nearby suburb], then still come out here [La Perouse] and feel at home, no matter which house we visited. That's how we are. – Sally

Similarly, for Tayla, home is La Perouse and is also the house where she brought up her sons in a nearby suburb.

I've raised my sons there. So we call it home. So, if we was to win the lotto and eventually move, my boys would always consider that their home, even though they no longer live there because they were brought up in that house. – Tayla

For Jason home is La Perouse because it's where he grew up and is now connected to.

...my family's not from here, but this is home for me. Yeah, because I've been here my whole life. – Jason

He said home is not a shelter, rather, *it's a feeling of belonging.*

...home is connection, right? You find connection, because otherwise, it's just a house, you know? You can live in a house and not feel like home. ... what does home feel like? Home is a connection. Home is a feeling. It's not just where you live. – Jason

For some Aboriginal tenants and community members connected to La Perouse home is a shelter and a place of safety. It's *just a roof over your head* and *three meals on the table* (Maria), and *a place to relax and not feel stressed* after a difficult day (Cathy).

A sense of belonging and safety through community support and services

Access to community support and engagement with local services was said to create a sense of safety, belonging and feeling of home. For example, Shae feels at home when she's *close to her support network* and *community resources*.

Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse all know each other and are part of multiple communities. *Having mates everywhere you go* creates a sense of belonging and *social connection* (Jason). When Jason walks around the area he bumps into people he knows from the different communities.

There's more than just the Aboriginal community, there's more than just the school community. There's a football community, a soccer community, a boxing community. - Jason

Tayla said everyone knowing each other around La Perouse *makes you feel a part of the community*. Sally, Leonie and Sue feel safe because everyone in the community knows each other. Being respectful and caring for one another is how Sally described what it meant to be part of the La Perouse Aboriginal community and what makes it home. They described the stark difference in community support between La Perouse and the nearby suburb where they live.

People out here know everyone. ...mum could lose her memory and walk the streets but everybody out here knows mum and they'll pull up and get in the car seat, drive [laughs]. [But] over at [nearby beach suburb], mum walks the streets or something like that, she's had a bad day - anybody could pick her up. – Leonie

They'll probably ring the police and say she's drunk or something. You'll get arrested. – Sue

I'd get arrested for sure. - Sally

Police out here, will notice. Yeah, she wouldn't get arrested or kidnapped. Someone would [take her home]. - Leonie

Leonie and Sally said that driving outside of La Perouse is crossing *that boundary*. The suburbs outside La Perouse are experienced as disrespectful and where people don't look out for one another. They stressed the importance of younger people looking after older people because home is enacted in community care.

...even the younger generations, they'll look after the older generations. Because that's how I was raised. [Nearby suburb]'s a whole different world. ...There's no respect out there, whatsoever. ... If I see Aunt walking down the street and she was sort of, not walking or keeled over, I wouldn't just drive past. I'd actually stop. – Leonie

For Tara there is a *cutoff* point beyond certain suburbs where there's no longer access to a family member. She emphasised the importance of La Perouse Aboriginal people staying in the area to be close to family and community support.

We don't like to go any further than Kingsford. Mascot is the cutoff because there's no access to a family member or a cousin, so to speak. I mean, our first cousins are classed

as our brothers and sisters, maybe even our second cousins are brothers and sisters 'cause we're all brought up together. - Tara

Tara said it was important to contribute to the community and be part of the collective group of La Perouse Aboriginal people.

You've got to help, and you've got to contribute. If you don't, then it's like, well, you're no good here. – Tara

Sue and Sally reflected on how Aboriginal people at La Perouse have always looked out for each other, and still do today. They described it as being *one family* and supporting each other, particularly with housing when there are shortages.

Well, we all had problems but when it come to the crunch, we was all one family. Especially with La Pa and housing because it's very short and always has been. – Sally

Access to services the Health Centre, the local school and childcare centre, and Aboriginal community-run organisations and cultural programs all create a sense of home. Jason said in La Perouse *we've got services here, we've got schools here and home is not just the roof over our head, home is connection to Country, home is connection to community. It's that sense of belonging*. He described the feeling of safety, connection and belonging when visiting the Aboriginal health centre with his son.

...you want people in community feel a sense of belonging when they come here [Aboriginal health centre]. You want them to feel welcome and connected. A nice open space where they can come, sit down and have a yarn. ... My son could walk through the door here and [staff name] says "Hey my baby, how you doing?" And put a big smile on his face, yeah? He walks around here, he's safe, he's connected. – Jason

Needing to stay connected to La Perouse

Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse need to stay living in the area. Some people are *culturally connected to it* (Eleanor), *belong* traditionally as Dharawal people (Sue) and are sovereign to the land. A holistic sense of wellbeing is derived from being in La Perouse and surrounds. For Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse - whether they are traditionally tied or grown up there - culture, family and community connection can't be accessed elsewhere.

Tayla said she *still* gets *homesick* for La Perouse even though she lives in a nearby suburb. Tayla *wouldn't move too far from home* because *it makes it hard*. Nancy

can't leave La Perouse because of family and community connection.

I've often thought about moving away but I couldn't leave here. At first, it's like, I can't leave because my parents. ... And then it's like I couldn't leave because my parents were elderly and sick. ... And now I don't know if I'd be able to leave because I've got my grannies now, how can I leave them? - Nancy

Leonie and Sally have a spiritual need to be close to their people and place.

We're not like white people, we can't go and move overseas. We got to stay here. We got to be with our people, aye? – Leonie

And we've heard that from a lot of Kooris. Even when we go to Queensland, you feel it in your spirit. The climate and everything. But yeah, a lot of us can't leave La Pa. – Sally

Tara said it's detrimental to Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse to be moved off Country and away from *family ties*. She said moving to another area as an Aboriginal person means needing to *earn trust to get that knowledge* from local Aboriginal people.

... for Blackfellas to be moved off Country is a big, big deal. ... I don't want to move off Country because then I have to figure out what I need in that area that my food source is, my family, because I've been taking out of that collective. – Tara

Being *out of area* means being far from Elders for debriefing after a hard day. Tara described a time when she experienced racism at work and needed support.

Also with debriefing, like I ran home to my Auntie straight away, straight out to the mission the day of [incident]. ... And I didn't even stop at the bottle shop. I just drove straight there 'cause I knew she'd have a beer for me to sit down and go, "This is what just happened". ... So we use the Elders just for debriefing. That's another reason why we can't be out of area. - Tara

For Sally, Sue and Leonie, living by the salt water at La Perouse is a necessity to experience the southerly breeze, without which they wouldn't survive spiritually.

If you'd moved us away like in the country somewhere we'd die wouldn't we? Because the heart's not in the in the right place, there. – Sue

And it knocks our spirit about it a little bit too. - Sally

That southerly - I think would die just not [having it], yeah. – Leonie

Not having our southerly. Because that's what keeps us at [nearby suburb], is we get a bit of a breeze like we do at home here, yeah. – Sally

Jason said people who are traditionally connected to La Perouse, *generations of family* [who] *have always been here*, can't leave La Perouse. Some people in the community have family records going *as far as back as invasion in 1788* and that *they've always been here* (Jason).

They say well, "Why don't you move to an area where you can live in private rental and it's not so much?" They don't understand that we have a connection to land. And community. We can't go, you know? We can't go. That's where we've grown up. – Jason

For Zac, whose people have *been here since Captain Cook landed*, it's vitally important to stay in La Perouse to access culture. He said wanting to be near or at La Perouse is not about wanting to live at the beach, like many Australians wish for. It is about a deep connection to culture, which is tied to the salt water, land, cultural practice, and people. It is everything that gives life to Aboriginal people. Zac said *No, it's not about being at the beach, it's a difference*. He shared stories of multigenerational connection to La Perouse and culture being passed down from generation to generation, culture and knowledge that is tied to place.

We still live off the land here. We still go diving. We still get seafood. Like, we're still doing what our old people done back in the day. We've got property – like the Land Council has a property over Kurnell, right on the Boat Harbour. It's huge. And we just go over there and camp on Country still, and it's something that we're always going to do. We've got places in the Royal National Park that we go camping at that our old people camped in there for years. It's just that connection. And it's keeping on that old tradition. Our old people done it. We're going to do it. Our kids are going to do it. Their kids are going to do it. It's always going to be passed down. – Zac

Needing decent homes and healthy housing for our mob

Alongside the core need to live as close to La Perouse as possible, tenants also need *safety* (Skye, Dennis, Shae, Eleanor, Nancy, Leonie, Sally, Tara), *stability* (Tara, Illana, Cathy, Gemma, Jason, Tayla), *decent homes and healthy housing for our mob* (Cathy) and *maintained housing* (Sally). Older adults and people with disabilities and chronic illnesses need physically accessible housing and safe bathrooms. Having large properties with many bedrooms for family to live in and for visitors to stay is also important.

Safe, healthy housing, stability and security

Housing that is safe from health hazards, that is maintained, and safe and secure from intruders and racist neighbours, are housing needs of Aboriginal tenants. Ageing, mouldy social housing properties cause asthma and respiratory illnesses and require effort to clean regularly.

My daughter at the moment, she's trying to clean her unit out because it's just covered mould and she's got a little, five-year-old son who's sick all the time. – Nancy

...my building and three other buildings around have mould in the foundation. So they have to be deep cleaned everything inside every month. Otherwise, black mould grows inside of the units. In our clothes, the furniture, the walls, ceilings, everything. ... I've got my kid there and he's going to get sick. My sister used to live in the building next door and her daughter ended up having asthma because of it. She was three years old and she looked like a one-year-old because her growth was stunted from the black mould and they had to leave. – Shae

A lot of these buildings are so rundown. A lot of them were made before they used to do waterproofing. So it's riddled with mould. ...mould is a massive issue, even where I am now in [suburb], I love my area, but the mould is just horrendous. ...my daughter ended up in hospital, because she's got really bad asthma, and her lungs are smaller than usual. – Illana

I just want like a regular old home or I would like for housing²¹ at least compensate for the money that I'm going to have to spend to make it a decent home. – Shae

For tenants with chronic illnesses such as kidney disease, housing must be *clean* and *safe* to prevent illness (Skye). Skye said Maria, an older woman on dialysis, should be allocated housing that is a *clean, safe environment* to not *risk getting sick*.

My house is just so bad. So black with mould. There's all the tiles are all split. Paint's all coming off the walls. I've got cracks in the ceiling, in the walls, everything. And my son's asthmatic, so he's always having asthma attacks. And as far as me, I do dialysis and the house is just so - it's not convenient, the bathroom, anything. – Maria

Tenants recognise mould as a *health safety issue* that requires support from services and maintenance completed by housing providers (Dennis, Shae).

They have to come and fix things, because with the mould and all these other things, there's a safety reason where they've got to come. – Dennis

...basically, it's just more the health safety. – Shae

²¹ Shorthand for social housing. Sometimes public housing is referred to as 'housing', as public housing in NSW used to be called DCJ Housing, however in my interactions with tenants, sometimes 'housing' referred to any housing provider

They need - the healthy side of it. They need to do the repairs when they need to be done ... Because, if the repairs aren't done, you're just living in crap the whole time and that's not healthy. And that's when you end up with all the sickness and that's not just Aboriginal people, that's everybody else as well - Nancy

Some tenants who have lived in their properties for decades expressed wanting their properties maintained, particularly new carpet put down for children to crawl on safely.

I've been in there 20 years and everything needs to be upgraded. It's feeling a bit dull and a bit depressing ... My great nephew's crawling now. I want new carpet. – Tayla

We're 11 years down the track and they haven't even changed the carpet in the unit since we moved in there. ... The carpet gets wet every winter. – Leonie

Safety from racist neighbours was voiced as a need by Sue, Eleanor and Illana who had experienced racism from neighbours in the Eastern suburbs, outside the safety of the La Perouse Aboriginal community.

I was in [suburb]. The difficult thing about that was, it's really high dense. So I was surrounded by a lot of old people who were racist. They used to call my daughter, who was literally just started walking, a little coon and things like that. It was just bizarre. I've never ever dealt with racism before, because it was the first time I've been out of my own community. – Illana

I didn't get on with the neighbours at the front, once they realised I was Aboriginal, I started having problems with them. - Eleanor

Eleanor and Shae experienced a lack of safety living near neighbours with *mental health* and *drug and alcohol problems* (Eleanor, Shae). Shae has issues with both mould and neighbours, saying *it's lose lose* because she can't keep her windows open to alleviate the mould issue for fear of the neighbours who have *mental health issues* and use *drugs and alcohol*.

Where I am [now] it's on the bottom floor. And because of the mould, I have to keep the windows open, so obviously I don't feel safe being there by myself on the bottom floor having the windows open. - Shae

Because the neighbours are drug users, Shae doesn't allow for her young son to play outside, affecting his wellbeing.

I don't want him outside. It's sad he has to stay in the unit because I don't trust anyone around and they all try to talk to him. I don't want my son talking to strangers who are users. I've found needles and things everywhere. – Shae

Accessibility

Accessibility for older tenants and people with disabilities is also needed. Cathy spoke about Maria, an elderly woman with trouble walking, being allocated an apartment on the third floor.

But with all her disabilities, her placement for this place, they had her on the third floor of a block of units to walk upstairs. She can barely walk up four stairs, let alone three storeys. – Cathy

Maria said while maintenance workers have visited her property multiple times to *look for modifications, nothing's been done*, posing an ongoing safety risk.

I fell down the stairs that many times. – Maria

Jessica is also struggling with a property that's *not set up for someone with a disability*.

I got arthritis bad. I can't get up and down the stairs and I'm waiting for a transfer. [My place is] not set up for someone with a disability... and [a place where] you can move around more mobile because I've got to have that. – Jessica

Both Jessica and Sally have mobility needs however their bathrooms have bathtubs they have to climb into, which was described as *dangerous* by Sally's daughter Leonie. Sally and Jessica spoke about not being able to shower safely and suggested being hosed down by family members, or showering at a relative's house, putting her at risk of a fall.

I've got that big old bathtub. I can't lift my leg up there. I've got bad knees, back, everything. ... I nearly slipped the other day, gave me the biggest fright. ... I'm thinking, oh God, I'm gone. ... So, I'm thinking, oh no, I can't do this anymore. So, I go over my sister's house and have a shower. – Jessica

Large properties for families to live and to visit

Cathy, Gemma, Tayla, Jessica and Danielle expressed wanting housing with enough bedrooms for family to live or to visit. Having visitors is an important part of home to Aboriginal tenants.

They want to put me in a two bedroom. I said, "No." I said, "Because I got my grandma and granddaughter staying with me." I said, "I do not want it like that," because I said, "When I get visitors, she shouldn't have to move out of her room, you know?" – Jessica

A trade off in housing needs

Tenants are forced to make trade-offs between housing needs. For example, meeting property size needs may only be possible if tenants accept living in poor quality housing. There are limited multi-bedroom large properties and those are in poor condition.

Say, people with children who can no longer share rooms, are in newer style apartments, but then when they ask for a three-bedroom, they're being offered filth. I wouldn't leave a newer style apartment to go and live in filth with teenage son and daughter – Gemma

Another trade-off Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse need to consider is living near La Perouse or having an extra bedroom. Ivy, a community leader, is aware Aboriginal people are forced to choose between a larger property or living close to community.

I wonder if you asked tenants if they had a preference of an extra bedroom or staying close to community and family, which one they would take? – Ivy

You can't make your house a home: How the housing system deteriorates tenants' sense of home and wellbeing

Housing access in La Perouse

Staying connected to Country, family, community and culture is challenging for the La Perouse Aboriginal community because of shortages in social housing properties in La Perouse, and private rental housing being inaccessible.

There's nothing in that area: A housing shortage in La Perouse

There is a lack of housing options for the La Perouse Aboriginal community. More housing is needed for the Aboriginal community, particularly as it is growing with *two generations coming through with a lot of us in the 60s and 70s age-range already and there's nothing here* (Sally). Sue said *we need more houses out here in La Perouse for Kooris* (Sue). Jason said the community needs *more housing specifically for Aboriginal people as part of Aboriginal-specific and equitable opportunities*.

When social housing tenants apply for housing, they can indicate locational preferences within a geographical allocation zone. This allocation zone is not suburb-specific, rather it is a general geographic zone that includes multiple suburbs. For example, the suburb of La Perouse is within public housing's CS02 - Eastern Suburbs Allocation Zone, alongside 45 other suburbs of the eastern suburbs. For Aboriginal tenants connected to La Perouse, selecting the Eastern Suburbs Allocation Zone as a locational preference does not guarantee being allocated housing

in the suburb of La Perouse. Many Aboriginal tenants connected to La Perouse are offered housing across Sydney, not specifically in La Perouse. There are limited social housing properties in La Perouse, however.

...if you go for housing, they say, "Oh, there's nothing in that area where you want to live, but we can stick you out in Penrith". And you say, "No, home is here." Yeah. "La Pa's home. This is our connection". And it's not just the area of La Pa, it's the surrounding areas because there's not enough housing just to house everybody in La Pa. - Cathy

Being allocated housing in or as close to La Perouse as possible has the positive effect of connecting people to Country, family, and community supports and services, which ultimately support wellbeing and a *sustainable* tenancy (Ivy). Ivy reflected on her family members who were *stuck* because they were offered housing that breaks *that connection* to *Country, family and community*.

I've had family members within the social housing space that are stuck in a bit of a roundabout, where the housing on offer either is inadequate for their needs or at a location or away from family. ... Neither one of them is going to be sustainable because you don't have that connection. ... You've got to have them in a location that's close to Country, or on Country or as close to where they've got family, a community nearby, that can support them. - Ivy

Living far from La Perouse makes it difficult to access Aboriginal services. Older tenants, for example, need to be picked up and driven to La Perouse. At times, Sue's relatives can't drive her to La Perouse for community connection, so she gets a taxi, which is costly. *Buses don't run often enough* to La Perouse, making it difficult to travel there (Cathy). For young mothers, access to Aboriginal healthcare services is difficult when living outside of the area.

It was too much for me to travel back and forth. All of our doctors, like we go to [name of Aboriginal health service]. Everything's in this community. And they housed me in [suburb] and I said, "I don't want to be in [suburb] anymore, it's too far". - Gemma

While Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse need to live as close to La Perouse as possible, providers with properties in the area are known to allocate properties to Aboriginal people who are not connected to La Perouse. This is frustrating to Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse who are struggling to stay connected to home.

Stop putting people that are not from the area in our space ... Put them out west, put them somewhere, wherever. - Tara

A scarcity in social housing means people wait many years for housing.

What we're going through, right now, with housing, it's ridiculous. Mum's been on the waiting list since 2014 and hasn't received any offer whatsoever. – Leonie

I'm waiting for a transfer. I've been waiting for eight years and put in all my letters and things like that but, still can't get it. ... I don't know what's the hold up. – Jessica

Disjunct in allocations policy and availability of large properties

Homes NSW's Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement outlines that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be matched to a larger property than their minimum entitlement, subject to availability²². This is informally described by tenants and frontline workers as the 'extra bedroom' policy, despite it not being a standalone policy. Aboriginal tenants experience the 'extra bedroom' policy not being applied because there are limited multi-bedroom properties.

I can tell you right now, I don't know one Blackfella, literally that's ever - let's just say you've got three kids and so you really, you deserve a four bedroom. I don't know one Blackfella that's come and said to me, "Oh, guess what, Housing gave me five bedrooms because I'm Blak". Like, "because I'm Aboriginal and I need and... I get that extra" - I can tell you that's never happened. - Danielle

The inability of providers to implement policy is experienced as *false information* because it's *never happening* (Danielle). In Danielle's experience neither the extra bedroom policy nor the locational need policy are implemented in reality. While housing providers claim they understand Aboriginal people's need to accommodate large families, in reality the extra bedroom policy is not applied.

And I think their policies need to be in line with what they actually can offer us and not give false information. ... We're not offered these different - none of that really happens. Most people are sleeping in the bedroom floor. – Danielle

This frustrates tenants given the policy is one way for housing providers to indicate recognition and understanding of Aboriginal people's need for more space to accommodate larger families.

²² As per Homes NSW's criteria for matching clients to properties, "Homes NSW will match Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients to a property that has one more bedroom than the minimum bedroom entitlement for the household, if the client has requested this. Homes NSW has this policy in recognition of the family responsibilities of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients. These clients can ask for an extra bedroom on their application for housing assistance or at any time while they are on the NSW Housing Register, where they have selected public or Aboriginal housing as one of their preferred providers." <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/homes-nsw/social-housing-resources/social-housing-eligibility-and-allocations-policy-supplement/matching-and-offering-a-property>

And so my client officer has been telling me there's no property available, especially in the five bedrooms ... I'm struggling at the moment and they're saying, "Oh no, it's not available. Can't do it." But on the other hand, they're saying, "Oh, but we understand Aboriginal people have huge families and we know that the family come down and stay and we know this and that." ... What are you doing about it?" – Danielle

This disjunct intersects with another policy and practice contradiction. Provider policies aim to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households having visitors stay as part of an understanding of cultural obligation, however providers also require tenants to disclose if they have visitors staying for more than a certain number of weeks. If visitors stay for longer than the allowable period, tenants may be penalised for hosting an “an unauthorised occupant” (NSW Government 2018).

You've got your sister, your brother or your mom and you're raising their kids because they're in trouble or gone to jail. ... They've got nowhere to go, you bring them into the house and you tell Housing about it and they go, "Oh, well we're gonna start charging you rent for that person". Or "You're in breach of your tenancy because they're not supposed to live there." But on the other hand, you're saying that there's an extra bedroom if they come down. But they're saying, we understand that you've got a huge family and you travel up and down this and that, here's an extra bedroom. But if they come and stay with you, you've actually got 28 days to tell us. 'Cause if you don't tell us, we're gonna charge you rent. – Danielle

Public housing was considered more *culturally safe* in Eleanor's experience because the provider allows more flexibility with visitors, while CHPs *police it* (Eleanor).

I honestly think why it feels more culturally safe with DCJ is they don't investigate if your uncle stayed there for 14 days, where the community housing provider, a young mob, a young organisation and their policy, it feels like they police. It's the best way to describe it. They police it. ... I've never notified DCJ when I've had cousins being homeless or my bub has been homeless and they've stayed with me for two months. I've never gone in and told them 'cause that's none of your business. That's my home. I pay the rent, if they moved in, different story... But little things, cultural stuff like that. I'm not getting permission off you so that my cousin can stay with me for two weeks. – Eleanor

An inaccessible private market

Some people connected to La Perouse want to move out of social housing and into private rental. But *it feels unsafe to leave social housing due to instability of the rental market* (Jason),

If I had an opportunity to leave, I would leave, right? Because I feel like I'm in a system of oppression, for numerous reasons. I'm dictated to - you take 25% of your wage and then once it gets above a certain amount, then you pay 30% of your wage, and if you earn too much then you're not eligible. – Jason

You feel stuck, because, oh, I'm better off going just to bloody live in private. Then again, realistically, I wouldn't be able to afford that. But the amount of money I'm spending on repairs is, I could have been in a nice Meriton. It's really frustrating. – Illana

Aboriginal people experience *racial prejudice and discrimination* (Jason), and unaffordability in the private market.

...the racial prejudice and discrimination. Every time you go for a private rental, you know? Not that the market's not already hard enough, but rock up there with your little Aboriginal children there and see if they want to give you. The racial prejudice and bias that you receive. Go and deal with that, lay us out a few more knockbacks there to add to the trauma and the transgenerational trauma. ... When I go and turn up for a private rental, I can guarantee you the little white couple are going to get the place. I guarantee you. – Jason

Private rental is inaccessible because of the high cost and the inability for social housing tenants to save because of low incomes and high social housing rents. Illana said she *couldn't afford it*. Tara said *it's hard to get any rental anywhere, for anyone*. Jason has *no opportunity to save for a bond* in private rental because renting in social housing is expensive.

[Housing providers say] *"If you don't like it, well go and find private rental. But in the interim, we're going to charge you so much rent that you live week-to-week anyway". We live week-to-week as a family. I have no opportunity to save for a bond for private rental.*
– Jason

Sovereignty, the fight for land and home ownership

Community members face increasing housing costs, an inaccessible private market, and an ongoing battle to save Aboriginal community land from the government. Land is a highly contested resource in La Perouse with local government councils having tried to take La Perouse Aboriginal community land that houses residential properties - the La Perouse Aboriginal Reserve and Mission - community organisations and services. Sally and Sue yarned about how councils have tried to uproot La Perouse Aboriginal people from the area but Aboriginal people have come together to fight back.

Oh yeah, that view's million dollar. And that many councils have tried to uproot us and get it. – Sally

Yeah, tried to move them. – Sue

Oh yeah. Oh, every generation, ain't it, Aunt? No doubt about it. They've all tried. ... Every man and their dog have had a go at La Pa - for the land. - Sally

...that's real estate and the whitefella. Yeah. We get called lots of names by [non-Aboriginal] La Perouse people but we don't care because it's ours. And they can't take it. And as soon as they want it, we just all rally together. It wouldn't matter if you had a punch up the night before at the local pub. We was all there for that march²³, yeah, you can come and take La Pa, look out. Yeah. Well, that's how we was with our era. And I don't think Aunt's mob [are] any different. That's who taught us, stand up. Mmhm. - Sally

Yeah. You belong here. – Me

Yeah. That's the big difference, I suppose, yeah. – Sally

Some Aboriginal families connected to La Perouse were able to purchase properties through various means, for example the past Australian Government's Aboriginal Loans Commission in 1974, which facilitated Aboriginal people owning properties and remain in La Perouse.

Because we had an Aboriginal Loans Commission years ago and that's how we got our start. ... And I think that's how a lot of them got to stay here in or around La Pa. – Sally

We lived with my grandparents for a while and then mum and dad ended up buying the house from them and we've still got that house now. Mum always wanted to sell it and I said, "No, Kooris should not sell land. We've got to get it all back". Yeah. You can't be selling it off. – Nancy

Today it's very difficult to purchase a home in La Perouse. Over time La Perouse has *gentrified* and housing has become very expensive (Jason). The average rental price in the La Perouse area in 2024 was \$1200 per week and the median house price to buy is \$2.2 million (Domain 2024). Jason said *in a sense* Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse are *just unfortunate* to be *connected to a place that white man has determined as being more profitable* than other areas.

²³ The 1988 Bicentenary Protest

This used to be the arse end of the earth. No one wanted to live here. Malabar, down the road, there was a sewerage plant there, no one wanted to live there. Now, you can't buy a place there for under two million. – Jason

He suggested a rent-to-buy scheme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants²⁴ to own property and to *break the cycle* for Jason's children.

Ideal outcome would be - because we can't own a place and have trouble just getting into private rental - bring back a rent-to-buy scheme. You had it once upon a time in government, rent to buy in housing²⁵. I remember it in the 80s and 90s. ... You could submit an application for rent-to-buy. Where's it gone? How can I save for a mortgage if I'm getting hit with 30% of my income before tax. I can't even save for a bond for a private rental property, let alone a mortgage. I'm stuck within a system. And a system's hard to get out of. ... How do I break the cycle for my kids? How do I buy back my own land in a country where I'm just being suppressed constantly- Jason

A rent-to-buy scheme was considered an example of *equitable opportunities*, with Aboriginal people recognised to have had less opportunity and limited intergenerational wealth because of colonisation, as opposed to an equality-based solution (Jason).

... it'd be really, really nice to see some incentives that aren't just "Oh, we're giving you the same opportunity as everyone else". Well, 50, 60, 70 years ago, we didn't have the same opportunity as everyone else, we had less opportunity than everyone else, right? So it'd be really good to see some equitable opportunities. And even if I can't do it in my lifetime, it continues onto my kids and they continue to rent and buy until someone in our family has some social capital and home ownership. – Jason

Housing conditions and unactioned and delayed repairs

Poor quality housing conditions and unmaintained housing impacts families' *holistic wellbeing*, *sense of belonging* (Jason) and feeling of being at home (Shae, Cathy). Tenants experience *mental health* issues (Shae) and *deep depression* (Illana) because of unhealthy housing.

Housing conditions, mental health and social connection

Mould is a barrier to making home. Mouldy properties have physical impacts on respiratory health and mental health impacts of anxiety and disturbed sleep.

²⁴ Today, the Land and Housing Corporation have a policy on tenant purchase of their social housing properties, however it is unclear how well-known, utilised or successful it is <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/?a=485378>.

²⁵ In this instance, 'housing' is shorthand for public housing

So you don't get a sense of belonging if you're not happy within your home. ... how can you feel like a home when you've got mould all through your house or you've got 20-year-old carpet, right? A kitchen that's falling to pieces - is that home? It's ... just a place where you lay your head. – Jason

And you can't make your house a home if - you might want to go buy something nice to go in the home, but... if the carpet's all derelict, and the walls are crap, not painted or even repaired and maintenance done. – Cathy

Shae said mould problems in her property trigger her anxiety and impacts sleep.

...the anxiety that comes from just being in there, it sets everything else off. – Shae

Shae does not feel like she's at home at all because of mouldy housing. She doesn't spend time at home and stays at relative's homes at La Perouse, using her property for sleep and storage.

I just use my unit to sleep basically. And to store our stuff, but then that doesn't really work when I have to throw it out every so many months [because of mould]. I've barely even stayed there. There's been points where I've had to leave because I just can't. I've had to live with mum for like, almost a year, just because I can't sleep knowing that [the mould]'s in the walls, in the carpets, it's in our bed, everything. – Shae

Jason and Illana expressed how poor-quality housing impact people's motivation, holistic wellbeing and mental health.

When I think of a home, yeah? A home motivates me to ... the minute I wake up it motivates me to keep it clean. I automatically feel better when I wake up there, when I go back there, right? That's a home, yeah? You make it nice. You put in effort to make it nice and put knick knacks around and it's yours, right? So you start to have some connection and some ownership over it. You can't have that in a place where there's all these issues. Because you stop giving a shit. But that stuff still impacts your holistic wellbeing, right? Because you go well, if I wake up feeling shit, where's my motivation to want to go to work today? Where's my motivation to want to find a job today? Where's my motivation to want to clean today? – Jason

So my bathroom at the moment needs a repair. Just the handle. Something in my kitchen. Another room, my window. So it's one thing on top of another, and then the mould, and it just brings on deep depression as well. So I've stopped working, just so I

can get on top of my house. And then not working's also made an impact on my mental health, because I like to be financially stable. – Illana

It's a *human right* to live in a place that is *maintained* (Cathy). Skye agreed, saying it's her *basic human right to live in a house* that isn't *damaged*. Illana expressed that it's *inhumane* to have people living in poor housing conditions and that social housing providers *just want to take people's money, but don't want to invest in those people either*. If providers offered housing that was in good condition, tenants would *be able to get on top of mental health* (Illana).

Poor housing conditions can disrupt social connection. Jason said social housing properties are rundown and poorly maintained due to delays and inaction by housing providers, actively deteriorating people's social connection and their sense of home and belonging.

If my house is shit, I'm not going to invite you over for dinner. I'm not going to invite anyone over, because the place is rundown. I'm going to feel embarrassed. ...so it starts to impact my social connection, my family connections. Because I even feel embarrassed having family there. – Jason

Sue lives in a house on a street where everybody else owns their home. She used to feel ashamed of the state of her house compared to the other houses on the street until her son painted it to make it more presentable.

I'll show you what my house looked like. I was too shameful. The courtesy bus dropped me off in front of that. It was disgraceful and I was the only Aboriginal in the street that lived in a shitty house. People talk about Aboriginals as dirty and lazy. So I've got my grandson to paint the house and it looks nice – Sue

There's no communication: *Unactioned repairs*

Requesting repairs and waiting for them to be actioned is an additional ongoing stress that leads to a sense of instability in home.

So you want stability. And being stuck with the process of even just maintenance, that's not stable enough. - Illana

Tenants wait for repairs to be completed for many months.

And they're supposed to come and fix my roof, but they haven't. It's been probably nearly six months. Because in the kitchen it leaks all over the power points, and they had to cut the power points off. - Sue

Additionally, when tenants put in a repair request, maintenance workers do not necessarily call before they arrive at the property, leaving tenants uneasy.

Half the time when I've asked for maintenance jobs, they show up without ringing and you miss them, and you've got to book the appointment all over again. ... There's a barrier with communication. I've always said, can you please ask them to ring me before they come, or let me know so I'm at the property. There's no communication. – Illana

Relationship between maintenance and rent

Tenants see a strong relationship between maintenance and rents. Tenants are *entitled* to have their places *maintained* (Cathy) because they pay rent.

But see your maintenance that [Sue's grandson name]'s done there, that's what they're supposed bloody do. That's what you pay rent for. – Cathy

However, tenants are paying rent to live in properties where *there's been no maintenance* (Gemma). Cathy recalled an experience with a frontline worker who had said the rent she pays is too low to cover maintenance workers, however Cathy had lived in her social housing property for 20 years and had never had any maintenance.

I heard one of [frontline workers] say that, "Oh yeah, you only pay low rent." ... "You know, your rent don't pay the men". He's done nothing for 20 years. Where's my 20 years of rent? Just come in and do something for me. – Cathy

Tenants experience minimal to no contact from providers when they request a repair, needing to follow up regularly, however when tenants are behind in rent, housing providers *pounce* on them (Annette).

There's been no maintenance. – Gemma

But as soon as you're behind in your rent. - Maria

Yeah, they pounce on ya. – Annette

This is an unfair dynamic, with tenants *entitled* to maintenance since they pay rent (Cathy). Shae said it's *not really fair* to expect tenants to pay a large sum per week *for a box that is dangerous to live in* and housing providers *should be accountable*.

Taking control, giving up

Aboriginal tenants' reactions to unmet housing needs vary, with some taking *control* (Illana), while others get *fed up* (Skye), get *sick of arguing* (Maria) and *give up* (Cathy, Jason). They repair

and maintain their homes to keep their children healthy, safe and to make their homes *liveable* (Illana), *decent* and their own (Shae). Tayla, Shae and Illana make huge efforts to *maintain* their homes out of being *proud* and out of *love* for their homes and families (Tayla).

I've done things over the years to my property too, to try and maintain it because I love my home, I'm proud of my home. Even though it's [social housing], I still want to look after it. ...you want to look after your house and keep your house nice. It's your home. – Tayla

Shae, Illana and Gemma spend their own money cleaning mould and replacing damaged items from mould. Illana *blew all her savings* on maintaining her home to *feel good in her space*.

I'm literally doing the mould once a year, just after winter. ... I have to scrub out, I have to, I've been through so many lounges, so many clothes, furniture, because the mould just goes right through. Through everything. Through my mattresses. I've bought a really expensive mattress with warranty, but the mould didn't cover that warranty. – Illana
...my eldest was sleeping about five metres from the roof covered in mould. We had to pull everything out and scrub everything down with mould spray, which is 90% bleach... and it cost me so much money just to get it – Gemma

Tenants spend large amounts of money to repair their homes however, it is costly and not always possible.

The thing is too, even if you want to try and do it, it's having the budget, right? – Jason

Tenants prepare support letters from healthcare workers and social services to request transfers and escalate repairs. Jason took control of unactioned repairs by going to the NSW Civil Administrative Tribunal to ensure his housing provider completed repairs he was entitled to. Going to Tribunal to action repairs of his kitchen was considered a *traumatic experience* that led to a sense of *disconnecting from home* (Jason). To Jason, needing to go to Tribunal to have straightforward repairs done is *systemic oppression*.

So still that work hasn't been done, we've got to fight for it. Now I've got to take a day off work to go to NCAT and the time it takes me to submit an application, to gather all the evidence, submit an application, this is the lengths I've got to go to, just to have a decent kitchen and find that connection. ... So when we talk about home, yeah? This ends up becoming a traumatic experience. And you end up disconnecting from home. – Jason

For other tenants, following up on repairs with limited or no results leads to giving up.

Some of these houses are that bloody rundown, that people just give up. They ring housing so many times, they give up. – Jason

I let it fall down now, the house, not ringing them up for nothing. I've got asbestos in the roof. All they come out to do it just patch it up. – Annette

But this is what they do, they don't act on anything, and then people just give up, and then the houses get that way where people get sick from them and they still don't do anything because people just say, "Oh, I can't be bothered with them anymore". And that's not fair because you have rights. You have a right to live in something that is decent. – Cathy

The inaction of housing providers on repairs was considered deliberate to make tenants stop asking for their housing needs to be met.

Yeah, and I think that's what they wait for. They wait for the people to just get too tired. – Gemma

Rental arrears, termination notices and Tribunal

Another way social housing providers disconnect tenants from a sense of home is through the power imbalance between them and tenants, particularly in relation to rental arrears. Tenants experience *panic* and *fear* (Nancy, Gemma) when providers call about rental arrears and when sending termination notices.

Rental arrears

At times, tenants may fall behind in rent, known as rental arrears. Sometimes rental arrears occur because tenants are not made aware of changes in rental payments during the annual rent review period, or their rental subsidy has not been updated after a change in income.

I only got into arrears because when I notified them I was working. They took so long to do the rental subsidy. 'Cause when you start a new job and I got these arrears 'cause they took so forever. ... So I ended up with a debt and took me ages to pay off. – Eleanor

They changed my rent and didn't send me a letter to say that my rent had gone up. – Gemma

Other times, tenants may experience financial difficulty for a range of reasons. They may prioritise cultural obligations such as paying for a family member's funeral rather than paying

rent to their housing provider. Eleanor gave an example of how social housing providers could support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in the case of Sorry Business.

They need an Aboriginal engagement officer in DCJ. 'Cause they're the ones that could case manage. If mob come in and say, "Listen, I'm going to be struggling paying my rent. My grandmother just died and I need to need use my next three payments of rent to travel" or whatnot, then she can link that person into services. – Eleanor

Tenants have varying experiences with providers when they're in arrears. When tenants are in arrears, providers should contact them to discuss a plan forward, however tenants are not always notified and begin to accrue greater sums that are much harder to pay back.

I got the letter to say I was \$900 in arrears and that they were going to evict me. I said, "I can't pay \$900, I don't have \$900," I said, "Why didn't some" – ... they sent me a letter to say they were going to evict me, and I obviously went into a full-blown panic. Why didn't someone contact me three months ago when you changed my rent to say that I wasn't paying enough? Why did you wait until it was over \$900? – Gemma

Not notified. How ridiculous. – Maria

They do it all the time to our clients, and they know that they've got no money. – Cathy

In other instances, tenants are called early about small amounts of arrears and spoken to in an intimidating manner.

Because even if I'm a little bit behind in my rent and every single fortnight, just before I get paid, they're ringing up saying, "You're behind in your rent, when are you going to pay your rent?" It's like, it comes out on Wednesday. Sometimes they'll say things like, "You owe X amount of dollars behind in your rent", "when you moved in, you agreed to pay your rent fortnightly". "You are in breach of your contract, you may lose your home". And things like that, that's very intimidating and stressful. – Nancy

Nancy recounts the first time she experienced *panic* and *fear* being called about a small amount of arrears. Because she's lived in social housing for many years she understands that she isn't actually going to be evicted.

I remember back then I was \$7 behind and they said, "Oh, you're going to lose your home". And the panic, the fear that went through me over \$7, it was just like, it was crazy. But now I've grown to - my skin is thickened up. – Nancy

It's punitive. It's imbalance of power: *Termination notices and Tribunal*

Social housing providers issue termination notices if a tenant has breached the residential tenancy agreement²⁶. Being in rental arrears more than 14 days is one example of a breach in the agreement. Termination notices are issued either by post or delivered in person. Notices of eviction are considered *punitive* and an *imbalance of power* between tenants and providers because tenants are not made aware that a termination notice is not a termination order (Eleanor).

So sad, some people moved out when they got that tenancy²⁷ [termination notice].

Some people have moved out from that first letter not realising, panicking, that they've been evicted. – Eleanor

Once a termination notice for arrears has been issued, tenants must either go to Tribunal to resolve the arrears or contact their housing provider and negotiate a payment plan. If they go to Tribunal, they may be ordered by the Tribunal to pay a certain amount as part of a Specific Performance Order (SPO). If they do not comply with the performance order, their tenancy may then be terminated through a termination order. A termination notice is not an order to evict, rather it is one step in a series of steps that may lead to eviction if the tenant does not comply with the performance order.

Tenants have varying understandings of what a termination notice means. Some understand that it means it's the beginning of a process towards developing a payment plan, rather than a termination order, while others believe their tenancy is being terminated and they must move out before the date listed on the termination notice.

Well, they've got to take you to Tribunal before they can actually kick you out. ... And I'd have people say, "Oh, they're going to kick me out because I'm behind in my rent, what am I going to do?" I said, "They can't kick you out. They have to take you to Tribunal first and then they will sort out a payment plan. That's what they have to do. They can't just kick you out. So don't stress too much". But I know that it's still going to stress. – Nancy

I've rang up [de-identified housing provider] and they said, "Well, if you pay that money before this date, then you won't need to go to Tribunal". Okay, sweet. So I've borrowed the money, paid it and then I didn't have to go. – Nancy

²⁶ Every residential tenancy agreement is bound by the RTA which outlines what constitutes a breach of the tenancy agreement, with some specific clauses applying only to social housing tenants in properties owned by the Land and Housing Corporation. For example, Part 7, Division 2 of the RTA stipulated that LAHC may engage tenants in an acceptable behaviour agreement, and gives LAHC the power to give a termination notice to tenants who seriously breach the terms of the agreement

²⁷ Termination notices were referred to as 'tenancy', 'eviction notices' or 'eviction letters' by tenants

But then there's other times when some sometimes you may still have to go, but just to make sure that contract is put in place. But once you go to Tribunal, that's all it. Pretty much, it's a payment plan. You agree to pay this much money. ... I used to get scared all the time, but once you get there - It's not as scary as you think it is. And so long as everybody is in agreeance, then you're not going to get kicked out. – Nancy

There is a lack of transparency in the process around arrears, termination notices and what triggers a termination order. For example, some believed that *if you stop paying rent, they just kick you out* (Jason). Others discussed exactly how much arrears led to an eviction notice.

You only have to be \$50 behind and they send out an eviction notice. – Maria

Yeah, a little bit behind, and that, \$1, or \$50, you get an eviction notice – Annette

Interfacing with the housing system

Accessing Aboriginal social housing workers as Aboriginal people

Tenants want to speak to Aboriginal workers at social housing providers.

Aboriginal people like to talk to Aboriginal people because they understand what they're going through. We're not that different to anybody else, but we are, you know. - Nancy

Tayla said when family or friends are having issues or have questions *you ring up the Aboriginal worker* (Tayla). However, Aboriginal workers, including Aboriginal Specialists, are often described as unavailable.

No, [the Aboriginal Specialist] is never available. I've asked to speak - I've been looking for the Aboriginal Specialist for a long time. A long time. ... I've got notes saying, "looking for [Aboriginal Specialist name] - date". – Skye

We used to call her the gunge, because no one's seen her. Gunge mean's ghost, spirit. – Eleanor

In the case of an Aboriginal Specialist at a public housing office, tenants face barriers, being asked to put in a referral to speak with the Aboriginal Specialist. Being asked to put in a referral to speak to an Aboriginal worker as an Aboriginal person is considered highly disrespectful.

We asked about the Aboriginal worker there and we're told, we have to put in a referral to speak to the Aboriginal worker in that office. ...that's ridiculous, as far as I'm concerned. I don't care how many people you have to deal with in one day. At least deal with them

instead of asking people to put in a reference like you're some big high and mighty [person]. - Leonie

The Aboriginal Specialist was said to be unavailable because the role is linked to public housing's key performance indicator (KPI) of rental arrears, and thus the Aboriginal Specialist only sees clients who are struggling with arrears.

Even complex cases she doesn't get involved with. I'm telling you, nine times out of ten, she only gets involved with rental arrears 'cause it's the KPI of housing. And that's when you'll see her. You only get referred to her when you're in arrears and she gets involved and tries to stop you being evicted. - Eleanor

Hitting a brick wall: *Being treated so rude by frontline workers*

Tenants spoke of being treated with disrespect by social housing frontline workers which adds *another layer* of difficulty to meeting one's housing needs (Illana). Eleanor said she prefers public housing compared to CHPs because CHPs are not *culturally safe* or *culturally appropriate for mob* (Eleanor). Going into some provider offices was described as *hitting a brick wall* (Maria) and can be *hard sometimes to approach housing* (Sal). Frontline workers were said to have poor customer service, are *rude* to tenants (Maria, Skye, Eleanor), and ridicule tenants.

She [frontline worker] came in, she was talking to me so rude. – Skye

... it's the customer service, that they're rude to the tenants. – Eleanor

In some cases, clients are denied due process, for example, when presenting housing providers with evidence from medical professionals to substantiate a claim or are denied access to recourse measures such as taking their provider to Tribunal.

I always feel like I'm hitting a brick wall when I go there. You're talking and they're just so rude, they're just ignorant to ya ... I've got doctors wrote letters, everything, and they just say, "Doctor's letters don't mean anything." - Maria

And I said, "Oh, what if I go to the Tribunal?" And the fella just laughed at me on the phone. – Anne

When tenants ask questions and push back on frontline workers' decisions, tenants are made to be the problem, labelled as aggressive, and categorised as a "two-person visit", i.e., two frontline workers need to be present attending the tenant's property.

And then they say, "Oh, you have to calm down, don't get aggressive." – Cathy

They put on my file that I'm passive aggressive. "Do not attend property alone", something like that, because I'm aggressive. ... They haven't seen nothing. I'm nice to them. But it's on my file that I'm aggressive. – Skye

Maintenance workers were said to be *aggressive* and to *look down on* tenants because they live in social housing (Illana).

...they're quite aggressive, they don't care, if you're in housing, they look down on you – Illana

Navigating housing providers' phone lines can be *overwhelming*, particularly for older Aboriginal tenants and people with *numeracy and literacy problems* (Dennis).

When you do ring up, like I rang up and I'm new to it, and you get all this music and you go to Step 1, Step 2, and you're waiting for hours. And by the time you've been sitting on the phone, you get through and "Oh, you didn't do this and do that". You've got to go through this channel and that channel, you've ended up tearing your hair out. And that's just overwhelming. Just to follow the steps. – Dennis

Making sense of the brick wall

Hitting a brick wall with social housing frontline workers was sometimes rationalised by workers being *incompetent* and *very set with protocol* (Illana).

The people in the job, in the offices, they're quite incompetent in the role. They're very set with protocol. Because they're stuck too, I get that. But it was very just, you hit a brick wall. – Illana

So when you're going into the housing office and you are speaking to these people that aren't aware of these things. Very frustrating when you know that ...it's in their policy. – Danielle

Frontline workers at times lose client's paperwork and support letters.

I've given support letters and things like that and they've claimed they hadn't received it. But I had the proof. – Tayla

Because of how regularly paperwork is lost, tenants keep copies of all their paperwork and take detailed notes whenever communicating with providers.

I've got this book, I write everything down. ... Keeper of records here. – Skye

A high staff turnover and not being important enough were other reasons tenants made sense of why they weren't being supported by frontline workers (Jason).

We've asked for support, and we haven't got it. We've asked for support from Client Service Officers that constantly change. High staff turnover there. We've asked for support from a client senior, they don't get back to us. We've asked for a Team Leader, they pick and choose. You're not important enough for us, right? – Jason

Decision-making power was considered in the hands of managers rather than junior frontline workers. Danielle expressed frustration that the social housing workers she interfaces with don't have approval to make decisions. She suggested tenants only be connected with workers who have decision-making power.

Not like over the phone, not emails, not this, where that accountability is being - and not just have a Client Service Officer, have a manager. Someone that actually can make decisions. Not someone that's sitting on the ground that doesn't really have the approval to do something. – Danielle

Interlude

We have just heard from Aboriginal social housing tenants and Aboriginal community members connected to La Perouse and the South-East Sydney area. These are stories of growing up in La Perouse, what home means, and why it's important to stay connected to La Perouse.

We've heard that to Aboriginal tenants connected to La Perouse home is about safety and security, connection to Country, salt water, salt air, traditional gathering places, family and community, culture, and connection to a spiritual world. These elements of home actively support wellbeing. We've heard that tenants struggle to meet their social, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing needs because of housing shortages in the area where they are connected, and racism in the private rental market.

We've heard that Aboriginal tenants prioritise good quality dwelling conditions and the need for properties that promote physical health, are well-maintained, and safe from harm, including racism from neighbours, injury, and risk to physical health. We've heard that older Aboriginal tenants need accessible housing in terms of mobility.

Tenants voiced that poor housing conditions are impacting wellbeing and they make great efforts to meet their needs either through DIY methods, through the social housing system, or a combination of both.

We've heard how tenants are treated by the housing system, particularly negative stories about interactions with frontline workers and maintenance workers. We've heard their frustrations at the system's non-responsiveness that creates a sense of powerlessness. We've also heard how difficult and overwhelming it can be to navigate the social housing system.

Now we will hear from tenant support workers who are tasked with supporting tenants.

Chapter 5: Tenant support workers

In this chapter we hear stories from the lived experience of seventeen members grouped as ‘tenant support workers’. They are tenant advocates, caseworkers or community-engaged government workers. There are several standpoints that intersect with one another in this group. Ten of the 17 members are Aboriginal²⁸ people and seven are non-Aboriginal people. At least²⁹ five of the Aboriginal members were social housing tenants at the time of data collection, had family who live in social housing and/or they had lived in social housing in the past. Three members are from the La Perouse Aboriginal community. At least one non-Aboriginal person had experienced living in social housing and had family living in social housing. Fourteen people were women and three were men. As we hear the stories, truths and lived experiences of the people in this group, we simultaneously hold space for the multiple, parallel truths and lived experiences of members in the Aboriginal social housing tenant group we’ve just heard from and the truths of the social housing provider staff group in the next chapter.

Tenant advocates, caseworkers and community-engaged government workers

Yarns and interviews were conducted with eight tenant advocates, six caseworkers working locally in the South-East Sydney area and three community-engaged government workers, see Figure 7.

Tenant advocates	Case workers	Community-engaged government workers
➤ State ➤ Region-specific ➤ Local council area ❖ 8 participants ❖ 5 Aboriginal people (Holly, Brooke, Cara, George, Teresa) ❖ 3 non-Aboriginal people (Frances, Thomas, Elle)	➤ Local South Eastern Sydney not-for-profit organisations ❖ 6 participants ❖ 4 Aboriginal people (Pat, Sal, Jo, Zac) ❖ 2 non-Aboriginal people (Charlie and Fiona)	➤ Federal Minister’s office ➤ Local council office ❖ 3 participants ❖ 1 Aboriginal person (Sid) ❖ 2 non-Aboriginal people (Leticia and Justine)

Figure 7 Tenant support worker summary³⁰

²⁸ There were no Torres Strait Islander people in the tenant support organisation group.

²⁹ Members of the research were not asked about their current or former tenure, rather their housing experiences organically arose during yarns and interviews. It is possible that more than five of the Aboriginal members had lived experience of social housing and simply were not compelled to speak about this experience in the context of their role and in the context of this research.

³⁰ All names are pseudonyms.

Yarns and interviews spanned 45 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes. Nine interviews or yarns occurred in person at workplaces and four occurred online via Teams. Nine of 13 yarns and interviews were one-on-one, and four were with two people.

Storying the context

Yarning about home with tenant advocates and caseworkers, some of whom are Aboriginal social housing tenants, brings out the context of the storying that follows. Yarning about home and housing inadvertently means yarning about sovereignty and the violence of colonisation, stolen land, intergenerational trauma, child removal today and in the past (the Stolen Generations), and white people governing and controlling housing. For Aboriginal caseworkers and social housing tenants Pat and Jo, yarning about home means understanding, in an embodied and lived sense, that home has been *taken from us* and home being *handed down to us by white people*. The nature of home is emotional, cultural and political because of the simultaneous trauma of colonisation, the ever-present truth of sovereignty and the need to live on and have continuous connection to Country.

I think, politically and culturally home has been taken from us. So we do our best with creating another home that's handed down to us and governed to us by white people. - Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant³¹

They stole everything from us. We're never ever gonna get to a position where, like, so La Perouse is a very Indigenous community, and it's our land, so why aren't we given the opportunity to actually own something in the land that they sell ... It's our fucking land in the first place. – Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Non-Aboriginal members recognised the context of colonisation and the detrimental impacts of systemic trauma. Some spoke of using trauma-informed practice in service delivery with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

The very first starting point for our service with Indigenous clients is an immediate recognition of genocide, colonisation, and systemic trauma. – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Another context for this group is that social services and the tenant advocacy sector are under resourced and lack capacity to support all clients who request support. Aboriginal tenant advocates particularly noted being *underfunded and understaffed*, making it *very challenging* to

³¹ For the purposes of this thesis, 'tenant' refers to being a social housing tenant.

support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants (Brooke). This gap in resourcing is compounded by the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants often face a multitude of health, social and economic issues. Aboriginal tenant advocates often support with matters spanning much further than tenancy alone even though it isn't officially part of their roles.

When an Aboriginal tenant presents with us, they don't just present with repairs and maintenance. For example, we have to engage them in disability service, mental health to reduce the antisocial behaviour. We had a lady come in that was Stolen Generations. We had to link her to Link-Up. They come in a package. - Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

As the tenant advocate ... on a daily basis it is, "Okay, why are you in arrears?" "Sorry Business". "What was it about Sorry Business that put you in arrears?" "We had to pocket money to help with the funeral cost". ...so we do everything behind the scenes. We don't just look at, okay, you got a termination notice, let's go to NCAT. We look at why, what put you there in the first place and what needs to change so you're not back there again in six months' time. ... It's a lot more to every matter. I wish it was just their tenancy. - Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Aboriginal tenant advocates in particular feel pressure to support tenants with issues beyond tenancy and beyond the scope of their practice because *a lot of Aboriginal tenants still don't feel safe in engaging with mainstream services* (Brooke).

We don't do transfers, but when they're so vulnerable and their circumstances have changed because of health issues, we've had to go in and support them... - Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

I can't take it on. But if I don't take it on, who does? - Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Non-Aboriginal tenant advocate Frances said there needs to be *more of us*.

For caseworkers employed at social service organisations, under resourcing was not described as an issue, rather, they discussed the problem of needing to support clients with issues they considered to be within housing providers' scope. Caseworkers were frustrated by housing providers because of the sense that caseworkers were *doing all the groundwork* for providers.

...last week we had a situation and the response from [de-identified housing provider] is to send them here ... send them straight here, when they could actually - it is part of their job to do certain things but they just send them straight here ... We're literally doing their

job and all they're doing is stamping it. That's if they even do that. – Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Members in this group recognised that housing provider staff are *under the pump* (Sid) and are *most probably really overwhelmed* (Jo), expressing the need for greater resourcing, cultural awareness training for housing staff, and *a lot more funding* (Frances) in the sector.

A lot more houses actually built ... Like, an investment into the sector, into public housing. – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

The stories in this chapter highlight the views of individual tenant support workers and their experience of the system within the constraints of this broader context and are not intended to be representative of their respective places of work.

Storying the tenant support worker experience

The following two sections tell two overarching stories. The first overarching story – **Yarning about the housing system** - is about the experiences of tenant support workers interacting with frontline housing staff. The second overarching story - **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' attempts at making a safe, healthy home in the face of housing providers' differential power** - is about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people try to make a home but are thwarted by the system. Interwoven into the second story is the story of home. The stories trace the trajectory of the social housing tenant experience, from becoming a tenant, interacting with frontline housing staff, attempting to make their property a home by requesting necessary repairs, living in unhealthy and unsafe conditions because there is no other choice, and in some cases, taking matters to Tribunal. Some of the experiences are repeated across the trajectory, showing how each layer interacts with one another, compounding the systemic trauma.

Yarning about the housing system

System navigation: The system can be really overwhelming to navigate

This is the story of navigating the social housing system. To become a tenant, people must apply to the NSW Housing Register, a single waiting list for eligible clients. When a client is offered and accepts a place to live, they sign a tenancy agreement and become a tenant. The tenancy agreement exists within the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (RTA) and tenants *are obligated* (Brooke) to comply with it. Tenants must also comply with a separate set of rules, that of the social housing provider policies. Each social housing provider has different policies although

they commonly stem from the policies of public housing provider Homes NSW, the largest provider of social housing in NSW.

As a tenant, contact with the social housing system occurs with frontline housing provider staff at their offices, on the phone, fax, SMS, or online through e-mail, forms on provider websites, online repair platforms or provider-specific mobile apps, e.g. Homes NSW's MyHousing Online App. Homes NSW tenants can contact their local provider office and speak to their designated Client Service Officer, use the MyHousing app or call the Housing Contact Centre for assistance. Community housing providers have frontline housing staff who tenants can call, e-mail or visit at a local office.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants have a request relating to their tenancy, for example, a request for repairs, they must interface with their housing provider. Their experiences of provider interactions are varied. In many cases, tenants aren't sure how to navigate the housing system. They may not always know how to ask for their needs so that it will be understood, or they are too afraid or ashamed to ask. When they make a request, they often wait months to years for it to be actioned. Members of this group said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants experience *confusion, judgement, racism, discrimination, are stigmatised* when interacting with frontline housing staff and with the housing system's processes. This is a form of *systemic trauma*.

For Jo and Sal, Aboriginal caseworkers, the housing system is *really overwhelming to navigate and really hard for us sometimes to approach* the housing provider. Jo said this is especially true for people that have experienced *trauma*, for example, *people that are homeless, people experiencing and escaping domestic violence*, people who have *just left jail* and people with *mental illness*.

We get a lot of people come over from Housing who aren't able to navigate the system. - Sal, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Zac, an Aboriginal caseworker agreed.

It is hard to navigate the housing system. It's very, very hard. A part of my role is, helping community members or clients navigate it, and even I struggle. - Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

Jo said *most* Aboriginal people *have no idea how to navigate* the system. *Sending a text message* can be a *barrier* to people, for example. She stressed that information must be *accessible* and *needs to be broken down* for Aboriginal people to understand.

Contacting the provider was considered difficult according to Sid, an Aboriginal community-engaged government worker, because providers don't always answer the phone and tenants don't always have phone credit.

You can ring and ring and ring. Like I said, nobody's got [mobile phone] data. Nobody's got credit on their phone. – Sid, Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

The difficulty in navigating the system is layered and complex, with many different providers, landlords, policies, laws and processes. Tenants must have a level of knowledge of the system, communication skills, and access to technology to meet their needs. To effectively navigate the system they must know who their provider is, how to contact them, what their rights and responsibilities are, provider processes and policies, and in some cases, knowledge of the legal system. To request changes to their tenancy, for example, request for an additional occupant to live with them, they must have form-filling skills and access to evidence requirements. If they can't complete this process themselves, they must self-advocate or find a service to advocate for them. They must be familiar with the language of non-Aboriginal white-collar people to communicate effectively with the provider. In many cases, Aboriginal tenants *don't have access to IT things like faxes or e-mails, they don't know how to do emails* (Brooke), they require a mobile phone with credit, internet access, e-mail, a printer and/or resources, such as enough money on a public transport card, to travel to their provider office.

The ability to fill out forms was a barrier to requesting changes. Sid and Leticia, community-engaged government workers, said Aboriginal clients *don't have capacity* to do *form filling*, highlighting literacy as a barrier to engaging with the housing system.

A lot of the Aboriginal clients when they come here, it is because they can't read the forms that they're being given. So they come down here for us to interpret that. – Leticia, non-Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

...most Aboriginal people don't have capacity to do that. They don't understand all that form filling. – Sid, Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

Forms are difficult to fill out because the evidence requirements are confusing to understand and onerous to obtain, especially for people without a birth certificate and people who don't have confirmation of Aboriginality. Jo said *the literacy and numeracy skills are very low* among her clients and described the long process of obtaining documentation.

Sometimes it takes us a long time to get that documentation... The Aboriginality, birth certificates... – Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

I have people that come in here that if you have a look at that evidence required... It's like eight pages of [evidence requirements]. To break that down for somebody that's not the best reader, it's foreign. - Sal, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Brooke, an Aboriginal tenant advocate spoke about literacy as not simply tenants' inability to read, but as things being lost in translation between providers and Aboriginal tenants because providers and tenants understanding things *in a different way*.

There's a lot of Aboriginal people still with broken English. A lot of them are coming from remote areas. And [housing providers] could be saying one thing, but they're taking it in a different way. And that's why we need more Aboriginal community engagement and more resources that are giving messages in a Blak way. – Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

What Brooke is describing is not necessarily a matter of poor comprehension skills on the part of Aboriginal people, rather, two different ways of seeing, being and understanding the world interacting with each other and not communicating effectively. The housing system itself is inaccessible to people who are not fluent in the white-collar world. The solution, Brooke said, is *community engagement* and for housing provider language to be translated *in a Blak way*.

From a different perspective, Frances, a non-Aboriginal tenant advocate, said social housing tenants do know how to navigate the system. The issue for tenants is not knowledge in the steps they need to take, rather they are *gobsmacked* by the *outcomes and processes*. In this instance she is describing the general tenant population, not exclusively Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to recognise the diversity of tenant capacities in navigating the system, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants are likely included in Frances' account.

It's not that they [tenants] don't know what to do or how to do it, it's that they're quite gobsmacked by the outcomes or the process. ...public housing tenants are some of the best record keepers I know in terms of - they've got their folder's, got their names, their numbers. ...their lives are quite structured and organised. It's just the banging your head against the wall trying to do the thing that like you're aware you're meant to do next. – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Literacy, ability to have one's needs understood by housing provider staff, ability to fill forms, access to internet, and navigate e-mail and technology and obtaining evidence requirements are barriers for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, particularly people described as *vulnerable tenants*. *Vulnerable tenants* were described by Aboriginal caseworkers Brooke

and Sid, as people with *mental health*, issues with *drug and alcohol*, *disabilities*, people with *Stolen Generations history*, *people that come out of custody*, *people that have experienced severe lateral violence and domestic violence*, *sexual assault*, people who've got so *many kids*, or people who are *not well enough* and *people isolated from supports*. Zac said *a fair few* of his clients *have mental health* problems.

The barriers for *vulnerable tenants* are layered with two further interconnected hurdles, that of *shame* and previous *trauma*. Aboriginal people were said to have *shame* around asking for what they need, shame in not understanding the system and shame to ask for help from *white organisations*. Sid said Aboriginal people who have been incarcerated are *too scared to come out in the community and ask for help*. She said this was because they live in *predominantly a white community*. Zac talked about the *shame factor* when tenants are in arrears – they don't want to tell their provider why they're in arrears because *it's embarrassing*.

Jo said people have *shame* around not being able to read and understand information.

Some people would rather be at home and reading [step-by-step instructions] what they can do and how they can do it. Some people have shame. Like, shame is a huge thing for people. They dunno how to act for it. They've been shamed. - Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Some Aboriginal people don't ask for help because they're proud and don't want to be seen as asking for support.

A lot them are not going to ring up... it's asking for charity and all that and some people are still very proud and you'll find Aboriginal culture still very proud as well. And especially with white organisations, they don't like asking, whatsoever. – Fiona, non-Aboriginal caseworker

The difficulty asking for help sometimes interacts with *shame* around housing conditions.

Another significant hurdle to interacting with the system is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' previous experiences with government and not-for-profit systems that are *extremely traumatic* (Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker). Some have suffered *real systemic trauma* (Frances). Despite this, they are expected to engage with the system to access housing.

System trauma manifests in tenants being reluctant for housing provider workers to visit their home for a smoke alarm check or client service visit, or for contractors to do repairs. People told many stories of Aboriginal tenants who did not contact their housing provider because they felt

judged during visits to their homes or had experiences with contractors who *aren't accountable or culturally appropriate* (Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate). Tenants are *scared to let them* [repairs contractors] *in* based on past experiences (Sal). One fear rooted in systemic trauma is *the fear of getting their children taken away from them* (George, Aboriginal tenant advocate). This fear is justified given the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from families.

A lot of white organisations the Aboriginal clients are not gonna ring up because they're just going to go, "They're not gonna help me, they're white". And that's cause their trauma, 'cause they've not been given help or they've had DoCS come in and take the children away. – Fiona, non-Aboriginal caseworker

The *systemic trauma* and *complex mental health* of tenants means that in some cases housing provider staff ask experienced Aboriginal caseworkers to support in smoke alarm checks.

'Cause they've [housing providers] got to check smoke alarms, and there's community members that have mental health. He's [frontline housing worker] rung me and said, "Can you come and help us with this? The police are about to kick the door in". – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

Smoke alarm checks are a requirement under the RTA. In instances where caseworkers can't support with requests, such as described by Zac, housing providers enter tenants' homes without consent, exposing tenants to further trauma.

In Sid and Leticia's experience as community-engaged government workers, the result of the system being difficult to navigate, coupled with shame, means people don't ask for help until *they're at eviction stage*. This becomes a challenge for them to effectively support people immediately prior to an eviction.

It is a huge effort for tenants to request any support from housing providers, given the systemic challenges described above. For these reasons, tenant support workers emphasised the *need* for an *accessible* set of *step-by-step instructions* (Jo, Sal) when designing a tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants³².

Yarning about ineffective housing frontline workers and avoidance of accountability

This is the story of members' experiences of frontline social housing workers and provider accountability. Frontline housing workers, often the first point of contact at the front desk of

³² The development of a tailored communication pathway and housing resource with and for Aboriginal social housing tenants is described in Chapter 8.

housing provider offices, were described as ineffective actors with limited knowledge of the housing system and/or limited power to effect the changes tenants need. Members expressed it is *frustrating* (Jo, Fiona) that frontline housing workers do not always know provider policies. Advocates and caseworkers sometimes explain provider policies and processes to providers. Frontline housing workers were also said to not *have the authorisation* to make decisions (Jo), *prolonging* the process (Fiona). Caseworkers would need to *go above their heads*, i.e., above frontline workers, and speak to a manager or a *head person to get anything done* (Jo).

Underlying all these frustrations is the desire for tenant support workers to meet their clients' housing needs, to *make things happen* (Jo) and to get *any results* (Fiona). Because tenants' requests are not being actioned within a reasonable timeframe, tenants express their *frustrations* at frontline housing workers.

But I can understand tenants and clients frustrations, right? And I've spoke to the [senior housing provider worker] about it saying, "Look, I can understand why your [frontline workers] cop it when people come in here frustrated." Because they're not getting any results, it seems to be prolonging and prolonging and prolonging. – Fiona, non-Aboriginal caseworker

For Leticia, a community-engaged government worker, when *nothing's moving* for a tenant she wishes for housing providers to simply communicate any updates. She said *community members are humans*, deserving common courtesy.

For Jo, an Aboriginal tenant and caseworker, her frustration comes from not being able to meet her own housing needs, and the needs of her clients.

...I might say this and that to my [frontline worker], but I know that she won't help me, and she doesn't really know the job. I'm telling her [how the system works], which is amazing. ...I know where to access information. I know who's gonna... move things forward. – Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Jo, Charlie and Pat said provider workers need the power to action clients' requests, as part of accountability. Housing providers were said to avoid accountability and actively obstruct building relationships with tenants in three ways. Some provider staff were said to deliberately not have names and phone numbers in e-mail signatures so clients can't contact them. A second way accountability is avoided is providers losing clients' paperwork.

You never get a receipt of email. If you ask somebody to reply back to you in email, they will call you purposely, so you don't have a written trail. And all the emails have no

names. ...It's nothing personal. So you can't hold them to account. Which is really difficult. Because every day they're gaslighting somebody or... breaching somebody for something. We're like, "We've sent you that paperwork." "Well, I don't have it." "Well, that's a you issue because I've got the receipt right here that I sent to you." But at the end of the day, it's affecting our clients and their outcomes for housing. – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

...I have actually filled out the forms with them and gone over with them and seen the forms stamped. Then we go to check the progress a couple of weeks later, even a month, and they [frontline worker] say, "Oh, no, there's no paperwork here. Nothing has been lodged". – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

The practice of losing paperwork was described by Charlie as *gaslighting* and by Frances as *systemic gaslighting*. Pat said it makes tenants feel like *morons*.

Housing provider processes were often not transparent, and providers were considered not to be held accountable for their mistakes.

There's never - not never - but the process is very rarely what the process is outlined as by a housing provider. – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

A third way accountability was said to be avoided is through high staff turnover. Speaking from a tenant perspective, Jo was frustrated with high turnover of staff in frontline roles. She said Aboriginal people *already have barriers to trust* and a good frontline worker is *hard to get*.

Fiona agreed that a *big overturn of staff* was an issue. Charlie shared this frustration, particularly when *lovely* staff who are effective move on from their roles. Charlie believed high turnover was done *purposefully* to stop the building of relationships between tenants and providers. She said *there's no relationships* between tenants and frontline staff.

From a caseworker perspective, Jo and Sal spoke about how difficult it was to work with housing providers on behalf of clients because the time and effort spent building trust with clients, then having housing providers fail to action their requests. Sal described her service as a *stepping stone*, where no clients are turned away, where people *feel that they're being listened*, where nobody is lied to and where there is *consistency*. This is part of building *rapport* and a *relationship*, knowing that some clients have *been burned before* by different services. Sal recognised that Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous people have trauma with services.

We have all that trauma from the past. And there's not just even being Indigenous that people in social housing. There's a lot of them that they're just over the bread line or just below it and they're struggling and they're find it hard. A lot of them come in with their suspicions from the start. - Sal, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

This recognition of systemic trauma means Sal and Jo work in a trauma-informed way, tapering expectations and ensuring they don't overpromise what their service can provide so they can build trust with clients.

I won't lie. I won't say, "Oh, I promise you the world" because I can't. I can't deliver the world. And that's not what we want. We need that rapport. If you're gonna start lying to people, well how far are you gonna really get? Transparency is best. – Sal, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

This becomes a problem when the trust built between clients and caseworkers is fractured by housing providers' inaction. Caseworkers encourage clients to enact their rights and attempt to meet their housing needs, only to be experience lack of responsiveness by a housing provider.

We can't have people left in limbo and going, "Well I've done this" because again, for Aboriginal people, we're here building them up saying, "You can do this". ... "We'll support you" and whatever else. And then they go through and they do all these things and they feel great the first time in their life. ...they feel like shit's getting done and then you don't hear from [the housing provider]. – Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Lack of response from housing providers potentially jeopardises the trust caseworkers have built with the client. In one example, a client Sal was supporting with extensive paperwork and support letters to lodge a housing application was *quite upset* because the housing provider had lost her paperwork. Even with the support of tenant support workers, tenants won't necessarily get their needs met. The loss of paperwork and lack of accountability was considered normalised practice by some caseworkers.

...even though they [tenants] get through all of the different barriers and stuff like that, it doesn't mean they're gonna get success on the other side. Like, "Oh, we lost [the paperwork] after all that". – Sal, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Jo emphasised the need for *some accountability for support workers*, and a support worker *fast track* for housing providers *to get back to us within a certain amount of timeframe*, because of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing alcohol and drug issues, *mental health, homelessness and jails*.

The consequence of ineffective frontline housing workers and avoidance of accountability means tenants are impacted in two ways. Firstly, tenants are distressed and their mental health is triggered when attempting to meet their housing needs. Secondly, tenants' housing needs are simply not being met, impacting their health where physical housing conditions are causing illness, or impacting wellbeing when their housing is inappropriate.

Given the experiences above, tenant support workers experience burnout from interacting with *the futility* of the housing system. Pat, an Aboriginal caseworker and tenant said *housing has totally burnt me out. The clients are great, but it's just that the futility of dealing with housing - I can't do it anymore.*

Yarning about treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by housing provider workers

This third story is about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants are treated by housing provider staff and the housing system. Members described providers' treatment of tenants as *racist* (Charlie, Holly, Pat, Sid), *classist* (Pat), not *empathetic* (Sid), and *discriminatory* (Holly). Aboriginal people were being *stigmatised* and treated like *they're a nobody* (Pat). They told stories of how clients were treated poorly by frontline housing staff, either at the provider's office or at home during client service visits. These stories highlight the ad hoc and discretionary treatment of tenants, and sense of surveillance by providers, compounding the trauma when interacting with the housing system.

Racism in some [housing provider] offices is so bad. It's so bad. And their attitude is, "oh, you're Aboriginal so you'll be fine. You'll get other stuff elsewhere". ... And by their attitude and the way they talk to me and the way they talk about the client is so bad it's not funny. They're a nobody. – Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

When I worked at [State government politician]'s office, we got a lot of correspondence about the officers at housing. Like, yelling at some of the tenants and they weren't very nice to them basically. And as a public servant, you don't want to believe them, but then so many people have said the same thing over and over again that you're kind of like... - Justine, non-Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

Fiona told the story of an Aboriginal woman in a provider office being ignored at the front desk. When Fiona spoke to the woman, understood she needed housing yet had exhausted the 28 days of temporary accommodation she was allowed and was not being offered additional housing support, Fiona voiced the woman's needs to the frontline staff. The staff member

justified that the client wasn't offered further housing support because of alcohol and drug issues and incarceration.

I said, "She's got nowhere to go." And she [frontline housing worker] says, "No, she's done drugs, alcohol, she's been in jail." And I say, "Well that's being pretty judgmental, don't you think? She still needs housing". – Fiona, non-Aboriginal caseworker

Reflecting on the interaction, Fiona said, *I don't think it's right. I don't think people should be stigmatised. ...it is being very judgmental.*

Brooke, Pat and Holly said not all housing staff treated tenants poorly. Brooke said housing staff are *compassionate* and they *try and do the best*, leading to *some good outcomes*. Pat's comments mirrored Brooke's, noting that staff are beholden to policies, with no power to action tenant's needs, while some staff actively obstruct the process.

A lot of the staff in Housing are decent people and they are governed by the policies. So there's nothing they can do, but some are really obstructive and racist and classist. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Holly said how a tenant is treated depends on the designated frontline worker who has the power to use policies against tenants. This highlights a problem with discretionary and ad hoc treatment by some housing provider staff.

If the [frontline housing staff] doesn't get on with you, you don't get on with them, they then use their policies against you rather than for you. So instead of using the policy that would help you, they will find another policy that will go against you. – Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Charlie described social housing providers having a culture of *top-down bullying* with *tenants on the lowest rung*. Frontline staff were said to make decisions that seemed *discretionary* and *personal*. She said the need for housing should not be discretionary, stating *there's a human right to housing*.

There's a culture of bullying in the housing office, like, top-down bullying, and clients get it the worst because it's like, "Well, I can't fix that. My manager's getting angry at me". And so it's like it's like it's a relationship, but it's not a professional one. So that whole thing of like, well "you don't sound very grateful", like all personal things where it's like, this is not discretionary. There's a human right to housing. It's not you doing me a favour.
– Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

Tenants often told advocates about being spoken to rudely by frontline housing staff, leading tenants to ask for assistance when communicating with housing provider staff. Tenants were spoken to more respectfully when communicating alongside caseworkers.

And what I've found is when community members do go up to housing they cop a lot of grief, so like they talk to me different to what they'll talk to the client ...and that's why we walk out of there, and they [clients] say, "Like, if you were here last week, the way they spoke to me." – they'd be like, "Yeah, it's a totally different person." – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

... she [the client] says, "Yeah, but they were absolutely talking to us like crap. Until I got you on the phone." And she says, "And then they change completely." And I say, "That's why I asked you to ring me, 'cause you're not the first one to tell me that." – Fiona, non-Aboriginal caseworker

Aboriginal tenants were also said to be talked *rude* to, judged and monitored at home visits. Zac told the story of a single Aboriginal mother who experienced a judgmental home visit from a frontline staff. How she lives was considered not *good enough* from the frontline staff member's perspective, causing anxiety and fear, as an Aboriginal mother who knows the real risk of child removal in her community. In this story, the staff member lacks compassion for the tenant's *struggle* as a single mother, makes racist assumptions about how she lives and enacts a level of power and surveillance over her as the housing provider.

I've had clients as well that have rung me up in tears because their [frontline housing worker] go and do a home visit, and they tell 'em, like, "Your house is dirty, you need to mow your lawn. If you can't mow your lawn you need to get someone to do it". This is single mother that's struggling, four kids, by herself. Kids are really well fed, clothed, well-mannered kids, but it's just hard being a single mother trying to look after the house as well, and [frontline housing worker] are just like, "Why have you got single mattresses on the floor?" "Because I still do it and like, I work. Like, we all pull our mattresses in the loungeroom and have a movie night. Like, everyone does it. And we all sleep together. And the [frontline housing worker] was saying "this is unhealthy" and just tearing shreds off this poor girl, and she was struggling. Yeah. She was like really, really struggling after. But she's a good mother. The kids always go to school, yeah, like the way she lives wasn't good enough for the [frontline housing worker]. – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

Tenant support workers acknowledged that frontline staff *cop a lot of abuse from clients* and that it isn't an easy job. Zac, for example, said it's like they *are very at their wits end* and *it's like they hate their job*. There is a cycle of abuse between some tenants and provider workers, with housing providers holding power over tenants, causing stress and tension in the relationship. The next section delves into this tenant-provider power dynamic, showing how it plays out when tenants attempt to make a safe and healthy home.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' attempts at making a safe, healthy home in the face of housing providers' power

This second overarching story is about the power imbalance between social housing providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants when attempting to make a safe, healthy home. The story is foregrounded by what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants value in housing and home from the perspective of tenant support workers, some of whom are Aboriginal social housing tenants themselves.

Yarning about what makes a home

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants do everything within their power to make their homes safe, healthy, stable, and comfortable. Advocates said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants want *safe, stable, healthy housing* (Brooke, Charlie, Frances), *security of tenure* (George, Elle) and housing that accommodates family staying (Pat, Jo, Zac, Brooke, Fiona).

Safe, healthy and appropriate housing was considered a key priority for Aboriginal tenants. Brooke said Aboriginal people want *safe housing that hasn't got mould in it*, provides *safety in terms of lateral violence*, and is *suitable* in terms of *medical needs*.

Zac agreed, saying *there's a lot of properties with mould damage* and as a result *there's a lot of kids that are getting sick from it*. Sid said Aboriginal social housing tenants *want to have a property that's the same standard as everybody else's*. Sid and Brooke said they want to stop being allocated properties that are inappropriate, for example, an elderly person housed next door to a drug dealer, or people with mobility needs allocated a property with stair access. Zac said inappropriate allocation was an issue.

Just a safe place to live because a lot of my clients, when they do get housed or re-housed or transferred, they get put into buildings that have drug users, domestic violence, and some of my clients are single mothers, and like they can't even take their kids out to the yard 'cause they find needles. – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

Housing that fosters family connection was highly prioritised. Jo spoke of home as a place for *family connection*, for family to *come down and stay with you* and wanting a *bigger property* to accommodate a big family. Brooke also said there is a need for *bigger properties* that can accommodate *family* and *kinship*. Pat said home is a *place where family can come together, where the children can bring their friends, where the extended family can thrive* and *where there is no racism*. She emphasised how important it is for Aboriginal people to have family *come together, especially during Sorry Business* and for there to be *enough room* for family to stay. Sorry Business is a culturally significant time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be together, often for several weeks, when a loved one has passed away. Home is at the centre of Sorry Business.

Home is very, very important because it's a place where family can come together, especially during Sorry Business. Home needs to be a place where there's enough room and capacity for people when they come down from the country for Sorry Business. And the same for people in the country, when city people get out there for Sorry Business. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

The experience of Sorry Business for Aboriginal people is different to non-Aboriginal people converging when someone passes. The needs of Aboriginal people during Sorry Business were said to not be understood by social housing providers, with providers perceiving visitors coming to stay at a tenant's home for Sorry Business as a breach in the tenancy agreement, encroaching on how Aboriginal people wish to make a home.

There needs to be an understanding of the intersectionality between Sorry Business and home. ...the thing is, sometimes, like with, non-Aboriginal people, people might converge on a house for a funeral, and there might be one day they'll stay there two days. But with mob, they might stay there for a couple of weeks, a month, until everyone is settled. Then this is seen as Aboriginal people breaking their agreement by having a lot of people living there and not paying rent there. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Being able to have family stay, without asking, is a critical part of home, particularly when *there's a big thing happening*, for example Sorry Business. When people stay it's *very cultural* to all sleep together in the lounge room on mattresses, however from Pat's point of view, provider staff would consider this *dysfunctional*. The accounts from Pat are a glimpse of what is important in home and how Aboriginal tenants' cultural ways of making home are monitored, judged, misunderstood and penalised by providers.

According to Pat, home to Aboriginal people is also *a place where there is no racism and a refuge from racism*, bound up in celebration and the happiness of being *together*. Pat said Aboriginal people find it *absolutely necessary to have a home that's welcoming and reciprocity-wise, that someone can stay there*. People take each other in, without question, when times are tough, as part of reciprocity.

And if you've got a relative with serious, mental illness, not health, mental illness, they're just gonna rock up them on a bed for the night and you're gonna do it, you're gonna give it to them. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Non-Aboriginal tenant advocate Frances echoed this, saying being able to support community *falling on hard times* was important to Aboriginal people.

In Charlie's experience as a caseworker and growing up in public housing in Sydney, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants want *safe, stable, healthy* housing that has *enough bedrooms* and has *functioning water, functioning sewerage*. She emphasized that social housing properties in NSW are not healthy and do not meet basic standards. She said that *even just the base level, everybody deserves safe and healthy housing, and that's not being met at all*. She spoke of tenants who couldn't use all the bedrooms in their house because of black mould, with some bedrooms unsafe to live in.

Frances said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal tenants alike want *security, stability and a degree of control and autonomy over their concept of home*.

According to Frances, Aboriginal people attempting to make their homes *liveable, safe* and open to *kin and community* was made *difficult* in the social housing context because of the *level of control* providers exert over tenants. She gave examples through the stories of Aboriginal clients, among them a woman with an acquired brain injury, a man who had experienced lifelong systemic trauma, and an elderly woman.

Tenant support workers described how the current system and the lack of housing stock means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in South-East Sydney do not always get what they need in terms of location, property size, number of bedrooms, type of housing i.e., apartment vs freestanding house, quality of housing and accessible housing for people with disabilities.

In the context of the La Perouse Aboriginal community's housing needs, Zac and Jo emphasised the need for Aboriginal people from the La Perouse Aboriginal community to be *housed on Country*, however this wasn't being realised.

What we've found as well is like there's a lot of Kooris or Indigenous people that have moved to community or around community, and that's been a problem for our own community members now because they – what we're finding is, our own community aren't able to get housed on Country. So when I say on Country, like our cultural boundary goes all the way to Bondi, comes all the way along the east coast there, and then goes all the way over to Sutherland. – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

There were mixed accounts of providers *taking seriously* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's need to live where they are *tied to a particular community* or to a certain area (Frances).

Aboriginal clients, if there's a particular connection to a certain area you can be exclusively looking at properties in Bondi Beach if you can show that there is a cultural historical kind of tie to that community. And I have seen that taken seriously. – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

However, Jo's experience is that Aboriginal tenants were unlikely to be allocated housing in the area they're connected to because of the need to provide *so much evidence*.

...you really need to prove, like you can't just walk in and say, "I'm from La Perouse, so you've gotta house me out there." ...there's gotta be family members maybe that are sick that you need to be at home to care for...you need to provide so much evidence. ... Again, if that's your reason for a transfer, I doubt your chances very much. Like, you've gotta prove so much. – Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Aboriginal people's need for larger properties was also not met. Zac said *there's just not enough housing* and wants there to be *four-bedroom houses* for big families rather than small *two-bedroom flats* for people who are *just getting bigger in their families*. For Homes NSW tenants the lack of larger-sized properties is a persistent issue despite some providers having a policy that entitles Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to one extra bedroom to meet family responsibilities, subject to availability of stock.

Frances said *the issue is stock, which is that there is none of*, speaking specifically of the South-East Sydney area. Elle said *availability of social housing was a big issue* and there is *extremely limited housing*. The lack of stock impacts on tenants being able to be transferred to quality housing that supports their health.

I keep telling my clients youse need to go to the doctors to get certificates, so you can show the housing and then they can relocate you. But yeah, there's just – because there's a lack of like – yeah, stock. – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

Home ownership was discussed as a need of Aboriginal social housing tenants by several members. Jo said there need to be more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to own land and own property. She said the land has been *stolen* from Aboriginal people, in her words *it is our land* and it'd be the least that the current colonial system could do, is to provide home ownership opportunities to remedy dispossession. Zac spoke of the positive impact his family owning housing had on his life and wellbeing, and connection to Country and culture on his land.

These accounts foreground what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants want in housing and home and is followed by storying of power and control while tenants attempt to make their homes safe and healthy.

Yarning about power, control, and mental health in the repairs process

This story is about how social housing providers exert power and control over tenants in the repairs process, impacting on tenants' physical and mental health.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants *really treasure their houses* and do what they can to *look after their places* (Pat), however when things need to be fixed, the process for repairs and maintenance is often long and delayed. Tenant support workers said repairs and maintenance is a *huge* need in social housing (Sid). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants are *trying* to provide a *safe and comfortable home*, particularly for children, family members with disabilities, and elderly people, however they lack control to address housing conditions (Charlie, Frances). Providers actively obstruct tenants from *making it a home* and punish tenants if they fix things themselves (Charlie).

You're not allowed to fix stuff. You have to request everything. So then people try and make changes to make their home a safe, inviting, warm space. And then housing come and do their inspection. They're like, "Who said you could paint this wall blue?" "Bro, I'm trying to paint over the mould that you left here". ...so people get punitive over that. You'll get written up, but they're just trying to make it a home and making it comfortable. – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

Tenants go through *correct channels* to action repairs but experience a lack of *actual ability and power* to *make a home liveable and safe* (Frances). They are *dependent on the housing*

maintenance team sending out their workers, an experience that Frances says is really distressing for tenants. Tenants wait for contractors, report delays, and are disallowed from fixing things themselves.

People want to feel like it's their place. And where I see that a lot with public housing tenants is in relation to repairs, which is that they do the things they're meant to do for their place. They notice a crack, they notice mould, they see a leak and report it. They follow up, they get the job numbers – it's their home, they want to look after it, but nothing happens. – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Tenants can request repairs either on the phone, e-mail or through an online system or app, depending on the housing provider. The first step of requesting a repair can be difficult for people who have experienced *systemic trauma* (Frances). When the request for repairs isn't actioned, tenants are *frustrated, distressed, miserable and afraid* (Frances). As time goes on with delays to repairs, some tenants begin to question their own *worth* (Frances) and consider whether they do indeed, *deserve nothing* (Charlie). Attempting to make one's home *liveable and safe* causes *despair, hopelessness*, and poor *mental health* among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

I think the mental health of Aboriginal people is severely affected by public housing. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

It [repairs process] makes you go nuts after long enough. And that's the thing. A lot of my clients that didn't have mental health issues when they moved into public housing, have mental health issues now. The hopelessness and the despair that comes with feeling like you are worth next to nothing and you deserve nothing. That creates obvious feelings of depression and then the anxiety of being like, "Are we going to do anything about the termites or is my house just going to fall on me in my sleep?" Like, "Should me and my kids start sleeping in the car because it's been a year and I've watched the staircase collapse and no one's come out to do anything about it yet?" – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Unactioned repairs are major drivers for tenants' mental health to *really slip* (Frances). In one example, a young mother who Frances supported was distressed because of *Housing's systemic failure to repair* her house, an experience that *interfered with her peace, comfort and privacy*, which Frances said *manifests in her feeling like she cannot provide a safe home to her children*. Housing providers themselves enact systemic trauma by not actioning repairs, despite

clients following providers' processes. They are left without *control and autonomy*. As Frances described, her client *couldn't fix that house up for her kids even though she did the right things, even though she followed the processes*.

Unactioned repairs impact mental health and tenants' sense of worth. Over time with repairs not being actioned, tenants begin to believe they *don't* deserve to live in good quality housing.

...people are living in squalor while they're housed and paying rent. ... Like, you are paying for this. And you really begin to believe that's what you deserve. ...Genuinely, you begin to believe like, you don't deserve shit. – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

Charlie said unactioned repairs were part of housing providers lacking accountability, describing it as *the housing system* having *messed them up*, and as *systemic gaslighting*. Because of the lack of accountability, caseworkers need to be vigilant and to hold providers accountable. Tenant support workers play an important role in ensuring tenants know their rights, encouraging them to ask for repairs, following up for them, and standing up for them in the face of worker's reluctance to support with repairs. However, Pat said while social services have some power to support tenants, they are up against a *siege mentality*. She said social services are all supporting tenants however whether they get results depends on if the service *can get through to the provider*.

We are hitting that siege mentality within public housing. We can't get past that. But we're all batting for them [tenants]. We are. And we're all hitting the same castle wall with the oil hanging over the top of our heads. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

Some said tenants often *give up* asking for what they need because of the reality that their request won't be actioned (Elle). Sid said when tenants experience inaction, they don't ask for maintenance.

And they're not game enough to ask [for maintenance]. Because housing don't do any. They go, "What's the point?" Or just leave it. – Sid, Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

Tenant's reluctance to report issues come not just from a place of futility, but from difficult navigating the repairs system and also a belief that reporting mould could lead to the tenant be transferred to a property in a worse condition. Tenants stay living in unhealthy conditions, for example, in mouldy properties.

And we have had tenants report moulds, and we've tried to do the log on, you know, reporting maintenance thing online. ... And they just haven't been able to get their heads around it enough and they're like, "Don't worry about it. That's all too hard. We're just gonna stay there. And they might put us somewhere that's worse anyway." Like the mould, they might put us somewhere where there's mould in every room instead of just one. So they just decide that they're just gonna stay. – Sid, Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

These stories show how social housing providers' power and control over tenants impact them when attempting to request repairs to make their homes safe, healthy and comfortable. The lack of accountability of providers in actioning repairs within reasonable timeframes and not following their own repairs processes is a form of systemic trauma. It impacts on tenants' mental wellbeing and sense of worth, leading them to give up and continue living in poor quality housing conditions, further impacting their physical health and wellbeing.

Yarning about power and termination notices: It feels actually quite abusive of the relationship

This story is about power being exerted over tenants through a Notice of Termination (NoT). While housing providers are required to contact tenants prior to NoT for rental arrears, tenant support workers said their clients often received notices without any prior communication. From some advocates' perspective, housing providers automatically send NoTs when a tenant is in arrears more than 14 days. When relaying to tenant support workers that housing providers had expressed to me that they always make attempts to contact tenants before issuing a notice, Cara, an Aboriginal tenant advocate said providers *actually don't* contact tenants when they are in arrears. Brooke agreed.

There's a generic system that if you're in arrears, they just send you a [termination] letter straight away. – Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

The practice of sending notices without prior communication was considered an oversight of social housing providers because tenants don't always have good *literacy* and will *throw* letters from their housing provider in the bin (Brooke). This is partly to do with low literacy, but also because of fear or shame.

What [housing providers]’ve overlooked too is the literacy. ...And what they [tenants] do is throw it out or because they can't read, they throw it out. - Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Housing provider staff are required to make attempts to communicate with tenants before they send NoTs. However, according to some tenant advocates, this isn't the experience of tenants. Holly describes the experience of an Aboriginal client who witnessed social housing workers taking a photo of themselves outside his property with a call note, as false evidence of attempts to contact the client.

There's one guy who actually has footage because he got so desperate and so fed up with the way that housing is treating him, that he actually put a camera at his door. He's got footage of them walking up, not even knocking on the door, just taking a photo of themselves, holding this piece of paper at the door and turning and walking away. ... Didn't even knock on the door. And then going back to the office and saying, "We knocked, but nobody answered the door". And they're repeatedly doing this. I've got several matters where they say that they are doing everything they possibly can, but you can see clearly they've not. – Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Thomas, a non-Aboriginal tenant advocate, said housing providers use NoTs to scare tenants into complying with the RTA, particularly in rental arrears cases. According to Thomas, providers don't seek to evict tenants when they send a NoT, rather it is a *tool* for providers to *coerce* tenants into particular *behaviours*, for example, paying rent. In the example of rental arrears, the provider's desired outcome is to set up a repayment plan with the tenant and the only *tool* they have to make this happen is a NoT. He says this is frowned upon by tenant advocates and believes it to be *abusive* not only of *the relationship* between tenants and providers, but also *abusive of the process*.

...but the experience of the renter is often that it's [NoT] used at a point where the landlord is not really seeking eviction as the outcome they want. They want – for instance, around rent arrears, they want a repayment plan and they use the tribunal mechanism to pull the tenant in and grab their attention, and scare them so that they will sign up to the repayment plan. And to do that they'll issue ... an eviction notice, and they've applied for the eviction orders. But they're very happy to walk away if the ... payment plan is there... - Thomas, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

According to Thomas, it is *abusive* of providers to send NoTs because some tenants believe that a notice is a termination order, and they must immediately move out of a property. However, in NSW, *only the sheriff can evict* (Elle).

Majority of the tenants believe that if they get the termination notice, it says you've got to be out by the 6th of the 6th, that means you've got to be out by the 6th of the 6th. They don't understand their rights, they don't understand they can go on SPO³³... To them it's a termination notice, it means that they have to be out of the property by that day. ... They don't know if they get a termination, that it doesn't mean they don't have to vacate the premises. – Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

We often get people on the advice line calling and saying, "I have this termination, I have to leave by next Wednesday, the date of termination in my notice." And we'd say, "Well, we follow the process of in the act under Section 120 - which says the landlord has to follow this process. If a tenant has not vacated, the landlord must wait until the date of the termination notice, go to NCAT, get a termination order and then a warrant". In New South Wales, only the sheriff can evict. – Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

In some cases, tenants do leave their property after receiving a termination notice, a distressing experience for tenants, and in the example below, for housing provider staff as well.

We had an advocate once who got called by a community housing provider who – and the worker was in tears because they had issued a notice of termination, on this tenant, who was a couple of weeks behind in rent and had a history of homelessness, and history of you know, poor experience with governments and so on. So she got the notice of termination, left, and was sleeping in a car in [State]. The worker, from the community housing provider, is calling the advocate, going, "Where is she, what's happened?" And "We didn't mean for this to happen". And it's like, "But you served the notice". But they don't see that as the same. They don't see the process in full. They see it's not an eviction until we've got their order of vacant possession, from the Tribunal, and the tenant leaves in accordance with that. – Thomas, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

The above example shows how some provider staff do not see tenants' viewpoint and believe termination notices are understood by tenants as one step in a legal process. The housing system exists within a legal framework that is not transparent to tenants and causes distress. The repercussions of not engaging with housing providers about a NoT and leaving the property potentially leads to homelessness.

³³ Specific Performance Order; an SPO is an order from the Tribunal that orders a tenant to correct a breach in their tenancy agreement, for example, anti-social behaviour or rental arrears. An SPO can be negotiated prior to a notice of termination being sent out to the tenant.

According to Charlie, tenants who have had poor experiences with their provider for many years are unlikely to engage when receiving a NoT – instead they will move out and stay with a relative. This highlights the systemic violence of the housing system, where poor experiences with provider workers over time lead to ongoing disengagement from the system, potentially leading to homelessness and people returning to the housing waitlist.

If people are getting termination notices, most people go, "That's it". Nobody's gonna go, "Well I'll go into the office to have a little discussion about it to these people that have only been punitive to me for 10 years". ... You just go, "Oh, well, fuck I'll go stay with aunt". "I'll just leave then". And it's like, "No, because now you've gotta go on a 20-year waitlist." It's ridiculous. – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

According to Thomas, this *abusive* and *coercive* dynamic can exist because housing is conditional on payment of rent to the provider, a dynamic that is supported by legislation.

...the big problems with the way that renting is structured, is that the core of the relationship is – and this is true for social housing as well – is that it is, we're going to provide you with this sort of essential shelter, but only while you pay us. And, ah, so the relationship is based on the kind of a threat of – and the ability to carry out, ah, the threat of eviction, particularly into homelessness. So there isn't another foundation for that relationship. And so when you need to resolve a problem, almost all the tools given to landlords are around evicting the tenant and using that to coerce whatever behaviour you want. ...And some of that sort of implanted by the legislation, and then people kind of internalise it into their practice... - Thomas, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

The provider-tenant relationship is damaged in the example of NoTs. Providers hold power over tenants, with the ability to send a NoT in instances where the tenancy agreement has been breached. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants who have experienced systemic trauma, the practice of sending NoTs without communication, and poor transparency of the broader legal system, is re-traumatising, *coercive* and *abusive*.

Yarning about avenues of recourse and power at Tribunal: A real nasty little trap

This next story is about *avenues of recourse* and how providers continue to exert power over tenants at Tribunal. If providers have breached the RTA, for example, not actioning tenants' repair requests and thus causing tenants to live in unsafe conditions, tenants can escalate the matter by applying to Tribunal. They can do this themselves or contact a tenant advocacy or legal service for assistance. On the other hand, if providers deem tenants to have breached the

RTA, they can take tenants to Tribunal. This story is about tenants taking providers to Tribunal with the support of tenant advocates and caseworkers.

Tribunal was described as *terrifying, so scary* (Charlie), a process that causes *fear* in tenants (Brooke) and *a real nasty little trap* (Frances). Charlie spoke about Tribunal as one of the only *avenues of recourse*. She said it was *too long, intimidating, extremely traumatic* for her clients. Her clients are people *with criminal justice issues*, people who *don't want to engage in any kind of institutional or punitive measures*. Pat shared this view that Tribunal is terrifying, noting that escalating to Tribunal shouldn't occur when someone has a simply maintenance issue

People are terrified when they have to do that [go to Tribunal]. But they shouldn't have to go to Tribunal, it shouldn't get that far. – Pat, Aboriginal tenant advocate and tenant

Charlie said because of the trauma and the fear, she said *nobody wants to do that*, i.e., go to Tribunal. Brooke, an Aboriginal tenant advocate also said *no one wants to go to NCAT*, and instead tenant advocates are negotiating with housing providers to *reduce going to NCAT*, with some successful outcomes.

So we're trying to negotiate as much as we can, but there's a blockage there. There's some housing providers that just don't see reason or realistic outcomes, and really develops a lot of fear and tenants - which is sad, but on the other hand, there's been a lot of negotiations that's got through the door without going to NCAT. So there's a bit of both there. – Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

All Charlie's clients want *is a house* and they don't want to have to *prove themselves for a human right*. Tribunal is a space where institutions and systems exert power over people and make them *prove themselves* as someone who *deserves* recourse. She didn't share any stories from Tribunal, instead spoke about tenants calling a popular current affairs television show to shame housing providers into action, rather than going through the traumatic Tribunal process.

People will call A Current Affairs before they call Tribunal. Because they know. They're like, "Well, we don't get through that process. You need to shame them." – Charlie, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Holly said tenants are *worried about talking* at Tribunal and tries to reassure them that she will be there, that they *don't have to do it alone* and that there's *help and support*.

Tribunal hearings were considered highly distressing experiences for tenants, and for tenant advocates. Frances said the Tribunal process was *traumatic* and *a real nasty little trap*. Housing

providers employed *nasty tactics* such as delaying hearings, being *vindictive*, lying about tenants, pressuring advocates to withdraw cases, guilt-tripping tenants and using irrelevant, sensitive and private information against tenants during hearings. In many eviction proceedings, one housing provider uses concepts of gratitude and appreciation of housing to guilt tenants.

So in eviction proceedings, half their evidence is, there's X amount of people sleeping rough on the streets tonight and you're taking a spot and you're not appreciative ... And basically "There's someone out there who deserves this more than you. Make way, buddy". – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Charlie held a similar view to Frances about tenants being made out as ungrateful.

...but it just seems they just try and be punitive constantly, over and over. It doesn't matter what your eligibility is. It doesn't matter what your disability is. It doesn't matter what your needs are, you are the problem. You could be the most disadvantaged, the most oppressed person there and they will still say, "You're taking this from someone else." – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

In another example, Frances spoke of a woman whose domestic violence history had been *weaponised* against her during a hearing about repairs to her home. In this example, the tenant was at Tribunal to action repairs. The housing provider knew about the tenant's domestic violence history and used it against the tenant during proceedings that were unrelated to the matter at Tribunal, to intimidate her. Frances said these *nasty tactics* were being used to deter tenants and advocates to give up on legal processes that are the only *avenues of recourse* to assert tenant's rights to housing (i.e., the right not to be evicted) and their right to living in a *safe, healthy* home through repairs.

...we're here because someone's got a leaky roof. I don't know what their life history has to do with this matter. ... it felt like a very deliberate kind of attack on not just the tenants, but our service of just like "You are going to give in and stop making these applications" because these things were drawing out for 12 months plus dealing with very distressed clients. – Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

The impact was felt not only on tenants, but on Frances and other advocates, saying it's become *like a war of attrition*, where it's wearing not just the tenant, but us down. Sid also spoke of housing providers *weaponizing* things *against* tenants. Pat said she was completely *burnt out*.

The effect of Tribunal greatly impacted on the provider-tenant relationship. Tenants would begin the process with a reasonably positive outlook on the provider, but at the end it would be soured by the trauma experienced during the Tribunal.

Yes, your wood rot got fixed, but at what cost? You are now in a whole different head space than you were a year ago when this started. Before it was, "Oh, they're being a bit lazy not doing the repairs." And now it's like, "These people hate me and they will do anything and say anything." - Frances, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Because of the *nasty tactics* and *attack* by housing providers Frances said *it's starting to not feel very worth it for people to go to Tribunal*.

Another aspect of Tribunal is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may not be able to attend due to Sorry Business. George, an Aboriginal tenant advocate said cultural awareness needed to be improved in the Tribunal system, to stop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants having tenancies terminated for not being at Tribunal for cultural reasons.

We'll have tenants that will be unable to attend a Tribunal session because of Sorry Business. And then there's been rulings where that's kind of disregarded that cultural sensitive aspect of Sorry Business and then would terminate without them being there. ... there's issues within the Tribunal itself and allowing more cultural awareness to essentially understand the importance of Sorry Business and the fact that it's very important culturally to Aboriginal people. – George, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants experience shame going to Tribunal. Some advocates had ideas for improved recourse measures, one of which was implemented in late 2023. Holly spoke of the establishment of an Aboriginal Tenancy List at Tribunal, which started at the Tribunal in Sydney. The list allows for greater culturally sensitive through a closed court, access to Aboriginal tenant advocates and additional time to decide on a case (NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal 2024).

They're trying to do an Aboriginal list so that on the matter, instead of having six matters all at once, it would be your matter with the member and it'll be a closed court. So other people don't get to hear your business. - Holly, an Aboriginal tenant advocate

Holly said the shame and pressure of Tribunal would be *massively* taken off Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants by the new Aboriginal list.

Charlie believed improved recourse measures would include *well-trained advocates* and *clear measures of recourse*, and complaints processes outside the Tribunal system that were heard.

In an ideal world, recourse measures would be having really well-trained advocates.

Whether that's legal, social worker... But well-trained advocates, and also clear measures of recourse because I know that if there was an option where it was like, put in a genuine complaint and it will go to a manager rather than a Tribunal or something, people would take that up more. – Charlie, non-Aboriginal caseworker

Interlude

At this point we have heard from Aboriginal social housing tenants, and tenant support workers.

We've just heard tenant support workers' perspectives on what makes a home for their clients who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and what home means to Aboriginal people who are tenant support workers. Aboriginal people working in tenant support hold similar meanings of home to Aboriginal tenants, such as connection to Country, family and community.

We've heard how tenants experience the social housing system, finding the system overwhelming and are treated poorly by some frontline social housing workers. We've heard that Aboriginal tenants experience racism, judgement, discrimination and poor treatment by some provider workers. We've heard about the negative experiences of Aboriginal clients interacting with housing providers and how much friendlier provider workers are to support workers compared to their clients. Housing providers lack accountability, transparency and clarity in housing provider policies and processes. They are known to lose clients' paperwork, a form of gaslighting with minimal to no recourse. Underlying these stories is the sense that, at times, housing providers do not value people living in social housing. They judge and stereotype Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants who are, at times, characterised as unworthy and ungrateful.

We've heard how tenant support workers often play a translation role between housing providers and tenants, communicating legal processes and housing provider language to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants.

We've heard of the differential power between tenants, tenant support workers and social housing providers throughout the repairs process, in termination notices, and at Tribunal. We've heard how traumatising the social housing system can be and how difficult it is for tenant support workers to meet tenants' needs through the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal system. They identify a need for tailored communication for clients and tenants, and improved resourcing for tenant advocates in NSW.

Now we will hear from social housing workers.

Chapter 6: Social housing workers

This chapter presents stories from the lived experience of twenty-six members of the research who are social housing workers. The people in this chapter hold multiple standpoints. Ten are Aboriginal people, identifying with various cultural and language groups, and 16 people are non-Aboriginal. At least four people have experience living in social housing³⁴. Twenty people are women and six are men.

Once again, as we hear the stories, truths and lived experiences of this group, we simultaneously hold space for the multiple, parallel truths and lived experiences of the people we've heard from in the Aboriginal tenant group and the tenant support worker group.

Social housing workers

Social housing workers are people employed at social housing providers, in public housing or at CHPs. Social housing providers are entities – whether government or non-government – that aim to deliver secure, low-cost and affordable housing for people who do not have the financial means to rent or buy in the private market (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2020). Workers at social housing providers facilitate clients' access to housing and housing products, within the scope of housing provider eligibility criteria, policies, law and within the limits of available housing stock.

In NSW there is one public housing entity, Homes NSW, a NSW Government consultative Division bringing together the Housing and Homelessness services of the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) and the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) (NSW Government 2024). There are also over one hundred community housing providers managed by not-for-profit non-government organisations across NSW (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2020). There are 46 mainstream community housing members, and 56 Aboriginal housing providers registered under the Community Housing Industry Association NSW, the state's peak body for community housing (Community Housing Industry Association NSW 2024).

At Homes NSW, there are several tiers of frontline workers. Client Service Officers (CSOs) are entry-level workers who have direct contact with clients and are based in either frontline offices or at the Housing Contact Centre, the Homes NSW's call centre. Senior Client Service Officers

³⁴ Members were not asked about their current or former tenure, rather their housing experiences organically arose during yarns and interviews. It is possible that more than four members in this group had lived experience of social housing and were not compelled to bring this experience to this research.

are more experienced workers who guide Client Service Officers in the application of policies and procedures. CSOs and Senior CSOs are in either the access and demand team, or the tenancy team. The access and demand team assess, review and process clients' applications for social housing, and support clients with accessing housing products, such as rental assistance. CSOs in access and demand teams may be based at Homes NSW offices or in the Housing Contact Centre, providing clients with information through phone, e-mail and e-platform communications, assistance with access to housing options and assessing eligibility for housing products (Department of Communities and Justice 2024).

The tenancy team manage existing tenants. Tenancy management involves conducting annual client service visits (CSVs) at tenants' homes, monitoring rental accounts, recovering debt from tenants, investigating reported anti-social behaviour, and supporting property maintenance (Department of Communities and Justice 2024). CSOs and Senior CSOs manage large portfolios of 300 to 400 tenancies³⁵ per CSO in one geographic area. They are supported by Team Leaders, Senior Client Service Officer Specialists and Senior Client Service Officer Aboriginal Specialists. The Specialist workers provide specialist advice and refer tenants with complex support and housing needs to appropriate services. They work with CSOs, Senior CSOs and external services to tailor support to clients. The Senior Client Service Officer Aboriginal Specialist (hereafter, Aboriginal Specialist) role is an identified role open only to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The Aboriginal Specialist provides specialist advice and referrals specifically to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants with complex needs. These roles are depicted in Figure 8.

³⁵ Tenancy load varies. The figure 300-400 is indicative of the tenancy load anecdotally shared in yarns and interviews with staff included in this research. One tenancy refers to one household.

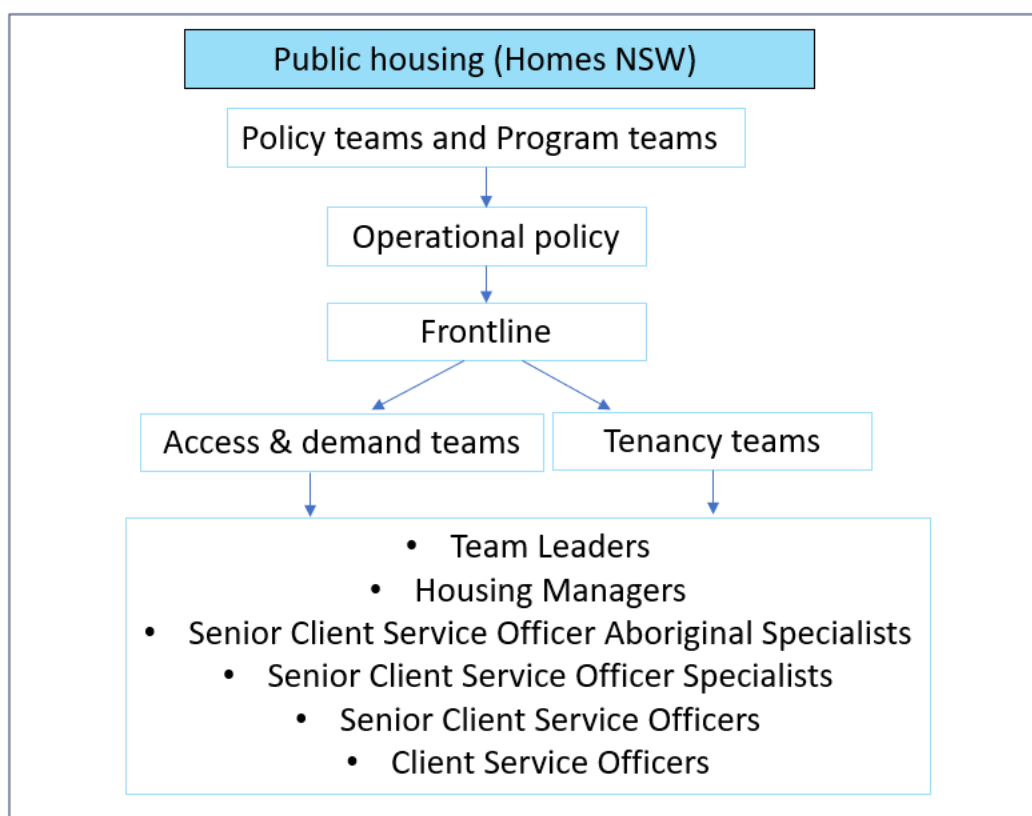


Figure 8 Roles within DCJ Housing (now Homes NSW) at time of yarns and interviews

Homes NSW employs workers to develop the strategy and policies and manage operations of the frontline offices. Homes NSW manage tenancies of people in properties owned by either the Land and Housing Corporation, the Aboriginal Housing Office, or by private owners under head leasing agreements. Tenants of public housing in both LAHC and AHO interface with Homes NSW workers, however in some instances tenants may directly contact AHO, and some AHO workers are tasked with engaging with tenants.

Community housing providers function similarly to Homes NSW, with workers in frontline roles and varying operational, policy and management roles across each provider. CHPs manage tenancies of people either in properties CHPs own, or properties owned by other entities such as Aboriginal Local Land Councils and Aboriginal Corporations.

Between June and November 2023, I yarned with and interviewed 26 social housing workers employed at social housing providers of public housing and community housing. Their roles spanned direct client and tenant engagement, known as frontline, to operational policy, relationships and strategy, policy and program roles with minimal to no client engagement. Seventeen workers were at the Housing and Homelessness services of the Department of Communities and Justice (Housing and Homelessness services of DCJ are now under Homes

NSW³⁶ and hereafter described as public housing, except where explicitly referred to as DCJ or Homes NSW in members' quotes), two workers were employed at the Aboriginal Housing Office, and seven workers from two CHPs. Of the 17 public housing workers, eight were in frontline, three were in operational policy roles, three were in program and policy roles, two were in policy roles, and one was employed at the District level, see Figure 9.

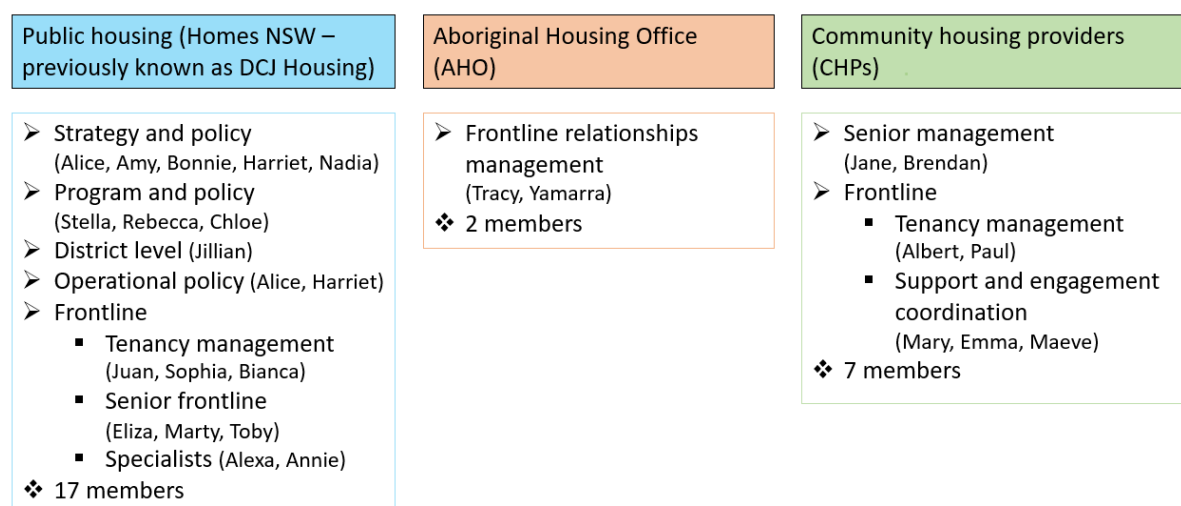


Figure 9 Social housing worker summary

The length of yarns and interviews was 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Fourteen of the 19 interviews and yarns were one-on-one, and four were with two or more workers. One repeat interview was conducted with two people from operational policy to ascertain information that hadn't been captured in the initial interview. Nine yarns and interviews were held in person at their offices and ten were held online via Teams.

Storying the context

Yarning and interviews with social housing workers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, housing and home brings out the broader context within which social housing providers operate, namely, the context of social housing as an undervalued and under resourced sector.

The social housing provider sector is the main avenue for the government to support people requiring social housing, with a waitlist of over 57,000 people in NSW³⁷. This pressure is placed on social housing providers and monitored closely by government and other authorities.

³⁶ At the time of data collection, workers were employed under the Housing and Homelessness services of the Department of Communities and Justice. In February 2024, DCJ transitioned to become an entity under Homes NSW. For the purposes of this research, I have described the members who were working at DCJ as public housing workers to reflect their place in the broader social housing sector.

³⁷ This figure is from the period of data collection in 2023. The number of people on the social housing waitlist increased in 2024. As at August 2024 there were over 59,000 households on the waitlist for social housing in NSW. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/families-and-communities-statistics/social-housing-waiting-list-data.html>

We do have tight KPIs with the government and the [community housing] registrar to meet as part of our obligations. There's 57,000 people waiting on the waiting list. That's just the expressed demand. So we can't be leaving vacant houses lying around – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, senior management at a CHP

However, the social housing sector is under resourced and public housing is increasingly experiencing residualisation (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2019). The *last 20 years* has seen *no significant amounts of money invested into social housing* (Amy). The availability of social housing stock in NSW is dwindling and becoming a *really tightly rationed resource* (Nadia). Providers are *understaffed* and employees are *overworked* (Juan), managing 300 to 400 tenancies living in housing that require continued maintenance. Providers' struggle to house people on the waitlist is *not because of the providers* but *because of the government saying they may not provide extra money for social housing*, which *impacts providers' ability deliver a service to the client* (Tracy).

At the same time, social housing's *client base is much more complex* than in the past (Jillian). The pool of social housing tenants is increasingly made up of people with overlapping complex social issues, for example, financial stress, chronic illness and domestic violence, compared to tenants of the past who were eligible for social housing solely on economic grounds, i.e., low-income earners.

Social housing workers are thus tasked with managing the tenancies of people who have various psycho-social, cultural and economic needs. Entry-level frontline workers are especially at the forefront of the public's access to a highly stigmatised form of tenure and regularly interact with people who have experienced trauma. However, they are not required to have specialised social support skills to be employed in social housing's frontline. Generally, social housing *staff aren't social workers* (Harriet) and as *housing providers* they *stay in their lane of housing administration and management*, brokering external social support when required (Jane).

In the past, public housing *had social workers* (Jane), or it was seen as *being really important to be a social worker* (Amy). Currently, *most of the entry-level frontline workers don't really have an education in any fields that's related to housing and there's not really any education requirement for the job* (Juan).

There's a lot of things we're not trained in, frontline staff, to help. We're not trained in mental health, we're not counsellors, we're not psychologists. We can't diagnose

people. But yet here we are with somebody that has either undiagnosed or diagnosed mental health, that's off their tablets, paranoid in our office, because we're stealing their rent, or their neighbour is looking through their window at 1 o'clock in the morning. –

Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO and previously a frontline worker in public housing

It seemed to one public housing worker that *a lot of the staff* are people who *were previously real estate agents* because of the *selection criteria* being designed around collecting rents, while in the past *it used to be that everyone was a social worker* (Amy). One frontline worker likened social housing tenancy management to private real estate tenancy management, saying his team *manages tenancy like your LJ Hooker* (Marty).

At times, frontline workers *get abused* by clients and tenants (Yamarra), for example, being *insulted on the job* or being *attacked* (Juan). They are exposed to and impacted by trauma experienced by tenants, for example, being involved in evictions or removing children from their families. They are also impacted by the aftermath of trauma experienced by tenants, such as suicide attempts, suicide, domestic violence, murder, mental health crises, substance abuse, and violence. They manage 300 to 400 tenancies alongside the complexity of these experiences.

Each Client Service Officer has to manage between 300 to 400 residents within their portfolio, which is very high given the complexity of our clients these days. The client base is much more complex than it would've been even five years ago probably. – Jillian,
non-Aboriginal woman, District level, public housing

Housing is a tough system to be in for tenants, social housing workers and tenant support workers (Bonnie). For tenancy management workers in social housing *it's a really tough, tough gig* (Alexa). There is *such a high turnover* of workers in social housing (Annie) as a result of how difficult it is. *A lot of people come and go because it's not an easy job* (Juan).

This context comes into play with how the social housing provider system functions and serves, or does not serve, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. These stories highlight the views of individual workers and their perspectives of the system within the constraints of this broader context and are not intended to be representative of their respective places of work.

Storying the social housing worker experience

The following two sections tell two stories, the first – **Meanings of home, priorities of tenants and constraints in meeting housing needs** - is the story of home and priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants from the lived experience of social

housing workers, and varying individual and structural factors that make it difficult for housing workers to meet tenants' needs. Honouring Aboriginal people's voices, this story is foregrounded by the voices of Aboriginal social housing workers on home³⁸ in the section **Yarning about what home means**. Their voices are followed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social housing workers' diverse views on the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, in **Priorities and needs** and followed by **The constraints in meeting housing needs**.

The second section - **Sustaining tenancies and strategies of engagement** - tells the story of social housing worker's goal for tenants (sustaining tenancies), where this idea is derived from and how it is achieved through various strategies of engagement and avenues of support. The story is then followed by an example of how sustaining tenancies is enacted through rental arrears management - **Engagement and termination notices – rental arrears** – and how termination notices are used as a punitive engagement strategy. Underlying this story is the *power imbalance* between tenants and providers (Jane), the problematisation of tenants who are *not engaging* (Sophia, Yamarra, Harriet), and workers' understanding of the context of why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants may not engage with the system.

Meanings of home, priorities of tenants and constraints in meeting housing needs

Yarning about what home means

Home to some Aboriginal people who work in social housing is connection to family, connection to the places and communities where they grew up, and connection to Country. For Bonnie, home is where she is connected to community in the Sydney suburb where she grew up, connection to her grandma's home and her embodied connection to place. Bonnie juxtaposes her concept of home as more than a shelter with the Western idea of home as a house.

I understand the white lens in regards to the concept of home... Well, it's a house, isn't it? ... It's just a little house with a couple of walls and something over your roof. But when I talk about home, that's my community that's walking around in [suburb]. That's when it's pouring down raining and I stand out the front of nan's flat and I take my shoes off and I let the water just rush through me while I'm standing in the gutter, in the driveway at the front of nan's and

³⁸ Yarns with Aboriginal social housing workers usually began with personal introductions and flowed into a yarn about what home means. Non-Aboriginal social housing workers were generally not asked explicitly about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home, as it was considered more appropriate to hear the perspectives of Aboriginal workers on this question.

I run down and get her mail. To me, that's home. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

The idea of home is *complex* to Bonnie because home is both community and connection to the place she grew up, while also the *property* where she sleeps.

I have a property, I have a house, I sleep there every night, that's my home, but that's not my home at the same time. It's very complex. ... And you know what, every Blackfella might look at it different, but for me, that's the way I see it. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

To Chloe, home is connection to place and Country, a feeling and more than a shelter.

It's a lot to do with the connection, with connection to the Country. ... You feel there's a connection. It's not just a building and four walls and bricks and mortar, as the mainstream view it. Home is a feeling. – Chloe, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Home is family, enacted in supporting one another and providing space to stay when visiting one another, as part of cultural obligation. There is a *reciprocal obligation to host your family and to support when you're asked for help to support* (Alice).

...everyone travels around and moves around, but actually there's this obligation for Aboriginal people. It's part of culture and that it's actually more than just, well, people come and go and travel and visit family, everyone does that, but there's just a bit more to it for Aboriginal people. – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

When we look at Blackfellas, traveling for Sorry Business, traveling for, you know, family gatherings, traveling for frigging things like Koori Knockout. Like I've heard stories and yarns of, you know, families traveling for Koori Knockout and staying for six months. You know, it happens. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Supporting family includes those who are beyond the immediate family. Annie said that in instances where a family needs support, *you can't say, "Oh well, you can't come"* (Annie). There is an obligation to collectively support one another and this shapes home as a broad network of supporting and caring for community.

Home is not necessarily just your immediate family. Home - it could be rel³⁹ that drop in and say they're staying for a weekend and next minute they're there for three, four, five

³⁹ Relatives

months [laughs]. ... Or it could be you're helping out someone else's kids or you're helping out someone that's homeless and couch-surfing. – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

Safety is an important element of home that is tied to place and family connection.

So my understanding of what makes a home is having somewhere safe to go to like, one central place. – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, senior frontline, public housing

Eliza and her siblings have lived around and visited her mum's place as the *central drop-in place* that is *safe*, for many decades. To her, home is safety and a place of love and reciprocity.

And we [siblings] all still lob on mum's doorstep, whenever you need a yarn or whatever, you don't ever go to visit one of the siblings - because all my siblings live around mum. ... And you don't ever go and see one of them without dropping into mum's. Because mum's is the central location. It's like central station, literally. And that's what a home is. It's where you can go. You can go to the fridge, go to the cupboard, grab something out, you don't have to ask, it's just there. And you give to that house as much as you take as well, because yeah, it's about being that central drop-in place that you know it's safe, it's home. It's people that you love there, they love you back. – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, senior frontline, public housing

For Mary, home and safety is intertwined with connection to community and spirituality through connection to place. She said *home is very sacred to us* and stressed the importance of Aboriginal people being allocated housing where they are *spiritually connected*.

Personally I wouldn't move out west or move anywhere from in and around this area. This is where I've grown up. I feel safe, culturally safe, comfortable, my kids have been raised here as well, and I think that needs to come into effect, that yeah, this is where your connections are, this is where you're safe. You don't know anywhere else. If you were placed or transferred to another location it's all about that disconnection of services or spiritual wellbeing. And that's where your mental health can play up and stuff. ... I spiritually am connected to where I live. And I think that's really something across our culture. Where you reside you're spiritually connected through that. – Mary, Aboriginal woman, support coordinator at a CHP

Stella experiences home as a multitude of shelter and non-shelter elements, importantly, *home* as a *safe place* (Stella).

...it's certainly the basic need, you know. Fresh water, roof over your head. Certainly, the connection is really important. – Stella, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Priorities and needs

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social housing workers' views about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' priorities and needs is diverse, spanning *successful* housing *allocations* that support *cultural links* and belonging (Jillian, Sophia) and housing that is *well maintained* (Toby). According to an AHO worker, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients *want to live in a place that they want to live in* and to have a *choice* about their housing (Tracy). They also *want to be heard* and treated in a *culturally minded* way (Yamarra) and for their concerns to be taken *seriously* (Eliza). There is an understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants want housing that facilitates connection to their families, community, culture, place and services. They want their shelter needs met and to be housed in properties and areas that are safe, and to have housing stability and security. They want maintenance and for housing providers to respond to them when requesting repairs, and they want to be taken seriously and be treated respectfully.

Housing that facilitates connection to family, community, culture, place and services

Social housing workers expressed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need housing that facilitates connection to family, community, culture, place and services. This means housing where *the location is right*, where people *really feel like they belong to the community* (Sophia), where people are culturally and *spiritually connected* (Mary), where there are *cultural links* (Jillian) and *where all their supports* are (Annie).

It's very important that when we are looking at housing Aboriginal people in general, whether it's social or community housing providers, that [cultural connection to an area] needs to be taken into account. ... It's not just "Here's a house, like take it or leave it" ... if you were placed or transferred to another location it's all about that disconnection of services or spiritual wellbeing. And that's where your mental health can play up and stuff
– Mary, Aboriginal woman, support coordinator at a CHP

A good tenancy starts with a successful allocation, you know, successful property match to that client particularly in, for the needs of Aboriginal clients, it's around cultural links ... – Jillian, non-Aboriginal woman, District level, public housing

...that affiliation with a property or with a suburb or with a location also appears to be coming out as a priority. – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Rebecca said that for *Aboriginal clients* it's *all about family*. For Yamarra, it's *really important not to isolate people* and to *have mob and family around you* including *organisations that do provide healing*. Aboriginal-specific services where Aboriginal people live is considered an important element of making it home according to Yamarra. She stressed the importance of passing down cultural knowledge through generations living near each other.

... I think it's really good for our younger generation to be able to live near their Elders, because they could pass knowledge down. – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Social housing providers have various allocation policies that include their consideration of clients' need to be in a particular area, to be near medical services, disability support, or live in an area for cultural reasons (Bridge Housing 2020). Homes NSW's policy, for example, outlines that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients can request to be in a particular area due to an affinity with the area, substantiated with evidence that they are connected to a kinship group living in the requested area or the area is their traditional homeland (NSW Government 2025).

It's called having a locational need and it's having an affinity with an area. ... with people needing transfers and stuff like that and wanting to move back to Country. ... Usually when they've lost a spouse and they've had that connection with that area, then they just want to go back to where mob are so that they can feel connected again. – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, senior frontline worker, public housing

Some frontline workers expressed that Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse need housing in the South-East Sydney area and try to allocate them housing there.

For example, with Aboriginal tenants... they would still go on the [location-specific] waiting list, but we are a bit more sensitive about their community. So if they, for example, would be La Perouse, the area, we would be more accommodating to try to match it for them. – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

Social housing workers said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want housing that accommodates large families, not only to accommodate the people living there but to fulfil *kinship responsibilities* (Amy) and allow for *extended family* visitors (Jillian).

Large properties. So usually they need larger - more bedrooms. – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

...and Aboriginal families are made up differently and so housing design principles need to be different to cater to Aboriginal families. – Amy, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

And as far as for Aboriginal families with kinship obligations and all that kind of stuff, they often need larger properties. – Nadia, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

In some cases, Aboriginal families do not apply for larger properties because they recognise the lack of existing housing stock that may meet their needs.

... sometimes we don't see them [Aboriginal families] apply for it, because they don't think they will – they'll be more likely to get a two-bedroom property. – Nadia, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Social housing providers' allocation policies outline providers' efforts to allocate clients to appropriate housing according to need. Some allocation policies include a section that outlines that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be matched to a larger property than their minimum entitlement, subject to availability. Public housing's Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement states that, if requested by the client, the provider may "match Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients to a property that has one more bedroom than the minimum bedroom entitlement for the household", stating that "Homes NSW has this policy in recognition of the family responsibilities of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients, who can ask for an extra bedroom on their application for housing assistance or at any time while they are on the NSW Housing Register, where they have selected public or Aboriginal housing as one of their preferred providers" (NSW Government 2025).

Social housing workers understand the nuances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's need to accommodate extended family as part of cultural obligations and because of colonisation, to varying degrees. Some workers see this section of the allocations policy as part of acknowledging that Aboriginal households may have people visiting who are connected to their household.

The extra bedroom policy⁴⁰ is kind of acknowledging the fact that when you're housing an Aboriginal household there's not just the one or two people on the lease that are going to be connected to that [household] – Albert, non-Aboriginal man, frontline at a CHP

Two workers from a CHP discussed the visitor policy as it relates to Aboriginal tenants, recognising the importance of being *flexible* with tenants.

We have policies under our social housing, that people can only stay for a certain amount of time. We are flexible with that when it comes to our Aboriginal tenants as much as we can be. It is still four weeks, 28 days. But someone staying a bit longer than that's fine. But if someone is still there six months later, it's like they're a member of the household. – Albert, non-Aboriginal man, frontline at a CHP

...I think you just have to be a little bit flexible and turn a blind eye. – Emma, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline at a CHP

Some workers expressed being unsure why providers have a *culturally sensitive* focus around supporting Aboriginal family structures (Marty). Others expressed an understanding of cultural obligation, described as Aboriginal people who *never turn their back on their family* (Rebecca), and structural *processes of colonisation* that mean Aboriginal people with *stable housing* provide housing to *members of their family* (Amy).

When it does come to Aboriginal clients, there is a lot more, and I don't know why it is, but it just always seems to be a lot more focus around being really culturally sensitive around the make-ups of families. – Marty, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

If their family come to visit, they will do anything for their family, regardless if they're causing problems when they come and they're visiting. And they're never going to turn their back on their family – Rebecca, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

I think that there's a lot of Aboriginal families in crisis because of processes of colonisation, so whereas I might not have my parents, my grandparents and my aunts and uncles needing to live with me and my grandparents needing to live with me kind of thing, an Aboriginal person has – because of the processes of colonisation – there might be one or two Aboriginal people in a family that are relied on heavily because they have

⁴⁰ The section of the allocations policy that refers to entitlements around extra number of bedrooms is informally described by frontline workers and tenants alike as the 'extra bedroom' policy. It is important to note that there is no standalone policy that relates to matching clients to an 'extra bedroom', rather, workers and tenants refer to the section of the allocations policy that describes the matching of clients to properties with one more bedroom beyond their minimum entitlement.

stable housing and many other members of their family don't have stable housing. And it's not within Aboriginal culture to turn family members away. – Amy, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

One Specialist worker, Alexa, noted that Aboriginal women often support one another by raising each other's children. According to Alexa, their priorities are to take care of one another through collective care.

I know the majority, like women with kids will, when they need the support, they will take on each other's kids. So they quite often take on multiple families' kids who are in trouble. So they will over house themselves and feel that pressure. But that's what they do and that's their priority. Family dynamics become more of the priority over housing being overcrowded. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Alexa experienced differences among Aboriginal people with regards to the desire to be with family. She said what Aboriginal people want in home depends *on the Aboriginal community* and can *vary around their mob* and their experience (Alexa).

I've worked with clients that are close to family and need to be together with their mob, and then there's some that go, "I can't be there because of all the abuse and I need to get away". So it really does depend on the individual and their experience with their family. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Shelter needs, safety and security

Safety, security and stability were said to be what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants want in housing (Bianca, Harriet, Tracy, Toby, Yamarra), and to be *comfortable and healthy* (Harriet). Workers stressed the importance of the basic provision of shelter to provide stability, and safety from health hazards and harm, and security from homelessness.

I think housing is the connection to everything, because if you don't have a house, you really don't have any stability, do you? So it really is the foundation to what mob need – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

It's definitely security 'cause, I wouldn't want to ever be in the situation that my cousin's in with her grandchildren, and many others and their parents, you know, sleeping in the car, the streets... – Stella, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

What they want is they want somewhere that's clean, safe and habitable. They want their properties to have heating, cooling. Be dry... economically sound for them. That's what they want - they want their needs met. – Tracy, Aboriginal woman, AHO

One Aboriginal worker said Aboriginal people who have experienced homelessness *just want a roof and don't have a high expectation* (Eliza).

To have a roof over their head. I think most Aboriginal people who have experienced homelessness just want a roof over their head. They don't care if it's the Taj Mahal or the tent down by the river as long as it's some sort of safe roof over their head. – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, senior frontline, public housing

Safety was said to be about living away from domestic violence perpetrators and to be housed in areas that are free of drugs, crime and violence. Some workers described in detail specific cases where women needed to live many suburbs away from perpetrators.

If they're coming through as a DV client or they need an urgent transfer because of something that's happened severely to them in their previous tenancy and we are finding an alternate housing transfer, then we can be a little bit more mindful of where they can't live in that area 'cause the perpetrator lives there. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Others described tenants who have experienced alcohol and/or drug abuse and their need to be housed where they can recover by not living around users of alcohol and other drugs.

Security was described as security of tenure and stability in a property, and affordability.

One of the main priorities is security of tenure. Just knowing that they've got a home. - Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

The security that in this property, the rent will be affordable for me. The security of knowing that if there's an issue with my tenancy that the landlord isn't trigger happy, that they're actually gonna wanna save my tenancy and work with me. – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Security of tenure was considered important when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants need to leave their property for extended periods of time for medical reasons, or for cultural reasons such as Sorry Business or to visit Country if they don't live on Country. Workers in public housing said they provide *flexibility* to provide for that *cultural need* and to keep their tenancy despite being away (Rebecca). Some providers have policies on how long tenants can

be away from their property - for example, 6 months - and for what reasons they can be away. If a tenant has been away for longer and hasn't let their provider know, their property might be considered *abandoned* and they may be at risk of losing their tenancy (Harriet). From Rebecca's perspective, housing providers offer reduced rent for tenants who leave their property for medical or cultural reasons, supporting people returning to Country.

They want that security as well. They want to know that they can return to Country without having to worry about their tenancy being at risk. So I think for us, we've allowed that to happen. We've also, in terms of the rent as well. We've got that flexibility where they have their reduced rent, so that they can attend medical services they need to, without worrying about paying their rent as well just to secure their tenancy. I feel like it builds more trust between DCJ and the client, because we understand and we have that flexibility in terms of what the cultural need is for them to continue on without their tenancy being at risk. – Rebecca, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Maintenance and responsiveness

All tenants, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal people, want homes that are *maintained properly* (Sophia) with maintenance done in a *timely manner* (Toby).

I think [desired outcomes are] similar to any other client, you know, sustainable homes to live in. ... Sustainable meaning they're maintained properly, and they can easily communicate with the housing office and they can easily get a response from us – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

Repairs is the biggest thing. Again, repairs, repairs, repairs. – Albert, non-Aboriginal man, frontline at a CHP

Maintenance is a big issue – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Based on experiences with tenants, housing providers say that *the main issues* for tenants are *maintenance and response times* (Toby).

So nine times out of 10, it's either going to be a complaint about the local office and the way they've been treated, or a maintenance issue that they can't get fixed because they can't explain to the guys at the contractor call centre what it is they're after with any clarity because of the terminology or jargon used. – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, senior frontline, public housing

Lack of responsiveness to maintenance is recognised as a regular experience in social housing. One worker said that a good tenancy is one where *they haven't had many maintenance issues or they've had the resources to just fix it themselves or do something themselves if they haven't had a response* (Sophia). If maintenance is not completed, tenants are then inclined to apply for a transfer.

[Maintenance and transfers] *go hand in hand together as well. Because if you can't fix it, then they want a transfer* – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Respectful treatment and an accessible system

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants *want their voices to be heard* by providers (Yamarra), to be listened to, treated with respect by housing providers. Some workers said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients are treated poorly by some housing workers, enacting a power differential over clients and talking to clients as though they own the housing *they're offering* (Tracy). Bonnie and Yamarra, two Aboriginal workers with past experience in public housing's frontline, recounted observations of frontline workers treating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients with disrespect.

I've seen some workers who will go above and beyond, and that's the type of client service that I like 'cause that's the type of client service that I like to provide. And then I've seen other people who I guess get a little bit of power and they trip on it big time. ... Like you manage a tenancy, bub, you're not a landlord. You act on behalf of a landlord, but you're not a landlord, calm down. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

I noticed a lot in DCJ when I was there, [frontline workers] would say, "Well, your name is on the list and you've already been approved, but how long is a piece of string?" And I used to think, "Oh my God. As a consumer, if I rang a business and they said that to me, I wouldn't wear it. I wouldn't be nice". – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Bonnie said workers across the social housing sector hold biases about Aboriginal people, which informs how they treat clients.

We also need to look at the social biases of our staff when it comes to dealing with those people. I've seen staff members go, "Oh it's an Aboriginal family, oh I bet they're on Sorry Business again." I've pulled these people into offices and I've had very, very stern conversations. But this is not just DCJ Housing, I've heard very similar conversations when we look at community housing providers as well and even Aboriginal Community

Housing Providers 'cause they're not required to have that cultural training associated with the actual organisation itself. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Public housing offices were at times described as *a bit confronting* and *sterile* (Alexa), leading to tenants not wanting to come to the office and interact with the provider.

Because a lot of clients don't like coming in here. You know, it's a bit confronting. It's a bit sterile. It's got that clinical government vibe, and a lot of clients that have a history of incarceration or history of institutionalised don't like coming in. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Workers' negative interactions with clients are also said to add to the *stigma of an office* (Alexa).

But I think someone coming in, sitting there almost pleading sometimes to the person behind that counter and they're just looking at them and going, "No, I can't do that. No, you're not eligible for that." It's like a, "No, no, no." And [clients] are like, "Oh, that's why I knew I shouldn't have come in." And then they leave and then it's just - then they won't come back. I don't know how to change the stigma of an office. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Social housing workers acknowledged that *as a whole the housing system is so complicated* (Bonnie). Inaccessibility of the system was recognised as a problem, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients who require housing. The application process to access social housing is *not fit for purpose* and *not culturally appropriate*, leading to Aboriginal people not applying for housing (Nadia).

One of the things that we hear a lot from the sector, very rightly, is that our application process is absolutely not fit for purpose and not culturally appropriate. And it makes it very, very difficult for Aboriginal people to apply. The burden of evidence, the complexity of the application process, all of that kind of stuff. Big problems with that. ... we think that fundamentally we have an application process that is really not catering to Aboriginal households. And we're hearing that from the [social housing] sector – Nadia, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

On a frontline level working with clients needing to access housing, Eliza said clients want their stories to be heard but don't want to have to repeat their stories.

You need to walk in this person's shoes for five minutes. They're homeless, they need somewhere to stay. They want to tell their story. Only once, not 20,000 times. Can we

just help them? That's what I used to do every single day. – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, senior frontline worker, public housing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants were said to want *face-to-face interactions*, and *personal contact*, particularly given *shame* and *gaps in literacy and understanding* (Jane).

Our staff tell us, and it still works for them, is people want face-to-face interactions. They want personal contact, the things about shame and all that kind of literacy and everything else. While you've got these gaps in people's literacy and understanding, you need a different model. – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, senior management at a CHP

Tenants want to be treated equally in terms of upgrades to properties.

If solar is happening across the board, they want it – they want solar, they want to be treated like everybody else. – Tracy, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Constraints in meeting housing needs

This story tells of the individual and structural level factors that are barriers to meeting the housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The social housing sector is a mainstream system that is not designed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While workers expressed an understanding of some of the key needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in housing and home – connection to family, community, culture and place, shelter, safety and security, maintenance and responsiveness, and respectful treatment – they are faced with varying constraints at the individual and structural levels, acting as barriers to meeting tenants' needs.

Social housing providers' policies and practices aim to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' needs, allocating people to areas where they are culturally and socially connected, and into larger properties. However, providers are constrained by limited or *no stock* (Mary) and *old stock* (Juan), particularly in Sydney's Eastern suburbs, and thus they then *can't meet* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's housing needs (Juan).

Workers have varying understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client's housing needs, and variability in knowing how to treat them in a culturally appropriate and trauma-informed way. Some workers do not consider the structural inequalities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants face. Frontline workers are encouraged to build trust with clients however they are constrained by large tenancy loads and KPIs that are oriented around property management and finance.

We don't have enough large properties: Lack of housing stock to meet tenants' needs

The social housing allocations policy (particularly the section about matching clients to an appropriate number of bedrooms) and the locational need policy are commonly referred to as policies that evidence social housing providers serving the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. However, the ability of workers to meaningfully apply these policies is subject to the availability of housing stock. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not able to access housing large enough for their families, and in the areas where they are connected, because *there's just not enough stock* (Juan). Workers find this *very frustrating* (Annie).

We give them an extra bedroom, if available. But we don't have enough large properties to accommodate their needs in the Eastern suburbs at the moment. There's lots of other issues but that's current and big. – Toby, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

What I'm finding is they're [LAHC] building a lot of one and two-bedrooms because of the ageing population, they say. But they're getting rid of the four and five bedrooms, especially in this area, I'm not sure about other areas. But we used to have a lot of four bedrooms. Now we don't have that many. And that's very frustrating when you've got a family of six or seven and they wanna live here – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

Like this conversation yesterday, it was about a client out at [place name] and that's her connection out there, and it's just again what [colleague name]'s saying with the housing crisis today, it's just like, there's no stock. – Mary, Aboriginal woman, support coordinator at a CHP

Because there is *no stock* (Mary), tenants in Eastern Sydney are then offered housing in areas where they are not connected to family, community, place and/or service supports. This is an attempt by providers to meet their property size needs.

I've said this to clients many times. I go, "I can't get you a four-bedroom here but if you move out west, I may be able to get you one." – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

I was speaking with a [non-Indigenous] colleague yesterday about an [Aboriginal] tenant [who] has been approved for high priority, and now needs to be reassessed. ...the question came up yesterday, would she move to another area? And it's like, well no because she's strongly connected to the area that she's currently housed in ... And so I

think you it needs to take into account like wherever your supports are, wherever you're connected to needs to be taken into account. – Mary, Aboriginal woman, support coordinator at a CHP

Housing workers expressed frustration that because providers *don't have the properties*, they as staff members *can't meet the expectations of clients* (Juan). They stressed that *we need more larger properties in the Eastern suburbs* (Toby) and *hope social housing investment will get better* (Juan).

...our hope now with social housing, they're going to invest more social housing in the next, period – decades. So I do hope the situation's going to get better, especially in the Eastern suburbs. – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

The need for larger properties in the Eastern suburbs is considered far from possible however. In the context of a broader societal housing crisis, the future possibility of new and increased social housing stock in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney is normalised as an impossibility.

The way the system works is that there are not often a lot of large properties around. – Nadia, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

More [large properties] — even if they are, we can't really say houses because that's not doable. But even more three and four-bedroom units. – Toby, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

I think they [LAHC] need to be still having four, five, six bedrooms. How they're gonna do that I don't know. And I suppose, because this area is so expensive, they'll probably have them out west. – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

Like I know in the Western Sydney, they're building a lot of new stock. They have been building for years. It's different housing. Nicer properties, newer properties. We just have old stock here. – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

The forcing of Aboriginal people out of the Eastern suburbs where they are connected, because social housing cannot compete with private housing market forces, is expressed by Bonnie as a *point of crisis* for Aboriginal people in particular.

Blackfellas who have lived there for two, three, four, five generations get pushed out. ... They're living in a point of crisis, because even we as a government organisation or even community housing as an established organisation do not have the stock and cannot

afford to be in that area, they get priced out. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants are expected to accept the *reality* (Annie) of waiting long periods of time to access housing that meets both their locational and size needs.

But the reality is - and I've said this quite a few times to clients is - the reality is we have a waiting list. You can check it on our website. It's called Expected Wait Times. And it will tell your bedroom categories and how long the wait is I say to them, you're literally waiting for someone to move out or die for you to get a four-bedroom. But you do get the ones that ring up and complain. And I feel for them but I can't do what I can't do – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

Limitations to locational need

There are some limitations to the locational need policy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants have limited scope to ensure they are allocated housing in a suburb-specific area that meets their social and cultural needs. The housing provider allocation system does not allow people on the housing waitlist to request to be in a specific suburb, they must choose to be housed in a general allocation zone.

Say, they need to be near family, but you can't be suburb specific when you're applying for housing. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

According to some workers, community and family links to a specific area are not necessarily considered at a detailed level.

I don't think the system allows this kind of really in detail community settings... family links – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

The locational need policy is further limited by a client's need to *demonstrate* their *connection to an area* (Paul). For some people, it may be onerous to provide evidence of connection.

You've got to demonstrate your connection to an area if you want to be transferred there – Paul, non-Aboriginal man, frontline at a CHP

They can request an area, provided supported documentation to substantiate locational need. - Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Another limitation to locational need is that requesting to be housed in a specific area may lengthen wait times for housing.

So we would communicate that. If you're Aboriginal, sure, you can have - there's an area that you feel you belong to. You can narrow that, but it's going to make it longer because you're narrowing the amount of properties that you're open to. And so that naturally will affect your wait time, right? – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

The flow on effect of these limitations is Aboriginal clients opt for smaller sized properties that don't meet their needs in terms of property size, to meet their locational need.

Aged properties: *Housing conditions*

In terms of housing conditions, the stock that currently exists in the Eastern suburbs is *really old* and *needs to be replaced* (Toby), making it difficult for housing providers to facilitate housing that supports wellbeing.

If you look at not just our [AHO] properties, but Land and Housing, there is so many properties, they're very aged properties. And probably in the area that you're talking about, wow, you've got some terrace houses and they're aging every day. – Tracy, Aboriginal woman, AHO

At the minute we have a housing shortage. We have that many people that are homeless and that do need transfers, and their properties may be falling apart, and it's affecting them. – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Maintenance

At the time of yarns and interviews, maintenance for public housing was contracted by an external company, limiting providers' ability to action maintenance requests. Tenants do not always receive a timely response to maintenance requests because of ineffective processes between housing providers and maintenance contractors hired by social housing landlords. Tenants are left with an unresponsive system, and in some cases social housing providers have no escalation pathways to ensure maintenance is completed.

Prior to July 2024, the Land and Housing Corporation were contracting an external private company to provide maintenance to tenants living in LAHC properties. All tenants in properties owned by LAHC and by AHO would need to request maintenance through a separate phone line and e-Repair system, rather than directly with their housing provider. The public housing provider did not have the power to action maintenance requests. If tenants did not receive a response from the private maintenance company, they had limited avenues to escalate the issue, as the housing provider would essentially be calling the same maintenance company phone number as the tenant would be calling to escalate a response.

[The maintenance company] raise a work order and should give you a timeframe. And then if it exceeds that timeframe, you call back. The idea is that you just deal with maintenance about maintenance, right? If you call us, we can't even access the system. We can't raise the work orders. We don't have special access when clients can't get through. I'm calling the exact same number. I'm waiting and I don't have any more weight than a client when I'm making those requests through the maintenance line. – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

This contracting arrangement led to frustration by both tenants and workers. As of July 1, 2024, Homes NSW are providing maintenance through their internal system, with tenants required to contact Homes NSW as their housing provider to action maintenance.

Varying treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients

Social housing workers have varying understandings of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants' want in housing, and varying knowledge in culturally appropriateness and trauma-informed practice. Workers ideally aspire towards a harmonious provider-tenant relationship however, they are constrained by large tenancy loads, KPIs that are driven by property management and finance, rather than by good relationships with people.

Equality, equity and culturally appropriate practice

Some workers take an equality rather than an equity approach, saying they treat all clients *the same way* (Alexa), and that social housing providers act as a *sort of umbrella trying to help everyone* rather than a *focus on treating just this stream of person differently* (Marty).

I think a lot of engagement it shouldn't matter where you're from, whether you are Aboriginal or what community you're from. I'll speak to someone the same way wherever you're from. I just think it doesn't matter who you are, I'll talk to you the same way. And that's how I'm able to build a lot of trust because I just listen and observe and ask questions. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Jillian said that workers enact a tailored approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to reduce further trauma, for example, going through an Aboriginal person's case with a *finer toothed comb*.

When it comes to arrears or so forth, we would make sure that we've had an Aboriginal Specialist or an Aboriginal service engage with those clients. But there's a lot of checks and balances that we'd, just a finer toothed comb than we would for someone that

wasn't Aboriginal. Because obviously you just don't want to create any more trauma. – Jillian, non-Aboriginal woman, District level worker, public housing

A tailored trauma-informed approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients is not the standard in service delivery, however, with workers often taking a one-size-fits all approach. Tracy said that some public housing workers *need to have a better understanding of Aboriginal clients, especially when they need to go back to Country for funerals, kinship, they need a larger property*, with some tenants needing to apply for transfers to larger properties. Not all frontline workers are knowledgeable about Aboriginal people's need to be allocated housing in the area where they are connected and where their supports are. According to Mary, *non-Indigenous workers need to have that awareness of Aboriginal people's strong connection to place and how detrimental it is to house Aboriginal people in areas where they are not spiritually connected.*

Yamarra said it's *not even a culture thing* when it comes to service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, rather it's important to *treat people how you deserve to be treated*. She emphasised the power of *listening* to clients so they're *heard*.

...And I think most of the time when clients and tenants come in, they just want to feel like they're being heard. And I think a lot of the time a lot of people miss that. They will try and cut them off, or interrupt them, or tell them, "No, don't do this, do that". But if you listen you'll learn a lot more if you listen. And you reiterate with them, to show them that you're actively listening. – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Constraints of KPIs and workload

Operational policy workers in particular encourage frontline workers to build trust and a good and *trusting* relationship with tenants (Harriet), and a *client-centred approach*, described as frontline workers saying "Yes" to clients instead of "No".

...we'd like to promote for [frontline workers] to build trusting relationships with their tenants and not just intervene at the point of crisis. – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

We encourage staff and say, "Look for reasons to say yes, don't look for reasons to say no." And sometimes it's really hard changing that mentality. ... the mentality of other Team Leaders who will look for reasons to say no, just because it's just too hard for them to be able to take on a whole heap of problems and issues and work by saying yes. – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Operational policy workers encourage frontline workers to spend time at client service visits rather than approaching visits as a tickbox. However, frontline workers are constrained by the pressures of meeting KPIs.

I think that it's as simple as take some Tim Tams and a coffee and sit down have a chat ... But I think because [client service visits] are linked to a KPI, it can become a checkbox for some people – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Workers recognised that frontline workers have large tenancy loads and do not have the time to provide good client service that builds a relationship and trust with tenants.

And they do counter shift twice a week, they do client service visits once a week. And then there's other field work that they do, right? Vacant properties. So there's very little time for them to actually go through their arrears reports. It's mainly just one day a week, they just need to smash it out. They just need to make that contact. It's hard for them to have the time and resource to, maybe do things a little more creatively or eloquently. So they tend to just have to do it that way. – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

...when you're managing 250 or 350 tenancies, how do you do that client service visit and have that relaxed chat and build that trust when you've got – it's not just all your CSVs, you've got to do also – you've got lots of antisocial behaviour. ...And I think that's why a lot of it doesn't get done properly because it's very time – labour intensive, like, get an allegation, investigate it, substantiate it, do the processes in Homes and that. ...so it's like, which one do you do really well? – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Unfortunately, the CSOs, the portfolios of 300 plus to get to every complaint is a huge ask. – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

Alice had experienced having a lower tenancy load and was able to provide a good level of service with a lower amount of tenancies.

...when I managed, 150 Aboriginal tenancies I knew everyone who lives at that address. And I knew every tenant that lived everywhere. And was able to have those client service visits where you just walk around the house with them and you're chatting and you're filling out your list of things, but you're having a relaxed chat. I was able to work like that when I had... a lower amount of tenancies, and then my move to another team where I had 250 or 300, and I'd go out with another staff member. And that was just very quick...

And there was just, like, the tick and flick, walk through, “okay, see you later”. I suppose, it was more numbers-focused. And booking, say, 10 or 12 CSVs in the morning. And I would never do that. – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Bianca said frontline workers *don’t have time* in the public housing office she works in and that *there’s no human connection*.

Providing a different service: An interest in culturally appropriate practice, a reliance on Aboriginal workers, and need for training

At the policy and operational levels Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were recognised to have different needs in housing to non-Aboriginal people and workers expressed a great interest in building *cultural appropriateness* into policy and practice (Nadia). Closing the Gap was cited as a key motivator to make change in service delivery.

We do look at ways that we can Close that Gap and look at culturally being appropriate in terms of the needs of our Aboriginal clients... [Colleague name]’s team has worked quite hard around Closing the Gap, and [colleague name]’s been very proactive in terms of reaching out to all the different teams and seeing how we can think differently and how we can provide a different service and outcome for our Aboriginal clients. – Rebecca, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Reliance on Aboriginal workers

One way that social housing providers say they tailor service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants is to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, either in roles that are designed to support Aboriginal clients, e.g., an Aboriginal Specialist, or in general roles that are not specific to Aboriginal client service, e.g., an Aboriginal person working as a Client Service Officer.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients are said to have the *luck of the draw* if their CSO happens to be an Aboriginal person who understands their needs and advocates for them strongly (Alice). Alice, an Aboriginal woman who used to work as a CSO described how she would advocate because she understood her Aboriginal clients, however she acknowledges that improved cultural appropriateness across the board is required so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients are not needing to be lucky to experience good service.

As an Aboriginal Client Service Officer, when you’re advocating for your clients, you’ve sort of got that perspective from - as an Aboriginal person with like when you’re advocating. And sometimes I just feel like - I don’t know, I have a perception that maybe

other staff members who didn't have that perception wouldn't advocate as strongly. And so it shouldn't come down to the luck of having an Aboriginal CSO. And that if we actually sort of operationalise all those extra considerations, then it won't come down to just the luck of the draw of having an Aboriginal person with an Aboriginal perspective advocating for you – Alice, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Non-Aboriginal workers described having Aboriginal workers in their team as part of a broader strategy to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's engagement with the social housing system.

We did have a staff member in his team who was Aboriginal and very proactive. And she assisted us very quickly to rebuild some relationships. Having an Aboriginal worker means you just get a better, deeper level of engagement with community – Jillian, non-Aboriginal woman, District level, public housing

In some cases, Aboriginal workers were described as being needed for crisis situations such as evictions, to smooth over relationships between the housing provider and Aboriginal clients.

We need Aboriginal staff to deal with stuff like that. – Toby, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

Aboriginal Specialists in public housing are relied upon to support with complex clients, however not every public housing office has an Aboriginal Specialist, and they are not always available.

...for the Aboriginal specialist, if they are onsite, and if the DCJ is lucky enough to have one – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

In the absence of an Aboriginal Specialist, one worker described how *good leadership* was how the team supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients (Alice).

...Aboriginal culture wasn't really talked about much in the office. I think the modelling in terms of how to be supportive just came from the good leadership that we had in that team. Really, like, supportive leader who was always bringing people back to "Have you thought about this?" ...we didn't have an Aboriginal specialist. So I think it came down to the leadership keeping things on track. That was my experience – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

The interpretation of how available an Aboriginal Specialists are was varied. Some workers believe there are strict internal referral pathways for clients be supported by the Aboriginal Specialist, while others believe clients don't need a referral.

So the referral form gets filled out when they wanna refer a client to a Specialist... And then the Team leader is supposed to give you some sort of direction, as in, this is the outcome I'm looking for you to achieve. And then that's what we're supposed to do. But often I find that staff will try and do shortcuts by sending an email or even the Team leader will do that. And they get very frustrated when I knock the e-mail back and go, "No, I'm not doing it because I need a referral." And they go, "Oh, but I don't have time for that." And I go, "Well, how do I know what outcome you want me to achieve?" – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

Some workers believed Aboriginal Specialists are only tasked with seeing complex clients who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, while others believed they should provide advice from time to time, on an *ad hoc* basis (Bonnie).

I think some of them [Aboriginal Specialists] are, like, come over to me and I'll help you with anything. And sometimes it's, like, I'm at my maximum caseload – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

*I was an Aboriginal specialist so I can tell you - we do not have the capacity to deal with every single Blackfella within the space. It's just not humanly possible. But also, it varies from person to person. ... it will only get allocated [to an Aboriginal Specialist] if there's a lot of complexities around the actual case. So let's say, for example, there's drug and alcohol, there's domestic and family violence, there's mental health, there's possible child protection issues, if there's a multitude of issues and the person who's managing that portfolio goes, "Hey, this particular person has so many complexities that I can't deal with it by myself." And let's be honest, we're looking at 80% of Blackfellas, we have complexity of needs. So the thing is as well, that Blak client can always say to their Client Service Officer, "Hey, I need you to refer me to an Aboriginal Specialist because, either I feel like you're not culturally safe, I feel like I'm not being heard." You know, we can have those conversations. But in regards to just having a conversation and providing advice, I'm sorry, but every single Aboriginal Specialist should be able to do that at an *ad hoc* basis 'cause that's client service – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing*

Training

Training was expressed as one way to ensure frontline workers treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients appropriately. Some workers said public housing workers are provided some form of cultural awareness training but it's not for all workers and *should be for everybody* (Bianca). Others said frontline workers either receive no training in culturally appropriate and trauma-informed approaches to client service delivery or receive *training for frontline that is not the best in the sector* (Yamarra).

I always go back to what if that was my nan, or my aunty, or my mum, or my dad, that walked into Housing, and got that treatment? Because I think a lot of the time the frontline Housing, they miss out on these triggers, and they add to them. But not intentionally. It's because they've not been trained on how to deal with it. So if somebody blows up and they speak to you wrong, or you ring the police, to me, culturally, that – you don't do that. And that happens quite a lot. Or they'll – we can – they'll red flag people and say, "Two people are required to go to this property", but it would only be something small. It wouldn't be a genuine risk factor... But, yeah, it's sad, because people aren't trained in that, and it would make their job a lot easier – Yamarra, Aboriginal frontline worker, AHO

At the time of yarns and interviews with operational policy workers, cultural training was being considered for frontline workers, on top of *a lot of general training* for workers.

We've got a lot of cultural training that we are wanting to look at and to enhance to make sure that not only that the cultural considerations are at the forefront, but also that client-centred approaches and that empathy as well is at the forefront – Harriet, non-Aboriginal operational policy worker, public housing

Sustaining tenancies and strategies of engagement

Sustaining tenancies and positive exits

Once clients who are eligible for housing accept a property from a social housing provider, they sign a residential tenancy agreement, are handed keys to the property and begin their tenancy. Tenants and providers must comply with the terms of the tenancy agreement, the RTA⁴¹, the

⁴¹ The RTA 2010 outlines specific obligations of both tenants and social housing providers under Part 7, Social Housing Tenancy Agreements.

Housing Act 2001 and the Residential Tenancies Regulation 2019. Tenants must also comply with their provider's specific policies, and providers must align their practices and decisions based on their own policies.

Frontline workers' goal for tenants is to *sustain tenancies* (Alice). They are allocated a certain number of tenancies to manage across a geographic area, with *sustaining the tenancies as the critical part* (Jane).

From a tenancy perspective, that is just the main thing - everything is to sustain a tenancy. ... your leaders are all about supporting to, "what have you done to sustain tenancies?" – Alice, Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

The *goal of sustaining tenancy is not specific to Aboriginal tenants*, it applies to people across all tenancies (Paul). There is no differentiation in the desired outcome between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal people, however there are some differences in policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, discussed earlier in this chapter.

I don't think that what we're working towards is something like, a set of outcomes that would be relevant to Aboriginal people in social housing that would be specifically tailored to Aboriginal [people]. – Nadia, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Desired outcomes for all tenants are derived from DCJ's overarching Human Services Outcomes Framework which outlines seven outcome domains – Social and Community, Empowerment, Safety, Home, Education and Skills, Economic, and Health. Under Home, the Framework stipulates that "All people in NSW are able to have a safe and affordable place to live" (NSW Government 2024). There are three areas of interest under the Home domain, namely, for housing to be affordable, for social housing to be physically accessible, accessible, culturally appropriate and well maintained, and to reduce homelessness. At the time of interviews and yarns, policy workers in public housing acknowledged that the Framework does not necessarily consider the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in housing as it was defined by Western and colonial ideas.

...the way that we measure outcomes for Aboriginal people living in social housing is defined by Western ideas about what that positive outcome is – or a negative outcome – and they're not defined by what outcomes Aboriginal people want to see from their housing. ...those outcomes [from the Human Services Outcomes Framework] are not reflective of outcomes that would – they're very Western sort of colonial ideas of what a positive outcome would be. And so to measure outcomes we need to firstly understand

– or what is an outcome that matters to an Aboriginal person. – De-identified policy worker policy, public housing⁴²

Public housing workers recognised they *weren't measuring outcomes that matter for Aboriginal people* (de-identified policy worker) and had begun to address this gap through the development of an Aboriginal Wellbeing Framework alongside the Human Services Outcomes Framework⁴³.

From a social housing provider perspective, sustaining tenancies means supporting tenants to stay housed rather than the undesirable alternative of being evicted. It is synonymous with the desire to *remove or reduce negative exits* (Harriet, Jane). Negative exits are tenancies ending for reasons such as rental arrears, anti-social behaviour, or people abandoning properties.

Absolutely reducing negative exits is a priority for us – and that fits with sustaining tenancies, doesn't it? – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, senior management at a CHP

Providers recognise the wellbeing impacts of tenants negatively exiting social housing.

...obviously we want to remove and reduce those negative exits as well because that's got ... very serious impacts on people's health, on their wellbeing, on all of those areas of people's, of their lives as well. ... We want to sustain - generally by sustaining tenancies, you're ... reducing those negative exits anyway. – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

According to a frontline worker in public housing, Marty, evicting tenants is the *last thing* social housing providers want to do. Marty recognises the *popular belief* among tenants that providers *like kicking people out*. He emphasised that on the contrary the aim is to house people, sustain their tenancies, and if tenants are *struggling in their tenancy*, to *support* as much as possible so *that people don't flounder in their tenancies* (Marty).

... at the end of the day we are social housing, so we are in a lot of cases, like the last ditch before the street sort of thing. So we, contrary to popular belief, don't like kicking people out, that's the last thing we want to do. – Marty, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

⁴² Some policy workers specifically tasked with the development of DCJ's Aboriginal Wellbeing Framework have been de-identified further, upon request of those members.

⁴³ The aim of the development of an Aboriginal Wellbeing in Social Housing Framework was said to support the measurement of outcomes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people consider important, to be applied across all Social Housing portfolios in future.

...our goal in social housing is not termination. Our goal is to engage with tenants and try to keep them. – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

Sustaining tenancies is coupled with the aim to *empower tenants to live fulfilling lives* (Annie), to *live and run their own race* and to *make their own decisions around their tenancy* (Marty).

The desired outcome is that we maintain and sustain tenancies and that we provide clients with all the tools and resources to empower them so that they can make informed decisions and live fulfilling lives. So that they are the ones making the decisions. – Annie, Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal Specialist, public housing

Tenants leaving social housing into housing independence, i.e., to become a homeowner or live in private rental, is another desired outcome for tenants, expressed by social housing workers. These types of exits are commonly known in the social housing sector as *positive exits* (Nadia). Harriet, an operational policy worker in public housing, said *positive exits* are a *big goal for us* alongside sustaining tenancies and reducing negative exits. However, frontline worker Sophia said positive exits *very rarely* happen.

The main reasons people leave housing is because they go into custody, they die, they move to another city or state, but it's very rarely because "I don't need it anymore. I found a place in private." – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

The desired outcome of positive exits is *complicated* and *problematic* according to a policy worker because tenants are exiting into a precarious private market and may need to re-enter social housing as they age (Amy).

There is an acknowledgement, certainly among our team, that with positive exits it's complicated because where are people positively exiting to? The private rental sector? Well once they hit 60 [years of age] they're going to have to come back in. Unless they go into home ownership they're going to have to go back into social housing because it's difficult to retire in the private rental sector. ... I mean, that's just one example of why it's just quite problematic. – Amy, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Nadia, a policy worker in public housing, noted that positive exits as a desired outcome *isn't really funded* by the system, and problematised the idea of positive exits given *Aboriginal people are profoundly discriminated in the private rental market*, making it difficult for them to sustain a tenancy in private.

Internal and external supports and partnerships to sustain tenancies

Each social housing provider has unique support pathways to sustain tenancies. Providers have internal roles, for example, Specialist workers in public housing and support coordinators at CHPs, who are tasked with supporting tenants with complex needs. They may be experienced in social work or case work and can work with tenants directly, or broker the support needed with external services. Public housing and CHPs often have agreements with social support services and refer tenants to services if needed.

Generally, a lot of the times in the lead up to evictions, we've had referrals made to support services. That's the very first stop that we do. Our staff aren't social workers. We've got agreements and we make those referrals to the appropriate support services to be able to support them to sustain their tenancies. – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy worker, public housing

We have a support coordinator, which is really about brokering support from the external service system. – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, senior management worker at a CHP

Public housing and CHPs also employ Aboriginal workers whose role is to specifically support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. In public housing, this is known as the Aboriginal Specialist role, and in CHPs this may include Aboriginal community engagement and partnership workers. One CHP had developed partnerships with external Aboriginal organisations and enact an *external referral mechanism* (Jane). Tenants are referred to Aboriginal Liaison Officers and culturally appropriate staff at partner organisations through this mechanism. In public housing, the Aboriginal Specialists also refer tenants to Aboriginal-specific organisations.

There's a lot of local partnership agreements with different agencies ... it's a very, very big part of what we do ... we've got a housing and mental health agreement, so we can refer people who need mental health support. We can make referrals for domestic and family violence, NSW Health, aged care, if someone's having financial difficulties, drug and alcohol, we've got a Memorandum of Understanding with Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services. We can refer them to Aboriginal legal services or regular services, Legal Aid, pretty much you name it, we'll make those referrals – Alice, Aboriginal operational policy worker, public housing

...sometimes we do get people that are out of our scope, so that's where the networking comes in as well. Because, "yep, I know that you've got this going on and it's affecting

you to live independently and sustain your tenancy. This is not my area of the business, but what I can do is link you in with A, B and C, and we can get that fixed, or we can get you the help that you need for that” – Yamarra, Aboriginal frontline worker, AHO

Some providers employ people internally to support tenants with social needs.

...support is funded for the support workers, and housing is funded for housing. That separation works well, because the advocate can be the support worker, and it doesn't blur that line. Where you've got the housing – your tenancy manager going, “Oh, how is everything going with these things”, and they might not want to share that information with the person who is going to collect their rent or mark them down on a property inspection. They want someone that they can talk freely with about the support needs that they have, that might be not the thing that the tenancy manager wants to hear. So there's definitely, I think, a really good evidence base to say separate those roles. Like, for us, we've taken the distinction, and we've implemented it. But some of the other CHPs have gone and kept that money themselves and hired their coordinators and support workers in-house – Brendan, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline at a CHP

In some instances, housing providers have case conferences to ascertain how to support a client. Case conferences may include teachers, school principals, police, community services, housing providers, and the client. The aim of case conferences is to discuss the issues faced by a client, to take action, make agreements, and distribute the workload to support them.

Engagement and termination notices – rental arrears

Workers learn of tenants' rental arrears by being alerted through their provider system. They employ multiple strategies of engagement with tenants who are struggling to sustain their tenancy, ultimately aiming to prevent eviction. Engaging with tenants around rental arrears is of primary importance to providers. Workers are determined to engage with tenants in arrears because they want to sustain the tenancy and avoid eviction. Frontline workers' key performance indicators (KPIs)⁴⁴ is low rental arrears within their tenancy portfolio and is directly linked to the goal of sustaining tenancies.

⁴⁴ Other KPIs across social housing providers are percentage of completed client service visits per year (e.g., for DCJ workers at least 65% of tenancies need to have been visited in the previous 12-month period), reduction of voids i.e., vacant properties, and management of anti-social behaviour. KPIs are related to provider obligations as landlords bound by the RTA. CHPs are bound by the Registrar of Community Housing. In the example of voids, all social housing providers are pressured by the NSW Government to reduce social housing waitlist numbers and ensure there are no vacant properties.

Our number one KPI is arrears. ... Total arrears divided by the number of tenancies; it should be under \$18. ... [Under \$18 per tenancy] is the corporate target. ... This is the main KPI for the whole State. - Toby, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

Workers dedicate a substantial amount of time managing arrears.

...we spend 20% of our time on arrears, that's how important it is to us. ... Monday - completely focused on arrears. - Toby, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline worker, public housing

The first engagement strategy for arrears is to contact the tenant on the phone and visit their home and leave a call note on the door. If they don't respond, tenants are contacted via SMS or e-mail. Approaches to arrears varies from team to team.

I called in on this date at this time, please contact me about blah, leave it in the letter box and we take a photo of a - on file to show that we've, and then, yeah, that's the sort of thing that you take to tribunal to show that you've been out there, knocked on the door 10 times – Alice, Aboriginal woman, policy worker, public housing

...each tenant in arrears, even if it's five or ten bucks, they get a call. ... then we send them a text and we door knock. - Toby, non-Aboriginal man, senior frontline, public housing

Workers call tenants to have a conversation and try to understand why they are in arrears. If tenants pick up or call back, workers can find out why they're in arrears, refer them to supports if needed, and develop a payment plan for the tenant to pay the arrears.

[When they call back] it's like, "great, now that I've got you, can we talk about what's going on?" And if they work on it and they start paying, or ... we do a referral, whatever, as long as we get that engagement, then a lot of times we don't actually go through with then applying to Tribunal for a hearing. – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

If tenants do not answer calls, texts, or e-mails, or don't answer the door, workers consider them to be *not engaging* (Sophia, Yamarra, Harriet). If tenants are *not engaging* and they are 14 days in arrears, workers can issue a Notice to Terminate Tenancy Agreement, commonly known as a Notice of Termination (NoT) or a termination notice (NSW Government 2025). Social housing providers have the power to act on behalf of landlords, and as such have the power to issue a termination notice if tenants breach their tenancy agreement.

...if people don't pay the rent, we will ... issue them a NoT, then go to Tribunal to get them on a performance payment plan. ... So for example, then Tribunal will give us a performance order. We're saying they have to pay \$40 extra a fortnight and their rent, but then if they don't follow that, we can basically then go back to Tribunal and say, they're not following the performance [order]. It's like in private tenancy, it's the same process, same Tribunal. Then we can basically go for termination. – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

Say for example, arrears, you have to be a certain amount in arrears to do a notice of termination. I suppose it depends on what type of tenancy breach it is. Like sometimes if it's under two weeks in arrears but it's repetitive and you're getting no contact, you might get instructed to go to Tribunal – Alice, Aboriginal woman, policy worker, public housing

Some workers expressed that engaging is simply the expected norm in social housing and clients of the social housing system, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, need to pay their rent. If they're struggling to pay rent, they must reach out to their housing provider.

It's social housing. It's social housing. That's all there is to it. It's social housing policy. Social housing houses. – Chloe, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

... at the end of the day, we as Blackfellas also need to have Black excellence and be functioning members of society. Like, and I don't mean to sound crude or rude or anything, but pay your frigging rent. Like at the end of the day, you've got to pay your rent. ... If there's stuff that's going on, call and have a yarn about it. Don't just put your head in the sand and go, "Oh, no, I can't deal with this," have someone call on your behalf then. If we as an organisation don't know, what the hell are we going to do to help? We can't. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Workers' understanding of context to disengagement

The context of colonisation makes it challenging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to engage with government agencies, housing authorities and social services. These entities continue to wield power over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for example, through the legislative requirement of mandatory reporting of child neglect leading to forced removals of children from their families, racialized policing and overincarceration. Social housing workers understand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people don't necessarily trust authorities for these reasons.

Obviously there's the history of mistrust in government and everything like that. ... We definitely in our team are acutely aware of the trust issues and the past ramifications of colonisation and forced removals – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Blackfellas have a massive distrust when it comes to government organisations. – Bonnie, Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Some workers from CHPs see the root of the mistrust as clients having had poor experiences with public housing, in the past.

And there's a trust issue as well because they just see us as Housing New South Wales basically. They don't trust us because they've been stuffed around by other organisations and government departments. – Albert, non-Aboriginal man, frontline at a CHP

Social housing workers understand there is a *power imbalance* between tenants and providers, and they don't expect tenants to *trust* straight away (Jane).

There's so much shame and whatever attached, and there's already a power imbalance in what we're doing, you know, "We're going to be your landlord, sign up here, trust me". – Jane, Aboriginal woman, senior management at a CHP

For these reasons, provider workers are aware that sometimes tenants don't wish to open a letter because *they've got a government seal on them* (Harriet).

Despite this recognition, social housing system processes relating to arrears are largely not tailored or trauma informed. One community housing provider described tailoring their notice of termination letters to *modify people's behaviour* (Jane), as part of recognising the trauma the letters cause.

Luckily we've done a bit of work on our [termination notice] letters. We've used a bit of work from a behavioural insights approach, and an external consultant to help us apply nudge theory to change the way our letters are represented. So that approach is being applied to our arrears management process. We're communicating with people about what stage of the process they're at, so they're not going "Oh, I've got to pack up and leave", because they received a notice of termination. ...the nudge theory is about using language to engage people so they adjust their behaviour, so they don't run screaming

from the room in this scenario. And the letters are simplified, they're easier to read – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, senior management at a CHP

Having *trusting relationships* between tenants and workers were said to be the answer to engagement.

But then if people aren't picking up the phone, not answering the door, not opening their mail, that's when I guess it could probably get to that point where they don't understand what's happening because then they're not communicating with us. And that's where those trusting relationships are really important so that they say, "Oh, okay, it's my CSO, I better talk to them." – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Termination notices as a rupture in the relationship

Termination notices cause a rupture in the worker-tenant relationship. Firstly, some tenants experience receiving termination notices without a prior conversation with their CSO, breaking trust with the provider. Social housing workers assert that termination notices cannot be sent without great efforts made by frontline workers to contact tenants. In response to a question about whether termination notices are automatic once a tenant is in arrears, Toby, a senior frontline worker, said *No way*. Sophia agreed.

...before we issue a Notice of Termination, there's work that we need to do. At every point, there's a lot of work. So in the first point of contact is just be a phone call, text message, just an email. And then it's a follow-up phone call, follow-up text message, follow-up email. Then it's door knocks, like, there's clearly, I've tried to contact you and you're not calling me back. Then it's a Notice of Termination. – Sophia, non-Aboriginal frontline worker, public housing

However, some workers acknowledge that tenants may not always receive a call about a termination notice.

... many of our processes in our mainstream [sector] is issue a NoT, and hopefully, someone's called you in advance. That is the process that should happen. But, you know, doesn't always, yeah. ...the theory is tenants should have a phone call or a doorknock before something like that happens. – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, senior management at a CHP

Others believe that frontline workers are not trained in *early intervention* with tenants with complex needs and resort to eviction notices rather than offering assistance (Yamarra).

...training is not the best in the sector either, with frontline then we're pretty much at the point where this person is getting an eviction notice, but hasn't been offered any assistance in between. And that's not fair. – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

Secondly, termination notices are used as a tool to force tenants to respond to providers. Providers may not intend for the tenant to go to Tribunal, or to be evicted, rather they use termination notices as a tool of engagement. Workers may not intend to terminate a tenancy when sending a NoT. They are bound by the RTA and thus by a system that requires tenants to pay rent and engage with them if rent is in arrears. In instances where tenants are not engaging, the primary avenue for engagement is to issue a termination notice. This is expressed as a lack of choice by providers, and in this process problematises tenants' lack of engagement.

...when we go to eviction, it's because we don't have the why, you know, we don't know why they're not engaging. ...we can assume what the reasons might be. Like, it might be drug and alcohol, but if you are not there, and I can't talk to you, what can I do? ... And a lot of the time we issue the notice of termination to get that response. So we might not even really want to go through NCAT, but if they're over two weeks in arrears, let's issue one. – Sophia, non-Aboriginal woman, frontline, public housing

And I think if we can get that early intervention it will stop a lot of [evictions] – but then again, you have the client side of things, where you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink. It's like if they're that unwell, and there's no trust or no rapport there, they're not engaging. Unless it gets to "We've got sheriffs booked, engage or we're coming". – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, AHO

To them it might seem, like it's [termination notice] kind of come up all of a sudden. But that could be because they're not engaging with us. They're not opening letters 'cause they've got a government seal on them, do you know what I mean? Like, they're not answering their phone. So there's a whole lot of grey area in the lead up to that. – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, operational policy, public housing

Thirdly, some tenants experience termination notices as termination orders. Workers are aware that tenants experience termination notices as *very overwhelming and confronting* (Alexa).

You'll get a notice of termination and then it can be quite overwhelming and confronting. Tenants go "Oh my God, I'm going to lose my home." – Alexa, non-Aboriginal woman, Specialist, public housing

In some instances, tenants vacate their property. How tenants perceive termination notices is reflected in workers' experiences in tenancy management. The tenant is expected to be knowledgeable about the system, rather than the system changing to be legible to them.

All they hear is the word termination. And you try and explain, "No, no, no. You don't have to leave. What this is is, you've agreed to say stop making a noise or paying your rent, that's just got to be put in an order. So if you keep doing what you're doing right now, it's all good. But if you don't within that certain time period within this order, we will keep working with you, but we could be back here. So it's up to you. How can we help you? What is it you need to change this?" - Albert, non-Aboriginal man, frontline at a CHP

There are processes in place in terms of, we don't just take someone straight to the NCAT for termination if they're behind in their rent, but we do send them a letter basically to say, "Hey, you're behind in your rent. This is really critical that we speak with you and put a plan in place to get you back on track so that we don't have to go to the NCAT". A lot of people misinterpret that as, they're evicting me. It's not. It's just, "You're behind in your rent, we need to catch up". – Harriet, non-Aboriginal woman, policy, public housing

Termination notices are not necessarily a pathway to eviction. In some instances, it is unlikely a housing provider would ever evict a tenant in particular circumstances. In the following example, if a tenant is not engaging and not complying with their payment performance order, if children are involved in the household, the tenant would not be evicted, rather referrals to appropriate specialists and support teams would be made.

So the policy would then be like, you can go for termination, but that's not what we want. So you have to then refer them to a specialist. If it's not an Aboriginal tenant, we also have a sustaining tenancies team. So, even if we would go to tribunal for termination, it really has to be like, no payment, no engagement, even like somebody with a kid, we wouldn't proceed. Things like that. So there's the policy, how you deal with things and then the reality is different. – Juan, non-Aboriginal man, frontline, public housing

Interlude

We have now heard from Aboriginal social housing tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers.

We've just heard social housing workers' experiences.

Aboriginal people who are social housing workers shared what home means to them, with similar meanings of home to Aboriginal tenants. Home to them is about connection to family, connection to the places and communities where they grew up, and connection to Country, and more than a shelter.

We've heard social housing worker perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' priorities and needs, such as the need for housing that facilitates connection to family, community, culture, place and services, timely maintenance, responses from housing providers. We've heard about the systemic and individual constraints social housing workers face to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' priorities and needs, such as some individual workers lacking culturally appropriate practice, the systemic lack of housing stock and large caseloads. We've heard of racism in the social housing system and the reliance on Aboriginal social housing workers to bridge the gap in appropriate service delivery.

We've heard that this group prioritises sustainable tenancies as the goal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and heard their perspectives on tenant disengagement. We've heard about intended communication processes with regards to rental arrears and the rupture in the trust with termination notices.

This concludes the storying chapters. The following chapter discusses the three perspectives.

Chapter 7: Synthesis of experiences across the three groups

The stories in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide critical insight into the meanings of home, housing priorities and the social housing service delivery experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, from the standpoint of Aboriginal tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers. Sixty-two people - 16 Aboriginal tenants, five Aboriginal community members, 17 tenant support workers (10 of whom are Aboriginal people) and 26 staff of public and community housing (10 of whom are Aboriginal people) - took part in the research. Of the 62 people, 37⁴⁵ identify as Aboriginal people. The main finding from the stories across these groups is a disconnect between the meanings of home and housing priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and the lived experience of social housing. Meanings of home for Aboriginal people in the urban social housing context of South-East Sydney is about connection to Country, place, people, community, culture and Aboriginal services. According to tenant support workers home for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants is about safe, healthy, stable, and comfortable housing that facilitates hosting family. Aboriginal social housing workers said home means connection to family and community, Country, safety, and is a place of love and reciprocity. These findings mirror international research on home and First Nations' people, with meanings of home emphasised as connection to culture and land (Bowra and Mashford-Pringle 2021).

There is, however, a disconnect between what homes means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and the lived experience of social housing. This disconnect manifests in some tenants experiencing poor housing conditions, unactioned and/or delayed housing repairs, communication gaps, culturally inappropriate housing offers, an overwhelming provider system and poor treatment. The preceding three chapters evidence these issues through story, are summarised in Figure 10 and Figure 11 below, and discussed in this chapter.

⁴⁵ This number of people adds up to 37 rather than 41 as some Aboriginal people are in two groups

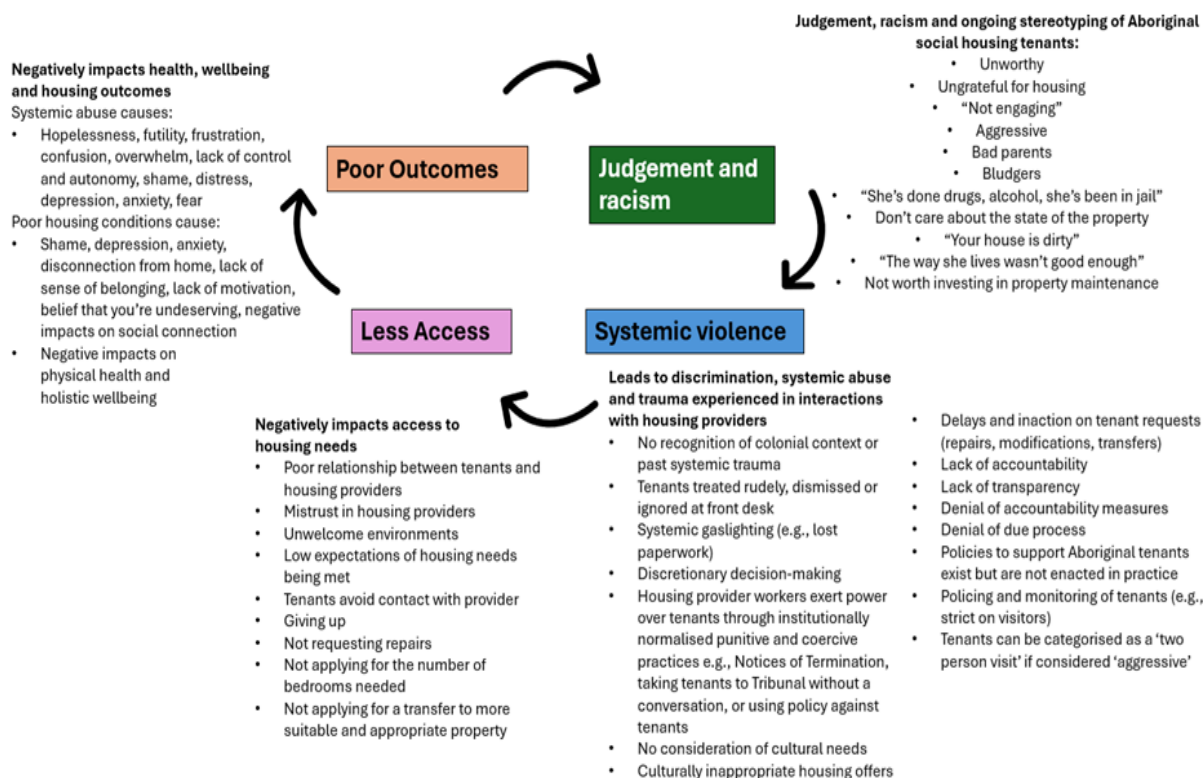


Figure 10 Cycle of systemic violence in the social housing system

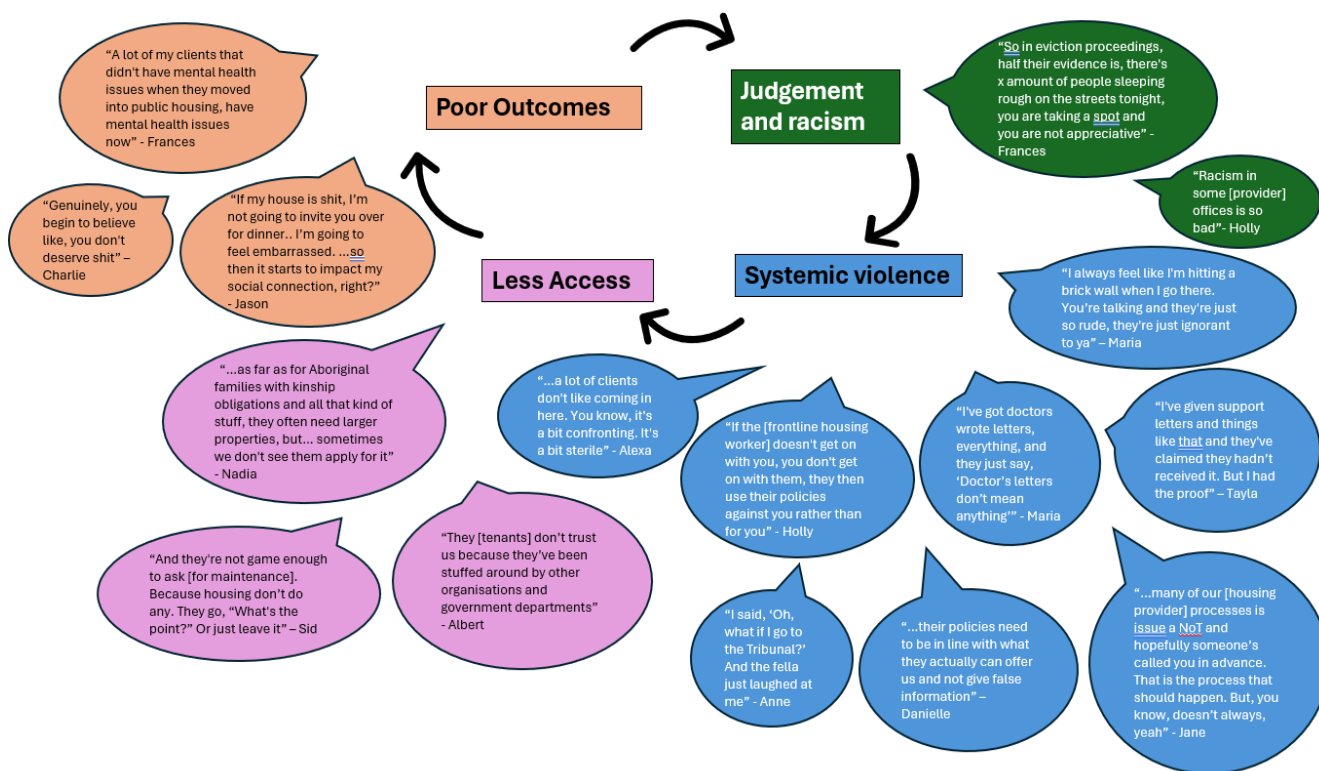


Figure 11 Quotes from Aboriginal tenants, community members, advocates and social housing workers showing some examples of the cycle of systemic violence

Lack of systematic application of meanings of home and housing priorities

It was found that while some housing provider policies aim to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' housing priorities, the mainstream housing provider system is not sufficiently equipped to systematically and consistently meet the housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This manifests in various ways, including in unhealthy housing conditions, culturally inappropriate property offers, minimal application of policies that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural needs, barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to access social housing workers and Aboriginal-specific support workers and poor treatment by housing provider workers, including Notices of Termination sent without prior communication. While interactions with providers do not always cause harm, there is an underlying lack of respect and in some instances lack of understanding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home and priorities in housing. Chapters 4 to 6 identified that ongoing disengagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants due to systemic racism, judgement, stereotyping and discrimination, and normalised inaction and/or delays in clients' requests.

Unhealthy housing conditions

The stories evidence that some Aboriginal tenants in South-East Sydney who participated in this research are living in unhealthy housing conditions, causing respiratory illness, poor mental health and social disconnection, and risk of physical injury, e.g., falls, particularly among older tenants. It found that tenants do everything within their power to make their homes liveable, healthy and safe, especially for their children, however, social housing providers delay or do not complete maintenance. A significant flow-on effect of delayed maintenance is that some tenants have grown accustomed to unactioned repairs, leading to them no longer requesting repairs, while others maintain properties themselves to make it feel like home. This is an important finding because it shows the tenant-provider relationship is damaged by unactioned repairs and tenants stop relying on provider maintenance systems, resorting to DIY solutions at their own economic expense. This places additional financial burden on tenants, particularly as they live on low incomes. Maintenance should be properly resourced within provider budgets and actioned in a timely fashion to reduce distress and poor health. An additional flow-on effect of tenants' maintenance not being completed is tenants then request a transfer. However, this research identified that transfers may also be delayed and, in some cases, tenants wait five to ten years to be moved to another property, with no guarantee it will be in better condition than their current property.

Interestingly, this research showed a disconnection of perception between tenants and social housing workers of unhealthy housing conditions and their associated health impacts. Tenants readily identified the impact of poor housing conditions on health through their lived experience, while social housing workers rarely spoke of poor property conditions or the impacts of unhealthy housing on tenants' health. This highlights the priorities of each group and demonstrates a knowledge gap, particularly among provider workers, in linking the impacts of housing conditions on health. Chapter 6 identified that social housing workers are aware that tenants are unhappy with maintenance delays, however this was normalised, often spoken about in a matter-of-fact tone ("Again, repairs, repairs, repairs" – Albert, page 184), and considered out of the control of social housing workers due to outsourcing of maintenance and/or resourcing shortages. Underlying these responses is a societally-accepted stigma of public and community housing tenants, a normalisation of tenants living in poorly maintained housing, and normalisation of under resourcing of social housing (Sisson 2020).

The phenomenon of poorer dwelling conditions in social housing compared to other tenure types is well-documented in multiple studies (Andersen, Fernando et al. 2016, Andersen, Williamson et al. 2017). In 2023, a quarter of public housing properties in Australia (24.4%) did not meet agreed minimum acceptable standards for dwelling conditions and 39.3% of public housing properties that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households were living in did not meet minimum standards (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2024). It is concerning, but unsurprising, that social housing providers delay or do not complete maintenance, as in recent years the most common complaints to the NSW Ombudsman about public housing⁴⁶ were about delays in responding to and completing maintenance (Ombudsman NSW 2022). However, tenants have a right to live in properties that do not harm their health. Providers are bound by the RTA and are required to meet minimum acceptable property standards (NSW Government 2010). Unhealthy housing becomes an economic burden on the healthcare system. Conversely, appropriate and timely maintenance can create positive changes in health (Howden-Chapman, Crane et al. 2024). The Housing for Health program in NSW, for example, found that standardised housing testing and repairs to Aboriginal community housing reduced up to 40% of infectious disease hospital separations (Standen, Morgan et al. 2020).

⁴⁶ There are no publicly available data about complaints to community housing providers.

Poor treatment

Racism, judgement and discrimination

The stories, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5, identified the experiences of racism, discrimination, stereotyping and judgement of Aboriginal tenants by social housing workers. It provides strong evidence that Aboriginal tenants experience distress interacting with rude, disrespectful, racist, classist and judgemental social housing workers. This finding is significant because racist and discriminatory treatment is highly detrimental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, impacting mental health and wellbeing (Kairuz, Casanelia et al. 2021). Systemic violence in the form of ongoing colonisation and racism is known to have negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing and life expectancy (Sherwood 2013, Paradies 2016). Tenants in this research expressed feeling undeserving, unworthy, confused, distressed and fearing housing providers. Racism and judgement by providers cause tenants to disengage from housing providers, impacting how and what they request, and in turn impacting housing outcomes.

These stories evidence racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within social housing, a significant finding given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often rely on social housing and must therefore interact with a culturally unsafe provider system to access the essential need of housing. While there is some research identifying racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the private rental market in Australia (Solonec 2000, Memmott and Chambers 2008, Carmody 2018, Stone, Goodall et al. 2021, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022), there are few studies providing evidence of racism by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in social housing (Dufty 2009, Andersen, Fernando et al. 2016). The social housing system and its actors, such as frontline workers, are not immune to racism – both individual and systemic racism. Australian news stories and public discourse regularly perpetuate false and racist ideas of Aboriginal people receiving “handouts”, “free houses” and are unemployed “dole-bludgers” (Sinclair 2015, Saunders 2019). These stereotypes and widespread misconceptions are pervasive in Australian society and are likely to be contributing to non-Aboriginal housing workers' attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants. Social housing providers perpetuating racial discrimination requires urgent redress and a vocal commitment to anti-racism, to support the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

Loss of clients' paperwork, Notices of Termination and denial of due process

Poor treatment also manifested in loss of clients' paperwork, Notices of Termination being sent without prior communication, denial of due process and lack of transparency and confusion

around Notices of Termination (NoT). Tenants and tenant support workers described the regular practice of lodged support letters and forms being misplaced or lost by social housing workers. This was identified by members as systemic gaslighting. Often tenants and their advocates would have made great efforts to gather all the evidence required to substantiate a request, e.g., a transfer, only to follow up and hear that the paperwork is missing from the housing provider's system. The experience of providers losing paperwork causes tenant and tenant support workers frustration, anger and a sense of hopelessness, leading to broken trust between tenants and providers. Tenants' experience of loss of submitted paperwork is an example of provider workers' and/or system incompetence, resulting in, amongst other impacts, a loss of faith in the social housing system. Chapters 4 and 5 identified the normalisation of this practice by tenants and tenant support workers, with tenant support workers encouraging clients to ensure provider workers date-stamp all documentation and provide clients with photocopies. Chapters 4 and 5 additionally identified that when paperwork was lost, tenants had no avenues of recourse presented to them. This is significant, as it shows that providers lack accountability when processes fail, and also highlights the power imbalance between social housing providers and tenants.

Another concerning and harmful practice identified in the research is the sending of Notices of Termination to tenants with limited or no prior communication. While social housing provider protocol is for social housing workers to attempt communication with tenants prior to sending a NoT, Chapters 4 and 5 showed that tenants experience receiving NoTs without any prior communication, causing fear, confusion and distress, and in some cases, tenants abandoning properties. Of particular concern, Chapter 5 identified that to some tenant support workers it seemed NoTs were automated. Chapter 6 showed that social housing workers have processes and systems that ensure tenants are sent communications prior to a NoT being sent, but some social housing workers stated that sometimes these communications do not occur.

An important finding is that tenants and providers have vastly different interpretations of the meaning of NoTs. Some tenants interpret NoTs as an eviction, and subsequently move out of their property, while social housing workers interpret NoTs as one step in a process towards eviction and in many cases do not intend to evict a tenant when sending a NoT. Tenant support workers see the different interpretations play out and consider NoTs as punitive and abusive as social housing workers hold power over tenants and ultimately do cause distress and in some cases, lead tenants into homelessness. This is a critical finding of the PhD, showing the harms of communication breakdowns between tenants and providers, and the lack of clarity in legal processes. Some social housing workers understand that tenants interpret NoTs as evictions

and consider tenants to simply not understand the process. The lack of transparency and clarity around NoTs highlights the potential for and the enactment of abuse of power by social housing providers, akin to other forms of systemic violence such as the Robodebt scheme, whereby some members of the Australian public were sent automatic debt recovery notices, causing severe distress (Commonwealth of Australia 2023). This finding also shows the critical role of tenant advocates to bridge communication between tenants and housing providers, and the need for greater resourcing of the tenant advocacy sector in NSW.

This research additionally identified tenants are treated poorly through the denial of due process. Clients are, at times, told they can't access an avenue of recourse or the evidence they've provided to substantiate a request is deemed useless ("I've got doctors wrote letters, everything and they just say, 'Doctor's letters don't mean anything' - Maria, page 134, and "I said, 'Oh, what if I go to the Tribunal?' And the fella just laughed at me" – Anne, page 134). This is an important finding, as tenants have the right for their requests to be treated seriously, and their wish to follow an avenue of recourse, such as Tribunal, to be respected. Underlying this finding is disrespect of tenants and power held over tenants by housing providers. Poor treatment evidenced in the stories also includes the experience of waiting long periods for action on maintenance or transfer requests to healthy properties. These examples are all forms of systemic violence, leading to poor health and housing outcomes, and disengagement of tenants from housing providers.

Some social housing workers acknowledge that Aboriginal tenants disengage because of poor treatment and ongoing lack of responsiveness from their provider, however this treatment was largely relegated to the past rather than the present time, or it was blamed on other housing providers ("They don't trust us because they've been stuffed around by other organisations and government departments" Albert, page 206). Overall, if providers don't attribute their current poor service delivery practices – including racism, judgement, discrimination, systemic gaslighting, sending of NoTs without communication and delays in completing requests - with the distress and subsequent disengagement of tenants, then providers may not address these issues.

Barriers to accessing social housing workers

Stories across Chapters 4 to 6 identified the barriers experienced by Aboriginal tenants in accessing frontline social housing workers and Aboriginal-specific support workers. It showed that tenants and tenant support workers are frustrated by the inaccessibility of frontline workers, with social housing workers often refraining from including contact numbers and

names on e-mail communications with tenants. Some tenant support workers believed this practice of not including contact numbers to be a purposeful avoidance of accountability by housing providers. It was also considered a purposeful barrier for tenants and providers building a trusting relationship. This is significant, as frontline workers' role is to support tenants, however, if tenants cannot contact them directly, they cannot request support, and workers cannot action tenants' housing needs. Interestingly, social housing workers emphasised how much they want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to engage with them, however this was often in relation to rental arrears, rather than the housing needs of tenants, such as repairs and transfers. This research thus identifies a lack of reciprocity in the tenant-provider relationship, with providers wanting tenants to engage on rental arrears, while tenants want providers to engage on maintenance and transfers. The stories additionally identified that social housing workers have a high case load and a high turnover of staff. The former means that social housing workers have limited time to build a relationship. The latter finding of high turnover is a barrier to building a relationship of trust between tenants and providers.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 also showed that at times it is difficult for Aboriginal tenants to access Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander social housing workers, such as the Aboriginal Specialist role at Homes NSW. It identified that Aboriginal tenants connected to La Perouse are offended and disrespected by the barriers faced trying to access an Aboriginal Specialist for support. It highlighted that the process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access Aboriginal Specialist workers at Homes NSW offices lack transparency for tenants and also internally among public housing workers. Some public housing workers believe there is an internal referral process for tenants to access the support of an Aboriginal Specialist because the role entails supporting tenants with complex needs, while others believe Aboriginal Specialists should be available to support tenants on an ad hoc basis. There is a need for Homes NSW to provide clear communications and a consistent process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants on how to access an Aboriginal Specialist at all public housing offices. This would build greater trust in service delivery among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants and increase engagement.

Chapter 6 identified that some social housing workers recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants may want to speak to an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander worker. This is a positive recognition, as some Aboriginal tenants do believe it is important for housing providers to offer support through Aboriginal staff. There are significant implications to these findings that relate to human resourcing, Aboriginal tenants' expectations of service delivery and cultural competence and capability of social housing workers. The social housing system

relies on the existence of an Aboriginal social housing workforce to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenancies. It has been suggested for the last two decades that the mainstream social housing sector should employ more Aboriginal people, alongside the need for non-Aboriginal workers to be trained in cultural competency (Baulderstone and Slatter 2003, Milligan, Easthope et al. 2013, Department of Family and Community Services 2015). Milligan (2011) highlighted the need for “culturally sensitive service provision” in social housing to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ needs by increasing the number of Aboriginal people in the social housing workforce. The focus on culturally sensitive service delivery is driven by the sector’s recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households experience higher rates of negative exits from social housing and higher rates of homelessness (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, Baker, Leishman et al. 2020). Some of these suggestions have been embedded into resourcing plans within public housing. For example, in 2010, public housing in NSW aimed for Aboriginal people to make up seven percent of their workforce to improve service delivery to Aboriginal people (Family and Community Services 2010). However, it is unclear whether public housing is reaching its target. Having Aboriginal people employed in social housing was considered a positive and culturally safe part of service delivery, with Aboriginal tenants expressing a desire to speak to Aboriginal individuals who work in social housing. Employing Aboriginal workers is considered positive on an individual level, however further research is needed to understand whether this would resolve the risks to harm embedded in the social housing system, such as the sending of NoTs without prior communication, delays in maintenance and repairs and unhealthy housing impacting health. There is a need for evidence to understand the impact of Aboriginal workers on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s experience of client service delivery and on housing and health outcomes at mainstream housing providers. Further research could explore the experience of Aboriginal workers at mainstream providers and how they’re valued and appropriately supported, similar to studies exploring the experiences of Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal liaison workers in mainstream healthcare settings as part of strengthening the workforce and improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health outcomes (Mackean, Withall et al. 2020).

Culturally inappropriate offers and visitor policies

The stories highlight the practice and negative impact of culturally inappropriate housing offers by social housing providers to Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse. Culturally inappropriate offers are an example of providers disconnecting Aboriginal people from home, negatively impacting health and wellbeing. Underlying this finding is a misalignment between

the policies of mainstream housing providers and the reality of housing being offered to Aboriginal people, causing frustration and breaking of trust between Aboriginal tenants and providers. There are two examples of culturally inappropriate offers evidenced in the stories. One example is offers of housing outside of La Perouse, far from social, cultural and spiritual connection. Another is housing that doesn't meet Aboriginal people's need to house, host, care for and connect with one another.

According to the Locational Needs section of Homes NSW's Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement (hereafter described as the Policy Supplement), Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people can request to be housed in an area of affinity:

“An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander client who has an affinity with a particular area satisfies locational need. In this case, affinity with an area is demonstrated by applicant's kinship group residing in the requested area or the area is the traditional homeland of their tribe.” (NSW Government 2025).

The Locational Needs section of the Policy Supplement recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's need to live in areas of connection to traditional land and kinship group. However, evidence from Chapters 4 to 6 shows that Aboriginal tenants connected to La Perouse do not experience locational need being applied in practice. This is an important finding as Aboriginal people lose connection to Country, culture, language and community, impacting social and emotional wellbeing (Dudgeon, Gibson et al. 2025). This has implications for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the mainstream social housing system in NSW who have the right to live in areas that foster their spiritual relationship and connection to traditional land, as per Article 25 of the UNDRIP which states that:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard”. (United Nations 2007)

The findings also show that some Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse are, at times, offered housing that doesn't meet the cultural need to house, host, care for and connect with one another. According to the Matching and Offering a Property to a Client section of Homes NSW's Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients can be matched:

“...to a property that has one more bedroom than the minimum bedroom entitlement for the household, if the client has requested this. Homes NSW has this policy in recognition of the family responsibilities of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients. These clients can ask for an extra bedroom on their application for housing assistance or at any time while they are on the NSW Housing Register, where they have selected public or Aboriginal housing as one of their preferred providers.” (NSW Government 2025)

This section of the Policy Supplement recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s cultural need for multi-bedroom properties to accommodate family, either to live together or for family and community to visit. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 evidenced the importance of housing family and community and taking in community members when they need it, for example, after being in jail or during a mental health crisis, as part of reciprocity and Aboriginal culture. However, Aboriginal tenants do not necessarily experience the ‘extra bedroom’ section of the Policy Supplement being practiced because the policy is subject to availability. Instead, they are often offered smaller properties such as one-bedroom units, restricting the ability to comfortably accommodate one’s people and enact culture. This is significant because Aboriginal people may take in family and community regardless of whether they have space, which is then framed negatively as ‘crowding’, potentially leading to physical health issues.

There are individual and systemic reasons for the practice of culturally inappropriate offers. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals working in social housing recognise Aboriginal people’s meanings of home and priorities, and advocate for clients’ cultural needs in housing, referring them to the Policy Supplement. This was shown to be particularly true of Aboriginal social housing workers who understand from their own cultural experience the need for Aboriginal people to live close to areas of connection. However, this recognition is not universally appreciated by provider workers and is not systematically operationalised, with Aboriginal tenants needing to tell social housing workers that the Locational Need section of the Policy Supplement exists, for example (see Danielle, pages 121-122 and 135).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 showed that locational need isn’t always applied because of limited social housing stock in La Perouse, and service delivery barriers, notably the burden of evidence required to request locational need and the rigidity of the allocation system. Housing providers require Aboriginal people to provide evidence of connection to satisfy locational need which can be a burdensome and complicated process. This is an enactment of systemic racism and power over Aboriginal clients by housing providers, as the colonial system is requesting for

Aboriginal people to produce evidence of cultural connection to *potentially* allow the continuation of a peoples to live out culture on Country with one's people. Furthermore, housing provider allocation systems are rigid, only allowing people to request properties in a general allocation zone rather than specific suburbs.

Tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers cite a lack of multi-bedroom properties in the Eastern suburbs as the reason why Aboriginal people aren't offered housing with an additional bedroom. Aboriginal people's meanings of home and housing priorities are not valued within this reasoning; there is a colonial inertia embedded in housing providers emphasising limited multi-bedroom stock as the reason for Aboriginal people's housing needs not being met, with no recourse and limited acknowledgement of the negative health and wellbeing impacts. There are indeed social housing stock limitations in the Eastern suburbs and broadly across NSW. As at 30 June 2024, expected wait times for 2, 3, or 4+ bedrooms in CS02 Eastern Suburbs zone was over 10 years, while expected wait times for studio apartments and 1-bedrooms were shorter, at 5 to 10 years (NSW Government 2020). The NSW social housing sector is predicting an expansion of smaller one- and two-bedroom properties rather than multi-bedroom houses (Crowley 2024). It is unclear how the social housing system is working to meet Aboriginal people's cultural need for multi-bedroom properties.

The above findings on culturally inappropriate housing are significant in terms of the relationship between providers and tenants, and the harmful social, cultural and emotional impacts. The misalignment between policy and practice causes frustration, confusion, and breaks down trust between tenants and providers. Aboriginal tenants read the policies as a glimmer of hope that providers understand their cultural needs, however when providers don't provide appropriate housing, the policies are deemed "false information" (Danielle, page 121). If tenants lose faith in the system meeting their needs, they don't ask for what they need and continue to live in inappropriate housing, impacting health and social and emotional wellbeing. A flow-on effect of misalignment between policy and practice is that Aboriginal tenants understate their housing needs in terms of bedrooms when they apply for housing because they are aware there is a limited number of multi-bedroom properties. This again leads to 'crowding' and subsequent health impacts.

The need for multi-bedroom properties intersects with the need for Aboriginal tenants to have visitors, sometimes for periods of time longer than housing provider policies allow, exemplifying a clash with mainstream social housing policy. For context, Homes NSW does not stipulate how long visitors can stay, however tenants must notify them about an additional occupant "within

28 days of a change of household membership” before a visitor becomes an “an unauthorised occupant” and the tenant is breaching the tenancy agreement (NSW Government 2018). Some CHPs explicitly state a 28-day length of stay for visitors (Bridge Housing 2025). Australian research has found that policies often do not allow for extended visits to social housing properties by those who are not on the lease (Milligan, Easthope et al. 2013, Andersen 2017). There is a longstanding knowledge of the cultural disconnect between the values of social housing providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants with regards to visitors (Cooper and Morris 2005, Flatau, Cooper et al. 2005, Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008, Habibis, Memmott et al. 2013). International research has similarly found that social housing provider policies are in opposition to the cultural obligations and spiritual needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Pickett 2022) and First Nations people in Canada (Christensen 2016), particularly in relation to hosting and caring for family and community.

Summary of policy and practice recommendations

The findings in Chapters 4 to 6 have several key policy and practice implications.

1. **Key finding:** Some tenants experience unhealthy conditions living in social housing, causing distress and poor health and wellbeing, disconnecting them from home. Unhealthy housing conditions are often related to delays and/or inaction in repairs and maintenance.

Policy and practice recommendations:

- a. Maintenance to be properly resourced within social housing provider budgets, actioned in a timely fashion, and monitored
- b. Social housing providers could improve communication with tenant support workers to action repairs and maintenance when support workers escalate repairs issues for their clients
- c. Housing providers could acknowledge harms caused by delays and inaction on repairs and maintenance with an apology and subsequent action in the form of accountability measures
- d. Accountability measures could be developed, clearly communicated and systematically actioned for property conditions causing harm to health (e.g., respiratory health, injury risk) and delays and/or unactioned in repairs and maintenance
- e. Providers could annually monitor maintenance, comparing expected response times against actual response times, and maintenance completion rates

- f. Providers could develop a policy that allows them to reimburse tenants for out-of-pocket property expenses relating to repairs and maintenance, in instances where housing providers themselves are not conducting repairs
 - g. Providers are bound by the RTA and are required to meet minimum acceptable property standards. An independent audit of the property conditions of all public and community housing properties could ensure minimum standards are met.
2. **Key finding:** Some tenants experience poor treatment in the form of racism the discrimination, stereotyping and judgement by social housing workers. Current escalation pathways, such as the NSW Ombudsman and the Tribunal, are not well known or used among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

Practice recommendation:

- a. Accountability measures developed, clearly communicated and systematically actioned for racism, discrimination and poor treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants by social housing provider workers
 - b. Improved communication of existing escalation pathways to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants by tenant support workers and social housing providers
 - c. Social housing workers could be trained in cultural competency, trauma-informed service delivery.
3. **Key finding:** Tenants' housing needs in terms of number of bedrooms and culturally appropriate housing allocation are not systematically being met. Social housing provider allocation policies – for example, Homes NSW's Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy – do not align with the lived reality of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, rupturing trust between social housing providers and tenants.

Policy recommendation:

- a. Mainstream social housing providers could evaluate their allocation policies as they pertain to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenant's housing needs. The evaluation could determine whether allocation policies are currently successful in meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' housing needs and priorities, particularly the need for an extra bedroom and culturally appropriate housing allocation in areas of connection. Upon evaluating the policies, providers could amend them to better reflect the reality of the policy being applied. Providers could subsequently publicly disseminate the findings and communicate them directly with tenants, leading to improved transparency and trust between providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

4. **Key finding:** Notices of Termination are not understood by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, causing distress, fear and confusion when received, particularly when sent without prior communication. Providers sending NoTs without prior communication to tenants breaks trust between providers and tenants and in severe cases are evidenced to cause tenants' unnecessarily moving out of the property.

Practice recommendation:

- a. Providers could conduct an inquiry into the practice of sending NoTs to social housing tenants, assessing communication pathways and trigger points for sending NoTs. Providers could aim to reduce the number of NoTs being sent without prior communication.
 - b. Providers could develop a clear plan aiming to improve trauma informed communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, specifically in the case of rental arrears
5. **Key finding:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants lack access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and experience a high turnover of staff generally, reducing the ability for providers to build relationships with tenants
- a. Social housing providers could internally evaluate communication and referral pathways between social housing workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to support tenants accessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing workers.
 - b. Development of clear pathways for tenants to access frontline workers and Aboriginal-specific support workers
 - c. Providers could reduce tenancy load, particularly in public housing where frontline workers manage, variably, 300 to 400 tenancies alone

Beyond these policy and practice recommendations, there are ample opportunities to mitigate to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' health and wellbeing. One way to mitigate harm is to improve communication to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants on social housing provider policies, escalation pathways, and local social support organisation. This research aimed to improve communications by developing and disseminating a local, tailored culturally appropriate housing information resource, developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. The development of the resource is described in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: The way forward in the development of a housing information resource

This chapter identifies ideas for a tailored communication pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and presents the process of developing a housing information resource. It also outlines ideas for housing support beyond an information resource and considerations for future research. The final housing resource developed for the PhD are available in Appendix 2: The housing information resources.

The aims

One of the three aims of the research was to develop a tailored communication pathway and tangible information resource to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to navigate the social housing system. The idea for a communication pathway is to support tenants in meeting their housing needs and improve health and wellbeing. This aim arose from the understanding that there are major communication gaps between social housing providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in South-East Sydney, in part due to an overwhelming and confusing social housing system, and that it could be beneficial to produce information resources that directly support tenants meeting their housing needs. At project inception, it was unclear what format the resource would take, however it was broadly envisioned that it might exist as a 'how to' information booklet, a visual map, a flowchart, a website or a set of factsheets. Critically, the resource was to be informed by the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants living in South-East Sydney, and it was to be culturally appropriate and tailored to this group.

The process of resource development

The resource was developed in an iterative process with three major steps, see Figure 12.

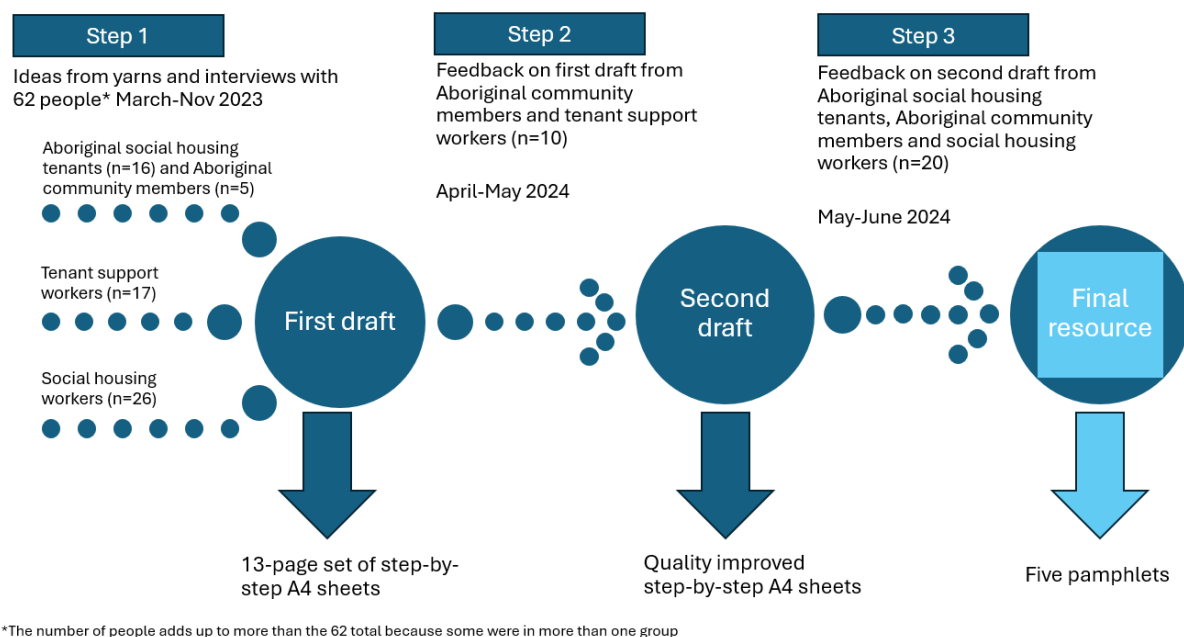


Figure 12 Iterative process of developing the housing information resource

At Step 1, an initial draft was developed, directly informed by yarns and interviews with 62 people from this study. The first draft was a set of A4 sheets outlining how a tenant would find out who their housing provider is, repairs and escalation information of local mainstream social housing providers, and tenant advocacy and support organisation information. At Step 2, the resource was shown to ten community members and tenant support workers for feedback. Their feedback directly fed into the development of a quality improved second draft.

At Step 3, the quality improved draft was shown to twenty people, initially to social housing workers to verify accuracy, and subsequently to nine Aboriginal social housing tenants (some of whom were also social housing workers) and Aboriginal community members. As a result of feedback, the resource was developed into five separate pamphlets, one for each of the four local mainstream social housing providers, outlining repairs, maintenance and escalation processes for each, and one pamphlet dedicated to social support and tenant advocacy organisation information.

Step 1: Gathering initial ideas for the resource and developing the first draft

Ideas from all 62 members, and scoping of existing resources, fed into the development of the housing resource. Aboriginal social housing tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers were asked about current tenancy resources available and ideas for a resource specifically to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in South-East

Sydney. Their responses heavily informed the initial iteration of the housing resource. Additionally, they provided suggestions of other forms of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, such as housing clinics and workshops, and discussed barriers to a resource being used.

Gathering information about existing resources to inform the resource

At the start of the project, it was clear that any housing resource developed should not duplicate an existing resource. This was remedied by searching online for existing housing information sheets and resources and asking each of the 62 people about any resources they were aware of that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. Several resources were identified, including the Tenants Union of NSW's Aboriginal renters page that provides Aboriginal-specific factsheets (Tenants Union of NSW 2024), Redfern Legal Centre's Repair Kit and Repairs diary for public housing tenants (Redfern Legal Centre 2019). Aboriginal social housing tenants were explicitly asked whether they had heard of any of these resources, to gauge knowledge of resources and usability. Only one tenant had heard of the Tenants Unions' Aboriginal Factsheets and it was identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally are not aware of factsheets ("*Heaps of mob don't even know about them.*" – Eleanor, Aboriginal tenant). A tenant advocate noted that their service refers clients to the Factsheets, however accessing a website is not feasible for some clients.

We refer them to the factsheets on the Tenant's Union website, but not everybody has the ability to access the TU website for a factsheet. – Holly, Aboriginal tenant advocate

Aboriginal tenants were asked about their knowledge of tenant advocacy services and local supports. Most Aboriginal tenants had not heard of tenancy services and did not know who they would go to for support.

I wouldn't have a clue who [to go to for tenant support, context of a transfer]. My plan would have just been to get temporary accommodation and get as many support letters as possible so that it could go faster. But other than that, that's about it. – Shae, Aboriginal tenant

Social housing workers were asked about the information they provide tenants at the beginning of a tenancy. They said they used to provide new tenants with information about their tenancy but today sign-ups tend to occur on iPads, with no paper-based information given to new tenants. Some frontline social housing workers developed their own photocopied sheets of information to give to tenants, while others provided no take-home information to new tenants.

Some frontline workers noted that when new tenants sign up, they have often come directly from homelessness and are not in a mental state to take in large amounts of new information. Despite this knowledge, tenants are not provided with paper-based information to read later when they're able to absorb information. This scoping and listening informed both the format and content of the resource and further justified the need to develop a housing information resource for tenants.

Ideas from yarns and interviews

Content of the resource

There were various and numerous ideas about resource content. Aboriginal social housing tenants said it would be useful to have an information sheet with phone numbers of organisations to call for housing support as well as steps for escalating issues, for example, information on going to Tribunal to resolve delays in repairs. It was said that an information resource could potentially alleviate feelings of being 'stuck' and stressed.

That tool - numbers and what they can do, and the steps. People are like, "yeah, right, well, if you're not going to listen to me, well, I'm going to ring these fellas and they're going to help me". ... Just somewhere they don't feel like they're stuck. – Illana, Aboriginal tenant

And if we can get that information of the services that can help with anything with Tribunal stuff and things like that. You know, then lessen the stress for some people. – Nancy, Aboriginal tenant

Jason, an Aboriginal tenant, said a sheet of key phone numbers available and accessible at local community organisations would be helpful. He said most tenants don't know what Tribunal (or NCAT) is and aren't aware that they can take their social housing provider to Tribunal. Providing people with information about the Tribunal process was considered part of self-determination.

I want you to ask everyone that you've interviewed, go back and ask them "what's NCAT?" And I bet yeah, they go "A cat? What cat? A CAT?" No one's going to know what it is. And we need to start encouraging people to – you know what? This is self-determination. They don't want you to know about NCAT. When they should be saying "If you're not happy with our services", they should have posters in the office, "Contact NCAT". – Jason, Aboriginal tenant

Tenant support workers agreed it would be helpful to have an information sheet for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants living in South-East Sydney (“...*definitely like an information sheet might - would be helpful.*” Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate). Some described the resource as a crash course or a step-by-step guide, and others stipulated to have clearly outlined information about maintenance and transfers in the resource.

Having the information about who to call around maintenance. If you are looking for a transfer this is what you do. Just have information or explain things like – not dumb it down but have things that explain. More clear information. – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

George, an Aboriginal tenant advocate, said providing tenants with knowledge gives them more control over a situation, so a resource would be useful. Some tenants aren’t aware who their social housing provider is, which means they don’t know who to contact when they’re having a housing issue.

I think a lot of them [tenants] don't even know what housing they are under. – Stella, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker

I think that's [knowing who the housing provider is] the critical thing. I think you've hit the nail on the head. That's the most important thing from the start. Who is your provider?

Who is managing your property? Who can you ring? - Tracy, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker

A list of support services to ask for help, particularly for tenants who are not well connected to services, was considered needed, so services can advocate for tenants.

...they need to know who to go to get their questions answered and their issues resolved.
- Tracy, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker

Aboriginal clients and Aboriginal people are pretty good with knowing who's who in the zoo, where they need to be going as far as their support networks. But then it's those ones that don't, and that sort of sort of shut themselves off from everyone. ...they're probably the ones that they wouldn't know about it. ...things like, the nearest support agency. - Marty, non-Aboriginal man, social housing worker

I think the biggest thing is having the contact details of where to go. ...a lot of people will call our office and say, “Do you have the number for this?” And usually you can just Google it, but you'll have to go through five pages of this website before you get to what you want. – Justine, non-Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

It was considered useful to have information on repairs (Yamarra, Marty, Elle, Sid), how to complete a transfer application (Yamarra, Jo, Pat), Notices of Termination (Albert, Nancy, Elle), rent arrears and evictions (Elle), rights and responsibilities (Tracy, Illana), and how to clean mould (Illana).

...they need clear instructions, whether that is on, paperwork, or it's on a video, or some type of tool, to let them know what their rights and responsibilities are. – Tracy, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker

...there was talk maybe six or seven years ago about resources for new Aboriginal tenancies. So that we could do the basic stuff so Aboriginal tenants could understand what you can do and can't do. What's acceptable, what's not acceptable. ...it would be really helpful if there was a resource, specifically targeted at Aboriginal people. They do it everywhere else. – Illana, Aboriginal tenant

...the most common things that we see anecdotally are the repairs and maintenance issues, rent arrears and evictions. So about rent arrears and contacting your housing provider to sort something out sooner rather than later. Yeah, that would be good to have. – Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

Social housing workers said the resource could provide a detailed description of the language tenants should use when asking for maintenance to trigger a response.

...that is something that would be absolutely helpful. ...just being able to coach, guide, what sort of things you need to be saying to get what you need to trigger that response, whether it be for maintenance, whether it be for, just things in general for your tenancy. – Marty, non-Aboriginal man, social housing worker

Ivy, a community leader and Nancy, an Aboriginal tenant, believed a resource would be useful to support with mapping out expectations and differences between social housing providers.

It is madness. It'd be good to sort of map, what's similar and what are the differences between each of them [social housing providers]. And what are the expectations and what they can and can't provide. A big part of that is understanding who the housing providers are too. So, even though you're part of the La Perouse community, you may not be in a Land Council house or you may be in a AHO or, you know? - Ivy, Aboriginal community leader

Some members suggested including information on how to apply for confirmation of Aboriginality, particularly when a client can't get direct confirmation (Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker). Others wanted to provide information to tenants on language around tenancy, for example, the difference between a lease and a tenancy agreement (Eleanor, Aboriginal tenant). Marty, a non-Aboriginal social housing worker, and Tara, an Aboriginal housing worker, both suggested including reminders for tenants in AHO properties to update their Commonwealth Rent Assistance. Tenants in AHO properties are charged rent from Commonwealth Rent Assistance and are required to update their details every 12 months to ensure they are eligible. If they don't do so, tenants go into arrears at the 12-month period. One tenant raised it would be important to highlight to tenants that DCJ Housing (now Homes NSW) and child protection are not the same entity, and that Homes NSW can't look in child protection files (Eleanor). Zac, an Aboriginal caseworker, said it would be useful to tell Aboriginal tenants that an Aboriginal support worker can accompany them to client service visits.

Simple, plain language, relevant information and accessibility

Zac believed the resource should have as much relevant information as possible for Aboriginal community members.

I think with the model, though, you've just got to have as much information in it as possible, because that – as much information that's relevant to what you've like learnt from people. 'Cause you don't want to put stuff in there that like doesn't sort of relate back to [Aboriginal] community. – Zac, Aboriginal caseworker

Social housing workers believed limiting the number of pages of information and providing the information in clear, plain language was the preferred approach, otherwise tenants would be overwhelmed.

I think it [a simple set of information sheets] would be good, but has to be really nice and plain, and simple. If you overdo it with big words or if there's too many pages, that will be a turn off to even people that can read and write. – Yamarra, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker

It was considered vital for the resource to be accessible, particularly for people who aren't educated, for older people and people with limited financial resources.

Just as long as they know it's accessible, there's so many people that will reach out. ... I'm a bit lucky that I was a bit more on the educated side, where I was like, "yeah ... I'm going to Aboriginal Tenancy". Or, "I'm going here. No, I'm going to Barnardos now". Like,

I'll keep putting up that little fight. But it's also quite draining. And for a lot of people that are a lot more vulnerable than I am, they give up. ... also, the most vulnerable that I've realised is the elderly. - Illana, Aboriginal tenant

[It has to be] very simple and still gives people options and choices - Jo, Aboriginal caseworker and tenant

So communication, assuming everybody is dirt poor and doesn't have access to devices is a place to start. All about how to communicate. ...they might not be technical or they can't afford to have any devices. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker

Intended audience

While the aim of this project is to develop resources with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, it was suggested to include information for people who need housing, not only current tenants.

We probably need to think about not just people who are in social housing but people who may need social housing. So, if you find yourself in need of support for housing options, where do you go? What do you do? ... what's my first point of contact? And then what technically should happen from there? ...'cause I think that that's probably where some people sort of fall away... - Ivy, Aboriginal community leader

Barriers to housing information resource success

Members outlined potential barriers to the resource being successful in meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' housing needs. Some said tenants having information alone is not enough. They expressed that an information resource is only useful if social housing workers and social support organisations could support tenants with their requests. They believed that having one's needs met comes down to individual workers being capable of supporting tenants.

Well people got to be happy to do their job. You know, you can put people's names on that paper [the information sheet]. Are they going to answer? Will they have the answers to satisfy - not everybody's going to be satisfied. Will they put somebody in the right direction if they can't do it themselves? Have they got some support, to say, okay, well I can't do it but, let me get in contact or go and speak to this person. There's a communication breakdown for sure, somewhere along the lines. And from what I'm seeing, it's got a lot to do with that individual and how confident they are in doing that job. – Leonie, Aboriginal tenant

Tenant support workers had a similar view, that having the information alone is not enough to produce a positive outcome because social housing providers were not responding to tenants.

Even if they're [tenants] good record keepers and they know who their landlord is, sometimes they're [landlords] so hard to engage with. People give up... even if they don't give up, it's hard to get a response or outcome. – Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

There is plenty of help out there. It's when we get to the [de-identified housing provider] that even the help can't do anything. There are plenty of us out there willing to take this on. Plenty of us writing letters, plenty office knocking on doors, making phone calls, plenty of us soothing these souls that are in pain. But that's all we are doing because we are hitting that siege mentality within [de-identified housing provider]. We can't get past that. ...that is where your problem lies. The services are there, can go to as many services as they want. It's whether that service can get through. – Pat, Aboriginal caseworker

Accessibility of information was considered key to the resource being used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. Having access to the internet was considered a barrier and face-to-face visits was considered important in making it accessible (Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate). Jason and Leonie said some services and some particular workers in social housing and social services were not trusted by the community to produce a positive outcome.

It was said that some Aboriginal tenants are proud and may not want to call support numbers and need encouragement to call.

But they're still not gonna do it [call]...A lot them are not going to ring up, but letting them feel, you know, it's asking for charity and all that and some people are still very proud and you'll find Aboriginal culture still very proud as well. And especially with white organisations, they don't like asking, whatsoever. ... If they don't feel they can do it, I'll say, "What do you think you can deal with?" Right? And if they say, "Oh, I'll ring that one or I'll ring them two", I'll say, "Okay, I'll take the rest. Right?" – Leonie, Aboriginal tenant

The need for in-person support from a friend, tenant advocate or social service advocate alongside the housing resource was also identified:

My friend will call me and say, "I did what you said and then they said this." And then I'm like, "Okay, so now, you need to go back and do this." But if I was there in person, I'd be like, "Actually, you can't say that." You know what I mean? So it's like that kind of stuff where it's like, if you have a person there with you. – Nancy, Aboriginal tenant

Look our staff, tell us, and it still works for them, is people want face-to-face interactions. They want personal contact, the things about shame and all that kind of literacy. While you've got these gaps in people's literacy and understanding then you need a different model. – Jane, non-Aboriginal woman, CHP worker

Face-to-face support and community education was still considered to be required alongside the provision of a simple, plain language information sheet.

Even the fact sheets, they've got to be explained to some clients. – Fiona, non-Aboriginal caseworker

...that is a key thing that's missing is that community education... If you look at them [Tenants Union] factsheets, they're just another document that would intimidate any tenant. Not only Aboriginal tenants. – Brooke, Aboriginal tenant advocate

It was suggested to update the resource frequently to ensure currency.

...things change all the time. Even if we make a pamphlet here, it can change in two months. – Nancy, Aboriginal tenant.

Developing the first draft

Based on these responses, a list of ideas was developed for the resource and was discussed with Aboriginal community members and PhD supervisors. Subsequently, the first draft content was developed in a Word document and designed by an Aboriginal staff member of the Guunu-maana (Heal) Program with expertise in developing communications material. This draft was a set of 13 A4 sheets outlining the steps of how a tenant would find out who their housing provider is, repairs, maintenance and escalation information of local social housing providers, and local tenant advocacy and support organisation information. It was decided to develop information relating to three social housing providers in South-East Sydney – two CHPs and the public housing provider. This was based on the knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in properties managed by these providers. Repairs and maintenance information for each provider was scoped from provider websites and based on the views of social housing workers. Escalation processes included in the draft were complaints to a housing provider, the housing appeals process, Tribunal, and for public housing the NSW Ombudsman. This information was scoped from provider websites and publicly available information on the housing appeals, Tribunal and NSW Ombudsman processes.

Not all ideas for the resource expressed during data collection were included in the first draft. It was identified that too much information would overwhelm tenants and a simple, plain

language set of information was considered the best approach. The first draft was informed by the concept that the resource could be used by tenants who don't know who their housing provider is and who have minimal financial and technological resources. Therefore, the draft resource began with the first step all tenants need to know: who their social housing provider is. Knowing one's provider is the springboard for accessing support to meet one's housing needs. The need for repairs and maintenance was heard as a great demand, thus the second part of the resource focused on repairs and maintenance. The next step was to provide tenants with information on how to escalate issues through a variety of different avenues if there were delays in repairs, maintenance, or any other issue with their housing provider.

It was highly recommended to include a list of local social support organisations and tenant advocacy contacts. While there are many services available, tenants said they don't always feel comfortable asking for support, partly due to being unsure what each service does and feeling deflated if the service can't support them. Based on this insight, detailed, up-to-date information was sought from each local tenant advocacy and social support organisation about the support they provide and was embedded into the resource. The information provided assumed tenants lacked financial resources and used public transport rather than private transport.

Step 2: Developing the second draft

At Step 2, the first draft was shown to Aboriginal community members and tenant support workers for feedback and quality improvement. Aboriginal social housing tenants were not shown the resource at Step 2 in case it presented inaccurate information and caused confusion. Community members and tenant support workers who understood Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' needs verified the accuracy of information.

At this step, Aboriginal community members discussed co-ownership of the resource, branding and artwork, where the housing resource would exist and how people would access it, i.e., in paper form at organisations and services, and/or online. Tenant support workers believed the resource was practical and would support them in their roles supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants (*"This is the perfect first step."* - Zac, Aboriginal caseworker). Fiona, a non-Aboriginal tenant support worker, said the resource would support people with mental health issues. Tenant advocates provided detailed feedback on the complaints, appeals and other escalation pathways.

A major change at this step was discarding the first step 'How to find out who your housing provider is'. Tenant support workers said this page was confusing and overwhelming. They

suggested discarding it and developing one set of information for each housing provider. They said the housing resource would likely be accessed by tenants and tenant support workers who already know the housing provider their client is with, thus it wasn't necessary to have separate information describing how to find out who their provider is. A second draft was developed based on the feedback as part of an iterative, collaborative quality improvement process.

Step 3: Developing the final resource

At Step 3, the quality-improved second draft was shown to twenty people for feedback. Initially it was shown to social housing workers to verify accuracy, and subsequently shown to nine Aboriginal social housing tenants and Aboriginal community members.

Aboriginal tenants said the resource was needed, suggesting modifying the format from A4 sheets to tri-fold pamphlets. At this step, Dharawal Elder Lola Ryan suggested naming the tool *Bundi*, a Dharawal word for tool or weapon. This idea was shared with local La Perouse Aboriginal community members including Lee Timberly, Beverly Davison and others, and their positive response led to the resource being called *Bundi: A housing tool for mob*.

At this step, a debate about language use in the resource emerged. Some Aboriginal tenants believed the language should reflect the social housing provider system, while others believed it should be plainer, colloquial, and thus more accessible. For example, the wording "I want to make a request for repairs or maintenance" was suggested to be changed to "How do I get things fixed?" The language was not changed based on the reasoning that tenant requests are not heard by social housing providers unless they use the language of the provider. Aboriginal tenants with a long history of social housing believed Aboriginal tenants should be encouraged to use provider language as this would lead to a better chance of achieving a good outcome.

Social housing workers considered the resource highly valuable ("*It's going to be a valuable resource.*" – Eliza, Aboriginal woman, social housing worker) and reflected that it was common sense for it to exist ("*It's common sense but nobody has done it.*" – Paulina, non-Aboriginal woman, social housing worker). The resource was said to show the gaps in tenants' knowledge (Paul, non-Aboriginal man, social housing worker). Social housing workers expressed the hope that the resource could be given to their clients at sign-up to a new tenancy. Social housing workers suggested several minor wording changes that were accepted. Social housing workers also noted that one mainstream housing provider operating in South-East Sydney that houses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants was missing - Community Housing Limited – thus this provider's information was added to the set of pamphlets. Homes NSW workers noted that their repairs and maintenance processes were soon to change (from 1 July 2024) and provided

contacts to Homes NSW workers who had more detailed information about these changes. The new repairs and maintenance processes of Homes NSW were fed into the resource.

Information encouraging tenants to update their details with the housing provider, and information about neighbour disputes, were included based on feedback. The resource was dated at August 2024 to indicate when it was most up-to-date.

Based on this round of feedback the content was modified and developed into five separate tri-fold pamphlets. This included one pamphlet for each of the four mainstream social housing providers, outlining repairs, maintenance and escalation processes for each, and one pamphlet dedicated to up-to-date social support and tenant advocacy organisation information.

Recommendations for further support and communication pathways

Members expressed that an information resource could only be truly effective in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants if it was coupled with a broader set of face-to-face activities. Housing clinics or workshops in one regular location and time was suggested by several people.

Information sessions. Having more of them. Hold 'em down here at Yarra House or hold 'em at the health centre. ...have it around the health and wellbeing and housing. – Ivy, Aboriginal community leader

It would [be helpful to have a housing clinic or workshop]. It is good because when you get to meet the clients face-to-face then and talk to somebody on the phone and especially with Aboriginal clients, they don't like talking over the phone so much, 'cause they don't know you. ... Whereas you meet them face-to-face, they can suss you out right away. – Leonie, Aboriginal tenant

Potentially workshops with the tenants. Something regular that people could voluntarily come to would be good - if they needed help. – Elle, non-Aboriginal tenant advocate

It was considered important for the housing clinics or workshops to be led by local Aboriginal people, to allow for trust of the service. It was also suggested it be run by at least two people, otherwise they would be burnt out by the demand.

I think also when you do the workshops, if youse end up doing it, hire one or two Aboriginal people, to get the community's attention. And it will kind of like just would just help them have trust in something as well. – Illana, Aboriginal tenant

But what you're looking at there is, are they going to be overrun with work? Will they have at least one or two people with them. ... One person, it doesn't work. And the government know this, so don't set it up to fail, in other words. ...it would be ideal for a lot of people, especially the young fellas. Like, any age group, really. You know, you got a problem. You like to talk to somebody. Right, they're going to be down there, this time, this month. – Leonie, Aboriginal tenant

One person noted that any workshops should be held in multiple locations in the South-East area, rather than only at La Perouse, as some Aboriginal people don't connect with La Perouse.

They don't feel welcome there. Or for their own reasons they won't go there. ...There's plenty of people that will [go to La Perouse]. ...then there's the Aboriginal people that are here [South-East suburb outside of La Perouse] - disconnected Aboriginal people who I work a lot with who are down here escaping DV from the Northern rivers and from the Mid North coast in places like that. ... They won't go near La Perouse. They've never had anything to do with it in their lives. So you need another place besides La Perouse. – Sid, Aboriginal community-engaged government worker

Future research is needed to explore the effectiveness of Aboriginal-led face-to-face housing clinics, workshops or information sessions in South-East Sydney in meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' housing needs. Many tenant support workers noted that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic their service would regularly attend community spaces and healthcare centres. However, these outreach activities ceased during the pandemic and have not started operating again. Other supports were suggested in the form of localised Aboriginal community engagement officers within Homes NSW offices that are not Aboriginal Specialists.

...you need a community engagement officer. Aboriginal community engagement officer working full time. Not contract work. And then they can identify what they have to scope 'cause each community is different. Redfern needs it. Waterloo needs it. Surry Hill needs it. – Eleanor, Aboriginal tenant

Further research could explore the effect of Aboriginal community engagement workers employed by housing providers. At present, some community housing providers employ Aboriginal community engagement workers, however it is unclear the impact these roles have in meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' needs. One person suggested an app to provide basic step-by-step information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

Everything's always online these days. Having a tab there [on a website] specifically for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people, it tells you literally what goes, step-by-step instructions, what is needed, how to go about making a repair, really basic, simple instructions. ...just very basic. – Illana, Aboriginal tenant

Homes NSW have a MyHousing app, however it was noted that the information is not easily digestible and is not tailored to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. While some Aboriginal-specific information does currently exist on the Homes NSW website, it was noted that the online navigation is overwhelming for some Aboriginal tenants. Homes NSW could develop tailored information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients within Homes NSW's current app and webpages.

Beyond South-East Sydney

Throughout quality improvement it was emphasised that the process of developing the housing resource could be duplicated and a resource could be developed with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in the inner-Sydney, Western Sydney and regional NSW areas. Some Aboriginal workers in social housing expressed an interest in developing a specific resource for Aboriginal young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independent living in social housing. This was described as having the potential to “break the cycle” and moving from social housing providers being reactive to being proactive and providing Aboriginal young people with the information needed to thrive.

Uptake of final version and dissemination

The housing resource as five separate pamphlets was finalised in August 2024. A key activity at this point was to ensure it was accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in South-East Sydney, as well as by tenant support organisations and social housing providers. To support dissemination, a webpage on TGI's website was developed, describing pamphlet development and linking to free colour and black and white pdf versions of each pamphlet⁴⁷. The webpage and pdf versions of the pamphlets were shared with all stakeholders connected to this project, including Aboriginal social housing tenants, the Ngala Nanga Mai (We Dream) pARenT group, the Health Centre, tenant support organisations, social services, social housing providers, and relevant housing researcher groups and not-for-profit organisations focusing on housing and homelessness, e.g., Shelter NSW. Dissemination occurred in person at social services, tenant advocacy groups and the Ngala Nanga Mai pARenT group. At the Ngala

⁴⁷ See <https://www.georgeinstitute.org/projects/housing-home-and-health-social-housing-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-in> for a webpage disseminating the housing resource.

Nanga Mai pARenT group, considerable time was taken to talk through and share the pamphlets with Aboriginal social housing tenants, community members and Aboriginal Health Workers. Pamphlets were placed in the public waiting room of the Health Centre and several other South-East Sydney services. The webpage was shared with staff of social housing and social services, and they were encouraged to print copies.

In October 2024, a half-day Aboriginal-specific Housing Forum was held, bringing together 15 Aboriginal people working in frontline and community-facing roles in the South-East Sydney and inner-Sydney areas. The forum was organised by Lola Ryan, Kate Hunter and I, and held in Redfern, Sydney at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence. Aboriginal people from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, such as the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance, Aboriginal community organisations, social services, tenant advocacy services and Aboriginal workers from two social housing providers, were in attendance. This was an important gathering of Aboriginal people to yarn about housing and health and to disseminate the housing resource to Aboriginal frontline workers who directly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants. Colour copies of the pamphlets were available for Forum participants to take and disseminate to clients and their networks. A QR code of the webpage was also made available to workers.

Discussion and conclusion

A housing resource was successfully developed alongside Aboriginal social housing tenants, community members, tenant support workers and social housing workers in an iterative cycle, with quality improvement processes embedded. The resource includes five separate pamphlets that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' knowledge of rights to repairs and maintenance, escalation pathways through complaints, appeals and Tribunal, and local tenant advocacy and social support services. The process of developing the housing resource elucidated a gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' knowledge of escalation and support pathways. It presented an opportunity to improve the accessibility and uptake of knowledge about tenants' rights and responsibilities within the social housing system. It showed a notable gap in social housing providers' communication of tenants' rights and responsibilities and support and escalation pathways for repairs, complaints, appeals and Tribunal. It also showed that tenant advocacy services and social services could improve in promoting their services and support pathways to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in South-East Sydney.

Social housing providers were found to offer limited information to tenants at the beginning of a tenancy, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants have limited knowledge of their rights, responsibilities and escalation pathways for repairs. Aboriginal social housing tenants were largely found to hold very little knowledge of tenant support services and escalation pathways to meet their housing needs, not having heard of Aboriginal-specific tenant advocacy services and local mainstream tenant advocacy services. This view was shared by tenant support workers and was considered the status quo given an under resourced tenant advocacy and social service sector, with limited capacity to promote their services. The impact of Covid-19 was cited as one reason why tenants didn't know about services, and the process of developing the resource highlighted the need to re-start public-facing promotion and outreach.

The process of developing this resource alongside a range of diverse stakeholders, some of whom have limited contact with each other (namely, tenants and providers), has indirectly supported communication between stakeholders, for the benefit of tenants. As each stakeholder's views were relayed to one another, they each learned about one another's viewpoint. This is a positive benefit of working in the third space, as an independent researcher, and developing resources in good faith alongside community and industry partners.

This housing resource is only one part of a series of activities that may support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants with housing and broader social support needs. Further, multi-pronged strategies are necessary to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants can smoothly navigate an overwhelming and complicated system to improve health and wellbeing. There is a need for greater resourcing of the tenancy advocacy sector, and improved, clearer communication and support pathways between tenants, tenant support organisations, social services and social housing providers. Drawing upon the findings from resource development, support pathways could include clearly communicated and advertised, regular or one-off housing workshops or clinics with local advocates and services at health and community centres.

Chapter 9: Reflexivity

Reflexive practice is a tool that supported my application of Indigenous, decolonising and third space methodologies on my PhD journey. Critical self-reflection, accompanied by discussion of my reflections with supervisors, Guunu-maana (Heal) team members and external mentors, kept me accountable and responsible, and allowed me to grow, to re-consider my approach and change practice. There is much to be gained from reflexive practice in research. It allows a researcher to see what they're doing and not doing. It holds researchers accountable and is a strategy to deal with discomfort by practicing vulnerability and revealing to oneself uncomfortable truths.

I practiced reflexivity through written journalling and audio from June 2020 to March 2025. This spanned the time I began considering a PhD to completing my thesis. I journalled after important conversations, meetings with Aboriginal community members and supervisors, yarns and interviews and other periods of deep thinking. Sometimes, yarns and interviews left me with so many impressions, I recorded myself on my phone afterwards. Written journals and audio included my honest observations, impressions, ideas, emotions and concerns. These journals were only for me. Knowing that only I would read/listen to them meant I could be honest and uncover uncomfortable realities, enabling change. This chapter describes several select, seminal moments of re-thinking and change in the PhD.

‘[Insert outcome]’: The process of changing the research question

A seminal point of the PhD journey was re-thinking the research question after deeper thinking and community input. My initial PhD scholarship application focused on culturally safe service delivery in the social housing system and asked the research questions in Figure 13.

TITLE: Housing and health: Towards culturally safe practice in the social housing service delivery system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales

Statement of the research problem and its significance

The aims of this PhD proposal are:

- 1). To investigate how the social housing service delivery system currently provides services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, within a cultural safety framework;
- 2). To describe the client service delivery experience in the social housing system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through client journey mapping, and;
- 3). To determine how the social housing delivery system can embed cultural safety into client service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and provide recommendations in the form of a service blueprint.

Figure 13 Initial research questions

Three months into the PhD I reflected on these questions, noting that focus on culturally safe service delivery would potentially contribute to change in service delivery, however it centred housing providers and service delivery, without a clear end goal for tenants.

... realising that I don't know the outcome, what is it that we are striving towards? "[Insert outcome]". – 24 September 2021

I asked supervisors, community members and external mentors “What is the actual outcome aimed for?” We agreed that while we collectively were aiming towards the concept of ‘healthy housing’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in social housing, we realised this outcome lacked specificity. We worked together to change the project to explore what outcome Aboriginal tenants want and to go deeper into understanding home. As the project progressed, the projected shifted away from the language of ‘desired outcomes’ and moved towards understanding tenants’ priorities and needs.

Unpacking my motivations and discomfort

I experienced ongoing discomfort being a non-Aboriginal, middle-class white person who does not have experience living in social housing, working on this research. This journey of discomfort began in mid-2020, a year prior to starting my PhD, with honest reflections on my judgemental nature, racism, whiteness and middle classness. Early on, my motivation came from wanting to be ‘a good white person’.

I'm thinking about how judgemental I am. How uncomfortable I am about my own whiteness. About my middle classness. Afraid to say the wrong thing. [Indigenous friend and colleague] wants me to work in Aboriginal health. I say I'm nervous about it. She says that's a good thing. I'm scared. Because I am still so judgemental. The work hasn't really started and I know that. I'm still interested in it being about my being a 'good white person'. Avoiding disappointing people. – June 2020

A year later, at the start of the PhD, I seriously considered my motivations, see Figure 14. It was important to be honest with myself about my motivations so I could truly see who I was, how I was potentially benefiting from a project that had nothing to do with my lived experience and to ensure I wasn't behaving from problematic, colonial and racist motivations. I did not want to cause harm. If I could see racism in my own motivations, I could problematise, unpack and make visible my own power within them and in doing so, attempt to undo that power.

- Driven by relationships, learning and ways of working
 - The desire to apply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing in research, and Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies and methods
 - The desire to work with people in collaborative, non-hierarchical ways
 - Wanting to spend time with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and enjoy building relationships with people I respect
 - Wanting to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal people from the First Nations health research space in a more substantial way and learn from them, grow in the process of a PhD in my work and personal relationships
 - Wanting to better understand Aboriginal peoples' cultures, ways of being, doing, working, thinking, knowing
- Make change and do something tangible through research
 - Call the housing system to account through (the whitely way) of a PhD thesis
 - Work together with Aboriginal people and the social housing system to better achieve the goals and agendas of each group
- Growth and transformation
 - Unpack and attempt to undo my whitely ways
 - Wanting to be a better person, i.e., a person who understands more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how to be a useful ally
 - Actively apply self-reflection skills
 - Learn how to resolve conflicts

Figure 14 My motivations, July 2021

For example, 'wanting to make change', if unproblematised and unchecked, could easily fall into problematic white saviourism. Dominant white Australian society is heavily invested in problematic ideas about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 'needing help' from white people 'to solve problems'. A large portion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research has been founded on these ideas (Smith 1999, Watego 2021). I experienced these problematic notions in non-Aboriginal people's reactions to my saying I was doing a PhD about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's priorities in social housing. Non-Aboriginal people would respond with racist, mainstream narratives about Aboriginal people and housing. They referred to me working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health as a form of 'helping' that was considered 'noble', and noticeably increased people's respect for me. I found these reactions disturbing and jarring. I don't believe in these notions and worked to counter deficit narratives. I was careful how I talked about the PhD to avoid gaining unwelcome social capital, attempting to undo power.

I questioned whether it was possible to be a white non-Aboriginal person working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and not perpetuate harm, and considered whether I had the 'right' to conduct the PhD.

Is it possible to do it 'well' being white? Being non-Aboriginal? And what does 'well' mean? I think I know what 'shit' means – there are hundreds of examples of white people

doing it the wrong way. Tamara talks about “perpetuating problematic colonial notions”. Sometimes I worry that I’ll absorb these ways of talking but not actually doing it. I might accidentally write something problematic without realising it and it has to get pointed out to me. Because racism is deeply embedded inside my body. It is embodied. This is so uncomfortable. It’s shameful. - March 2022

I’ve been thinking about why I’m doing the research, but more deeply than that, why focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s experience of social housing, an experience I know next to nothing about. What gives me the right? – July 2021

In these reflections I recognised that I held racism within my body, because of my experience of growing up as a white person, marinated in the dominant colonial Australian, racist culture. I was nervous, anxious and troubled, politically and personally. I struggled to make sense of how to do the work in the ‘right’ way, when a PhD involves me, a non-Aboriginal student, learning to do it the ‘right’ way. I had to accept I would make mistakes because of my positionality, my unconscious bias and my deep-set embodied racism.

Ultimately, I believe in self-determination which in research means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lead research that relates to them. I believe it is problematic for non-Aboriginal people to lead research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I’m uncomfortable with the fact that I’m a non-Indigenous person working in Aboriginal health. I’m almost embarrassed. That I’m one of those people. – July 2021

It should be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leading and doing research in this space. No more white people. – March 2022

I found myself being very careful about how I described my role in the project, always highlighting that it was guided by Dharawal and Bidjigal people at La Prouse.

An Indigenous friend and I discussed my anxieties and led me to conclude that the work would be useful and that the discomfort is a natural part of working in this space.

I had a chat with [Indigenous friend and colleague] and it was helpful. She asked “Is it better that this research is done versus not done at all?” And it’s true, it will be good and useful. And the discomfort will sit with me the whole time. – January 2022

I also came to appreciate the privilege of working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, especially as a non-Aboriginal person.

It is a massive privilege to be invited into the Aboriginal health research space. – March 2022

Throughout my PhD the level of discomfort changed. In some moments, I felt grounded and comfortable because of the permissions given from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the purpose of it.

Today I feel grounded in why I'm doing the research and especially grounded in knowing that it was strongly suggested by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that I do it. – December 2021

I used my level of discomfort as a marker of whether I was becoming complacent.

I feel like being uncomfortable is a good marker, but I'm not experiencing as much discomfort as I did a year ago. And I see that as a bad thing, that I'm not as uncomfortable. But it could be because I'm applying the concepts, I've got good community support, good communication and relationships with people, so there's less to be uncomfortable about. It feels like I've been given a 'stamp' of approval, even though that's a problematic way of framing it. Because consent to do the research is ongoing and not a one-off event. I have to keep working to earn the ability to do this research with community. It's not a given. So I will always be in the discomfort space, but not being as much in that space doesn't have to be a bad thing. It doesn't mean I'm complacent or arrogant. I'm just understanding things better and I'm in it. – June 2022

Despite feeling more comfortable, I remained vigilant and cautious because of my standpoint.

I'm often thinking "I don't belong". "I shouldn't be doing this". "This isn't my place." – February 2023

I see the discomfort as a necessary part of working as a non-Aboriginal person in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. I now experience it as a welcome friend that says 'hey, just wait, who are you, how are you benefiting, are the right people involved, slow down, check yourself'.

Towards the end of my PhD, having worked closely with Auntie Lola and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, relationships deepening, and beginning to have something 'to show' for the years of work, my discomfort shifted to a sense of peace, ease and sense of being trusted. This came from the depth of relationships and relationality at the core of the project, seeing things in a less binary way and as connection and collective effort.

My bond with Lola grows stronger and we are less and less like what I thought we were – me the white ‘outsider’ ‘researcher’ and she the Indigenous ‘insider’ ‘non-researcher’ in the health space – actually I’m more and more invited into her community and I see more and more how we are in this together in a way we weren’t at the start. – April 2024

The ease was supported by a crucial, grounding element I never lost sight of – that of community needs at the centre. I saw this as ‘shadow standpoint’. If I was talking to people about the project and key Aboriginal community members weren’t with me, I would consider what I knew they wanted and acted and spoke from that place, not on behalf of them, but with respect for their wishes. Reflecting this to one of my supervisors, I became emotional, and we discussed how this was testament to my deepening understanding of relational work.

Talking about shadow standpoint and the giants sitting just beside me is emotional. Tamara says this is because it’s acknowledgement of collectivity and relationality. How things connect us all. – September 2023

I was deeply moved by working in this way.

Relatedness, relationality, relationships at the centre as a thing that flows through the core of everything and manifests in every single corner of the work is so much more profound than I imagined. – May 2024

Being questioned

Some Aboriginal people asked me directly why I am working on the project. Questioning came from members of the La Perouse Alliance, Aboriginal tenants and Aboriginal people working in social housing. Being questioned was both confronting and very welcome and ultimately, a sign of health⁴⁸. It is part of Aboriginal people’s right to understand the deeper rationale for why a non-Aboriginal person is working on issues that directly affect their lives. It is also part of the need for Aboriginal people to understand what they’re bringing their energy to in the context of being a research ‘participant’. I was already very critical of my right to conduct the research, so I was quietly relieved to be questioned by Aboriginal people and to enter an honest, authentic dialogue about my motivations and to be steered in the right direction if my project wasn’t aligning with community priorities. I found that responding authentically, vulnerably, and in a non-defensive manner built trust, as some of the strongest relationships with Aboriginal people

⁴⁸ Health to me means a broad and holistic sense of wellbeing as well as connectedness to people and working from a place of integrity and authenticity. Here I use the term health to mean integrity and valuing of relationships based on honest dialogue.

are now with those who have initially challenged me. Being in tune with my motivations through reflexive practice allowed me to show up authentically in these conversations.

Learnings in Indigenous research methodologies

Re-thinking what constitutes a ‘research activity’

Prior to the PhD, my research experience was primarily on projects within positivist paradigms, with minimal community engagement, tight timelines and pre-set outputs. Throughout the PhD I spent a lot of time at the Health Centre, having cups of tea in the tearoom with staff and community members. Initially, I felt anxious about how much time I was spending there. I’d come home after a day at the Health Centre wondering when ‘the research’ would ‘begin’. My anxiety came from the belief that I wasn’t ‘doing’ research. I was conceptualising time with community members and staff as social rather than ‘research activities’. I relayed this to an Indigenous colleague, who said, “But that’s the work, that’s research in our space”. I realised that time with community was foundational to the project and crucial to working relationally and building trust. There is inherent value in spending time with community and I learned that trust-building is an essential part of rigor in Indigenous research. I was reminded by supervisors that genuinely connecting with people supported other activities in the project. I valued the time with community but after this reflection I valued it even more as part of doing research ethically and responsibly with Aboriginal people and as part of a legitimate methodology. I began to truly understand relationships and relationality as the purpose of the project.

[Supervisors] and I talked about how the tearoom chats are relationship building. It makes me ask the question, ‘What is the research and what is just life?’ [Supervisors] said there are all these things that happen before the ‘active’ research begins, i.e. the research as per the ideas of the institution, the data collection. And those things, the tearoom chats, are just as important as data collection itself, and can’t happen without it. It’s all the research. – January 2023

These conversations with supervisors helped me relax. I stopped questioning the time spent with staff and community and could connect genuinely because I understood that connecting with people was foundational to the methodology. I began to appreciate Indigenous research methodologies and relationality as a practice that contributed to rigor.

...the more you do the research, you get closer and closer to the people and the issues, rather than further away, and you get less and less objective. Which is kind of the

*opposite to traditional Western models of research. And I think that's happening for me.
It's more like a community building project. – February 2023*

I recognised I was working across Indigenous and Western research paradigms. While my project is within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program where an Indigenous research methodology means I spend time with community members, I am also constrained by the university timeline and Western academic outputs such as a written thesis.

Figure 15 provides a rudimentary sense of my evolving thinking on what constitutes a research activity while working within both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. It shows a list of key research activities, with Indigenous research methodologies, such as relational, trust-building activities in orange, and dominant Western research activities in black. These are not dichotomous however, as yarns and interviews are both Indigenous and Western research methods, respectively, and I moved between methods. In reality, and as described in Chapter 2, relationality supported and cut across all activities.

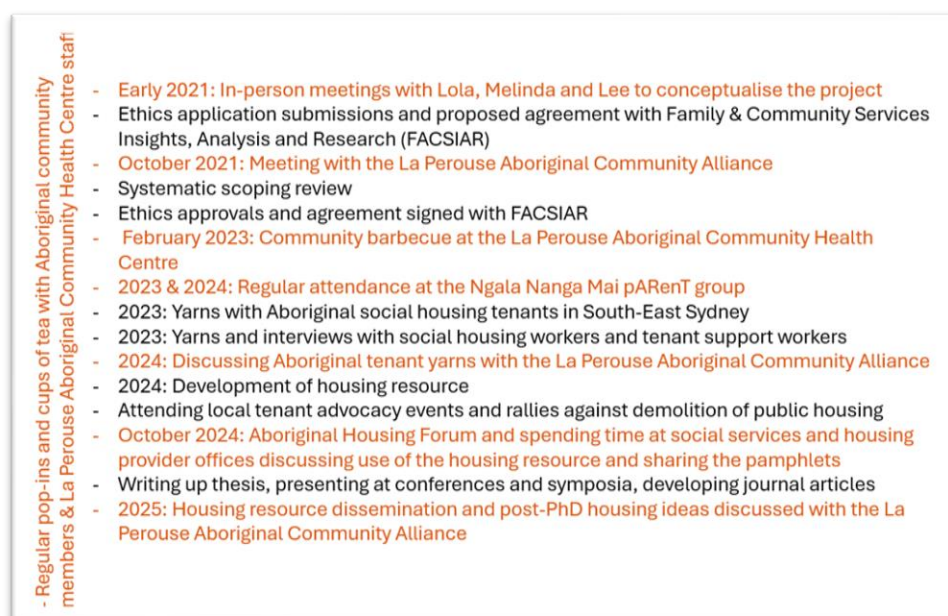


Figure 15 Research activities across research paradigms

Control and pacing: Walking, not running

I learned that in Indigenous research, things happen when they're meant to and in their own time. Supervisors often reminded me to slow down and not force things to happen sooner. This was difficult because in my education and professional life I've been trained to be 'results-driven' and measure success through visible, time-bound outputs. I moved between being able to relax, slow down and trust the process, especially with ethics applications and data

collection, and being stressed, frustrated and impatient. At the same time I appreciated the rarity of being trained in Indigenous research methodologies where research happens at the pace of trust and community needs.

How excruciating it is to slow down when you've been trained to run. And how rare this training is [in Indigenous research methodologies]. – May 2024

This learning was connected to the need to let go of control and understanding the project as being deeply relational. I often needed to wait for the appropriate people to give the green light to start the next stage of research.

I want to do things but it's not really my call, and a lot of things aren't my call. I feel like I want to run but I'm not allowed to, I have to walk. And there's a good reason why I need to walk, but it's hard! I can't push. I'm trying hard not to push. – February 2023

Slowing down and letting things happen, without force, and letting go of control, was one of the hardest lessons of the PhD, as a white person trained in Western ways of doing.

I also learned that the work demands its own pace. In mid-2024 during data analysis and the storying process I found that the data must be honoured and treated with respect. I began to engage with it in a 'flow state' rather than trying to rush it, producing much improved work.

I've been thinking about the speed of the work ... there is a real learning in knowing what speed to do the analysis in. The work has its own flow and I have to tune in to it. It feels literally like a tuning in, to be at the speed of the work. ... There's a groundedness to it that comes through when it's done at the right pace. – May 2024

Working slowly was also necessary because I was learning, for the first time, to work outside of my Western qualitative training of categorising data into themes, and instead embrace a different way of knowing, through story.

I need to think and do in stories, not themes. This is a stretch epistemologically for me. I'm not used to it. It's much harder than theme and categorisation work. – December 2023

I learned to treat data respectfully and work at the appropriate pace, as part of my responsibility as an ethical researcher.

I'm feeling the weight of the data. I need to keep myself steady and accountable, responsible. – July 2024

The third space

Learning about, applying and inhabiting the third space was a difficult, embodied, emotional and transformative experience. Initially, I didn't understand the third space at all. I leaned on Durie's (2004) interface methodology work, Ganma theory (Willis, Dwyer et al. 2015) and Ryder's (2020) weaving metaphor as a guide, however I discovered, with supervisory guidance, that the third space for my project was unique to my standpoint and my specific project. I learned about the third space as it applied to my project through practicing in relationship with people. I experienced the third space by moving regularly between different worlds; worlds of people with different values and lived experiences, and differences in class, education, race, age, gender and (dis)ability. These worlds are not dichotomous - they overlap. In each world I came as myself, authentically, as a white, Polish, queer, non-binary trans person in my thirties, a researcher from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health program within a global health research institute, a middle-class person and a first-generation migrant. I was respectful of each person's experiences, values and ways of being that were different to my own. I came to understand that moving between these worlds while holding respect, reverence for multiplicity of truth, not trying to categorise anyone or anything, or to come to a single truth, and while being authentically myself, was the third space. I experienced it as a dynamic, expansive and constantly moving space.

...the interface between different ways of being, it's dynamic, it's in constant motion. My interface isn't Ganma⁴⁹ or weaving. Mine is fluid and relational. My anchor is standpoint, integrity and relationality. If I were Indigenous my anchor would be Country. I'm moving together with Lola in the work and we're creating something with community. My interface is tied strongly to the idea of multiple truths – I sit with one person and together we create an interface and I honour their truth and story and then I sit with someone else and we create another interface and truth and story, and on it goes. – April 2024

This fluid way of working was deeply transformative as I learned to let go of trying to 'capture a single truth', as I'd been previously taught.

We are trained to contain, to pinpoint, to tell 'a truth' and that be it. Dot points, findings, recommendations and conclusions. This is not what my work is and that is not what life

⁴⁹ Ganma is a Yolngu concept from several Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land that describes salt water and fresh water from different waterways coming together. The concept illustrates how two separate knowledge systems – Indigenous and Western – come together to produce new knowledge. It is about intercultural relations and also relatedness between people, animals and the land. Source: Willis, E., J. Dwyer, J. Kelly and T. Mackean (2015). "Hybrid cultures: creating a third space in Aboriginal healthcare." *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 18(4).

is either. Accepting fluidity and not pinpointedness is probably the hardest, most painful and beautiful lesson of the last 3 years. – May 2024

Reflecting on the third space in my final PhD year, I recognised I had often defaulted to a Western way of working. However the more I worked to apply Indigenous research methodologies – particularly working relationally and guided by community – I found my PhD requirements, namely the thesis, jarring.

I'm still working in a mostly Western way, the way of the world I mostly inhabit, the way I know. Having to break out of that is uncomfortable and difficult. When it came to doing things, sometimes I'd ask, "How do I actually do it?" And supervisors would say, "Remember the methodology?" Oh yeah. It was an afterthought, not the machination humming underneath. And other times I'd get fully inside the [Indigenous research] methodology, the whole ship steering the project, and then jarred by the thesis and the world that's asking me to work in a Western way. It is really hard. – May 2024

Yarning and semi-structured interviews

I applied the third space in my approach to yarning and interviewing. Each time I spoke to someone in data collection, I was not applying one single method of yarning, or one single method of interviewing. I was moving between both methods, intuitively, as appropriate and in flow with the person or people I was speaking with. Each time, I brought my full self in ways that were influenced by yarning, i.e., I was vulnerable and shared about myself. At the back of my mind, I was loosely thinking about my research questions, and if appropriate I would ask direct questions, similar to a semi-structured interview approach. I held both worlds at once.

In my reflexivity I often noted when parts felt like a yarn and when parts felt like an interview.

The first 18 minutes was this natural flow – a yarn, really. And then into interview style. – July 2023

It felt like a yarn to me, the informal flow, the sharing nature of it. – June 2023

After speaking with one Aboriginal tenant for the research, I decided to draw the 'flow' of the yarn / interview to exemplify how parts felt like a yarn and when it felt like an interview, see Figure 16.

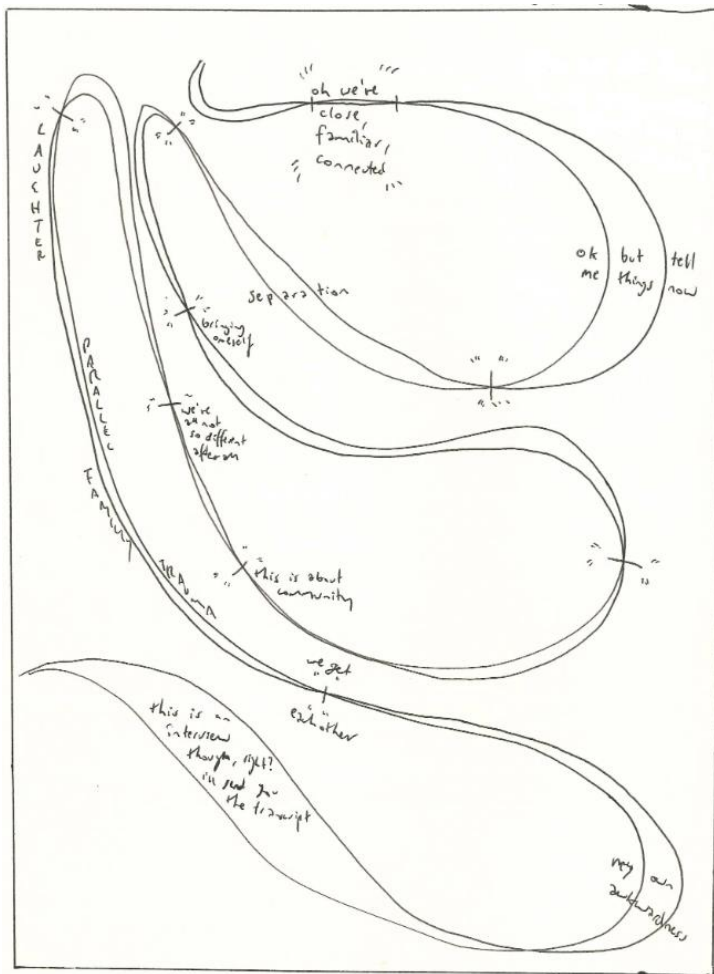


Figure 16 Flow of one yarn with an Aboriginal tenant

In this figure, there are two lines, each representing a person. At the start of the yarn / interview I asked an opening question, “What was it like growing up in La Perouse?” and I spent a long time listening and where appropriate, bringing myself by sharing my own experiences of childhood and family history. As we connected, the lines draw closer, as seen in the figure. As we continued speaking and listening, I moved into an ‘interview zone’ and asked a question about what home means. This felt like an interview; I was asking a question directly with some expectation of an answer. We were more disconnected in that moment, depicted by the lines being further apart. The yarn / interview moved in this way for an hour and a half, naturally and intuitively connecting and at times disconnecting. At the end, when I needed to reiterate that I would send the person the transcript from the audio, it particularly felt like an interview, and it was at this point that we felt most disconnected. I turned off the audio recorder and stayed for longer to continue our cup of tea. This is one example of how I conducted data collection in the third space, moving between yarning and interview, Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, and moving respectfully between my standpoint and the standpoint of who I was speaking to.

Section C: Bringing it all together

Section C presents a summary of key findings, followed by an overall discussion of thesis findings, that includes significance, strengths and limitations and conclusion.

Summary of key findings and contributions

Using multiple methods and applying Indigenous, decolonising and third space methodologies, this PhD presents a body of evidence on the meanings of home and housing priorities of Aboriginal social housing tenants in urban Sydney. It bridges a gap in communication pathways between Aboriginal tenants and mainstream (i.e., not Aboriginal community-controlled and run) social housing providers, through the development of a culturally appropriate, tailored housing information resource designed with Aboriginal tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers in one urban geographic location (South-East Sydney).

A systematic scoping review identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home are holistic and relational, about ontological belonging and safety, and connection to the interconnected life-giving elements of Country, family, community, culture and spirituality (Chapter 3). Yarns and interviews with 62 people - Aboriginal tenants, community members, tenant support workers and social housing workers – in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 demonstrated that to Aboriginal tenants connected to La Perouse, home is about connection to Country, salt water and air, traditional gathering places, family and community, culture, and spirituality. Being connected to home was said to facilitate wellbeing. A key finding is the critical need for Aboriginal people to live in areas of connection to Country, family, community, culture, spirituality and Aboriginal services. The three story chapters evidenced that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants prioritise housing that embeds these cultural and community elements of home, and is safe, secure, stable, and facilitates family and community living together and hosting one another when in need. It identified tenants' need for good quality dwelling conditions and accessibility for older people. Chapters 4 to 6 provide evidence of the social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing impacts on Aboriginal tenants of social housing providers' service delivery and treatment. It highlights a disjuncture between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home and services delivered through the mainstream social housing sector. It shows that social housing providers do not systematically apply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home and priorities to service delivery. These harms are a form of systemic violence, leading to some clients and tenants experiencing hopelessness, futility, frustration, confusion, overwhelm, sense of lacking control and autonomy, shame, distress, depression, anxiety and fear.

Chapter 7 synthesised the three story chapters, outlining the major finding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' meanings of home and housing priorities are not systematically applied in the mainstream housing system. It provided key policy and practice recommendations, specifically for social housing provider system to improve service delivery, bridging the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' needs in housing and home, and the experience of the social housing system.

Chapter 8 outlined one way forward to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' meeting their housing and home needs. Through tenant, tenant support worker and social housing worker voices, it identified a lack of tailored, appropriate communications about tenants' rights and responsibilities, provider policies and processes, and avenues of recourse and supports. The chapter outlined the process of developing a culturally tailored housing information resource to improve communications.

This PhD makes a significant contribution to improvements in tenant-provider communications and transparency, with the development of tailored housing information resources. The resource includes repairs processes, avenues of recourse and clear, locally specific support organisation information, developed with and for Aboriginal tenants, local tenant support organisations and social housing providers (Chapter 8).

Chapter 10: Discussion and conclusion

Meanings of home and priorities

This PhD highlights the critical importance of Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse to live where they are connected to Country, place, people, culture and Aboriginal services.

Connection to each of these was shown to be foundational to meanings of home for Aboriginal people in the urban social housing context of South-East Sydney. The PhD's systematic scoping review grounded these findings, identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home as holistic and relational, about ontological belonging and safety, and connection to Country, family, culture, community and spirituality (Chapter 3). These review findings are reflected strongly in the meanings of home voiced by Aboriginal public and community housing tenants connected to La Perouse (Chapter 4), with home identified as connection to Country and people, which in turn is about connection to culture and community. The findings mirror international research on home and First Nations' people, with meanings of home emphasised as connection to culture, land and traditional ways of living (Bowra and Mashford-Pringle 2021).

This PhD demonstrated a strong link between meanings of home - as relational, holistic and about safety, connection and belonging - the housing priorities of Aboriginal tenants, and health and wellbeing. The holistic and relational elements of home are critical for health and wellbeing. Being connected to traditional lands is known as a positive factor supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's wellbeing (Christensen 2013, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024). Being on Country and caring for Country are instrumental to social and emotional wellbeing, as Country offers cultural and spiritual connection and belonging to a family or community group (Dudgeon, Walker et al. 2025). Connecting with culture - through connection to family and community, Country and place, cultural identity and practices such as language and ceremony - also supports wellbeing (Verbunt, Luke et al. 2021, Dudgeon, Walker et al. 2025). Aboriginal people connected to La Perouse continue to practice culture on Country, through caring for Country programs, gathering and camping on ancestral Country, traditional dance and Dharawal language education and sharing Songlines (Gujaga Foundation 2023). Community members care and look out for each other, taking one another into their homes when they have nowhere else to go; this is an enactment of cultural values of reciprocity and community care.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 highlight that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants prioritise good quality dwelling conditions that promote physical health, are well-maintained, and safe from harm, including racism from neighbours, injury, and risk to physical health. These findings are echoed in the work of Andersen (2017, 2017, 2018) who found that the poor housing conditions of Aboriginal public housing tenants in urban Western Sydney impacted negatively on children's physical health. This PhD expands on the existing literature by additionally highlighting the need for older Aboriginal tenants in urban Sydney to live in accessible housing to prevent injury. These findings are useful in that they clarify some of the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the social housing context, potentially assisting efforts to Closing the Gap Outcome Nine (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021).

Chapter 3 evidenced that some Aboriginal tenants are frustrated by the purported recognition of Aboriginal people having large families, however when tenants want to host family, they're penalised and asked to pay rent for the additional occupant (Danielle, page 121). It also showed that some Aboriginal tenants consider themselves to be policed by some housing providers with regards to visitors, while other housing providers were considered more lenient. This variability in approach was corroborated by some social housing workers in Chapter 6, who said they "turn a blind eye" to Aboriginal tenants hosting family for longer periods of time because they understand the cultural need for Aboriginal people to host family and community (Emma and

Albert, page 181). This exemplifies that social housing providers take variable approaches to the visitors of Aboriginal tenants when visitors stay for longer periods of time than stipulated in policy. This is an important finding because for the last two decades the social housing sector has been aware that a 'one size fits all' approach does not support tenancy success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants (Cooper and Morris 2005, Milligan, Phillips et al. 2011, Habibi, Memmott et al. 2013, Department of Family and Community Services 2015). It has been suggested that the social housing sector provide culturally appropriate and adapted services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households by being flexible with policy (Department of Family and Community Services 2015, Brackertz, Davison et al. 2017). Adaptability and flexibility is seemingly extended to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being allowed longer timeframes for visitors among some social housing workers and providers.

These findings build upon existing national and international evidence on the disjunct between First Nations tenants' cultural needs in housing and social housing provider policies. The PhD offers clear examples of tenants experiencing culturally inappropriate housing, tenants being monitored heavily by some providers with regards to visitors, and barriers in meeting the cultural needs of hosting family and community, despite recognition by individual social housing workers or in policy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's housing priorities.

Lack of tailored communications about tenants' rights and responsibilities, provider policies and processes, and avenues of recourse

Chapter 8 of the PhD identified that social housing providers provide limited tailored, culturally appropriate communications to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, particularly around rights, responsibilities, policies, processes and avenues of recourse. It showed that minimal if any information is offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants when starting a tenancy. It identified that Aboriginal social housing tenants in South-East Sydney have limited knowledge of local tenant support services and escalation pathways to meet their housing needs. These two findings are significant, as they mean Aboriginal tenants are left with minimal support if they experience housing issues. These findings have led to the development of housing information resources that bridge a major communication gap between tenants and providers.

Connected to this finding, the research identified that clients and tenants find the social housing system complicated and overwhelming. Some Aboriginal clients needing to access social housing find it so overwhelming that they do not apply because of the burden of evidence

and complexity of the application process (Nadia, page 186). Social housing providers assume tenants have a moderate level of literacy and education, and if they cannot meet that level, tenants are either left to fend for themselves, or access tenant support workers who advocate on their behalf. Social housing workers understand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have limited literacy and understanding of the housing system, however they provide no tailored communication pathways. This is significant as it leads to miscommunications and traumatic outcomes, such as unnecessary evictions caused by poor communications (i.e., NoTs) and systemic, historic and ongoing poor relationships between tenants and providers.

The need for change

This PhD shows that the public and community housing provider system is not designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mind, despite providers' awareness that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are overrepresented in social housing and are twice as likely to exit social housing than other tenants, often into homelessness and returning to the housing waitlist (Family and Community Services 2010, Bermingham and Park 2013, Department of Family and Community Services 2015). While there is some recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home and priorities in some policies, for example in Homes NSW's Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement, the social housing provider system largely takes a one-size-fits-all approach and is limited in providing tailored culturally appropriate support.

The mainstream social housing sector in Australia wants to know how to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants for a positive outcome (Milligan, Phillips et al. 2011, Milligan, Easthope et al. 2013, Brackertz, Davison et al. 2017, Moskos, Isherwood et al. 2022). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, at the same time, want to be supported by the mainstream system in their prioritisation of social and cultural roles and responsibilities, relationship to Country, physical comfort (Moran, Memmott et al. 2016) and need for healthy housing (Andersen, Fernando et al. 2016, Andersen 2017, Andersen, Williamson et al. 2017, Andersen, Skinner et al. 2018). This PhD shows that some individual social housing workers wish to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' priorities and needs, however a multitude of systemic barriers prevents them from doing so. Barriers include the normalisation of policies reflecting the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander not being applied, workers' variable cultural competency and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural and social needs, high tenancy loads, KPIs that are finance- and property-oriented, outsourced repairs and maintenance and limited housing stock. Underlying

these barriers is the social housing system's lack of respect and valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's quality of life and right to healthy and culturally appropriate housing. For providers, it seems the interest is primarily to sustain tenancies as part of meeting KPIs, as evidenced in this research. Workers are beholden to finance- and property-oriented KPIs, such as rental arrears and property visits. However, a deeper understanding of Aboriginal people's priorities, and how to *operationalise those priorities* is lacking in the system.

Homes NSW acknowledges that its system is difficult to navigate, that service delivery varies across providers and there's a need for tailored, trauma-informed approaches (NSW Government 2024). It aims for improved service delivery across all social housing providers, with the idea to develop baseline service standards that are accessible, culturally appropriate and trauma-informed (NSW Government 2024). These are welcome calls to action, showing a willingness for the system to change. Currently there are no service standards, nor are there publicly facing frameworks that explicitly monitor cultural safety in the social housing sector.

There is opportunity to change the system with particular attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. In 2024, NSW's public housing provider changed its name to Homes NSW. The public housing provider - and community housing providers - can work towards truly meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' meanings of home and priorities through the following practice and policy recommendations:

- Improving internal processes and building cultural competency among the social housing workforce to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW are offered housing in or as close to the places, peoples and communities they're connected to and in culturally appropriate dwellings with multiple bedrooms for family and community to stay and be cared for, enacting reciprocity and collective responsibility
- Training social housing workers in cultural competency, trauma-informed service delivery and respectful, plain, non-judgemental communication. This includes ensuring workers' recognition of colonisation as an ongoing process that may, at times, impact tenants' ability to engage with providers and/or pay rent on time
- Improving housing provider office environments with respect to cultural safety
- Clear pathways for tenants to access frontline workers and Aboriginal-specific support workers, e.g. access to names and work phone numbers
- Conducting an inquiry into the practice of sending NoTs to social housing tenants. Cultivating a culture of trust, transparency and accountability between providers and

tenants through improvements in social housing provider communications with tenants, specifically more frequent updates for tenants awaiting maintenance and transfers, clear communications around policy and practice expectations, and respectful, clear and trauma informed communication around rental arrears

- Reducing tenancy load, particularly in public housing where frontline workers manage, variably, 300 to 400 tenancies alone. Reducing tenancy load could support respectful and trusting relationships between social housing workers and tenants, as workers would have more time to manage tenancies. This could also lead to a more proactive and preventative tenancy management system, preventing health crises in the long-term
- Changing social housing worker KPIs from property- and finance-oriented KPIs that centre the reduction of rental arrears and visiting clients once per year, to people-centred KPIs that truly aim to ensure social housing tenants' broader social needs are supported. This could include KPIs that measure whether the tenants in workers' portfolios are living in housing that supports social, cultural and spiritual connection
- Accountability measures developed, clearly communicated and systematically actioned for racism, discrimination and poor treatment, inappropriate property offers, delays and/or inaction in repairs, delays in transfers to suitable properties, and property causing harm to health (e.g., respiratory health, injury risk).
- Developing, communicating and actioning accountability measures for delays and/or inaction in repairs and maintenance
 - Providers are bound by the RTA and are required to meet minimum acceptable property standards. There should be an audit into the property conditions of all public and community housing properties to ensure they meet minimum standards prior to tenants starting a tenancy
 - Maintenance should be properly resourced within provider budgets and actioned in a timely fashion to reduce distress and poor health on tenants.
 - Housing providers apologise for delays and inaction on repairs, maintenance and transfers, with acknowledgement of harm caused by delays and inaction.
 - Providers reimburse tenants for out-of-pocket property maintenance expenses
 - Annual review and monitoring of maintenance expected response time against actual response times and maintenance completion rates

A summary of these changes is provided in Figure 17.

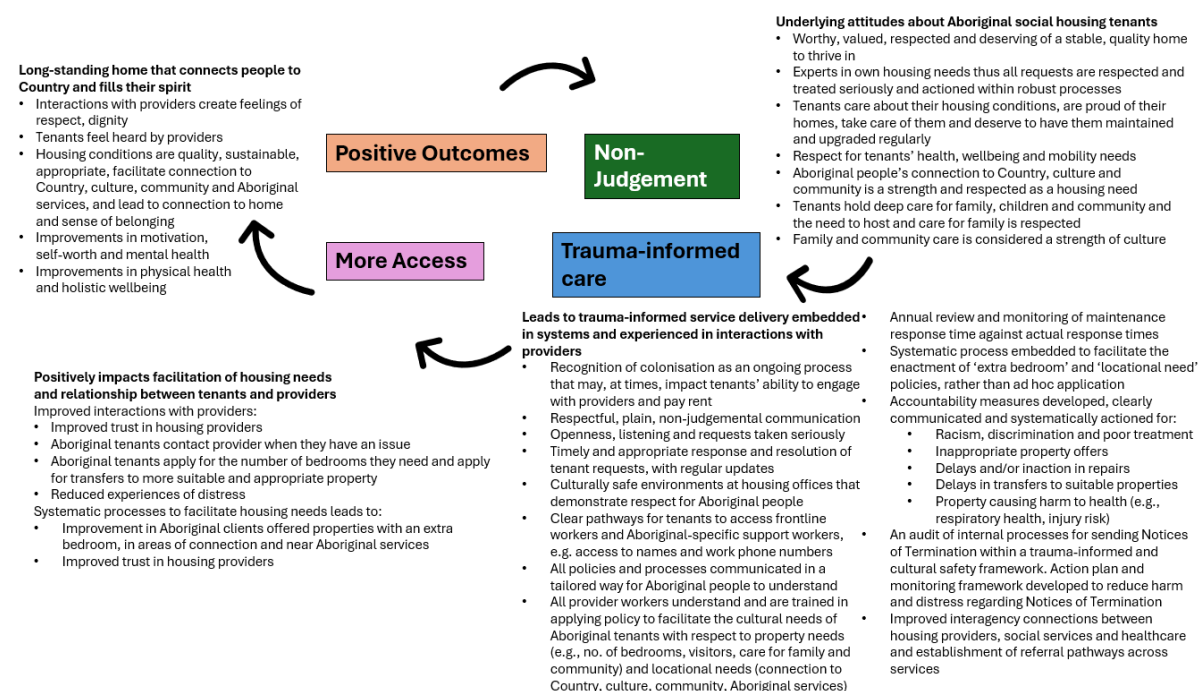


Figure 17 Opportunities to change the social housing system

Underlying these recommendations are positive changes in how the social housing system and its actors (i.e., social housing workers) value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, tenants and staff. These actions would improve trust and relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and providers and ultimately may lead to improvements in both housing outcomes and clients' mental, physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing.

Overall significance, strengths and limitations and conclusion

This PhD is the first known body of research on meanings of home and priorities of Aboriginal people living in urban public and community housing, conducted within an Indigenous research paradigm, and resulting in the development of housing resources designed with and for Aboriginal tenants. The thesis privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices and worldviews on meanings of home and housing priorities, as well as tangible solutions to improving housing outcomes. The systematic scoping review on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's meanings of home is one of few studies exploring First Nations people's meanings of home, intentionally centring First Nations voices (Christensen 2012, Christensen 2016, Penfold 2017, Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020). It centres the meanings of home of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, highlighting home as relational, tied to sovereignty and connection to land, Country, people and culture, rather than Anglo-Saxon concepts of home that centre family and belonging, but not a connection to Country and culture. These findings

are significant as the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are rarely centred in housing studies.

The thesis is the first study bringing together the multiple standpoints of Aboriginal tenants, social housing workers and tenant support workers in an urban setting (South-East Sydney), conducted within an Indigenous paradigm that values story, lived experience and multiplicity of truth. It identified the disconnect between Aboriginal tenants' meanings of home and priorities, and Aboriginal people's lived experience of the social housing system. It evidences how tenants are harmed by racism, judgement, stereotyping, discrimination and poor treatment, resulting in tenant disengagement from social housing providers and impacting access to positive housing and health outcomes.

The PhD builds on a body of work evidencing housing as a key social and cultural determinant of health among First Nations people. Through story, the thesis provides further evidence of the physical, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing impacts of unhealthy housing conditions and culturally inappropriate housing, and social housing system.

Finally, the PhD has contributed to improved communication between the local Aboriginal community and the South-East Sydney tenant support and social housing sectors in the development and dissemination of a culturally appropriate, user-driven tailored housing information resource. The process of developing the resource is a useful exemplar for the tenant support and social housing sector. The resource's uptake is a testament to the process of hearing from, listening to, and working closely with Aboriginal tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers across South-East Sydney. The housing information resource fills an important gap in communication pathways between providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

Methodological innovation

The PhD is a strong demonstration of the transformative possibilities and positive opportunities available when working relationally across Indigenous and Western worldviews and knowledge systems, applying third space, Indigenous and decolonising methodologies and methods. It is a significant contribution to Australian housing research, exemplifying research conducted *with* Aboriginal people rather than *about* them, centring the lived experiences and voices of Aboriginal social housing tenants in an urban rather than a rural context.

Current knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's priorities in social housing are largely derived from research within a Western paradigm and a colonial legacy of

government policy determined by non-Aboriginal people. Some housing research has been conducted with appropriate Aboriginal advisory bodies or committees, or in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, exemplifying positive steps towards culturally appropriate and ethical research that embeds Aboriginal governance structures and Aboriginal leadership (Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020, Vallesi, Tighe et al. 2020, Moskos, Milligan et al. 2025). However, the voices, stories and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are rarely centred and there are limited examples of housing research conducted within an Indigenous research paradigm using Indigenous methodologies and third space methodologies. There is a notable gap in housing research conducted by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

Researchers in housing studies have called for research with “culturally specific conceptualisation, framing and methodology” to explore the housing aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020). Providing effective housing policy relies on understanding what people want from housing, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020, Loosemore, Drake et al. 2022). There may be a need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to lead housing research to develop appropriate and effective policy, if desired and determined by their own interests. There may also be a need to capacity build non-Aboriginal housing researchers in culturally appropriate methodologies to support the housing interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Few studies relating to Aboriginal people and social housing in Australia are conducted in urban contexts (Cooper and Morris 2005, Andersen 2017), and to our knowledge none in urban contexts are conducted using Indigenous, decolonising and third space methodologies. The majority of housing research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban areas focuses on homelessness, rather than social housing (Keys Young 1999, Coleman 2000, Memmott and Chambers 2008, Commonwealth of Australia 2013, Anderson and Collins 2014, Vallesi, Tighe et al. 2020, Tually, Tedmanson et al. 2022). This PhD fills some of this gap by focusing on the experiences of Aboriginal social housing tenants in urban Sydney, an important contribution given the false imaginary of Aboriginal people living only in rural and remote areas (Behrendt 2006).

The PhD demonstrated the value of applying Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies to understand the complexity of Aboriginal people’s lived experience of the social housing system. Applying third space methodologies, particularly to data collection and

data analysis, is a major strength, allowing the voices of people with diverging and overlapping worldviews to be heard, respected and held together in one body of work.

Strengths and limitations

A major strength of the PhD was the power of community priorities being at the centre of the research and working within an Indigenous research paradigm. The PhD was grounded in the priorities of community members directly impacted by the research – a way of working that meant all aspects of the research were held together by the lived realities of people who would be most affected by it. The PhD was thus rooted in deep purposefulness and integrity at all times. Working within an Indigenous research paradigm meant stories and relationality were highly valued. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people connected to the project were deeply respected and valued, as Aboriginal cultures and ways of knowing, being and doing were respected. Guidance by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure was highly valuable to ensure cultural appropriateness and the alignment of the project to community priorities; the meaningful involvement of people within this structure was a great strength of the PhD. Working from a strengths rather than deficit base was another key strength. The PhD was grounded in recognising the realities and context of colonisation and actively divested from harmful, outdated colonial narratives about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Interface methodology applied to a systematic scoping review, conducted with the oversight and intellectual and cultural knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is another innovative strength of the research.

The research is limited in that it only shares the voices of a small number of Aboriginal tenants, community members, tenant support workers and social housing workers we yarned with and interviewed, with particular focus on one geographic area of Sydney. Thus, the thesis is not necessarily generalisable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants more broadly. However, the research was deeply relational, community-guided and ethically considered, and our community-guided approach to recruitment of Aboriginal tenants, in particular, was culturally appropriate and resulted in rich and highly valuable stories. Furthermore, despite the feasibility of a relatively time- and resource-limited PhD project, this research has produced very rich data and provides often unheard insights into the meanings of home and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, alongside the development of a beneficial, tailored resource. A limitation is that that the stories included in this thesis are nowhere near exhaustive of what was expressed in yarns and interviews. Aboriginal tenants, tenant advocates and some social housing workers had many stories that are not often given the space to be heard. It was not possible to include all that was spoken due

to the limitations of the format of a PhD project. One other limitation is that not all members could check the story, as they had moved on from their work roles or were uncontactable through the contact information they had provided. This means it is possible that some of the stories are not the most accurate representation of people's stories, however, every effort was made over the course of nine months to contact each person and ensure accurate representation and de-identification.

Concluding statement

This research sought to understand what home means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the meanings of home, priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in urban NSW, specifically in South-East Sydney, from the standpoint of tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers. It additionally sought to develop a housing resource to facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's wants and needs in housing and home. This thesis has presented the meanings of home of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia through a systematic scoping review, and presented in-depth research into the meanings of home and housing priorities of Aboriginal people in one urban Australian mainstream social housing context. It additionally presented the process of developing a housing resource with and for this community.

The research was grounded in the community priorities of Dharawal and Bidjigal people and Aboriginal Health Workers, supported by a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structure, and conducted within an Indigenous research paradigm using multiple innovative methodologies and methods. It identified a clear need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to live in areas of connection to Country, peoples, culture and spirituality, as a vital part of thriving and being healthy and well, within the holistic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concept of health and wellbeing. It clarified good quality housing conditions and culturally appropriate housing in the form of multiple-bedroom properties in areas of connected as key housing priorities for some Aboriginal tenants. Clarification of the housing priorities and needs of some Aboriginal tenants in one urban social housing context could support efforts to Closing the Gap Target 9. These findings are supported by a systematic scoping review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' meanings of home more broadly.

The research provided unique insight into how the social housing system delivers services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, through the lived experience of tenants, tenant support workers and social housing workers. The findings from these standpoints suggest a disconnect between the meanings of home and housing priorities of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander tenants and the lived experience of social housing. The disconnect from home manifests in some tenants experiencing poor housing conditions, unactioned and delayed housing repairs, communication gaps, an overwhelming provider system and poor treatment by housing providers. It found a concerning power imbalance between some housing provider workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, with power exerted through multiple individual and systemic means, causing distress and impacting mental health and wellbeing. It identified ongoing disengagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and tenants due to systemic racism, judgement, stereotyping and discrimination, and normalised inaction and/or delays in clients' requests. Overall, the research found that while some housing provider policies aim to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' housing priorities, the mainstream housing provider system is not adequately equipped to systematically meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenant's housing needs.

These findings suggest the need for systemic change of the social housing system to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants meeting their housing priorities and improve housing outcomes and holistic health and wellbeing. System changes that focus on building positive relationships and culturally appropriate and trauma-informed, tailored communication pathways between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and housing providers are suggested. This research may assist the social housing system in how it delivers services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW more broadly, with the clear identification of systemic issues and opportunities for change. Further research could monitor the effectiveness of enacting the ideas for change arising from this thesis, for example, studies that build evidence on the health and wellbeing impacts of providers' culturally appropriate and anti-racist communications with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

The study demonstrated positive potential for change in the development of a tailored, culturally appropriate housing information resource designed with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, tenant advocates and social housing workers. Further research is needed to understand the efficacy of this housing information resource. Research building on this study could explore the development of further communication pathways to bridge communication gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and providers.

In summary, the PhD offers a unique example of how to apply relational ways of working in research, drawn from Indigenous and decolonising methodologies, into housing studies to produce new knowledge and enact positive change.

Appendices

Note: Some names and details are redacted for privacy purposes.

Appendix 1: Study materials

Engagement Terms of Reference

This document is a Terms of Reference outlining engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations that have shaped and continues to shape the PhD project titled **Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales**.

The PhD research project is being conducted by a non-Aboriginal person, [REDACTED] Anderst, at Guuna-Maana (Heal), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW. The PhD is being supervised by Dr Kate Hunter, Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health, Associate Professor Tamara Mackean, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University and Dr Julieann Coombes, Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health.

Project overview

Housing is a well-recognised social and cultural determinant of health. Consequently, the risks of injury and disease are increased when housing does not meet families' needs or the quality of housing is poor. Social housing is a significant component of housing assistance in Australia. Social housing services in NSW are critically overstretched. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience housing disadvantage, (such as living in substandard housing), which is a major contributor to the disparities in health and social and emotional wellbeing experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There have been numerous calls and efforts to align housing conditions and services with the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is a limited understanding of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people consider to be desired outcomes in the social housing context. Without clear and specific outcomes for housing providers to aspire to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing outcomes will not improve.

The PhD focuses on the voices of community members and will develop clear, specific outcomes that align with the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants in urban NSW.

Purpose of the Terms of Reference:

This Terms of Reference has been developed to make explicit the ways in which the PhD Candidate is operationalising engagement with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the research process. It states the specific role/s of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people actively engaged in the research. The Terms of Reference honours the preferred ways of working of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members who have been guiding the PhD research since the start of the research project. It reflects a commitment the PhD Candidate has made to respectful and equitable research that centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's ways of knowing, being and doing. Reciprocity is embedded in the research process through community engagement, whereby Aboriginal

community members have defined and determined the benefits and priorities of the research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged in the research have the opportunity to build skills that are relevant to them socially, culturally or professionally. This Terms of Reference speaks to the relational way of working and organic development of relationships as the project unfolds. The relationships between the PhD Candidate and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged in the project are evolving, and may change, with additional people potentially being engaged during the study.

Outline of engagement:

There are five distinct groups the PhD Candidate is engaging with to ensure the PhD research is relevant and beneficial to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- Key local Aboriginal community members
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors and external stakeholders
- Aboriginal supervisors
- The Healthy Housing Aboriginal Reference Group
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff of Guuna-Maana (Heal), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health

At all steps of the research project, from conception to dissemination of findings and beyond, the PhD Candidate has engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged in the PhD research are cultural leaders, mentors, community members who are local to the area where the research is being conducted, Aboriginal people with the experience of living in social housing or are fellow researchers and colleagues.

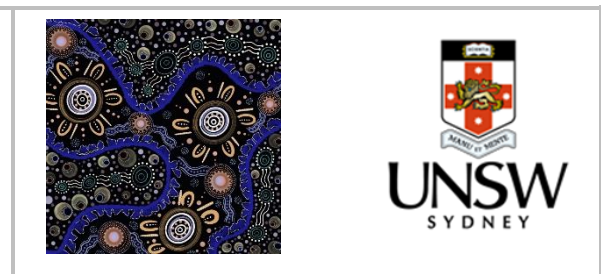
Key local Aboriginal community members
Role: Three Dharawal and Bidjigal women have been integral to all aspects of the research process thus far. Importantly they have ensured that relevant housing and health issues, community priorities and potential benefits are embedded in the research questions and aims. They have guided the design of the study, methods and study materials, such as the inclusion of yarning with social housing tenants and supported the development of the yarning guide. Going forward, they will be involved in culturally appropriate participant recruitment, data collection in the form of yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, data analysis and interpretation of findings, development of a resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, development of recommendations evolving from the findings, strategies for dissemination, knowledge translation and sharing of project findings; and, planning for future directions. They will be co-authors on all papers relating to the PhD research, as they have provided significant input into study conception, research aims and methods, and will be involved in data analysis. They will also be provided the opportunity to co-present at community meetings and research conferences. The key local Aboriginal community members meet with the PhD Candidate quarterly for one hour per meeting, and as required for specific activities for the PhD, e.g. yarning with tenants.

Lola Ryan	A Dharawal woman and member of the local La Perouse Aboriginal community, and Aboriginal Health Worker, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District
Melinda Moore	A Dharawal woman and member of the local La Perouse Aboriginal community, and Aboriginal Health Worker, Sydney Children's Hospital Network
Lee Timbery	A Bidjigal woman and member of the local La Perouse Aboriginal community, and Aboriginal Health Worker, Sydney Children's Hospital Network
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors and external stakeholders	
Role: The following Aboriginal people provide ongoing mentorship and cultural advice. Since the start of the research, the PhD Candidate has met with Dr Courtney Ryder bimonthly to yarn about challenging, confusing or unclear aspects of the research. Dr Ryder provides a confidential space to discuss any issues and offers advice that relates to her cultural knowledges and as an early career academic researcher in Aboriginal health. The PhD Candidate and Courtney Ryder continue to meet bimonthly throughout the PhD. Aunty Kerrie Doyle and the PhD Candidate will meet once or twice every year throughout the project; Aunty Kerrie is a senior Aboriginal researcher and will provide cultural and academic advice. [REDACTED] and the PhD Candidate will meet once or twice every year; [REDACTED] is an Aboriginal woman with extensive experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in social housing, and will provide advice according to her cultural and sector expertise.	
Auntie Kerrie Doyle	Professor, Indigenous Health, School of Medicine, Academic Lead, Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Clinical Academic Group, Western Sydney University
Courtney Ryder	Senior Lecturer in Public Health, Indigenous Health, College of Medicine and Health, Flinders University
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Aboriginal PhD supervisors	
Role: Two of the three supervisors for the PhD are Aboriginal researchers who provide input on community engagement, topic identification, development of research questions, methods and methodologies, data management including advice on data sovereignty, ethics, feedback on drafts of written work (chapters, papers etc.) and presentations, as well as support, academic and cultural guidance in Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, research at the interface, and in decolonising research methods. Supervisors will be co-authors on papers that relate to the PhD.	
Associate Professor Tamara Mackean	College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University
Dr Julieann Coombes	Research Fellow, Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff of Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health	
Role: The following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members are involved in yarning about research findings as part of the PhD Candidate receiving feedback on analysis and ensuring it is relevant and true to the worldviews and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are also involved in specific support in ensuring the research is rigorous, for example, data extraction and data interpretation for the systematic scoping review. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff may also be involved in data analysis and recommendations resulting from research findings. They may become co-authors on papers or co-presenters of research at conferences and symposia.	
Keziah Bennett-Brook	Program Lead, Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health
Alinta Trindall	Research Assistant, Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health
Bobby Porykali	Research Fellow, Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health
Elizabeth Bourke	Research Associate, Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health
Ty Madden	Research Associate, Guuna-Maana, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the Healthy Housing Aboriginal Reference Group	
The PhD is a sub-study of the Healthy Housing study and has drawn on the expertise and knowledges of the following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are investigators on the Healthy Housing study and also members of the Healthy Housing Aboriginal Reference Group. The PhD Candidate connects with them once every six months, or as needed, to provide insights into project conception, interpretation of data, data analysis, recommendations arising from the research findings, and may include co-authorship of papers.	
Professor Kathleen Clapham	Director, Ngarruwan Ngadju, Professor of Indigenous Health University of Wollongong
Natasha Larter	Aboriginal Health Outcomes and Equity Manager, Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, and Conjoint Associate Lecturer, School of Women's and Children's Health, UNSW
Carina Williams	Aboriginal Youth Health Promotion Worker, Youth Health Services, Community Health, NSW Health

Participant Information Statement and Consent Form: Tenant yarn

Version 5 dated: 13 October 2022

	
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM Tenant yarn <i>Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales</i> Lead site investigator: Lola Ryan Lead investigator: [REDACTED] Anderst (PhD Candidate)	

1. What is the research about?

You are invited to take part in this research. We would like to yarn with you about the meanings of home and what you would like to see as an outcome of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants living in urban New South Wales. The research aims to explore the meanings of home and the desired outcomes of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants living in urban New South Wales. We will be asking you what home means to you, what makes you feel at home, and what resources might be useful for you to achieve what you need in home. Together with tenants and tenant support organisations we would like to develop ways to help with success that align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's priorities and needs in relation to home, housing, health and wellbeing. To do this, we need to understand what home means from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants. Together with tenants we would like to develop a resource or strategy to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants.

You have been invited because we're interested in yarning with you about your meaning of home, and if there are strategies you might find helpful for home.

2. Who is conducting this research?

[REDACTED] Anderst, PhD Candidate from The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW. This research is being conducted as part of a PhD under the supervision of Dr Kate Hunter, and two Aboriginal women, Dr Julieann Coombes and Associate Professor Tamara Mackean, and in partnership with Aboriginal health workers, community service workers, health workers and researchers. A full list of the team is at the end of this information sheet.

Research Funder: The research is funded by the Research Training Program Scholarship.

3. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Before you decide to participate in this research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part. The research study is looking to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are current tenants living in social housing.

4. Do I have to take part in this research study?

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. The information you give us is confidential. We will combine your answers with all the other yarns we are doing with tenants. Your name will not be connected to any information you give us.

Please note that we will keep the standard limits to confidentiality.

If you decide you want to take part in the research study, we will ask you to:

- Read the information carefully (ask questions if necessary);
- Sign and return the consent form via email or in person if you decide to participate in the study;
- Take a copy of this form with you to keep.

5. What does participation in this research require, and are there any risks involved?

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will ask you to participate in a face to face in-person or online (via Zoom) yarn. We will talk about what home means to you. We will talk about strategies you might find helpful to achieve what you need for home. We may bring example questions and ask what you think about them. This should all take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

To collect your responses accurately, we are asking if you will give your permission for us to digitally record the yarn using a digital audio recorder. If you want to participate but do not wish to be recorded, please let the researcher/s know and we can take notes during the yarn instead.

We will transcribe the yarn into writing. If you would like, we will send that transcript to you for your review and you will have two weeks to make any changes or withdraw statements before we use your transcript in the study analyses.

If you experience discomfort or feelings of distress while participating in the research and you need support, you can stop participating at any time. You can also tell a member of the research team and they will help you by giving you a list of support services and their contact details.

If you disclose information that causes the researcher/s to feel concern for your safety or that of your immediate family, the lead investigators will be notified and the matter will be discussed with locally-based Aboriginal members of the research team. Any information you disclose will be kept confidential, subject to any legal requirements.

Possible additional involvement

Once we have finished yarning, we will use the feedback tenants give to develop a resource or strategy. The type of resource or strategy developed will depend on what you and other tenants tell us during the initial yarn. We will invite participants to take part in a final feedback session to give their opinions about the resource or strategy and possibly also ask your opinion about whether you would find it useful, and how it might be improved. We hope this resource or strategy will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants to navigate the social housing system. This additional involvement may be done in a group session or an individual yarn, depending on what you and other participants prefer. If you want to be involved in this second phase of the study, please mark this in the consent form and how you would like us to be back in touch with you.

6. What are the possible benefits to participation?

We hope to use information we get from this study to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants, tenant support organisations and various services that support tenants, including health services. We hope this new resource or strategy will help smoothen communication and processes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' and the social housing system. Please note that participation in this study is very unlikely to result in an improvement in your personal housing circumstances.

Participants will receive a \$40 Eftpos gift card for the time taken to participate in this study.

Participants additionally involved in the second phase of the study will receive an additional \$20 reimbursement in the form an Eftpos gift card.

7. What will happen to information about me?

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using information about you for the research study. Your information will be kept for 7 years after the project's completion. We will store this information in a password-protected server based at The George Institute for Global Health. Signed paper consent forms will be stored in locked cabinets housed at The George Institute. Access to the institute is via security swipe cards. Paper consent forms will be destroyed after being scanned, converted to pdfs and stored on the password-protected server.

Results from this study will be combined and grouped and your name will not be connected to any other information you give us. Your comments will be combined with results from other participants and your name will not be associated with results. Information collected for this research project may be made available to other research projects in de-identified form only.

The information you give is personal information for the purposes of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW). You have the right of access to personal information held about you by the University, the right to request correction and amendment of it, and the right to make a complaint about a breach of the Information Protection Principles as contained in the PPIP Act. Further information on how the University protects personal information is available in the [UNSW Privacy Management Plan](#).

8. How and when will I find out what the results of the research study are?

We aim to publish and/or report the results of the research study in a variety of ways. We will do this in a way that will not identify you. If you would like to receive a copy of the results you can let the research team know by including your details in the space provided in the consent form.

9. What if I want to withdraw from the research study?

If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. You can do so by completing the 'Withdrawal of Consent Form' that is provided at the end of this document. You can also ring the research team and tell them you no longer want to participate. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not affect your relationship with UNSW Sydney, The George Institute for Global Health, La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre, your Local Health District or any other related service or organisation

If you decide to leave the research study, the researchers will not collect additional information from you. Any identifiable information about you will be withdrawn from the

research project. We will delete your yarn from the server although please note that de-identified information that has already been analysed may not be able to be withdrawn.

If you decide to participate in the “additional involvement”, this may be in a group yarn. If so, your comments along with other participants will be recorded during the group yarn. Because of the way that the group yarns are recorded, the research team will not be able to withdraw or destroy individual participant responses.

10. What should I do if I have further questions about my involvement in the research study?

The person you may need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. If you need more information about this study or if you have any problems that may be related to your involvement in the study, you can contact the following member/s of the research team:

Research Team Contact Details

Name	██████████ Anderst
Position	PhD Candidate, The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW
Telephone	██████████
Email	██

Name	Dr Kate Hunter
Position	Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW
Telephone	██████████
Email	██

For a full list of all investigators in this study refer to the final page of this Information Sheet.

Support Services Contact Details

If at any stage during the study you become distressed or require additional support from someone not involved in the research please call:

Name/Organisation	Beyond Blue
Telephone	1300 224636
Email	https://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/contact-us

11. What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the research study?

The conduct of this study at the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre has been authorised by the South East Sydney Local Health District. Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study may contact the Chairperson of the AH&MRC Ethics Committee, or the SESLHD Research Office details provided below.

Complaints Contact

Position	The Chairperson AH&MRC Ethics Committee
Telephone	+ 61 2 9212 4777
Address	P.O. Box 1565 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Email	ethics@ahmrc.org.au
HC Reference Number	1963/22

Position	SESLHD Research Office
Telephone	+ 61 2 9382 3587
Address	G71, East Wing Edmund Blacket Building Prince of Wales Hospital
Email	seslhd-rso@health.nsw.gov.au
HC Reference Number	2022/ETH00640

Research study team

Kate Hunter - Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute, UNSW; **Lola Ryan**, Aboriginal Health Education Officer, Child and Family Nursing, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, NSW Health; **Melinda Moore**, SCHN, NSW Health; **Lee Timbery**, SCHN, NSW Health; **Julieann Coombes** – Research Fellow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Program, The George Institute for Global Health; **Tamara Mackean**, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University; **Alinta Trindall**, Research Assistant, The George Institute for Global Health and [REDACTED] **Anderst** – PhD Candidate, The George Institute for Global Health.

Consent Form – Participant providing own consent

Declaration by the participant

- ☐ I understand I am being asked to provide consent to participate in this research study;
- ☐ I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me and explained it in a way that I understand;
- ☐ I understand the purposes, study tasks and risks of the research described in the study;
- ☐ I understand that the research team will audio/video record the yarns; I agree to be recorded for this purpose.
- ☐ I provide my consent for the information collected about me to be used for the purpose of this research study only.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received;
- ☐ I freely agree to participate in this research study as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and withdrawal will not affect my relationship with any of the named organisations and/or research team members;
- ☐ I would like to receive a copy of the study results via email or post, I have provided my details below and ask that they be used for this purpose only;
- ☐ **Additional involvement: I give consent to be contacted to be involved in the second stage of the research study to provide input and feedback on developed resources or strategies.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email Address: _____

- ☐ I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep;

Participant Signature

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature of Research Participant	
Date	

Declaration by Researcher*

- ☐ I have given a verbal explanation of the research study, its study activities and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher Signature*

Name of Researcher (please print)	
Signature of Researcher	
Date	

***An appropriately qualified member of the research team must provide the explanation of, and information concerning the research study.**

Note: All parties signing the consent section must date their own signature.

Form for Withdrawal of Participation

I wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in this research study described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** affect my relationship with The University of New South Wales, The George Institute for Global Health, La Perouse Aboriginal Health Community Centre, my Local Health District or any other related service or organisation. In withdrawing my consent I would like any information which I have provided for the purpose of this research study withdrawn. I understand that some information collected during individual yarns may not be able to be withdrawn if this request comes after the information has already been de-identified and analysed and that information collected during my participation in the group discussions cannot be withdrawn given the nature of focus groups.

Participant Signature

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature of Research Participant	
Date	

The section for Withdrawal of Participation should be forwarded to:

CI Name:	Kate Hunter
Email:	
Phone:	
Postal Address:	PO Box [REDACTED] Missenden Rd NSW 2050 Australia

Participant Information Statement and Consent Form: Staff interview

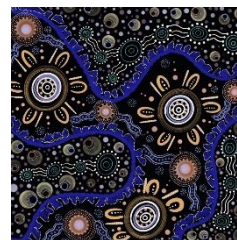
Version 5 dated: 13 October 2022



The George Institute

for Global Health

Australia Insert site logo



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

Staff interview

Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales

Lead site investigator: Lola Ryan

Lead investigator: [REDACTED] Anderst (PhD Candidate)

1. What is the research about?

You are invited to take part in this research. The research aims to explore social housing provider's and tenant support organisation's understanding of the desired outcomes of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants living in urban New South Wales. You have been invited because you or your organisation has been identified as a housing provider or tenant support organisation that provides services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants. This research study aims to identify desired outcomes and success indicators for current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants from the perspective of social housing providers and tenant support organisations, as well as identify the support strategies providers currently offer to tenants.

2. Who is conducting this research?

[REDACTED] Anderst, PhD Candidate from The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW. This research is being conducted as part of a PhD under the supervision of Dr Kate Hunter, and two Aboriginal women, Dr Julieann Coombes and Associate Professor Tamara Mackean, and in partnership with Aboriginal health workers, community service workers, health workers and researchers. A full list of the team is at the end of this information sheet.

Research Funder: The research is funded by the Research Training Program Scholarship.

3. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Before you decide to participate in this research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part. The research study is looking to recruit staff of social housing providers and tenant support organisations who provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in urban New South Wales. This includes staff who work at the frontline in client service delivery, as well as staff who develop policies and practices.

4. Do I have to take part in this research study?

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. The information you give us is confidential. We will combine your answers with all the other interviews we are doing with staff. Your name will not be connected to any information you give us.

If you decide you want to take part in the research study, you will be asked to:

- Read the information carefully (ask questions if necessary);
- Sign and return the consent form via email or in person if you decide to participate in the study; or give verbal consent before the telephone interview starts if you prefer to do a telephone interview rather than a face-to-face interview.
- Take a copy of this form with you to keep.

5. What does participation in this research require, and are there any risks involved?

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will ask you to participate in a face-to-face in-person or online (via Zoom) focus group, yarn, or one-on-one interview. We will ask about what your organisation's understanding is of the desired outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, whether your organisation has success indicators specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, and how your organisation meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. We may bring example questions and ask what you think about them. This should all take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

To collect your responses accurately, we are asking if you will give your permission for us to digitally record the interview using a digital audio recorder. If you want to participate but do not wish to be recorded, please let the interviewer know and we can take notes during the interview instead.

We will transcribe the interview into writing. If you would like, we will send that transcript to you for your review and you will have two weeks to make any changes or withdraw statements before we use your transcript in the study analyses.

If you experience discomfort or feelings of distress while participating in the research and you need support, you can stop participating at any time. You can also tell a member of the research team and they will help you by giving you a list of support services and their contact details.

Possible additional involvement

Once we have finished doing interviews, we will use the information you give to develop a resource or strategy for tenants. The type of resource or strategy developed will depend on what you and other participants tell us during the initial interview. We will invite participants to take part in a final feedback session to give their opinions about the resource or strategy and possibly also ask your opinion about how it might be improved. We hope this resource or strategy will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants to navigate the social housing system. This additional involvement may be done in a group session or an individual interview, depending on what you and other participants prefer. If you want to be involved in this second phase of the study, please mark this in the consent form and how you would like us to be back in touch with you.

6. What are the possible benefits to participation?

We hope to use information we get from this study to benefit both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants and service providers. We hope to develop a new resource or strategy that will help smoothen communication and processes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants' and the social housing system.

7. What will happen to information about me?

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using information about you for the research study. Your information will be kept for 7 years after the project's completion. We will store this information in a password-protected server based at The George Institute for Global Health. Signed paper consent forms will be stored

in locked cabinets housed at The George Institute. Access to the institute is via security swipe cards.

Results from this study will be combined and grouped and your name will not be connected to any other information you give us. Your comments will be combined with results from other interviewees and your name will not be associated with results. Information collected for this research project may be made available to other research projects in de-identified form only.

The information you give is personal information for the purposes of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW). You have the right of access to personal information held about you by the University, the right to request correction and amendment of it, and the right to make a complaint about a breach of the Information Protection Principles as contained in the PPIP Act. Further information on how the University protects personal information is available in the [UNSW Privacy Management Plan](#).

8. How and when will I find out what the results of the research study are?

We aim to publish and/or report the results of the research study in a variety of ways. We will do this in a way that will not identify you.

If you would like to receive a copy of the results you can let the research team know by including your details in the space provided in the consent form.

9. What if I want to withdraw from the research study?

If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. You can do so by completing the 'Withdrawal of Consent Form' that is provided at the end of this document. You can also ring the research team and tell them you no longer want to participate. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not affect your relationship with UNSW Sydney, The George Institute for Global Health, La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre, your Local Health District or any other related service or organisation.

If you decide to leave the research study, the researchers will not collect additional information from you. Any identifiable information about you will be withdrawn from the research project. We will delete your interview from the server although please note that de-identified information that has already been analysed may not be able to be withdrawn.

If you participate as part of a focus group, your comments along with other participants will be recorded during the group discussions. Because of the way that focus group discussions are recorded, the research team will not be able to withdraw or destroy individual participant responses.

10. What should I do if I have further questions about my involvement in the research study?

The person you may need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. If you need more information about this study or if you have any problems that may be related to your involvement in the study, you can contact the following member/s of the research team:

Research Team Contact Details

Name	██████████ Anderst
Position	PhD Candidate, The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW
Telephone	+61 ██████████
Email	████████████████████

Name	Dr Kate Hunter
Position	Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW
Telephone	██████████
Email	████████████████████

For a full list of all investigators in this study refer to the final page of this Information Sheet.

Support Services Contact Details

If at any stage during the study you become distressed or require additional support from someone not involved in the research please call:

Name/Organisation	Beyond Blue
Telephone	1300 224636
Email	https://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/contact-us

11. What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the research study?

The conduct of this study at the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre has been authorised by the South East Sydney Local Health District. Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study may contact the Chairperson of the AH&MRC Ethics Committee, or the SESLHD Research Office details provided below.

Complaints Contact

Position	The Chairperson AH&MRC Ethics Committee
Telephone	+ 61 2 9212 4777
Address	P.O. Box 1565 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
Email	ethics@ahmrc.org.au
HC Reference Number	1963/22

Position	SESLHD Research Office
Telephone	+ 61 2 9382 3587
Address	G71, East Wing Edmund Blacket Building Prince of Wales Hospital
Email	seslhd-rso@health.nsw.gov.au
HC Reference Number	2022/ETH00640

Research study team

Kate Hunter - Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute, UNSW; **Lola Ryan**, Aboriginal Health Education Officer, Child and Family Nursing, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, NSW Health; **Melinda Moore**, SCHN, NSW Health; **Lee Timbery**, SCHN, NSW Health; **Julieann Coombes** – Research Fellow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Program, The George Institute for Global Health; **Tamara Mackean**, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University; **Alinta Trindall**, Research Assistant, The George Institute for Global Health and [REDACTED]; **Anderst** – PhD Candidate, The George Institute for Global Health.

Consent Form – Participant providing own consent

Declaration by the participant

- ☐ I understand I am being asked to provide consent to participate in this research study;
- ☐ I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me and explained it in a way that I understand;
- ☐ I understand the purposes, study tasks and risks of the research described in the study;
- ☐ I understand that the research team will audio/video record the interviews; I agree to be recorded for this purpose.
- ☐ I provide my consent for the information collected about me to be used for the purpose of this research study only.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received;
- ☐ I freely agree to participate in this research study as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and withdrawal will not affect my relationship with any of the named organisations and/or research team members;
- ☐ I would like to receive a copy of the study results via email or post, I have provided my details below and ask that they be used for this purpose only;
- ☐ **Additional involvement: I give consent to be contacted to be involved in the second stage of the research study to provide input and feedback on developed resources or strategies.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email Address: _____

- ☐ I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep;

Participant Signature

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature of Research Participant	
Date	

Declaration by Researcher*

- ☐ I have given a verbal explanation of the research study, its study activities and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher Signature*

Name of Researcher (please print)	
Signature of Researcher	
Date	

***An appropriately qualified member of the research team must provide the explanation of, and information concerning the research study. Note: All parties signing the consent section must date their own signature.**

Form for Withdrawal of Participation

I wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in this research study described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** affect my relationship with The University of New South Wales, The George Institute for Global Health, La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre, my Local Health District or any other related service or organisation. In withdrawing my consent I would like any information which I have provided for the purpose of this research study withdrawn. I understand that some information collected during individual interviews may not be able to be withdrawn if this request comes after the information has already been de-identified and analysed and that information collected during my participation in the group discussions cannot be withdrawn given the nature of focus groups.

Participant Signature

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature of Research Participant	
Date	

The section for Withdrawal of Participation should be forwarded to:

CI Name:	Kate Hunter
Email:	[REDACTED]
Phone:	[REDACTED]
Postal Address:	PO Box [REDACTED] Missenden Rd NSW 2050 Australia

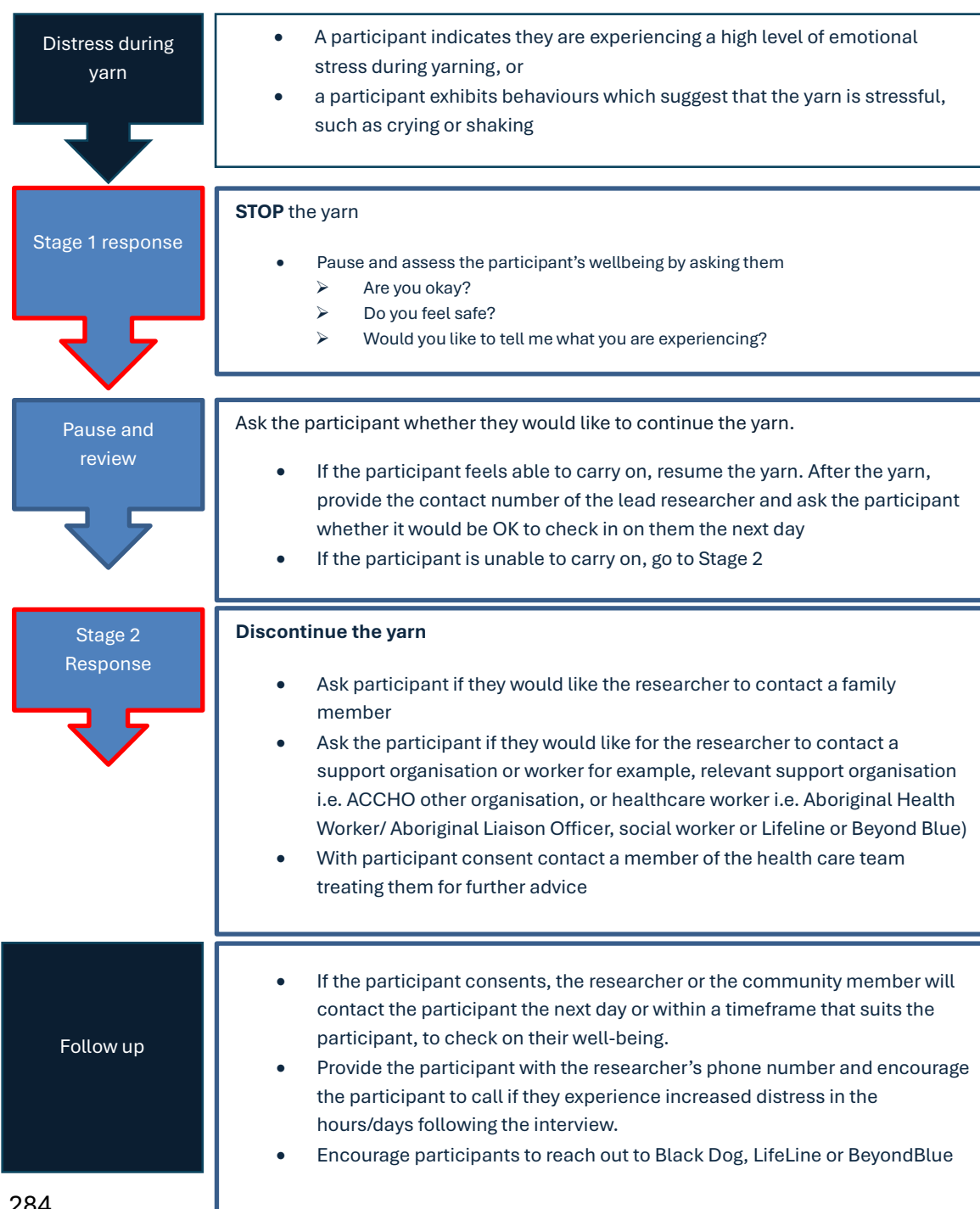
Distress protocol

Distress pathway V1.0_14.02.2022

This document outlines distress pathways for participants of the research as well as researchers and community members conducting yarning as part of the PhD project titled *Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales*.

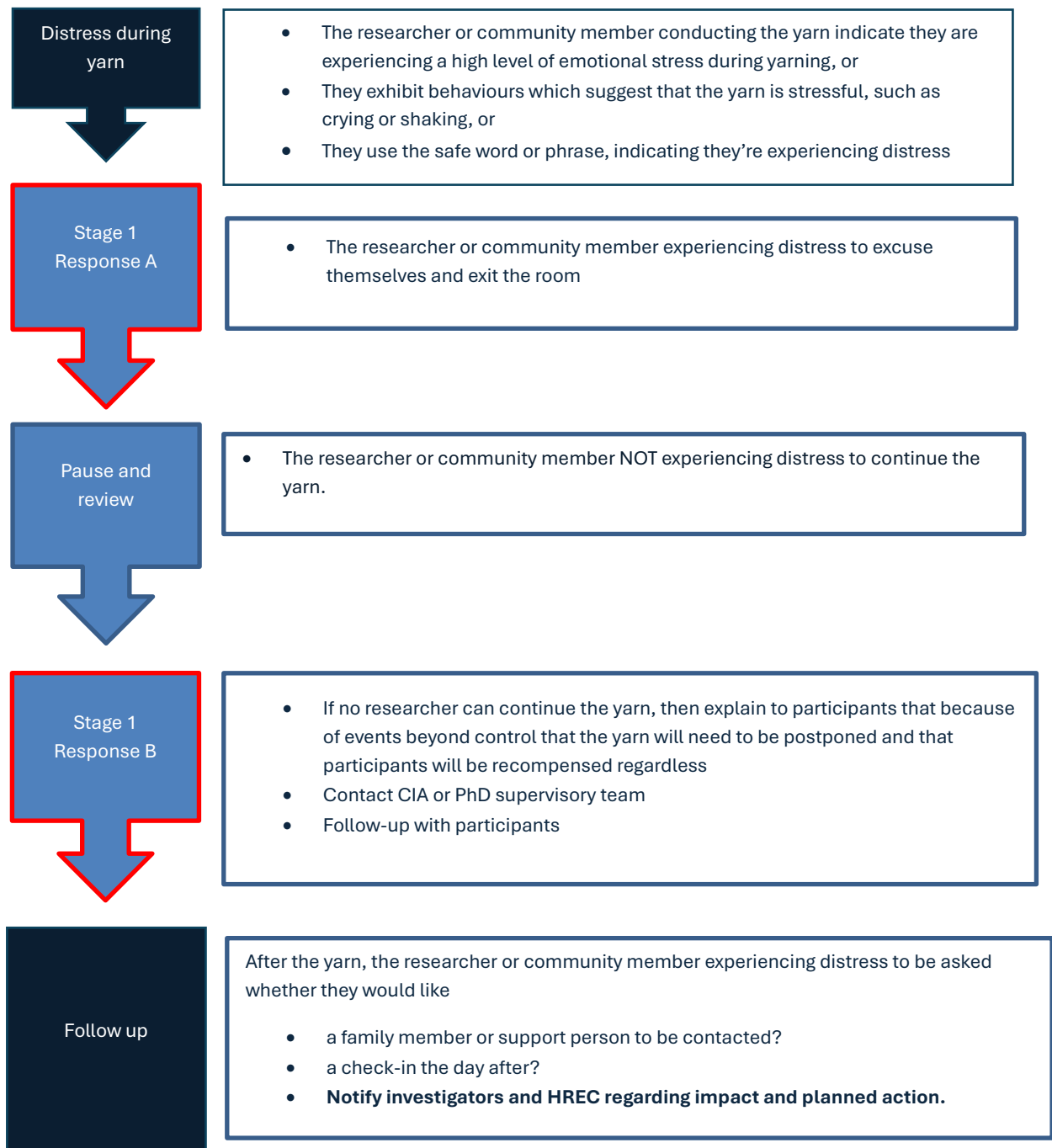
Protocol for participants

- Before the yarning begins, researchers and community members conducting the yarn will ensure the participant understands that the yarn can stop at any time
- Lead researcher to maintain record of incidence, impact of distress experienced and actions taken, and report to supervisors.



Protocol for researchers – distress during yarning

- The yarning will be conducted with at least two people, the lead researcher and a community member
- Before the yarning begins, the researcher and community member conducting the yarn will ensure they have established a 'safe' word or phrase in the event they experience distress and need to stop the yarn
- Team member, external to the yarn, is available as support should the yarn be unable to be continued.



Protocol for researchers – preparation for the research

Researchers will be encouraged to discuss the potential to experience distress and will be encouraged to complete training in vicarious trauma.

The team will agree on processes and protocols to ensure the team's wellbeing is not compromised during the conduct of the research.

The CIA will conduct regular 'check-ins' with key team members.

Protocol for researchers – distress during other times of the research

In the event that a researcher or community member indicates that they are experiencing a high level of emotional stress, or researcher exhibits behaviours indicating distress during other times of the research (not during yarning), the following actions may be taken:

- Supervisors and/or managers notified about the impact of the research
- Person is encouraged to access support options such as Black Dog, LifeLine, the Employee Assistance Program or BeyondBlue
- Person may discontinue face-to-face involvement with research
- Person may discontinue or have a break from the research

Key Contacts

Anderst	Anderst PhD Candidate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health The George Institute for Global Health [REDACTED] <i>The CONTACT PERSON is able to refer the participant for long term counselling and support</i>	Email: [REDACTED]
Kate Hunter	Dr Kate Hunter, Senior Research Fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health The George Institute for Global Health	Telephone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

BeyondBlue	Tel: 1300 22 4636 Email: https://online.beyondblue.org.au/email/#/send Chat online: https://online.beyondblue.org.au/#/chat/start
LifeLine	Tel. 13 11 14 Text: 0477 13 11 14 Chat online: https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/
Black Dog	Website: https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/

Recruitment poster for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants



What does home mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants?

What does 'home' mean to you?

Researchers at Guunu-Maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health program, The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW Sydney and several health providers¹ are looking for volunteer research participants to talk about home and housing. We would like to develop a resource to support what tenants need at home.

Would the research study be a good fit for me?

The study might be a good fit for you if:

- You are an Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander person
- You are a current social housing tenant

What would happen if I took part in the research study?

The lead researcher, [redacted] Anderst, will contact you to find a time to talk with you about the project.

If you decide to take part we would:

- Set up a time to talk with you (either by phone or face-to-face)
- Have a yarn with you to hear your story about what 'home' means to you – this would take about 30 to 45 minutes

Will I be paid to take part in the research study?

- Yes, you will receive \$40 for participation in the form of an Eftpos gift card.
- Whether or not you participate won't affect how you or your child is looked after at the health centre in any way, and participation will not affect your tenancy.
- Participation is confidential.

Who do I contact if I want more information or want to take part in the study?

If you would like more information or are interested in being part of the study please contact:

Name: [redacted] Anderst
Email: [redacted]
Phone: [redacted]
Website: <http://www.georgeinstitute.org/>

HREC Approval Number: 1963/22

Participant group: Tenants

Community Health Centre Version: 08/08/2022

Yarning guide

Ethics approved version: Tenants_Yarning_V1.0 14.02.2022

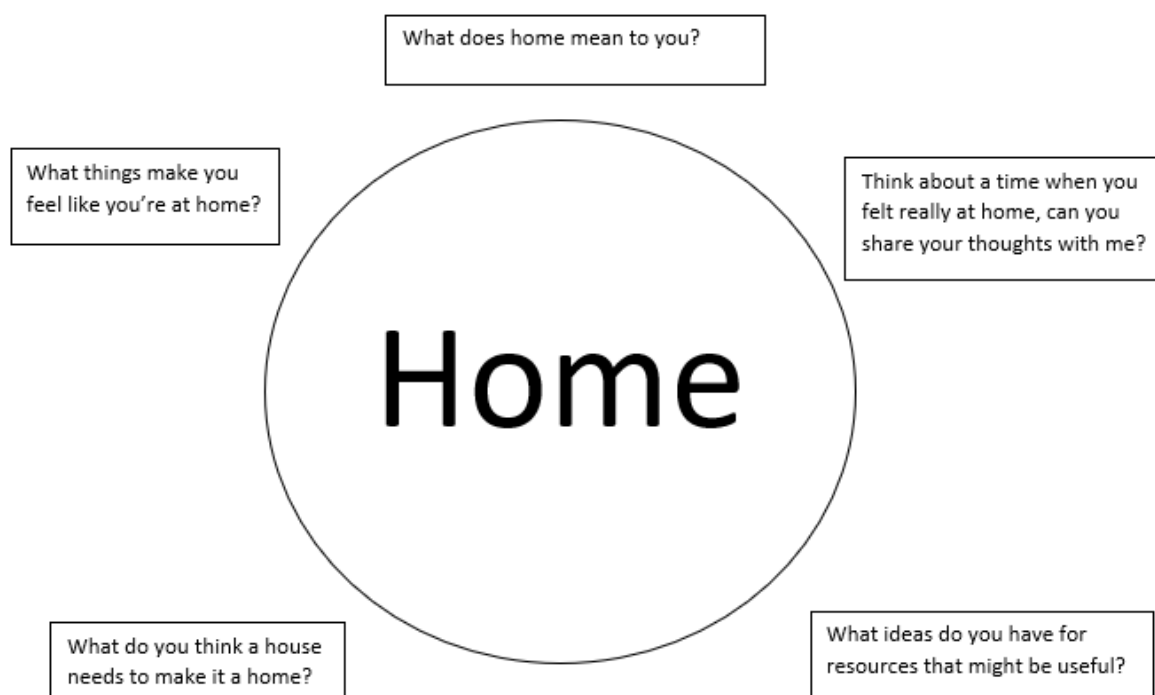


Artwork by Angela Webb,
Gumbaynggirr Nation

YARNING GUIDE

**Housing, home and health: Social housing and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
in urban New South Wales**

[This guide is a list of key items to cover in yarning
with social housing tenants who are participants of this study.]



Semi-structured interview guide

Ethics approved version: Staff_Interview Guide_V1.0 14 February 2022

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW – Indicative questions

Housing, home and health: Social housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban New South Wales

General questions

1. What is your role with [organisation] and how long have been in this role?
2. What specific services are provided by [organisation] to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how long have those services been in place for?

Housing providers

1. What does the housing provider consider to be the desired outcome for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants?
Desired outcome examples may include tenants previously on the waitlist being housed, tenants housed in adequately sized properties, tenants connected to the local community and services, tenants responsive to provider contact, sustained tenancies, positive exits from social housing to the private rental market or to home ownership
2. How do the desired outcomes and indicators take into account the social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and physical/material aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants' wellbeing?
3. Does the housing provider have success indicators (including Key Performance Indicators) for current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants? (I.e., how do housing providers deem tenants are doing well in the tenancy?) If so, what are the indicators?
4. How does the housing provider meet the needs of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants? *For example, if a current property does not meet a family's ideas of what they need in housing or sense of home, how does the tenant make a change?*
5. What information or resources do current tenants receive and do you provide specific resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants? How do tenants currently access this information?

Tenant support organisations

6. What is your support organisation's understanding of the desired outcome for current urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social housing tenants?
7. How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants currently achieve this desired outcome? *For example, if a current property does not meet a family's ideas of what they need, how do they make a change? What information or resources do tenants need to achieve the desired outcome? How do tenants currently access this information?*
8. What tangible supports do you provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants?
Example: if it is integral to a person's sense of home to have enough space for extended family to visit and their current home is a very small apartment, what processes would a tenant need to go through to apply for a transfer to a more suitable property?
9. What other tangible supports do you think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants need? What is the best way for other supports to be made available? E.g., a "how to" information booklet, a visual map, a flowchart, a website, factsheets?

Appendix 2: The housing information resources

Homes NSW pamphlet, front and back

Complaints and Appeals

Complaints are when you're unhappy with the standard of service from your social housing provider

Appeals are when you're unhappy with a decision made by your social housing provider relating to their policies

There are two stages to an appeal:

- First Tier Appeals (internal review of decision with your provider)
- Second Tier Appeals (external review of the decision, including a hearing with the Housing Appeals Committee)

Complaints to your housing provider

Call **1800 422 322**
Press 2 for housing services, then 5 for Client Feedback
You can ask to speak to an Aboriginal officer

feedback@facs.nsw.gov.au

FACS Client Feedback Service, Locked Bag 7150,
Liverpool BC, NSW 1871

Homes NSW take 15 days to write back to people who have complained

Make an appeal (known as a First Level Appeal)

Complete the appeals form
<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/appeals>

Make an external appeal (known as a Second Level Appeal)

Complete the Second Level Appeals form
<https://forms1.facs.nsw.gov.au/register/SLA/>

Tribunal

Tribunal, or NCAT, is a separate process to complaints, appeals and the Ombudsman. You can take your housing provider to the Tribunal by applying to NCAT. You can do this yourself or you can ask a local support service to help you.

If you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you can ask to have your case heard in the Aboriginal Tenancy List. Being on the list means you'll be connected with support services and specialist Aboriginal Tenants advocates, your case will be discussed with a designated tribunal Conciliator and you have extra time for a Tribunal Member to decide your case if you are unable to agree on your own solution. Apply online to be on the Aboriginal Tenancy List.

NSW Ombudsman
You can also complain to the NSW Ombudsman.

What can you complain about to the NSW Ombudsman?

- Unreasonable delay in taking action or making a decision
- Failure to contact you or reply to your correspondence, emails or phone calls
- Failure to adequately respond to a maintenance request
- Failure to comply with work orders, technical inspection orders or orders by the NCAT
- Failure to comply with other undertakings
- Poor customer service
- Missing paperwork, errors or mistakes
- Not providing reasons for a decision that affects you
- Not telling you the outcome of your complaint.

How to complain to the NSW Ombudsman

Complete the complaints form online and make sure to have all documents about the complaint ready to be uploaded

<https://www.omb.nsw.gov.au/Making-a-complaint>

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BUNDI

A HOUSING TOOL FOR MOB

Homes NSW

(previously known as Housing NSW or DCJ Housing)

Level 7/832 Anzac Parade, Maroubra or another office
Open Mon-Fri 9am - 5pm

1800 422 322

If you want to speak to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, when you call 1800 422 322, ask for the Aboriginal Enquiry Line. The Aboriginal Enquiry Line has dedicated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff to help you.

feedback@facs.nsw.gov.au

This free housing resource was developed as part of community-based research between the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre and Guunu-maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute. Accurate at August 2024.

Steps to making a repairs request

Is it an emergency or urgent repair?

Things like gas, electricity or water supply is not working, blocked or broken toilet, burst water pipe, gas leak, serious roof leak, electrical fault, flooding or flood damage, storm or fire damage

Call 1800 422 322

and press 1 and follow the prompts for New Requests. Follow up requests or to Provide feedback

Say what's happening and be specific
Example: "there is a gas leak in the kitchen"

Write down the name of the staff member, time and day of the call and ask the staff member to give you a reference number for future reference

Emergencies

Things like a gas leak, flooding, serious damage from fire, storm or break-in, major leak, ceiling fallen in, electrical fault, or anything that risks your safety and security

Response time
2-8 hours

Urgent repairs

Things like faults in gas, electricity or water, no hot water, no heating, no water coming from taps, entire stove not working, blocked toilet, serious roof leak, broken glass, smoke alarm

Response time
24-48 hours

Non-urgent repairs or maintenance

Things like slow draining sinks, broken tiles with sharp edges, clothesline leaning, internal doors won't close

Call 1800 422 322 and press 1.

Write down the name of the staff member, the time and day of the call. Ask the staff member to give you a reference number and write it down for future reference when following up on the repair.

Go into a Homes NSW office and ask for support lodging a request for repairs

Use the eRepair online system on the Homes NSW website or use the MyHousing app on your phone

www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/living/maintenance/erepair

Once the repairs request is in, a contractor may come to your house - your Client Service Officer won't call you first. When a contractor comes, ask for their ID and ask for the job number in case they need to return

Response times for non-urgent repairs: 20 Days

Told it's planned works?

Planned works is non-urgent work, such as painting, replacing floor coverings, or upgrading a kitchen or bathroom. Speak to your local office about the timeframe of your planned works. If you don't believe your issue comes under 'planned works' and needs repairing sooner, contact an advocacy service like the Eastern Area Tenants Service (EATS).



If you're in an Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) property and you've made a repair request that isn't getting fixed in a reasonable time, you can contact AHO.

Before contacting the AHO you must have tried your housing provider first and given them time to respond to your request.

AHO General contact

1800 727 555
enquiries@aho.nsw.gov.au

AHO Sydney/South Eastern region contact

9995 5020
sse@aho.nsw.gov.au

Are you having trouble with a neighbour?

You can let Homes NSW know by filling out a Housing Statement form



Remember...

Keep your details up to date. If you've changed your phone number your social housing provider needs to know so they can contact you

This free housing resource was developed as part of community-based research between the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre and Guunu-maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute. Accurate at August 2024.

Bridge Housing pamphlet, front and back

Complaints

Complaints are when you're unhappy with the standard of service from your social housing provider

Appeals are when you're unhappy with a decision made by your social housing provider relating to their policies

There are two stages to an appeal:

- First Tier Appeals (internal review of decision with your provider)
- Second Tier Appeals (external review of the decision, including a hearing with the Housing Appeals Committee)

Complaints to your housing provider

Call **8324 0885** and talk to the Housing Team

Email: customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au

Complete the complaints form <https://bridgehousing.snapforms.com.au/form/complaints-complaints-and-appeals-feedback-form>



Go into a Bridge Housing office to lodge your complaint

Level 9, 59 Goulburn St, Sydney

Bridge Housing take 21 days to write back to people who have complained

Appeals

Make an appeal (known as a First Level Appeal)

Go into a Bridge Housing office with an advocate or friend for an appeals interview – call ahead to arrange a time (**8324 0885**)

Complete the appeals form online <https://bridgehousing.snapforms.com.au/form/complaints-complaints-and-appeals-feedback-form>



Bridge Housing take 21 days to write back to people who have appealed a decision

Make an external appeal (known as a Second Level Appeal)

Complete the Second Level Appeals form <https://forms1.facs.nsw.gov.au/register/STA/>





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A HOUSING TOOL FOR MOB

Bridge Housing

Level 9, 59 Goulburn St, Sydney city or Level 1, 660-664 Pittwater Rd, Brookvale
Open Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9am - 4:30pm
Weds 1pm - 4:40pm
Use the lifts that face the street to get to Level 9

customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au
PO Box 20217 World Square NSW 2002

8324 0800

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Steps to making a repairs request

Is it an emergency or urgent repair?

Things like gas, electricity or water supply is not working, blocked or broken toilet, burst water pipe, gas leak, serious roof leak, electrical fault, flooding or flood damage, storm or fire damage

Call **8324 0800** and press 1

Say what's happening and be specific
Example: "there is a gas leak in the kitchen"

Write down the name of the staff member, time and day of the call and ask the staff member to give you a reference number for future reference

Emergencies

Things like a gas leak, flooding, serious damage from fire, storm or break-in, major leak, ceiling fallen in, electrical fault, or anything that risks your safety and security

Response time 4 hours

Urgent repairs

Things like faults in gas, electricity or water, no hot water, no heating, no water coming from taps, entire stove not working, blocked toilet, serious roof leak, broken glass, smoke alarm

Response time 24 hours

Non-urgent repairs or maintenance

Things like slow draining sinks, broken tiles with sharp edges, clothesline leaning, internal doors won't close

Call **8324 0800** and speak to the Repairs Team. Write down the name of the staff member, the time and day of the call. Explain what needs repairing in detail. Ask the staff member to give you a reference number, the expected response time, and write it down for future reference when following up on the repair.

Go into a Bridge Housing office, either Level 9, 59 Goulburn St, Sydney or Level 1, 660-664 Pittwater Rd, Brookvale

E-mail: repairs@bridgehousing.org.au with your name, phone number and description of the issue

Use the online repairs form <https://bridgehousing.snapforms.com.au/form/repair-request>



Once the repairs request is in, a contractor may come to your house – Bridge Housing won't call you first. When a contractor comes, ask for their ID and ask for the job number in case they need to return.

Response times for non-urgent repairs

**Routine 1
5 Days**

**Routine 2
21 Days**

Tribunal

Tribunal, or NCAT, is a separate process to complaints, appeals and the Ombudsman.

You can take your housing provider to the Tribunal by applying to NCAT. You can do this yourself or you can ask a local support service to help you.

If you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you can ask to have your case heard in the Aboriginal Tenancy List. Being on the list means you'll be connected with support services and specialist Aboriginal Tenants advocates, your case will be discussed with a designated tribunal Conciliator and you have extra time for a Tribunal Member to decide your case if you are unable to agree on your own solution. Apply online to be on the Aboriginal Tenancy List.

Are you having trouble with a neighbour?

Contact the Bridge Housing team or refer to the Good Neighbour Approach policy to learn about how to resolve a dispute with a neighbour



Remember...

Keep your details up to date. If you've changed your phone number your social housing provider needs to know so they can contact you

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St George Community Housing pamphlet, front and back

Complaints and Appeals

Complaints are when you're unhappy with the standard of service from your social housing provider

Appeals are when you're unhappy with a decision made by your social housing provider relating to their policies

There are two stages to an appeal:

- First Tier Appeals (internal review of decision with your provider)
- Second Tier Appeals (external review of the decision, including a hearing with the Housing Appeals Committee)

Complaints to your housing provider

Complete the complaints form
<https://www.sgch.com.au/your-tenancy/appeals-complaints/appeals-complaints-form/>



Print a copy of Complaints and feedback form
<https://www.sgch.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Complaints-and-Feedback-Form.pdf>



and email it to office@sgch.com.au
 or post it to **SGCH, PO Box 348 Hurstville BC NSW 1481**

Make an appeal (known as a First Level Appeal)

Complete the appeals form
<https://www.sgch.com.au/your-tenancy/appeals-complaints/appeals-complaints-form/>



Tribunal

Tribunal, or NCAT, is a separate process to complaints, appeals and the Ombudsman.

You can take your housing provider to the Tribunal by applying to NCAT. You can do this yourself or you can ask a local support service to help you.

If you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you can ask to have your case heard in the Aboriginal Tenancy List. Being on the list means you'll be connected with support services and specialist Aboriginal Tenants advocates, your case will be discussed with a designated tribunal Conciliator and you have extra time for a Tribunal Member to decide your case if you are unable to agree on your own solution. Apply online to be on the Aboriginal Tenancy List.



<https://ncat.nsw.gov.au/tenancy-property/tenancy.html>



<https://ncat.nsw.gov.au/tenancy-property/tenancy/aboriginal-tenancy-list.html>



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St George Community Housing



11 Gibbons Street Redfern
Open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm



office@sgch.com.au
PO Box 348 Hurstville BC
NSW 1481



1800 573 370

This free housing resource was developed as part of community-based research between the La Perouse Aboriginal Community Health Centre and Guunu-maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute. Accurate at August 2024.

Steps to making a repairs request

Is it an emergency or urgent repair?

Things like gas, electricity or water supply is not working, blocked or broken toilet, burst water pipe, gas leak, serious roof leak, electrical fault, flooding or flood damage, storm or fire damage

Call 9585 1499
and press 3

Say what's happening and be specific
Example: "there is a gas leak in the kitchen"

Write down the name of the staff member, time and day of the call and ask the staff member to give you a reference number for future reference

Emergencies
 Things like a gas leak, flooding, serious damage from fire, storm or break-in, major leak, ceiling fallen in, electrical fault, or anything that risks your safety and security

Response time
4 hours

Urgent repairs
 Things like faults in gas, electricity or water, no hot water, no heating, no water coming from taps, entire stove not working, blocked toilet, serious roof leak, broken glass, smoke alarm

Response time
24 hours

Non-urgent repairs or maintenance

Things like slow draining sinks, broken tiles with sharp edges, clothesline leaning, internal doors won't close

Call 1800 573 370
 Write down the name of the staff member, the time and day of the call. Ask the staff member to give you a reference number and write it down for future reference when following up on the repair.

Go into a SGCH office
11 Gibbons Street Redfern
 Open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

Use the online form & upload any photos of the issue to the form
<https://www.sgch.com.au/your-tenancy/repair-maintenance/report-a-repair/>

Complete a pdf form
https://www.sgch.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SGCH_Repair-Form.pdf

Then email pdf form to repairs@sgch.com.au or print it, fill it out and post it to the address: **SGCH, PO Box 348, Hurstville BC NSW 1481**

Scan for online repair form



Scan for pdf repair form



You can access St George Community Housing's computers at the Redfern office (11 Gibbons St, across from Redfern Station) to fill out forms or to upload photos for repair requests.

Are you having trouble with a neighbour?
 Contact your Tenancy Manager or refer to the Anti-Social Behaviour Factsheet to learn about how to resolve a dispute with a neighbour



Remember...
 Keep your details up to date. If you've changed your phone number your social housing provider needs to know so they can contact you

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Once the repairs request is in, a contractor may come to your house - St George won't call you first. When a contractor comes, ask for their ID and ask for the job number in case they need to return.

Non-urgent repairs
 (e.g., inoperable windows, lights or a leaking tap)
14 Days

Handyperson repairs
 (e.g., internal doors won't close, damaged fly screens)
28 Days

Community Housing Limited pamphlet, front and back

Complaints and Appeals

Complaints are when you're unhappy with the standard of service from your social housing provider

Appeals are when you're unhappy with a decision made by your social housing provider relating to their policies

There are two stages to an appeal:

- First Tier Appeals (internal review of decision with your provider)
- Second Tier Appeals (external review of the decision, including a hearing with the Housing Appeals Committee)

Complaints to your housing provider

Call us on **1300 CHL Housing (1300 245 468)** and speak to the staff

Complete the complaints form online
<https://chl.org.au/tenants/do-it-online/feedback-form/>

Make an appeal (known as a First Level Appeal)

Call us on **1300 CHL Housing (1300 245 468)** and speak to staff to complete an appeals form with you over the phone

Complete the appeals form online
<https://chl.org.au/tenants/do-it-online/feedback-form/>

Tribunal

Tribunal, or NCAT, is a separate process to complaints, appeals and the Ombudsman.

You can take your housing provider to the Tribunal by applying to NCAT. You can do this yourself or you can ask a local support service to help you.

If you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you can ask to have your case heard in the Aboriginal Tenancy List. Being on the list means you'll be connected with support services and specialist Aboriginal Tenants advocates, your case will be discussed with a designated tribunal Conciliator and you have extra time for a Tribunal Member to decide your case if you are unable to agree on your own solution. Apply online to be on the Aboriginal Tenancy List.



Tribunal
<https://ncat.nsw.gov.au/tenants/housing-and-property/tenancy.html>



Aboriginal Tenancy List
<https://ncat.nsw.gov.au/tenants/housing-and-property/tenancy/aboriginal-tenancy-list.html>



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Community Housing Limited



2/20 Charles Street, Parramatta
Parramatta office



nswinfo@chl.org.au
info.parramatta@chl.org.au
PO Box 3453, Parramatta
NSW 2150



9891 7600

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Steps to making a repairs request

Is it an emergency or urgent repair?

Things like gas, electricity or water supply is not working, blocked or broken toilet, burst water pipe, gas leak, serious roof leak, electrical fault, flooding or flood damage, storm or fire damage

Call 1300 424 573

Say what's happening and be specific
Example: "there is a gas leak in the kitchen"

Write down the name of the staff member, time and day of the call and ask the staff member to give you a reference number for future reference

Emergencies

Things like a gas leak, flooding, serious damage from fire, storm or break-in, major leak, ceiling fallen in, electrical fault, or anything that risks your safety and security

Response time
4-24 hours

Urgent repairs

Things like faults in gas, electricity or water, no hot water, no heating, no water coming from taps, entire stove not working, blocked toilet, serious roof leak, broken glass, smoke alarm

Response time
Within 24 hours

Non-urgent repairs or maintenance

Things like slow draining sinks, broken tiles with sharp edges, clothesline leaning, internal doors won't close

Call 1800 573 370

Write down the name of the staff member, the time and day of the call. Explain what needs repairing in detail. Ask the staff member to give you a reference number for the call, the expected response time and write it down for future reference when following up on the repair.

E-mail: maintenance@chl.org.au with your name, phone number and description of the issue

Use the online repairs form
<https://chl.org.au/tenants/do-it-online/request-a-repair/>

Once the repairs request is in, a contractor may come to your house – your Client Service Officer won't call you first.
 When a contractor comes, ask for their ID and ask for the job number in case they need to return

Response times for non-urgent repairs: Within 21 Days



Community Housing Limited repairs and maintenance fact sheet
<https://chl.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Repairs-and-Maintenance-Fact-Sheet-ver-2.0.pdf>

Remember...
 Keep your details up to date. If you've changed your phone number your social housing provider needs to know so they can contact you

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Support organisations pamphlet, front and back

About

This resource provides information on local support organisations and tenant advocacy services in the South East Sydney Area. See the key below to find out what each organisation can help you with

Key

Support with repairs and maintenance
Eastern Area Tenants Service, Kingsford Legal Centre and Greater Sydney Aboriginal and Advocacy Tenancy Service

Support with complaints, appeals and taking your provider to Tribunal
Eastern Area Tenants Service, Kingsford Legal Centre and Greater Sydney Aboriginal and Advocacy Tenancy Service

Support filling out a form
Junction Neighbourhood Centre, Strengthening Our Mob, Weave Youth and Community Services, The Hub at Lexo

Eastern Area Tenants Service (EATS)

Advice service for tenants living in the Waverley, Randwick and Woollahra council areas

EATS supports with

- General rights and obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and the Boarding Houses Act 2012
- Rent arrears, increases, reductions
- Termination notices
- Eviction
- Anti-social behaviour
- Strike notices
- Fraud allegations
- Illegal lockouts
- Applications to the Tribunal
- Attending hearings and conciliations
- Liaising/negotiation with local offices and management
- Natural justice meetings
- Housing Appeal Committee (HAC) matters including reviews/appeals and HAC hearings

Repairs (including mould)

EATS does not support with

- Housing Pathways forms
- Disputes with neighbours
- Modifications and social housing transfers
- Support letters

Call **9386 9147** or fill in a form to ask for assistance
<https://eats.org.au/form/online-request-form>

Kooloora Community Centre

A community centre in Malabar

Kooloora supports with

- Free food – Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays
- Support with bills, subject to assessment - post codes 2031 to 2036
- Information and referral to legal services
- Support letters, subject to assessment

Call **9661 9160**
or go in at 167 Bilga Crescent, Malabar
<https://kooloora.org/>

Bus 390X from La Perouse, change at Juniors Kingsford to bus 343
Bus 343 from the City, change at Juniors Kingsford to bus 399

Weave Youth & Community Services

A youth and community service in Waterloo

Weave supports young people with

- Casework
- Counselling
- Mental Health support
- Drug and alcohol support
- Assistance with navigating the justice system
- Specialist domestic and family violence support
- Information and referrals to other services
- Assistance with housing and health services
- Practical and material support
- Access to education and employment opportunities

Call **9318 0539**
or go into 1B Elizabeth Street (Corner Elizabeth & Allen Streets), Waterloo

Bus 390X from La Perouse, change at Juniors Kingsford to bus 343
Bus 343 from the city



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Support Organisations

- Eastern Area Tenants Service
- Greater Sydney Aboriginal and Advocacy Tenancy Service
- Kingsford Legal Centre
- Junction Neighbourhood Centre
- Strengthening Our Mob
- The Hub at Lexo
- Kooloora Community Centre
- Weave Youth & Community Services

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Greater Sydney Aboriginal and Advocacy Tenancy Service (GSATS)

Advice and support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in greater metropolitan Sydney, Blue Mountains Central Coast, Hawkesbury and McArthur areas

GSATS supports with

- Telephone advice
- Letters of support
- Attending the Tribunal
- Mediation and advocacy
- Housing Appeals Committee applications
- Helping to find services who can assist with other issues
- Attending meetings with your landlord (including Homes NSW)
- Negotiating with landlords and Community Education and Duty Advocacy
- Repairs & maintenance

GSATS does not support with

- Form filling
- Social housing transfers

Contact GSATS Call **9833 3314** or email admin_gsats@alnsnswact.org.au
Open 9am-5pm

Strengthening Our Mob (SOM)

A place-based social and emotional wellbeing program within the La Perouse Aboriginal community

SOM supports with

- Navigating the justice system
- Housing support
- Clinical and medical
- Employment and education

Based at Yarra Bay House, Strengthening Our Mob is led by local Aboriginal community members

Email: SOM@laperouse.org.au

Bus 390X

Kingsford Legal Centre (KLC)

A legal centre in Randwick

KLC supports with

- General advice about housing
- Rent arrears
- Terminations
- Fraud allegations
- Strike notices
- Escalating repairs (including mould) and maintenance by following up with the client's housing provider
- Support with Housing Appeals Committee applications
- Support with Tribunal applications
- Attending Tribunal with clients
- Mediation and advocacy
- Support tenants to access the Aboriginal Tenancy List (tribunal matters for Aboriginal Tenants only every fortnight on a Wednesday)
- Writing a support letter for things like getting put on the priority housing waitlist, for property modifications and transfers, upon assessment

KLC does not support with

- Housing Pathways forms
- Disputes with neighbours
- Modifications and social housing transfers
- Support letters

Contact KLC Email: legal@unsw.edu.au
Monday – Friday 9am-1pm and 2pm-4.30pm
<https://www.klc.unsw.edu.au/>

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Junction Neighbourhood Centre (JNC)

A community service in Maroubra for people living in the Eastern Suburbs and City of Sydney

JNC supports with

- Specialist trauma informed support
- Casework and individual support
- Assistance with housing and health services
- Specialist domestic and family violence support
- Wellbeing and resilience programs for First Nations Women
- Form filling
- Assistance with accessing other services

First Nations Families caseworkers are available

Call **9349 8200**
Email: contact@jnc.org.au
or go in at Shop 2/669-673 Anzac Parade, Maroubra
Open 9am – 4.30pm

Bus 390X from La Perouse
Bus 390X or **396** from the city

The Hub at Lexo

A place based community service Hub in South Maroubra

The following services and support workers regularly attend Hub at Lexo support with housing and legal advice

- Homes NSW
- Kingsford Legal Centre
- Centrelink
- Housing Support Worker from the Benevolent Society

Staff at the Hub can support with form filling - call ahead to ask when they're available

Check the most recent schedule on Facebook www.facebook.com/TheHubatLexo/ or call and ask when the housing support workers and services are next in at the Hub.

Call **9093 6145**
Email: lexo.hub@randwick.nsw.gov.au
3-7 Lexington Place, Maroubra
Tuesday & Thursday 10am-4pm
Wednesday & Friday 930am

Bus 390X from La Perouse or Maroubra and walk 10 minutes

Appendix 3: Chapter 3 Supplementary Tables

Supplementary Table 1 Quality assessment using the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Quality Appraisal Tool for all records

[illegible]

Penfold, 2017	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Penfold, 2020	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Queensland government, 2019	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Sadik, 2014	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
The Australian Centre for Housing Innovation, 2019	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Salvation Army, 2021	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Watkin, 2012	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

Supplementary Table 2 Quality assessment using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for qualitative research records

Author, Year	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	How valuable is the research?
Birdsall-Jones	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clark, 2012	Yes	Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Commonwealth of Australia, 2013	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes
Cooper, 2005	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greenop & Memmott, 2016	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes
Judd, 2004	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes
Keys Young, 1999	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes
Knox, 2006	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lowell, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Watkin, 2012	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yesd	Yes

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