

Submission from the Central Australian
Aboriginal Legal Aid Service Inc
to the Public Accounts Committee, Legislative
Assembly of the NT

Response to the *Inquiry into Housing Repairs
and Maintenance on Town Camps*

March 2016

About CAALAS

Founded in 1973 as the first Aboriginal organisation in Alice Springs, CAALAS provides high quality, culturally appropriate legal advice and representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Central Australia in the areas of criminal, civil, family and welfare rights law. CAALAS deals with tenancy matters in the Central region through its Civil and Welfare Rights sections.

The organisation also advocates for the rights of Aboriginal people¹ and improved social justice outcomes. Additionally, CAALAS provides community legal education, support for youth interacting with the justice system and assistance to prisoners, detainees and their families to support reintegration into the community.

CAALAS strives to achieve its vision statement of “Justice, dignity and equal rights and treatment before the law for Aboriginal people in Central Australia” through its service provision across the vast southern region of the Northern Territory, expanding south from Elliott and outwards to remote communities nearing the borders of WA, SA and QLD. CAALAS is led by a Council of elected Aboriginal representatives and funded solely by the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department to operate two permanent offices (in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek) and to conduct a range of outreach trips and clinics, and attend bush court circuits.

CAALAS welcomes this Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Housing Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps, and is grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback. In our view, the public housing situation in the NT is at crisis point and this applies to both town camps and remote communities. There is a need for a thorough review of remote housing arrangements in addition to this Inquiry regarding town camps.

For further context, we also attach our more comprehensive submission in response to the *Housing Strategy Consultation Draft* that was recently released by the Department of Housing for comment. *Please see Attachment A.*

Our specific responses to the terms of reference are below. We hope these responses are of assistance to the Public Accounts Committee.

(a) Timeliness of completing repairs

At CAALAS we are frequently contacted by Department of Housing (**Department**) tenants with repairs and maintenance concerns, who advise they have requested repairs be conducted yet nothing has occurred. Almost all repairs and maintenance enquiries we receive are from tenants who instruct they have provided notification about the issue through the correct channels, to no avail. Tenants often complain they have lived with the housing

¹ In this submission, ‘Aboriginal people’ refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

defect for not just months, but years. Such defects have included blocked drains, -a sagging or cracked ceiling, broken windows and locks, or an electrical fault.

The delays in rectifying these maintenance issues are breaches of the timelines set out in the *Residential Tenancies Act NT* for repairs and maintenance to be conducted by the Landlord.

In some instances it is not easy to establish who is responsible for the delay, and on occasion we have requested access to our client's Department of Housing file pursuant to Freedom of Information legislation. In most cases we have discovered that the Housing service providers had sent the required documentation to the Department and the delay stood with the Department not actioning the request.

Case Study 1 – Ms C, resident of Hoppy's Town Camp, Alice Springs.

Ms C is a 35 year old working mother of 5 living at Hoppy's Town Camp in Alice Springs. She first attended CAALAS in November 2015 because speaking to the housing provider about the need for maintenance at her home had yielded no results. When Ms C tried to call and find out about what was going on she said "*there were always excuses*".

CAALAS reported Ms C's broken air conditioner to the Department through their email address set up for maintenance requests on town camps and also the advocates email address (just for legal advocates, not tenants). CAALAS reminded the Department that if the repairs are considered emergency repairs, as defined in the *Residential Tenancy Act NT*, they are required to attend to those Repairs within 5 business days of receipt of this notice, or make arrangements to have those Repairs done, notify the tenants accordingly, and ensure the Repairs are made, within 14 days of the date of notice.

The air conditioning problem was then attended to, however promptly broke again 3 days later.

Other issues were reported to the Department, namely the major structural damage above the front door.

On or around 10 December 2015 the Department assured CAALAS that orders were raised to address the issues as a matter of urgency.

On 18 December Ms C's ceiling caved in and fell on her dining room table. Luckily no one was sitting at it at the time. The Department were approached by CAALAS directly and treated the matter as urgent.

Ms C now feels that she must ask her lawyer to approach the Department of Housing to ensure that things get done.

Ms C instructs that she followed the Department's processes regarding repairs and maintenance requests, and followed up to check the progress of this. However she rarely received clear answers as to the progress of her repairs and in frustration, contacted a lawyer for assistance.

Attached is a copy a Condition Report of the premises written in May 2015 assessed by

Tangentyere Design. *Please see attached at Attachment B.*

The Condition Report recommended that, amongst other things, the cracks in the blockwork above the entry door and the sagging ceiling lining required rectification as a matter of priority for reasons of structural safety.

The attached photo shows the workmanship finally done on Ms C's brickwork above the door. *Please see attached at Attachment C.* It is unclear whether the structural safety issue was addressed or if the work undertaken was more superficial.

None of Ms C's matters were addressed until legal advice was sought and the Department was contacted by our legal service in December 2015. Requiring legal assistance to effect basic repairs and maintenance on a property is not ideal or sustainable. Clearly, the obvious preference would be for tenants to receive prompt action in response to notifications made by them.

In relation to remote communities, we have observed tenant files in which repairs and maintenance issues are clearly identified through routine inspections and brought to the attention of the Department; with no action being taken to request that a contract service provider attend to the repair.

Based on feedback from clients in Town Camps about the lack of action regarding maintenance issues, we suspect this is a common occurrence. Unfortunately, our consistent observation based on discussions with clients from both remote communities and town camps is that requests for repairs and maintenance are approached very differently depending on whether the request is made by a tenant or their legal representative.

Case Study 2 - Ms J and Ms T, residents of Trucking Yards, Alice Springs

Sisters J and T attended CAALAS to seek assistance regarding routine maintenance needed on their homes at Trucking yards Town Camp, Alice Springs.

Ms T instructed she had reported the damage to the home since 2013; this was evidenced by the housing documents received under Freedom of Information legislation. Within the Housing file CAALAS found that Ms T had also been charged \$3098.50 for maintenance arrears from a previous tenancy. None of this was proven or sought as compensation through the correct channels, which require the Department to seek compensation from the tenant at the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NTCAT).

It was only when CAALAS intervened that the outstanding repairs and maintenance was conducted.

(b) Cost of repairs

We are frequently approached by clients whose applications for public housing have been denied because of outstanding arrears for maintenance and repairs that have allegedly arisen during a previous tenancy. Some of these debts have reached up to \$25,000.

Quite often these debts are alleged without proof that the tenant was responsible for the repairs and maintenance issues. In these instances, CAALAS can assist clients to appeal the decision to refuse an application for housing through the Department of Housing appeals mechanisms.

We believe the amount of maintenance debt enquiries that CAALAS receives is barely the tip of the iceberg, as many tenants are of the understanding that they cannot question a maintenance debt allocated to them by the Department or request for it to be reviewed. We believe most tenants informed about a maintenance debt by the Department simply commence paying it off in instalments, and that the policy to refuse applications for public housing due to maintenance debts can place pressure on clients to unquestioningly accept them.

The following case study relates to a client who was allocated a maintenance debt in connection with a tenancy at an urban public housing property in Alice Springs. The same procedures apply regarding town camp properties and in our view analogous situations could (and would) occur there.

Case Study 3 – Ms Y

Ms Y was allocated a debt of \$10,596.63 being maintenance costs from a previous property she had rented. She was told she had to pay off the debt before being eligible for a public housing property.

CAALAS appealed the decision and the amount of the debt through the Department's internal mechanisms.

CAALAS managed to have the debt reduced to \$872.33 for the following reasons:

- (a)** Inadequate proof of tenant responsible damage and unreasonable costs charged for maintenance and repairs;
- (b)** Maintenance charges were passed on to the tenant for a period she was not residing in the property;
- (c)** The condition reports were incorrectly completed;
- (d)** Unlawful refusal to return bond monies; and
- (e)** Unreasonable charges by the Department of Housing.

The majority of the costs passed on to our client were unreasonable charges for maintenance. Physical wear and tear was not taken into account, tenant charged for things that clearly are the Landlords responsibility for upkeep. The itemised charges indicated the client was double charged in many cases.

Excessive amounts were charged, for example, maintenance to remove and dump furniture and household items was \$3,254.96.

CAALAS has not seen many town camp tenants charged excessively for maintenance, because it appears there is very little maintenance being done. We can say that there is no clear and transparent mechanism to establish what is considered fair wear and tear and what should be considered as tenant responsible damage. We have observed clients frequently be held accountable for the entirety of repairs and maintenance costs without an appropriate demarcation between these categories.

(c) Consistency, accessibility and efficiency of administrative arrangements

The effectiveness and efficiency of housing services provided to town camps in Alice Springs is confusing and fragmented. By sub-contracting housing services there is a lack of cohesion which not only causes delays and confusion but also inefficiency and a lack of accountability and transparency. The quality of service provision is severely compromised by a lack of coordination and cooperation between these different roles.

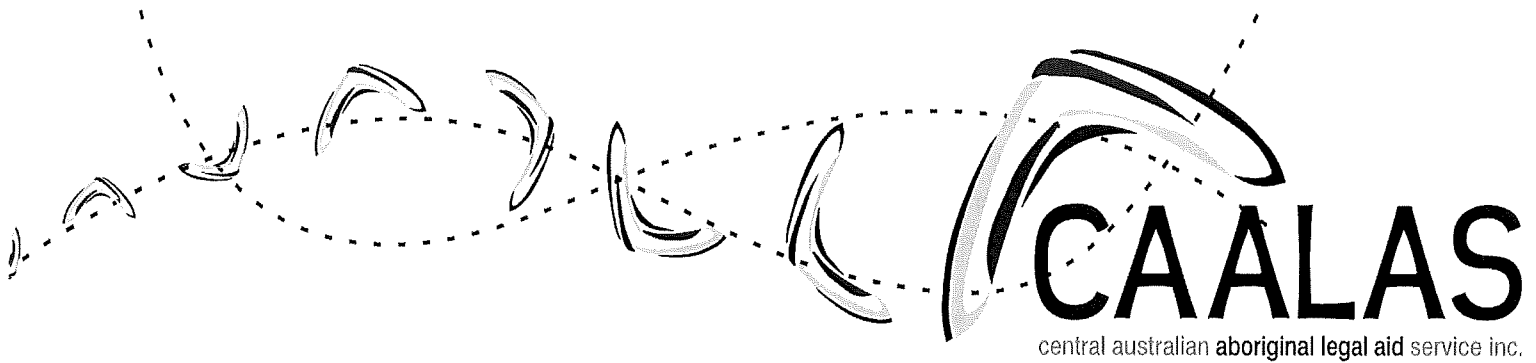
We have observed instances in which repairs and maintenance issues have been exacerbated due to the separate branches of housing service provision working in silos. We referred earlier to instances in which a client may alert a service provider about a repairs and maintenance issue during a routine housing inspection, with no follow up action being taken to affect the repair. It is unclear why a request made during a housing inspection - the purpose of which is to assess to the condition of the property - would not be sufficient notification of the need for maintenance work to be conducted.

On occasion, CAALAS has followed up client queries regarding repairs and maintenance only to be told by the Department to speak to the sub-contracted maintenance provider; who in turn directs us back to the Department. It can be very difficult for a legal service, let alone a client who may be experiencing a number of life stresses in addition to language and cultural barriers, to rectify a repairs and maintenance issue when both arms of housing service provision are indicating that they are not responsible for progressing the issue.

Conclusion

We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to this Inquiry, and look forward to hearing the outcome.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office should you wish to have further discussion about the matters raised.



Feedback from the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service Inc (CAALAS) to KPMG

Response to the *Housing Strategy Consultation Draft* January 2016

CAALAS appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Housing Strategy Consultation Draft* ("the Strategy"). We frequently assist clients experiencing housing legal issues, and are well placed to provide comments on the approaches proposed. We would be happy to have further discussion about any of the matters raised.

About CAALAS

Founded in 1973 as the first Aboriginal organisation in Alice Springs, CAALAS provides high quality, culturally appropriate legal advice and representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Central Australia in the areas of criminal, civil, family and welfare rights law. Housing and tenancy legal issues make up a large portion of our welfare rights casework. We also advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people¹ and improved social justice outcomes. Additionally, CAALAS provides community legal education, support for youth interacting with the justice system and assistance to prisoners, detainees and their families to support reintegration into the community.

CAALAS strives to achieve its vision statement of "*Justice, dignity and equal rights and treatment before the law for Aboriginal people in Central Australia*" through its service provision across approximately 900,000 square kilometres of the Northern Territory (NT). CAALAS is led by a Council of elected Aboriginal representatives and funded solely by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department to operate two permanent offices (in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek) and to conduct a range of outreach trips and clinics, and attend bush court circuits.

General Feedback on the Strategy

CAALAS is only able to provide feedback so far as it affects our client base, Aboriginal people of Central Australia.

The executive summary states that the emphasis of the Strategy is on the "*needs of people who are most vulnerable, principally those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, in supported accommodation, and social housing tenants*".

¹ In this submission, 'Aboriginal people' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Most of CAALAS' client base fit this description. We welcome the Department's commitment to focusing on the needs of these most vulnerable individuals. In our view, it should also be acknowledged that many of these vulnerable individuals in need of social housing are also Aboriginal. To be effective, the Strategy must acknowledge the complexity of these social needs when coupled with Aboriginality, and include sound approaches for overcoming cultural and language barriers. To effectively focus on (and address) these needs, cultural differences must be acknowledged. The Strategy speaks generally about housing difficulties experienced across the broader NT population, however does not adequately delineate the clearly pressing social issues experienced by Aboriginal people across the NT, whether they are tenants or without a home. In our view the Strategy is lacking in real and practical future strategic mechanisms to help mend the housing crisis faced by Aboriginal people.

Practical strategies for urban, town camps and remote communities could be considered quite distinct. Remote communities and town camps need a community focused model, with emphasis on maintaining homes for life, while urban may fit more into the mainstream housing continuum explored in the Strategy.

We have broken down our feedback to correlate with the different sections in the Strategy and the associated proposals therein. Whilst some of the proposals are positive, without an increase in available social housing the utility of new initiatives to support tenants will be limited.

Whilst preparing our feedback, some key points continued to arise in response to the possible solutions identified in the Strategy. These include the following:

- The Strategy acknowledges that more and greater diversity of temporary and supported accommodation is required, however there is not proper acknowledgement of the urgent need for more permanent, culturally appropriate and better built homes;
- The Head leasing system is not reliable, nor a substitute for secure social housing – due to the discrimination and disadvantage that Aboriginal people face as tenants and the risk that private home owners will not want to be part of such a scheme;
- Social Housing should not be described as merely “*a subsidised form of rental accommodation available to people who meet the criteria, which typically include having low or very low income*”. The stated purpose of social housing should be to serve those most in need. Reference should be made to the Priority Housing Policy that clearly states *people at risk of homelessness, disabled people, people with serious medical or social problems and domestic or family violence* will be placed further up in the wait list queue;²
- The Rental Rebate Scheme has been chaotic for Aboriginal tenants in town camps and remote communities. Anecdotally, we understand that up to 80% of Aboriginal people living in town camps are in rental debt, and we believe that the rebate scheme has contributed to this high figure. No alternative scheme is proposed in the Strategy.
- More emphasis and research funds be put into looking at the future possibilities for home ownership of aboriginal housing in remote communities, town camps and urban, in consultation with aboriginal communities and long term social housing residents.

² Department of Housing Priority Housing Policy as at 2016.
http://www.territoryhousing.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/152810/Priority-Public-Housing-Policy-150915.pdf

Our more detailed feedback to each section of the Strategy is as follows.

a) Homelessness

The Strategy establishes that homelessness in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and amongst the remote communities in Central Australia manifests itself as severe overcrowding in aboriginal households. Specifically, there is reference to an ABS statistic that 13,171 people are living in 'severely' crowded dwellings, with Tennant Creek and Alice Springs the most affected. There is an acknowledgement that more and greater diversity of temporary and supported accommodation is required. However, we note the lack of acknowledgement that more permanent, more culturally appropriate and better built homes are also urgently required.

We see extended families living together with up to 20 people living in a 2-3 bedroom home, not to include transient visitors. The home will quickly deteriorate and repairs and maintenance issues increase. The Department has shown it cannot attend to the maintenance issues in a timely manner, leading to Aboriginal people living in decrepit, unhygienic and sometimes unsafe homes.

The Strategy outlines the following gaps:

- *There is not adequate affordable accommodation for people visiting centres from communities for short periods of time;*
- *There is not adequate early intervention and prevention programs in place for people at risk;*
- *Strong links are needed between services (including housing, homelessness and other human services);*
- *There are not clear pathways or transitions between services and between housing options along the continuum.*

A major gap not identified by the Strategy is that current Housing policies do not alleviate homelessness. We have observed the Department to take a punitive approach to tenants, often seeking eviction and being disinclined to renew leases due to issues such as repairs and maintenance which can be traced to overcrowding and other social issues.

In our view, current Housing policies also fail to progress security of tenure or the inherent social issues affecting Aboriginal people. This includes but is not limited to the disciplinary Three Strikes Policy, the policy to have periodic other than fixed term tenancies, Transfer and Debt Management policies, often affecting the elderly and the most vulnerable.

Our feedback on possible responses identified in the Strategy:

More and greater diversity of temporary and supported accommodation options

We agree that affordable, culturally appropriate temporary visitor accommodation is lacking in Aboriginal remote communities, town camps and towns. However we note the lack of acknowledgement in the Strategy that more permanent, more culturally appropriate and

better built homes are also urgently required to address the issues. There are no clear pathways or transitions between services and between housing options on the 'continuum' because the housing options do not exist. If a person finalises a year at transitional accommodation (such as Percy Court) they are meant to transition into a Territory housing home. More often is the case that there is no home to go into. Once again, more short and long term affordable accommodation is desperately needed.

Often Aboriginal families are encouraged to go into an Aboriginal Hostel; however these are not affordable for most of our clients. The cost is upwards of 90% of their entire social security benefit. It is essential that more affordable options are made available.

Create opportunities for NGO's to develop new approaches to service delivery that improve the operation of the system; and intervene early to prevent homelessness

Support must be given financially from the NT government to NGO's to implement programs to support homeless people. These programs must be acknowledged and supported by the local council and agreed upon by the community. Some NGO's have had the practice of handing out blankets in winter. It has been known that the local council then confiscates the blankets if left lying around during the day. For this reason and others, stronger links between services is recommended.

Build on and expand existing tenancy support programs already in place to more proactively identify and address client needs at all stages in the housing continuum

We agree that there needs to be greater support for problem tenancies. We agree that client needs will vary as they move up the continuum, however some tenants will require support on an ongoing basis. Support is not short term in many cases, and this needs to be acknowledged by the Strategy.

b) Supported accommodation

The Strategy outlines the following gaps:

- *There are not housing options for people to move from crisis and supported accommodation;*
- *Supported accommodation services are not located in areas of highest need; and*
- *There are not clear pathways or transitions between services and between housing options along the continuum.*

In addition to the above, we submit that despite 44% of supported accommodation being situated in Alice Springs, there is still a shortage. Where supported accommodation is available, it is often very expensive for tenants who have very limited financial means. In our view supported accommodation should be further subsidized so that it can be more readily accessed by vulnerable clients.

Our feedback on possible responses identified in the Strategy:

Increase the flexibility and responsiveness of public housing quickly and cost effectively through models such as leasing existing housing on the private market (known as ‘head leasing’)

‘Head leasing’ could be a useful way of supplementing social housing supply but may create insecurity for tenants if private rental demand increases. We do not believe that head leasing will work effectively in Alice Springs or Tennant Creek. A head leasing system will not work in markets where private demand is strong,³ such as Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The head leasing system is highly unlikely to work in these areas, not just because of the unavailability of houses to be included in the scheme, but the inherent racial discrimination that exists due to the social issues affecting Aboriginal people. Social issues such as substance abuse, domestic violence and homelessness create a risk that many private owners will not want to be a part of such a scheme.

It is important that other options are there if the private rental property is no longer available. Should rent increase, there should be consideration of further subsidizing the rental amount as a safety net. Head leasing should not be considered a replacement for actual public housing properties which are indefinitely designated for that purpose. We note that many tenants requiring supported accommodation may be highly vulnerable, in which case continuity is particularly important.

Create opportunities for NGO’s to develop new approaches to service delivery that improve the operation of the system; and intervene early to prevent homelessness

We support using existing expertise, experience and relationships held by community organizations. It would be great if capacity and resources were built to maximize the utility of this experience, especially to resource innovative ways of potentially preventing homelessness. Should additional responsibilities be assumed by NGO’s it is extremely important that adequate resourcing be provided so that these responsibilities can be met.

Build on and expand existing tenancy support programs already in place to more proactively identify and address client needs at all stages in the housing continuum

In our view there would be some benefit to a more coordinated service delivery approach, regarding different kinds of support that are offered to a tenant. A more integrated response would reduce confusion for tenants and better ensure that needs are met through agencies being appraised of work being undertaken as opposed to working in silos.

It would be very positive to encourage a more proactive identification of needs so that appropriate assistance can be arranged and things do not escalate to the point of disrupting the tenancy. We further note that tenancy support programs should be supportive, not punitive or undertaking surveillance approach. It is essential that the Department of Housing work closely with relevant NGO caseworkers who may be assisting tenants with matters such as domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse.

³ Review from the Central Land Council, by Hal Bisset

c) Social Housing

The Strategy outlines the following gaps:

- *Existing housing could be better aligned to current and future demands of those on the waitlist*
- *Redevelopment of social housing assets and sites to provide for new dwellings*
- *Housing policies do not encourage people to improve their housing circumstances and live more independently*
- *The community housing sector is small and developing*

The Strategy describes Social Housing as “a subsidised form of rental accommodation available to people who meet the criteria, which typically include having low or very low income.” Social Housing is a lot more than that; it is providing houses to those most in need.

There are several other gaps that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, there is simply not enough housing available. The wait times identified at p26 of the Strategy confirm that: “the average time current new applicants have been on the waiting list is 3.2 years... as at June 2015 there were 687 eligible applicants on the priority wait list. The average time applicants have been on the priority wait list is 2.3 years”. These figures demonstrate that the amount of housing available is simply inadequate.

We also note that many public housing premises are in poor condition and there are significant delays regarding repairs and maintenance. Many tenants have expressed frustration through their repairs and maintenance requests not being attended to efficiently, or at all. More local responses are needed to avoid bureaucratic delays. Many of these delays amount to breaches of the timelines set out in the *Residential Tenancies Act* for repairs and maintenance to be conducted.

Our feedback on possible responses identified in the Strategy:

Increase the flexibility and responsiveness of public housing quickly and cost effectively through models such as leasing existing housing on the private market (known as ‘head leasing’)

As mentioned above, ‘head leasing’ could be a useful way of supplementing social housing supply but may create insecurity for tenants if private rental demand increases. It is important that other options are available if the private rental is no longer available. Should rent increase, there should be consideration of further subsidizing the rental amount as a safety net. Head leasing should not be considered a replacement for actual public housing properties which are indefinitely designated for that purpose. We note that many tenants requiring supported accommodation may be highly vulnerable, in which case continuity is particularly important. Lack of continuity can be a source of significant stress and anxiety for tenants.

Invest in a stock renewal strategy to align stock to needs, supported by a clear asset management plan that identifies and sells low quality stock; upgrades existing stock in key locations; and builds new stock in targeted locations.

This possible response is linked to the need to align stock to needs. We query how 'key locations' for stock upgrades will be identified? Additionally, we have heard reports of numerous public housing properties being left vacant in Alice Springs. If this is due to houses being uninhabitable, would more prompt repairs and maintenance also assist in maximizing the houses available?

Work with the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment to look at innovative approaches to support Government and private developers to deliver diverse housing options across the system that support transitions from social housing

We agree that efforts to support people in moving out of social housing are positive; however it needs to be acknowledged that some tenants will always be dependent on the social housing system due to life circumstances.

Identify Department of Housing policies and procedures that could be improved to achieve better housing and non-housing outcomes for clients, potential clients and the community

In CAALAS' view much could be gained by reviewing Department of Housing policies and procedures with this lens. The quarterly Department of Housing and Legal Services meetings that CAALAS participates in are a constructive forum to discuss Department of Housing policies and provide input and feedback as they are being reviewed.

Some examples of key policies that we believe should be urgently reviewed include the Rental Rebate policy, the Transfers policy, Relinquishment, and the Debt Management Policy. In our view, there should also be an urgent review of the periodic tenancy approach that has been preferenced in the Department's new Tenancy Agreement. We have outlined our various concerns regarding this approach previously.

Create opportunities for NGO's to develop new approaches to service delivery that improve the operation of the system; and intervene early to prevent homelessness

As mentioned above, we support using existing expertise, experience and relationships held by community organizations. It would be great if capacity and resources were built to maximize the utility of this experience, especially to resource innovative ways of potentially preventing homelessness. Should additional responsibilities be assumed by NGO's it is extremely important that adequate resourcing be provided so that these responsibilities can be met.

Deliver housing services effectively and efficiently through identifying optimal roles and responsibilities for public, private and non-Government agencies across the system; assessing local community capacities and aspirations with regard to

housing; and identifying the terms under which any future transfer of responsibilities could occur.

The effectiveness and efficiency of housing services is compromised by the current approach which is confusing and fragmented. By sub-dividing housing services and delegating to numerous agencies, there is a lack of cohesion which we believe causes delays and confusion. There needs to be greater coordination between these different roles.

We agree that communities should be consulted and their housing aspirations and capacity assessed; however it is essential that any transfer of responsibilities is coupled with appropriate support during the transitional period and that all efforts are made to avoid the situation of communities inheriting a broken system.

d) Renting

The Strategy outlines the following gaps:

- *Supply of affordable rental housing, to add options between public and private rental, in a number of key locations in the territory*
- *There are not suitable planning provisions in some locations to allow smaller houses on smaller allotments to be built.*

An additional gap that must be acknowledged is the fraught nature of the Rental Rebate system. The Rental Rebate system applied by The Department of Housing does not work well for Aboriginal tenants for a range of reasons, including literacy and language barriers and high mobility. As mentioned earlier we understand that up to 80% of town camp households already have a debt to Housing which we believe in many cases to be connected with the introduction of the rebate system. This is not for want of paying rent; it is that rebates cannot be administered properly because paperwork is not supplied. This is usually because there is not an adequate postal system in town camps, or if received there is a lack of understanding what the rebate means.

Our feedback on possible responses identified in the Strategy:

Identify Department of Housing policies and procedures that could improve housing and non-housing outcomes for clients, potential clients, and the community

As mentioned above, we are concerned that current Housing policies do not alleviate homelessness. We have observed the Department to take a punitive approach to tenants, often seeking eviction and being disinclined to renew leases due to issues such as repairs and maintenance which can be traced to overcrowding and other social issues.

In our view, current Housing policies also fail to progress security of tenure or the inherent social issues affecting Aboriginal people. This includes but is not limited to the disciplinary Three Strikes Policy, the policy to have periodic other than fixed term tenancies, Transfer and Debt Management policies, often affecting the elderly and the most vulnerable.

Work with the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment to look at innovative approaches to support Government and private developers to deliver a diverse range of affordable housing options that support transitions from social housing

CAALAS suggests an overhaul of the Rental Rebate system in particularly of town camps and remote communities. This should be devised in consultation with aboriginal people living in these communities.

e) Home Ownership

The Strategy outlines the following gaps:

- *Planning provisions that support a range of housing choices for Territorians*
- *Lease arrangements in place in some communities can impact on private land and house ownership*

Our feedback on possible responses identified in the Strategy:

Work with the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment to look at innovative approaches to support Government and private developers to deliver diverse housing options across the system.

Continue to progress initiatives to widen opportunities for individual home ownership

Buying a home provides an asset that can provide security for the future. At the moment the NT Public Housing system does not provide a great deal of security for the tenant. Tenants are on periodic leases and are readily threatened with eviction or non renewal of leases if things go awry.

More energy and research needs to be put into looking at the possibilities for home ownership of aboriginal housing in remote communities, town camps and urban in consultation with those an aboriginal communities and long term social housing residents.

Many other jurisdictions such as Victoria,⁴ Queensland,⁵ and NSW have schemes to help people purchase their public housing home. As described in the NSW Sale of Homes Policy the scheme is “to help public housing tenant’s transition into home ownership”.⁶

Conclusion

Generally, CAALAS would suggest a clearly outlined section on Aboriginal housing that takes into account cultural differences, the severe overcrowding and the social issues affecting Aboriginal people. Whilst it is positive to consider new approaches to tenant support, it is essential that more accommodation is built to address the unacceptable and chronic rates of homeless being experienced within the Aboriginal community. We note that

⁴ <http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/buy-your-public-housing-property>

⁵ <https://www.qld.gov.au/housing/public-community-housing/buying-your-rental-home/>

⁶ <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/forms,-policies-and-fact-sheets/policies/sale-of-homes-policy>

the newly established body Aboriginal Housing NT would be an excellent point for consultation on these matters.

If these underlying issues are not acknowledged, including approaches for addressing these issues, then the Strategy is ignoring the majority of its client base. The NT Government and the Department of Housing need to take the social issues seriously and liaise with community sectors that deal with the issues, such as disability advocates, mental health organisations, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres and legal advocates to ensure the full picture is being taken into account. Policies must be adapted accordingly to encourage safer community living for these community members.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Strategy, and are available for further discussion on any of the points raised. We look forward to hearing the outcome of this consultation.



HOPPY'S CAMP
HOUSE [REDACTED]
ULPAYA ROAD

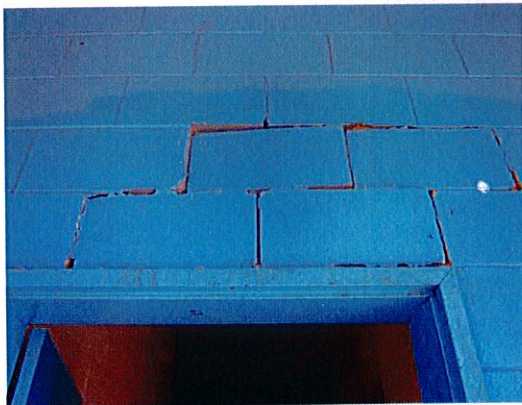
CONDITION REPORT
15 MAY 2015

BACKGROUND

Tangentyere Council requested Tangentyere Design to attend Hoppy's Camp, House [REDACTED] to inspect the house and prepare a brief condition report. Our inspection was limited to select areas identified by the tenant as items that had been previously reported to NT Housing.

SITE PHOTOS

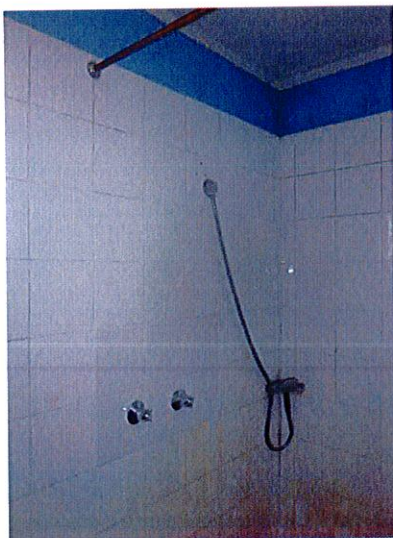
Refer to attached plan showing location of photos.



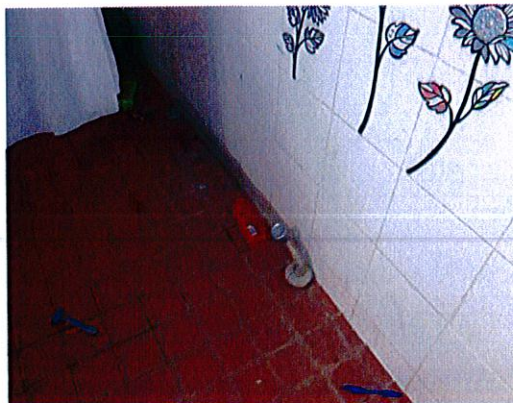
Item 1: Cracks in blockwork above entry door.



Item 2: Sagging ceiling lining in living room may indicate roof damage.



Item 3: Missing shower hose rail following plumbing repair.



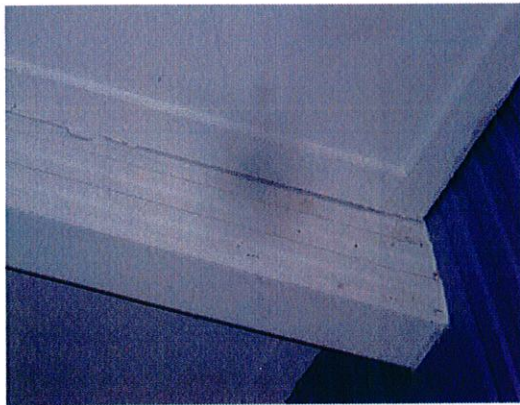
Item 4: Shower hose rail located on floor of shower.



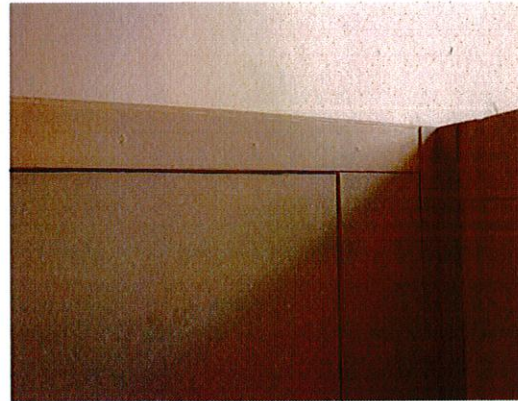
Item 5: Crack in wall adjacent to WC door.



Item 6: Broken screen door handle makes safe entry an egress difficult.



Item 7: Gaps between ceiling and beam.



Item 8: Gaps around ceiling panel in WC corridor.



Item 9: Gaps between ceiling and beam.



RECOMMENDATIONS

All items require rectification. Those items that would be considered priorities for reasons of safety and environmental health include:

- Item 1 – structural safety
- Item 2 – structural safety
- Item 3 & 4 – environmental health
- Item 6 – safe egress

Please do not hesitate to contact Tangentyere Design if you have any questions.

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"Attachment C"

