



**Aboriginal
Housing
Office**

AHO Strategy 2028-38

Discussion paper

Acknowledgement of Country

The Aboriginal Housing Office proudly acknowledges the collective Aboriginal people and lands within the boundaries of modern-day New South Wales, the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. Our Elders' strength, resilience and guidance was and is paramount to ensuring Aboriginal people continue to thrive as the world's oldest living culture.

Since the Dreaming, Aboriginal people have practised their lore, languages, and nurtured Country by drawing upon cultural knowledge, and they continue to do so to this day.

Through the strength, resilience, and pride of Aboriginal Peoples; their cultures, communities, and economies, continue to grow and thrive.



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About this strategy

The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) is developing its next 10-year strategy with the support of Nama Jalu Consulting. Their goal is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to affordable, quality housing.

To be a success, the AHO 2028-2038 strategy must share a clear vision for the future. It will collaboratively design solutions for the future by:

- centring the voices and hopes of Aboriginal people and communities across New South Wales.
- consulting with anyone with experience of Aboriginal housing in NSW, including people who:
 - are Aboriginal tenants, community members, Elders or young people
 - live in Aboriginal, public, community or affordable housing
 - are waiting for housing
 - have used homelessness, temporary, or crisis accommodation
 - receive rental support or help to stay housed
 - work in housing organisations, service providers, or peak bodies
 - are part of Local Aboriginal Land Councils or community groups.

Why now

Housing needs are changing and growing. Since 2018 we've seen new Closing the Gap commitments, sector growth, the creation of Homes NSW and stronger expectations for culturally led design and local decision-making—alongside persistent supply, maintenance and affordability pressures. Now is the time to set clear, long-term directions with community at the centre.

Context

When considering the AHO's 2028-38 strategy, a few contextual factors should be considered.

1. The AHO is a statutory body created under the Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 (NSW). It continues to have obligations to fulfil under this legislation (see Appendix 1).
2. The AHO is an Aboriginal-led body working within a broader government context. Consideration must be given to the rights of tenants and of the AHO to enact self-determination (see Appendix 2).
3. Most Aboriginal social housing in NSW is owned or managed by Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs). The success of housing outcomes—safe homes, timely repairs, culturally grounded tenancy support—relies heavily on the capability and sustainability of these providers. To deliver better outcomes for tenants, the AHO must continue to invest in the strength, skills and long-term- viability of the ACHP sector.
4. The last AHO strategy (Strong Family, Strong Communities (SFSC) delivered strong results for tenants, communities and the sector. There is a desire to continue to build on those foundations (see Appendix 3 for SFSC results to date).



Proposed priorities for 2028-38

Based on results and feedback from the previous strategy, plus consultation that has been completed in 2025-26, we believe that there are four key priorities to focus on for our next 10-year strategy:

1. Aboriginal people thriving
2. More and improved housing
3. Strengthening the ACHP sector
4. Improved ways of working

The four proposed priorities are indicative and will continue to evolve as we hear from stakeholders. These priorities will form the framework for the strategy and underpin the themes and accompanying measures.

We want to hear your thoughts on the priorities and possible actions that the AHO has drafted.

Your feedback matters

We welcome feedback on the full range of issues affecting Aboriginal housing. While some matters may sit outside the AHO's direct remit, this input remains valuable.

Where appropriate, we will share relevant insights with other government agencies to support a coordinated response. We will also report back to stakeholders on what we heard and how the final AHO Strategy reflects your contributions.

Thank you for your participation and partnership in shaping this work.



Priority 1: Aboriginal people thriving

To improve community and individual housing outcomes, the AHO will focus on improving tenancy management, supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies and focusing on preventing homelessness.

Overview

The AHO wants to create a future where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have safe, affordable and quality housing. To understand our progress toward this goal, we must regularly measure, reflect and report on progress.

However, information is collected differently across the sector to guide work and inform actions, making it hard to see the full picture. The AHO remains committed to partnering with the sector to help to better collect, share and use information to drive better client and community outcomes.

The AHO will work with local Aboriginal communities to understand and measure what matters to them. Communities will develop their own outcomes that will be used across the sector, in a way that promotes self-determination.

The AHO will focus on specific areas to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal people. These areas include improving tenancy management to support tenants in sustaining their tenancies and preventing homelessness.

Future actions we are considering

To improve client and community outcomes, the AHO could:

a. Provide sector leadership

- Bring Aboriginal organisations together, build trust and lead action to help the sector work better.
- Work with Aboriginal-led organisations, peak bodies and people with lived experience to improve tenancy management, policies and define shared outcomes.

b. Respond to the varied needs of community

- Support people with greater challenges and higher needs in the housing system, including younger people, Elders, people with disability, those in overcrowded houses or discrete and remote communities and those affected by domestic and family violence or leaving prison.

c. Continue to deliver local culturally safe supports

- Work with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to better support Aboriginal tenants.
- Continue programs, like Services Our Way (SOW) and the Tenancy Support and Engagement Program (TSEP), that support holistic approaches to sustaining tenancies.
- Continue Aboriginal led co-design programs to address community and individual housing outcomes.

d. Continue investing in early support to stop housing problems

- Expand successful programs, including but not limited to, the Strengthening Aboriginal Tenancies Program (SATP) and the Finding Your Way (FYW) program.
- Prioritise supporting groups at higher risk of housing pressures or homelessness.
- Work with ACHPs to deliver culturally safe homelessness support services.



Data snapshot

- 80% of Aboriginal tenants said they need support services but only 22% are referred to services, meaning access to support is still a challenge.
- Aboriginal homelessness has increased by 14% since 2011, showing the growing need for homelessness services.

Priority 2: More and improved housing

To deliver more and improved housing, the AHO will focus on maintaining quality homes, designing culturally appropriate homes, planning housing adequate for the challenges of climate change and supporting pathways to home ownership.

Overview

Across Australia, the housing crisis is getting worse and Aboriginal people are more affected than non-Aboriginal people. In NSW, the demand for Aboriginal social housing is expected to go up, especially in regional and remote communities. Current actions are not enough to meet the number of new housing options needed in the future.

These problems got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, when overcrowded housing increased health risks and limits on travel and available supports meant important property repairs and maintenance were delayed.

Across NSW and nationally, Aboriginal housing providers are managing ageing housing stock that is old and in need of repair or replacement. Fewer Aboriginal families are now living in homes that meet national standards. Responsibility for repairs and maintenance is split across agencies, making it difficult to maintain safe homes. The two main agencies responsible for repairs and maintenance are Homes NSW and the AHO.

New construction methods and programs to build Aboriginal homes are showing good results. But the AHO still faces obstacles in building new homes, including needing more tradespeople in regional and remote areas and better access to land. Climate change is another challenge, especially in regional and remote areas. Rising temperatures and more extreme weather make homes less safe and comfortable, increasing health risks and may push families to move to regional towns and cities.

Future actions we are considering

To build more and improved housing, the AHO could:

a. Work with communities from the start

- Work with communities to guide and make decisions about housing from the start including shaping programs, services, repairs and maintenance and local jobs and training opportunities.
- Listen and learn from communities about the places they live and what they need, to guide action.

b. Strengthen repairs and maintenance supports

- Work closely with housing providers and Homes NSW to make sure repairs and maintenance are done quickly and to a high standard.
- Provide more support, training and skills development activities to housing providers.
- Explore if and where the AHO could manage repairs and maintenance directly.



c. **Continue making housing design more culturally responsive**

- Use the AHO's culturally responsive design principles in all new housing projects.
- Make sure that new homes reflect local culture and community needs.

d. **Address barriers and find new ways to build homes**

- Advocate to state and federal governments for more and lasting funding and look for new ways to fund Aboriginal housing.
- Unlock Aboriginal land for housing by working with NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC), Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), local councils, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), and Aboriginal Affairs NSW (AANSW).
- Support Aboriginal housing organisations to adopt new building methods that are faster and keep costs down.

Data snapshot

- More than 236 new homes were built by the AHO between 2018 and 2023, highlighting our commitment to building new homes.
- 1 in 5 Aboriginal households live in unsafe housing, these homes are below national health standards, showing the need for safe, healthy homes.
- 1 in 3 Aboriginal households report major structural problems with their property, highlighting the need for action to improve housing conditions.

Priority 3: Strengthening the ACHP Sector

To continue strengthening the ACHP sector, the AHO will focus on supporting the sector towards sustainability, including assisting with regulatory complexity and building capability.

Overview

ACHPs play a central role in providing Aboriginal people and communities with safe and culturally appropriate housing. The ACHP sector in NSW is varied and providers differ in size, experience, housing outcomes and their access to resources.

Recently, more AHO properties have been transferred to ACHPs and outcomes for many tenants are improving as a result, showing the strengths of ACHPs in delivering good property and tenancy management. Alongside these achievements, the AHO must work with the sector to ensure providers can remain financially stable in the long term.

Many providers, including larger organisations, face difficulties securing funding from sources outside of the AHO. ACHPs also report workforce challenges, including recruiting and keeping staff long-term. For some ACHPs, the transfer of properties from the AHO added pressure, as they state they had limited support and resources to take on more responsibilities. In multiple cases, ACHPs took on more practical and financial responsibilities including rates, insurance, large repairs and maintenance costs.

ACHPs also report across many systems. They must meet national requirements and report to the AHO and, in some cases, to NSWALC. Some ACHPs have said meeting these requirements creates stress, takes a lot of time, and may not be appropriate for small providers.



Importantly, there are many examples of ACHPs working effectively to achieve strong outcomes, especially where housing is delivered as part of a combined model that includes cultural, health and community supports. These models show the strength of Aboriginal-led housing, especially when ACHPs have the right resources and support.

Future actions we are considering

To continue strengthening the ACHP sector, the AHO could:

a. Continue using place-based approaches with ACHPs

- Work with communities and providers on funding and ways of working that meet local needs.
- Explore local contracting to support providers with strong connections that make business sustainable.
- Continue making ACHPs contracts easier to understand and manage, with clear expectations and open communication.

b. Improve supports to grow ACHPs

- Support ACHPs to find new ways to partner with businesses and funders to create new funding opportunities.
- Continue to support and develop programs that build the skills and capabilities of ACHPs. Including delivery through organisations like the Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA) NSW.
- Review and improve how properties are transferred to ACHPs, including how the AHO can provide more direct help to ACHPs during this time.
- Increased management transfers of public housing stock to well performing ACHPs.

c. Improve ACHP reporting requirements and process

- Work with ACHPs to find better ways to measure and report their work and use this data to make decisions across the sector.
- Simplify and combine reporting requirements for ACHPs across the sector.
- Review national requirements to make sure they work for ACHPs of different needs and sizes.

d. Support the success of ACHPs

- Develop programs and actions to increase Aboriginal staff in the sector and retain them.
- Provide more regular training to ACHPs based on the support ACHPs ask for.
- Build clear career pathways to grow and retain a stable local workforce.
- Support TAFE and university students by offering local job opportunities with ACHPs and other housing organisations, to help build the next generation of Aboriginal housing workers.

Data snapshot

- More than 1,476 homes have been transferred to ACHPs between 2018-2023, the target is 1,500 homes, supporting Aboriginal-led housing ownership and management.
- 57% of ACHPs are happy with the support the AHO provides them, up from 30% in 2017, showing our improvement in supporting ACHPs.

Priority 4: Improved ways of working

To improve ways of working, the AHO must centre culture, advocate for the sector, collaborate and commit further to co-design and place-based approaches.



Overview

Culture must be at the heart of the AHO's work. We will work with Aboriginal people and communities to better understand how you want us to place 'culture at the centre' of our work. The cultural and community priorities in NSW are incredibly rich.

The Closing the Gap (CTG) policy emphasises working in real partnership with Aboriginal people, supporting the right to decide for themselves about their own lives and strengthening Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Our next strategy will focus on improving how Aboriginal organisations can have more influence in decision-making.

The NSW Aboriginal housing system is made up of many organisations who are connected. This includes the AHO, ACHPs, ACCOs, LALCs, Homes NSW, mainstream community housing providers and peak bodies. While having different organisations is a strength, it can also create a system that is divided and complicated. We will work to improve coordination, give clearer direction, reduce duplication and support agencies and sectors to work together.

Gaps in data about housing outcomes across the sector make it hard to understand needs, impact and plan. Many Aboriginal tenants live in housing owned or managed outside the AHO's direct influence, making it harder to understand their experiences of services and outcomes.

Pressures such as rising living costs, infrastructure costs and constraints and climate-related risks also affect the system. Addressing these challenges will require stronger collaboration with planning, infrastructure and service agencies.

Future actions we are considering

To improve our ways of working, the AHO could:

a. Make sure culture is at the heart of Aboriginal housing

- Build respectful, culturally strong relationships across the Aboriginal housing sector.
- Work with Aboriginal people and communities at every stage across the housing sector.
- Strengthen the AHO workplace culture to make sure culture is at the heart of everything it does.

b. Take on a bigger role guiding, supporting and advocating

- Clearly communicate the AHO's role in guiding and supporting the sector.
- Better explain the roles of organisations across the sector and how they work together.
- Lead collaboration across the sector to reduce competition, support the sector to speak with one voice and solve problems together.
- Continue to advocate to all levels of government for Aboriginal housing needs for today and into the future.

c. Build stronger relationships across the sector

- Improve collaboration across partners to improve ways of working and create change.
- Explore ways to better fund relationship and community-building activities that acknowledge the expertise and time of community.
- Improve communication across the sector, including with communities, tenants and Aboriginal housing organisations to build trust and respect.



Data snapshot

- Around 60% of properties are managed by Homes NSW and around 30% are managed by ACHPs, showing that the Aboriginal housing sector has many parts.



Appendices

Appendix 1: The Aboriginal Housing Act

The AHO was started under the Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 (NSW). The Act guides the AHO in creating and delivering an Aboriginal housing system that gives choice to clients, tenants and community, is focused on meeting their needs and has culture at the centre. The objects of the act are:

- a. to ensure that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have access to affordable and quality housing,
- b. to ensure that such housing is appropriate having regard to the social and cultural requirements, living patterns and preferences of the Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders to whom the housing is to be provided,
- c. to enhance the role of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in determining, developing and delivering policies and programs relating to Aboriginal housing,
- d. to ensure that priority is given, in providing housing assistance for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, to those individuals who are most in need,
 - o to ensure that the available supply of housing under this Act is shared equitably among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders who are most in need,
- e. to increase the range of housing choices for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to reflect the diversity of individual and community needs,
- f. to ensure that registered Aboriginal housing organisations are accountable, effective and skilled in the delivery of Aboriginal housing programs and services,
- g. to ensure that the Aboriginal Housing Office's housing programs and services are administered efficiently and in co-ordination with other programs and services that are provided to assist Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders,
- h. to encourage the sustainable employment of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the delivery of Aboriginal housing assistance.

The Act guides the AHO in creating and delivering an Aboriginal housing system that gives choice to clients, tenants and community, is focused on meeting their needs and has culture at the centre.



Appendix 2: Human Rights Commission on self-determination

“Self-determination is an ongoing process of ensuring that peoples are able to make decisions about matters that affect their lives. Essential to the exercise of self-determination is choice, participation and control.

Self-determination is an ongoing process of ensuring that peoples are able to make decisions about matters that affect their lives. Essential to the exercise of self-determination is choice, participation and control.

It is the right of peoples to freely determine their political status and economic, social and cultural development. The outcomes of self-determining processes must correspond to the free and voluntary choice of the people concerned.

The right to self-determination is enshrined in international law under Article 1 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) as well as the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#).^[i]

While many traditional human rights are concerned with individual members of a society, self-determination is a collective right exercised by peoples.^[ii]

Articles 3 and 4 of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) confirms that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination under international law.

This means Australia is obliged to ensure that Indigenous peoples have a say about their social, political, cultural and economic needs. It requires official recognition of Indigenous nations' and peoples' representatives and institutions.”



Appendix 3: AHO's Strong Family, Strong Communities Strategy results 2018-2028

The AHO's Strong Family, Strong Communities (SFSC) strategy has guided our work since 2018. Work has been delivered underpinned by four interconnected pillars – Housing Solutions, Client Outcomes, Growing the Sector and Data and Evidence. These are the key achievements to date for each of those pillars. With more than two years to go with SFSC, achievements will continue to build. Phase 1 (to June 2022) saw the implementation of new initiatives and piloting of others. Phase 2 (July 2022 to June 2026) builds on the lessons learned through phase 1, with successful initiatives scaled up or streamlined into new programs. The final phase of SFSC will see a continuation of these initiatives to drive strong Aboriginal housing outcomes.

Housing Solutions

Under this pillar, the AHO has:

- Supported 495 families to buy a home with grants.
- Delivered 505 new homes:
 - 109 of these were ACHP homes funded by the Aboriginal Community Housing Investment Fund, Social Housing Accelerator Fund and Flood Recovery.
 - 396 of these were AHO homes.
- Upgraded 7,183 homes:
 - 1,824 of these were ACHP homes through ACHIF, Murdi Paaki Housing Program and Social Housing Energy Prioritisation Initiative (SHEPI).
 - 5,359 of these were AHO homes (3,825 were energy upgrades, 1,534 significant property upgrades).
 - This included repairs in 10 Roads to Home discreet Aboriginal communities and in Local Aboriginal Lands Council owned homes, improving repairs and maintenance in regional and remote communities.
- Transferred the titles of 3,357 properties from the Land and Housing Corporation to the AHO, which provides more dedicated Aboriginal housing for Aboriginal people in NSW.
- Completed Asset Portfolio Reviews to inform future plans for delivering new Aboriginal social housing.

These achievements built on foundations established in the first phase (July 2018 - June 2022):

- 280 Social and Affordable Homes delivered, exceeding the target of 120
- 2,279 homes were refurbished, exceeding the target of 1,500
- \$50M in grants awarded through the Housing Innovation Fund
- Solar installed in 5,257 homes and air-conditioning in 2,158 homes.

Client Outcomes

Under this pillar, the AHO has supported:

- Nine Client Experience Initiatives co-designed to each improve a housing and social need in their community.
- More than 46 people with transitional housing in 20 Finding Your Way properties. Some properties cater to women and children escaping violence, with others supporting homeless men and women and people exiting custody.



- Two Leading Community Demonstration Sites, including the establishment of the [Gunida Gunyah Aboriginal Corporation Hub](#) which offers extensive housing and homelessness support to the New England region.
- More families each year since the start of SFSC through Services Our Way, which connects people to services and provides supports to address homelessness or with retaining tenancies. Financial year 2024-25 saw 849 Aboriginal families supported.
- 406 Aboriginal students with accommodation grants to address rental stress so they can complete tertiary studies.
- 209 families to sustain their tenancies through the Strengthening Aboriginal Tenancies program.

These achievements built on foundations established in the first phase (July 2018 - June 2022):

- Successfully completed Strengthening Aboriginal Tenancies Program pilot.
- 26% Aboriginal employment participation in construction achieved, exceeding 20% target.
- 24 construction apprenticeships funded exceeding targets.
- 53% of Tenant Support and Education Program (TSEP) clients supported across the Murdi Paaki region to reduce rental arrears.

Growing the sector

Under this pillar, the AHO has:

- Established and funded ACHIA NSW, the peak body for ACHPs.
- Run annual Sector Visioning Workshops (co-hosted by AHO, NSWALC and ACHIA NSW).
- Supported the registration of 55 ACHPs under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) which improves service delivery standards for tenants and aligns ACHP regulations standards to the mainstream housing sector.
- Supported 1,530 dwellings this financial year through the High-Cost Community Support (subsidy) Program.
- Provided 51 Sector Capability Grants for ACHPs to support ACHP sector development.
- Transferred the management of over 1,500 properties to ACHPs. At least one third of AHO properties are now managed by ACHPs and AHO new builds continue to be transferred to management by the ACHP sector.
- Developed the Common Terms and Conditions management agreement with the ACHP sector, giving longer term management leases and more certainty to ACHPs to support their growth.
- Implemented the ACHP Rent Policy and Calculator to streamline the rent setting process and improve and standardise rent collection.
- Developed and continually improved the Ngamuru provider portal to make reporting easier for Aboriginal housing providers and help them stay compliant.

These achievements built on foundations established in the first phase (July 2018 - June 2022):

- Completed High-Cost Community Support Program subsidy pilot.
- 11 ACHPs supported with IT grants.

Data and Evidence

Under this pillar, the AHO has:



- Conducted biannual tenant and provider surveys to continually improve service delivery and ensure we're listening to tenants, community and the sector.
- Completed a Housing Demand Model and AHO Portfolio Review to inform future social housing delivery.
- Established an Aboriginal Knowledge and Research Advisory Group (AKRAG), providing Aboriginal cultural expertise to inform AHO research and evaluation practice.
- Started SFSC Phase 2 Evaluation.

These achievements built on foundations established in the first phase (July 2018 - June 2022):

- SFSC Evaluation Framework and targeted program evaluations completed.
- Mid-Term Review of SFSC to inform and improve AHO programs completed.
- Aboriginal housing management tools and resources developed.



More information

To find out more about this work:

- Read the latest news on the AHO website: <https://aho.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news.html>
- Contact the AHO Strategy Team at AHO-SIRP@aho.nsw.gov.au.