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VALS' submission to Federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, in response to 'Living in the Sunburnt Country: Indigenous Housing – Findings of the Review of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme Final Report (February 2007) – sent 27 April 2007

The Indigenous communities in both urban and rural areas in all States visited are facing a severe housing crisis. This is occurring with respect to the unaffordability, the lack of appropriate support services, the significant levels of poverty and the underlying discrimination There is an urgent need to establish decision-making processes and institutions that are representative of all communities, and allow for proper self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. Miloon Kothari (United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Mission to Australia, August 2006)

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the “Living in the Sunburnt Country”: Indigenous Housing – Findings of the Review of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme Final Report, February 2007.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS) welcomes the Commonwealth Government's commitment to increase housing provision to Indigenous Australians in remote areas.

Unfortunately, this commitment is accompanied by a proposal to radically shrink the Commonwealth's responsibility to fund Indigenous Australian housing programs. This is done via geographic exclusions and an ill defined service sustainability test. The geographic exclusion means redefining the Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme (CHIP) as only applying to people who live in areas classified as remote. This means that only about 10% of Indigenous Australian people will live in the potentially eligible areas. For example, urban, regional (inner and outer) and very remote will all be excluded from receiving specific Indigenous Australian housing programs. The second exclusionary criteria is an open ended 'adequacy of other services in the area' test.

Secure, affordable and appropriate housing is a critical factor in building stronger communities and stronger families. It contributes to individual confidence and resilience, reduces the likelihood of disease and illness, reduces the likelihood of sexual assault, family violence and community violence. It contributes to reduced crime and reduced incarceration.

Today Australia is facing major challenges in ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate housing that low income people can afford. According to most indicators of housing need Indigenous Australian people have higher levels of need across the board. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Mission to Australia, said, “The Indigenous communities in both urban and rural areas in all States visited are facing a severe housing crisis. This is occurring with respect to the unaffordability, the lack of appropriate support services, the significant levels of poverty and the underlying discrimination.”

This appalling state of affairs in relation to housing Indigenous Australians occurs against a backdrop of significant mainstream housing stress. This includes upward spiralling house prices, a chronic rental housing shortage and the Commonwealth Government reducing its commitment to public housing. When speaking more generally about the state of housing in Australia, the UN Special-Rapporteur described the situation as a ‘hidden national housing crisis’. In this context, VALS believes that Commonwealth Government’s actions in addressing housing issues are urgent and should be based on solid evidence.

Departmental staff have been circling the country consulting about the Report. However, public statements by the Minister strongly suggest that he has already accepted the Report which contains a number of problematic conclusions and methodology which appears to ignore good practice in terms of assessing housing need and evaluation standards recommended by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

There are six issues of concern that we wish to raise.

- The need to consider Indigenous Australian housing need in a multi-dimensional context.
- The increases in remote area funding are to be funded via cuts to all other areas.
- The impacts of removing these funds from other areas has received cursory attention.
- Given the scale of housing need how productive will this reshuffling of funds be?
- The strengths of Indigenous Australian Housing organizations and Indigenous Australian people in addressing housing issues appear to have been over looked.
- The lack of explanation for departing from previous Government housing policy.

Indigenous Australian Housing Need

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in their examination of a multi-dimensional housing need model recommended utilising a range of indicators to assess need. These included homelessness, affordability, overcrowding, appropriateness, dwelling conditions and connection to essential services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005). They quote other similar models such as Neutze, Sanders & Jones (2000) who used three dimensions of housing need (homelessness, overcrowding and affordability). Census data that indicates that Indigenous Australian people change address much more frequently than the average Australian also provides an indication of higher levels of housing stress.

The Report mentions homelessness in a cursory way before relying almost completely on overcrowding as the central measure of housing need. The Report also rules out housing provision to people who live in 'non sustainable' areas. How this will be determined is unclear.

The Report takes a simplistic approach to assessing housing need. Had the report examined 'housing affordability', and other indicators, a richer picture would have emerged.

Housing Affordability

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) have published a report which highlights the use of a multi-dimensional needs model. The issue of housing affordability is one significant indicator of housing need. The Report portrays increased numbers of Indigenous Australians in Public Housing as a significant achievement and a license to close down Indigenous Australian Housing services for 90% of the Indigenous Australian population. The Report fails to make a link between galloping housing affordability problems and increased use of Public Housing, albeit it often for a relatively short time. In other words, the small increase in utilisation of mainstream public housing is used as some sort of sea change in mainstream housing accessibility rather than the equally valid, and more likely, interpretation that it highlights a dearth of funding for Indigenous Australian Housing and support services and a crisis of housing affordability.

The number of Indigenous households in affordability need was highest in major cities (5,822), inner regional (4,261) and outer regional areas (2,849). These figures are for households so the number of people affected would be considerably greater. Many of these households would also have overcrowding problems as well. Together these areas contained 97% of the Indigenous Australian households in affordability need within Australia. According to the Report all these people should be denied access to Indigenous Australian housing programs.

The proportion of affordability need households was highest in Victoria (41%), followed by New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory combined (40%) and Queensland (39%).¹

Taking Commonwealth rent assistance into account in the States and Territories, the highest proportion of income units in affordability need was in the Australian Capital Territory (48%), followed by Victoria (35%).²

Homelessness

Rather than focus on the slightly higher percentage of Indigenous Australian homeless people in Northern territory the Report could have reported on the total numbers of people who were homeless. Alternatively, it might have considered the AIHW observation:

In all jurisdictions, the rate of homelessness was significantly higher in the Indigenous population than in the non-Indigenous population. The disparity was highest in Victoria, where the rate of Indigenous homelessness was 5.1 times that of non-Indigenous homelessness, and in South Australia, where the rate of Indigenous homelessness was 4.7 times as high. The differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homelessness rates were lowest in the Northern Territory, where the rate ratio was 1.3.

These sorts of statistics suggest that there may be a shortage of accessible housing services for Indigenous Australians in states that the Report wants to exclude from Indigenous Australian housing programs.

Evaluation Framework

The Report makes no reference to a Framework for Evaluating *Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010* (AHURI, 2005) or to developing paradigms and discourses to establish more appropriate evaluation frameworks and indicators for housing programs (AHURI Final Report No. 29, 2003). Both these documents recommend an approach to evaluation which recognizes different stakeholder viewpoints and accountabilities and contributes to theory building, knowledge base and self-determination and capacity building. The evaluation in the Report gives us a predominantly a narrow economic analysis. Occasionally it acknowledges that some of the sustainability problems are connected to the small scale of some housing organisations, not the lack of skill of the people managing. Rental collection rates are always described as ‘too low’, there is never a problem of poverty.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ‘Indigenous Housing Needs: A Multi Dimensional Needs Model’, 2005, p46

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005) above n1, p49

The Report contains no acknowledgement that at least to some extent the overcrowding, and lack of maintenance of houses, was a logical outcome of under funding of organisations which are trying to prevent people being homeless. The Report tells us that we have learned nothing about good practice, innovation, capacity building, organizational planning and policy. There is no learning to build on; simply economies of scale, mainstreaming and the Commonwealth setting up some new goal posts. The whole of CHIP is slated.

The Report is honest enough to record that many people consulted felt that Governments needed to lift their game. Unfortunately, the Report does little in this respect and instead suggests the Commonwealth Government retreat from most of the playing field.

A more sophisticated evaluation model would have highlighted a wider distribution of housing need, at least considered improved collaboration with the States, and considered building on the considerable social capital that Indigenous Housing providers have developed.

Remote housing increases at the cost of all other areas losing funding

VALS supports increased funds going to improve housing in remote areas. However, it beggars belief that it is proposed that these funds are to be taken from metropolitan and regional allocations of funds. The UN Special-Rapporteur's Preliminary Report in 2006 stated that there is a housing crisis for Indigenous Australians in urban and rural areas. There are a range of reports which highlight housing needs of Indigenous Australian people in all areas (AIHW, 2005).

There appear to be at least four lines of conjecture that the Report to reach this bizarre recommendation. One is to focus solely on overcrowding as an indicator of need. Two is to conclude that only the highest level of overcrowding should be addressed. Three is to only address the highest examples of overcrowding if they occur in an otherwise well serviced area. Four is to make an unsubstantiated claim which is almost immediately contradicted in the Report that Indigenous Australian people in inner and outer regional and metropolitan areas can access mainstream housing services.

The Report proposes a spectacular Commonwealth Government retreat from Indigenous Housing provision. The Report is a recommendation to 'cut and run'. The Report tries to pretend that approximately 75% of Indigenous Australians should be taken off the Commonwealth Government Indigenous Australian housing agenda. Also, money that would have improved housing accessibility in regional and metropolitan areas will be redirected to remote areas. This does not amount to a huge amount of money, but given the scale of the housing stress being experienced it seems foolish and counter-productive to simply pull funds out of areas that are struggling because someone elsewhere is struggling.

However, the extent of the retreat goes well beyond this. The table below outlines the ABS estimates of where Indigenous people live. Those living in major cities and inner and outer regional areas are ruled out of receiving Indigenous Australians specific housing assistance because they are too proximate to mainstream services. This leaves the remote and very remote people. The Report says funds should go to remote areas, this excludes the very remote areas. This will exclude another 15% of the population. In case the Commonwealth should need more flexibility there is a further basis to exclude people from housing services, that is the recommendation to not provide new housing unless a range of services such as education, health, law and order etc are available. There is no estimate of exactly how many communities the Report will rule out and a Government could give itself a very wide discretion to decide this. The Report suggests that there will be a lot of people in remote areas who will not qualify for housing assistance because they don't have enough other services.

Estimated resident Indigenous population distributed by remoteness (ARIA) category, 2001 (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003a)

- Major city 138,494
- Inner regional 92,988
- Outer regional 105,875
- Remote 40,161
- Very remote 81,002
- Total: 458,520

The Report proposes an approach which would reduce Commonwealth Indigenous Australian Housing Program responsibility to less than 10% of the Indigenous Australian population (ie: those who live in what the Commonwealth Government will define as 'the right area').

Access to Mainstream Services

In an epic piece of overstatement the Report says, "In looking to increase Indigenous peoples' utilization of mainstream public housing in urban centres and increase the opportunity to fund housing in remote communities, the following research from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2005) is encouraging." (pg 32)

The only 'encouraging' finding is that there have been small increases in the percentage of 'newly assisted' Indigenous Australian tenants.

The Report then manages to also include under the heading of 'encouraging' a detailed list of problems which contradict the claim that services are accessible to Indigenous Australians.

List of 'encouraging' facts:

- a need to further boost the stock of larger dwellings to reduce overcrowding for Indigenous households in mainstream public housing,
- to continue to improve the sustainability of tenancies.
(The AHURI Report highlights that tenancies for Indigenous Australian people are on average shorter and that there are higher levels of eviction).
- there is an urgent need to arrest recent declines in the overall supply of mainstream public housing dwellings if levels of housing need among Indigenous Australian people are to be further reduced.
- There is a need for Supported tenancy programs to improve the sustainability of tenancies
- Indigenous Australian households are more likely to enter mainstream public housing as ‘greatest need’ tenant households than non-Indigenous Australian households and experience lower income levels while in public housing. This outcome is probably a reflection of the higher levels of severe housing need among Indigenous Australian applicants compared with non-Indigenous Australian applicants.
- The case studies reveal histories of discrimination in housing experienced by Indigenous Australian people in need. Discrimination experienced by Indigenous Australian people in housing leads to its own negative outcomes including a lack of dignity, self-worth and feelings of shame.
- The case studies provide evidence that a lack of permanent long-term housing and the high use of emergency accommodation helps to perpetuate the social circumstances which conspire against good housing outcomes for Indigenous Australian people in housing need. The high levels of use of emergency accommodation illustrate the ‘stop gap’ housing history of unstable accommodation and homelessness.
- The case studies also point to concerns regarding the quality of public housing available to tenants and to its suitability for Indigenous Australian households.
- Once in public housing Indigenous Australian households face particular problems. The rate of moderate overcrowding is twice that for non-Indigenous Australian households and remains of critical policy concern.
- The ‘moderate overcrowding’ rate (where one additional bedroom is required to satisfy the proxy occupancy standard used by the AIHW) is also twice that for non Indigenous Australian households. (Pg 59)

This extensive list of ‘encouraging’ things is capped with a bizarre conclusion that ‘Given the increasing move into mainstream public housing by Indigenous tenants in urban areas, and the support that is now available, the opportunity exists to better direct CHIP funding to remote and regional areas. This is an unconvincing argument. This is a recipe for a Government to avoid taking responsibility for a problem.

The Report quotes the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) submission which noted that:

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A significant proportion of the Commonwealth's \$310 million Indigenous housing and infrastructure budget is spent in cities and towns where the residents already have access to mainstream public rental housing (and to Commonwealth Rental Assistance for private rental). For example: NSW and Victoria, which have few remote communities, account for 23.5% of ARHP funds and for 21.1% of CHIP housing funds (Source: CGC p. 154).

The fact that OIPC claim that mainstream service are accessible to Indigenous Australians suggests a significant lack of understanding of the reality on the ground for people and suggest they have not seen the figures on homelessness, over-crowding and affordability which give the lie to this claim.

The Impacts of Removing These Funds from Other Areas Has Received cursory Attention

VALS has called for the impact of removing housing funds from metro and regional areas to be assessed. VALS is also concerned at the impact of the decision to withdraw funds for housing in most very remote areas.

A further concern is how this retreat from Indigenous Australian housing by the Commonwealth will affect policy and resource allocation by States.

Given the scale of housing need how productive will this reshuffling of funds be?

The Australians for Affordable Housing group state that there is a shortage of 30,000 rental properties for low income people.

The UN Special Rapporteur has noted in his 2006 Report that that while the specific issues in the communities he visited can vary, the systemic problems are very similar across the country. These problems include:

- The general housing conditions of Indigenous Australian Peoples,
- Widespread lack of affordability creating a very large demand for affordable accommodation and public housing,
- Overcrowding,
- Homelessness,
- Inadequate and ageing public housing stock,
- Stigmatisation of people living in public housing,
- Waiting lists for public housing up to 10 years,
- Discrimination in accessing private housing, particularly rental accommodation (in particular for peoples receiving social benefits, Indigenous Australian peoples, low income households, households with children, women and people with disabilities),

- Lack of emergency and medium-term accommodations, including women refuges and transitional housing,
- Lack of planning and interest in State policies for rural areas and their needs,
- Uncoordinated approach to the problem of adequate housing, and the lack of understanding of the various components of this right,
- Lack of secure tenure for tenants in both public and private rental accommodation, and
- Lack of appropriate redress mechanisms.

In the light of this serious range of issues the decision to redeploy \$100 million from area a to area b is hardly a recipe for effective program reform.

The Report claims that it will cost over \$700 million to do maintenance on existing houses. Unless there is new money the \$100 million redeployed from other areas will not have all these houses fixed inside of seven years.

There have been estimates of \$2 billion dollars required to address overcrowding in Indigenous Australian communities. The amount that the Commonwealth is talking about reshuffling would take decades to make a dint on the problem. There is an estimated 72,000 Indigenous Australians living in overcrowded conditions. The expenditure of \$100 million is grossly inadequate.

Indigenous Home Ownership and Financial Inclusion

In November 2004, ANZ released research into financial exclusion in Australia. This research identified that Indigenous Australians were the only group of people consistently associated with financial exclusion (Chant Link, 2004). Although 71 per cent of all Australians have some degree of home ownership, Indigenous Australian participation in home ownership is 28 per cent. Indigenous Australians have low home ownership rates relative to non-Indigenous Australians, and significantly lower home ownership rates when compared to other Indigenous people in developed countries (*Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited 'Indigenous home ownership in Australia' November 2006*).

Role of Indigenous Australians

The State/Commonwealth Housing Ministers document *Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010* gave a strong role to capacity building. Just a few years later this policy has been abandoned.

More generally the Report and the Minister Brough's response to it indicate a significant deviation from previous housing policy and a capacity to side step the scope and the seriousness of the housing crisis in Australia. It is disturbing that the Report and the Minister's response indicate that they are wedded to the completely unwarranted

assumption that the Commonwealth Government only has a responsibility to consider the needs of Indigenous Australians when they live in some remote areas.

Victorian Government research indicated that two thirds of Indigenous Australians would prefer to use an Indigenous Australian service.

VALS argues that there is a need for both Indigenous Australian specific services and mainstream services, not one or the other. VALS is critical of mainstreaming because it removes the choice between using an Indigenous Australian service or mainstream service. One might use the former service in order to be assured of a culturally sensitive service and once might user the latter service because they know a worker at the Indigenous Australian service and desire privacy. Regardless of whether mainstream services are the only service option (ie: mainstreaming) or a service option they should be culturally sensitive and the Government should ensure that mainstream services have the capacity to do this.

Unfortunately, mainstreaming is easily accepted by other members of the Australian public who:

- Hold negative views of Indigenous Australians and accept the demonisation of Indigenous Australian culture and Indigenous Australian organisations, such as allegations of corruption of Indigenous Land Councils.
- Do not experience problems accessing mainstream services and so fail to understand the barriers in place for Indigenous Australians and the consequential need for Indigenous Australian specific services.
- Have short memories and have not learned from the mistakes of the past where assimilation was practiced (ie: stolen generation).
- Subscribe to the myth that Aborigines do not live in urban areas.
- Believe Aborigines receive too much special treatment.

The challenge for those who do not support mainstreaming is to highlight that:

- The reception of Indigenous Australians at mainstream services is crucial and if the service is not culturally sensitive then the Indigenous Australians are unlikely to return to the service.
- Many assume that more services are available in urban areas in terms of quantity, but in reality many urban services are inaccessible in terms of quality (ie: cultural sensitivity).
- Research documents that mainstream services do not deliver culturally appropriate services (Campbell & Goodall, 1999; Coleman, 2000; Finlayson,

1997; Grundy, Tyrell & Wakerman, 2001; McMichael et al., 2000; Keys Young, 1998).³

- Given the flaws of mainstreaming other options should be considered such as providing training on governance to Indigenous Australian organisations.
- The following extracts elaborate on lack of access to mainstream agencies, lack of trust of mainstream services and trust in friends/family instead, failure of mainstream services to meet Indigenous Australian's needs (ie: immediate service) and how "racism is not confined to private real estate agents":
 - "Friends, actually! I've got a lot of friends, like heaps. And I've always had them to go to. That's why I've never really used agencies. I've used St Vincent de, you know, the regular, Lifeline, St Vincent de Paul. I've used the Royal, I've walked in there trying to seek help for my drug problems and they were like...I wanted it then and there, I wanted to talk to someone then and there because I knew if I sat down I'd get up and walk out, if I was left to sit there. I'd think twice, and I'd double think it because you think the cops are going to come and target you, they're in liaison with the cops and they're going to send them around and bust you and the girls still have that fear today."⁴
 - ... they don't like working with Indigenous people. Sometimes I think they don't want to help, don't want to or can't, can't relate to who we are and the way we are".⁵

VALS argues that if metropolitan/rural funding is rerouted to remote areas then in an attempt to give voice to the concerns above, as an exercise of self-determination, there should be representation of Indigenous Australian people in mainstream public housing offices and in decision-making roles in mainstream public housing.⁶ Mainstreaming ignores Indigenous Australian's right to self-determination.

If the Report recommendations were really based on need then it would recognised in the Report that urban and regional Indigenous Australians also have *need* for Indigenous Australian specific services and that assimilating them into mainstream services will not meet their needs.

Listed below are the needs of urban Indigenous Australians:

³ Cooper Lesley, Morris Mary 'Sustainable tenancy for Indigenous families: what services and policy supports are needed?' (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute – Southern Research Centre), page 5, February 2005

⁴ Cooper Lesley, Morris Mary above n1 (2005) p33

⁵ Cooper Lesley, Morris Mary above n1 (2005) 39

⁶ Cooper Lesley and Flatau Paul 'Indigenous Access to Mainstream Public and Community Housing' *AHURI Research and Policy Bulletin* Issue 65 October 2005 p.4

- According to the Institute of Health and Welfare, the proportion of households in affordability need was highest in major cities, at 68 per cent.⁷
- According to Taylor “..Indigenous people as a group are substantially disadvantaged relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts at each level of the settlement hierarchy, regardless of location.”⁸
- The living standards of urban Aborigines have slipped compared with their white neighbours, despite a decade of economic prosperity. Figures show that urban Aborigines did not improve their lot in the 10 years following the last recession in 1991.⁹ "Over the decade since 1991, it appears indigenous people have comprised a progressively rising share of total population in the lowest status neighbourhoods and (since 1996) a falling share in middle-ranked neighbourhoods."¹⁰
- We should not reinforce that myth that 'real' Indigenous Australian people only live in remote areas and not in the cities.¹¹

The emotions that are sparked when urban Aborigines are ignored are apparent in the following comment by Indigenous Australian Paul Briggs.

*If indigenous people in south-eastern Australia are to join the mainstream as equals in our national society, then we need to be allowed to reclaim and share our identity and culture. That requires an acceptance that identity is not prescribed by geography and cannot be imposed on people by commercial forces or cultural dominance.*¹²

Appendix one contains a longer discussion of this issue

Consequences for Indigenous Australians of the Report Proposals

Ms Jenny Macklin, the Shadow Opposition Spokesperson for Indigenous Australian Affairs has stated that “Australia’s housing crisis will only get worse if the Howard Government scraps support for Indigenous housing in our cities”.¹³

⁷ Macklin Jenny Media Release ‘Indigenous Housing Crisis To Worsen’

22 February 2007 as at

<http://www.jennymacklin.net.au/infocentre.asp?data=04450601020507074858525D5E50794651544B4E4D4C>

⁸ Taylor J ‘Population and diversity: policy implications of emerging Indigenous demographic trends’ (Canberra: Centre for Indigenous Australian Economic Policy Research), (2006), p 20 as at

http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html_population/population_identification.htm#population

⁹ Megalogenis George ‘Aborigines in cities worse off *The Australian* , 17 July 2006 as at

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/printpage/0.5942.19812251.00.html>

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Bartlett, Andrew (Senator) Media Release ‘Hansons Ghost Lingers on, as Indigenous Housing Under Threat’ Thursday, February 22, 2007

¹² Briggs Paul ‘We’re Aborigines, Too’ *The Age* Wednesday, August 23, 2006

¹³ Macklin above n 5

The undesirable consequences of the proposal for Indigenous Australians are as follows. Indigenous Australians will continue to be more likely to:

- Encounter difficulties accessing housing as the funds available to reduce housing stress are inadequate. Services that are theoretically available (ie: mainstream) are already operating at capacity and there are cultural accessibility problems.
- Be disadvantaged in the mainstream service sector as they are less likely to have a rental history, own a home than non-Indigenous Australians. Also, they are more likely to experience race discrimination than non-Indigenous Australians.
- Face difficulty in getting bail because the judiciary is reluctant to grant bail if the Defendant does not have a fixed address.
- Continue to hold the status of being over-represented in the criminal justice system. The National Prisoner's Survey, which measures the number of people in prison on 30 June 2005, noted that 22% of prisoners on that date were Indigenous).¹⁴
- Be disadvantaged by continued failure to adopt the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Indigenous Australian Deaths in Custody to address underlying issues, such as housing problems, in order to address the over-representation of Indigenous Australian people in the criminal justice system.
- Be at further risk of homelessness given that they are over-represented in the:
 - major risk factors for homelessness:
 - Family violence
 - Domestic violence
 - Alcohol and drug abuse
 - Overcrowding
 - Poverty.¹⁵
 - Other risk factors for homelessness
 - History of unstable accommodation
 - Anti-social behaviour (noise, drinking, mental illness)
 - Mental illness.
 - Contact with the criminal justice system.¹⁶
- Be at further risk of tenancy failure given that they are over-represented in the following risk factors:
 - Debt (personal)
 - Partner debt
 - Racism in the private rental market and amongst mainstream service providers

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics ' 4517.0 - Prisoners in Australia, 2005'
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/4517.0?OpenDocument>

¹⁵ Cooper, Morris (February 2005) above n1, pg 95

¹⁶ ibid

- Discrimination based on race, gender and economic circumstances
- No formal supports
- Few informal supports
- Safety issues
- Few life skills
- Poor housing living skills
- Literacy skills.¹⁷
- Be ‘warehoused’ out of the city and suburbs and end up in the urban/remote areas, placing demand on housing there.
- Lose capital of existing services, employment and social capital.
- Be disadvantaged in the mainstream service sector because they:
 - Continue to be victim of a current trend identified by Taylor, and this trend could arguably be accelerated:
 - “Indigenous Australians people are over-represented in the poorest city neighbourhoods and this pattern appears to be very stable over time.”¹⁸
 - “within these poorest neighbourhoods Indigenous people continue to display the worst economic outcomes”¹⁹
 - The reality is that most Indigenous Australian people in urban areas are on very low incomes. Homeless and housing stress can mean difficulty in accessing health and employment programs. It can lead to greater child and family stress.

Consequences for State Government

VALS argues that the Report is a blue print for the Commonwealth Government to shirk its responsibility towards Indigenous Australians to ensure accessible housing by cost shifting to the States/Territories.

Conclusion

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited welcomes the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to increase housing provision to Indigenous Australian people in remote areas. However, the fact that funding to achieve this is to be redirected from other Indigenous Australian programs ignores the scale of Indigenous Australian housing need. There is a need for a collaborative multi- dimensional multi government response-which is adequately funded.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Taylor J, (2006), above n6, p 20

¹⁹ Ibid

VALS argues that there is a need for both Indigenous Australian specific services and mainstream services, not one or the other. VALS is critical of mainstreaming because it removes the choice between using an Indigenous Australian service or mainstream service. Victorian Government research indicates that two thirds of Indigenous Australians would prefer to use an Indigenous Australian service.

Regardless of whether mainstream services are the only service option (ie: mainstreaming) or a service option they should be culturally sensitive and the Government should ensure that mainstream services have the capacity to do this. A policy for mainstreaming needs to be accompanied by a policy to ensure mainstream services provide a culturally sensitive service.

If the proposal was really based on need then the Government would recognise that urban Indigenous Australians also have *need* for Indigenous Australian specific services and that assimilating them into mainstream services will not meet their needs.

VALS argues that the voting public deserves to know the whole story about Indigenous Australian disadvantage which could be gained by highlighting that:

- The needs of urban Indigenous Australians:
- Demographics such as almost three quarters 74% of Indigenous Australians are now resident in major cities or regional areas. The Report proposes the Commonwealth should ignore Indigenous specific services to these people.²⁰
- We should not reinforce that myth that 'real' Indigenous Australian people only live in remote area
- The Report also indicates a proposal to withdraw services to very remote areas

Mainstream services are struggling to deal with the housing crisis facing low income people. In this environment a proposal which adopts a simplistic measure of Indigenous Australian Housing need, ignores the scale and breadth of Indigenous Australian housing need and ignores the value of Indigenous service providers is unhelpful. The need for a collaborative multi-dimensional multi government response-which is adequately funded is urgently required.

²⁰ Taylor J, (2006), above n6, p5

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Appendix One

Editorial

'It's bad in the bush, but try living in the city'

National Indigenous Times, 19 April 2005, Issue 78

In the southern states of Australia, where colonisation is seen by some as a 'success', Indigenous Australian people still struggle with the unemployment, sub standard living conditions, poor health and education, and no real economic base - the 'outback' doesn't have a monopoly on disadvantage. But on top of that we also have to deal with the loss of our culture and identity and most are still victims of racism every single day. Believe me, it's there. People have just become better at disguising it

The moment you tell someone you are Indigenous Australian, people immediately form an opinion of you.

Everyone has something to say about Indigenous Australian people.

Why? Because we live in a world where everyone needs to be the same. Where white Australia wants Indigenous Australian people to progress when it suits them and in ways that it is convenient for them.

...Comments like 'You don't practice any traditional stuff', 'which part of you is Indigenous Australian (my left foot!)' and 'Look at how light your skin is', are all about other people not wanting you to be different. People don't like to feel out of their comfort zones.

But as you get older and wiser - or maybe just tired of justifying your existence - you start to realise how much your culture and traditions are very similar to what once was practiced by your people, and still is in northern Australia.

So why it is Indigenous Australian people in Australia seem to have to prove that they exist? That their culture - while progressing - is still alive?

...It bewilders me why he felt he needed to go all the way to Wadeye, spending thousands of taxpayers dollars along the way.

He only needed to travel a couple of kilometers up the road from his Kirribilli mansion, to Redfern. He could have gone there on one of his morning power walks. Or he could catch a train out to the western suburbs of Sydney where the Indigenous Australian population is triple that of Wadeye, and where many Indigenous Australian people live in similar conditions to those sprawled all over the front pages of our major newspapers.

Many of the Indigenous Australian people I know in Sydney have 16 people eating out of one kitchen and 20 people living in a three-bedroom house. The difference is these

people are living in urban areas. Nothing romantic about that. A little too close to home, perhaps?

Why is it that Australian society fails to understand that Indigenous Australian people in urban areas still have the same issues - and often the same cultural values - as those living in the bush?

The government doesn't want to spend money on urban Indigenous Australian people because it thinks it can assimilate us. Making urban blacks use mainstream services - which is the government's latest 'plan' - is one way of achieving that.

Unlike those living in remote communities where the population is mainly black and white people are often in the minority - urban Indigenous Australian people have to fight for their human rights on a far grander scale, against many more people.

Australian society has no problem with having special services for migrants. We encourage our new Australian friends to set up clubs and organisations to make them feel more comfortable, where they can practice their culture and speak their traditional language.

We embrace places like Chinatown and now see it as an integral part of Australian society.

But when it comes to helping out Indigenous Australian Australians in the same way... the silence is deafening [Amanda Vanstone calls it a quiet revolution!

The government wants to get rid of Indigenous specific legal services, medical services, and educational programs.

And give the illusion of fairness, at the same time it creates facades like our new one-stop Indigenous Co-ordination Centres (ICC's).

Anything that creates what the government views as separatism, they must eliminate, especially anything that's visible.

So where to for Indigenous Australian people who still want to participate in society and who also wish to maintain some of their traditional ways?

I don't know. But if I look into my crystal ball, I can see one thing - me, sitting here in five years writing the same old thing.

It takes years to have a revolution... you only need to look at world history to know that.