Indigenous Homelessness in Regional Australia

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AERC</td>
<td>Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (University of Queensland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APSCC</td>
<td>Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCP (WA)</td>
<td>Department for Child Protection, Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoC</td>
<td>Department of Communities, Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoCCSD</td>
<td>Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoH (WA)</td>
<td>Department of Housing, Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs (C'th)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FV</td>
<td>Family Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRPA</td>
<td>Homelessness Research Partnership Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSR</td>
<td>Institute for Social Science Research (University of Queensland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTHC</td>
<td>Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre (Mt Isa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KASH</td>
<td>Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAOA</td>
<td>Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance (WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPAH</td>
<td>National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPD</td>
<td>Public-place dwellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCWR</td>
<td>Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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</table>
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- Acknowledgments to the staff of the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC) who have assisted with the production of this series of reports: Linda Thomson, Shelley Templeman, Anna Oh, Imogen Baker.
Executive Summary

This is the final report following a series of five research reports prepared for FaHCSIA over the last two years on Indigenous homelessness in regional Australia.

The overall aim of this project was to examine the phenomenon of Indigenous homelessness in Australian regional cities and to explore a range of service responses that have been developed for homeless and public-place dwelling Indigenous people in selected regional centres, so as to assess their appropriateness and effectiveness in responding to Indigenous homelessness.

Key findings

Several key findings emerged through discussion of relevant information and issues raised in the five research reports:

- that special regional services are needed for homeless Indigenous Australians;
- that the Indigenous homeless population is underestimated;
- that chronically homeless Indigenous people may be accessing services in ways that perpetuate their dependence;
- that well-designed locally and regionally based programs can work well;
- that Indigenous involvement is highly significant for achieving positive outcomes; and
- that the accommodation needs of Indigenous people in highly mobile communities require further investigation to be fully understood.

Five research reports

The focus and findings of each of the five research reports can be summarised as follows:

The first report (Cultural Argument Report) outlines the case for conceptualizing Indigenous homelessness differently from mainstream Australia due to set of cultural factors that effect the causes, manifestation and design of services.

The second report (Monitoring Challenge Report) points to the anecdotal evidence that Indigenous homelessness has been growing across some 24 or so regional cities throughout Australia, but this growth cannot be readily objectified or monitored closely at a national level because the ABS method of reporting findings is often too coarse or general, being aggregated to larger spatial units.
The next three reports comprise case studies in regional centres which demonstrate particular forms and scales of service delivery and how they are specialized to cope with the cultural specificities of the clients.

The third report (Homeless Centre Report) focuses on the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in Mt Isa, run mostly by Indigenous staff for homeless Aboriginal people with a transitional housing program into mainstream rental housing and a managed alcohol program.

The fourth report (Women’s Refuge Report) profiles a Women’s Refuge in Tennant Creek including Aboriginal staff and clients, and its responses to hidden homelessness in the Barkly Region. This report also analyses the findings from the crowding survey carried out as part of the case study.

The fifth report (Gascoyne Report) presents a comparative study of cross-agency approaches to Aboriginal homelessness services in the Mid-west Region of Western Australia, outlining three different styles of: (i) informal coordination, (ii) formal coordination, and (iii) a silo approach, in the three towns of Geraldton, Carnarvon, and Meekatharra.

Two significant findings from the Tennant Creek study are indicative of the overall study theme. The first concerns the Aboriginal construct of crowding, a form of secondary homelessness, which draws from earlier AHURI research by the authors. This research applied a social science theory of crowding which states that stress arises from a situation of human density to constitute crowding, to a cross-cultural context. In traditionally oriented Aboriginal households where a strong value of sharing with and respecting kin prevails, large households can often exist without loss of control by the householder, and crowding may not technically exist from a scientific or household perspective. However perceived (actual) crowding can readily occur when there is loss of control of household behaviours and transgression of rules about the allocation of individuals into sleeping groups (often arising from substance abuse). Yet the Australian Government applies a density rule of a threshold of two persons per bedroom to assess crowding on a national scale (using the Canadian National Occupancy Standard).

The ABS Census also deliberately excludes Aboriginal visitors when calculating household size, yet residential mobility is very high amongst traditional Aboriginal societies and visitors are a frequent phenomenon. These factors explain why the 2011 ABS Census fails to accurately model the extent of Aboriginal crowding in a
regional centre like Tennant Creek where the authors’ survey found a mean of 9.9 persons per house (including visitors) as opposed to the official ABS density of 2.9, yet only 50% of these large households perceived themselves to be crowded due to the reasons above. It can be seen that the UQ team’s culturally sensitive findings on households, crowding and homelessness are quite at odds with the official census findings yet the latter is partly relied upon by the government to guide allocation of national funding to services for the alleviation of homelessness.

**Policy issues and recommendations on Indigenous homelessness**

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) ending in 2014 is the main national policy and funding initiative aimed at reducing homelessness. No further funding had been announced by the time of writing which was significant in the light of our study findings with respect to funding cycles, regional focus for service delivery, expanded support programs and definitions of homelessness.

Following on from our case studies we recommend that funding bodies institute three-year block funding as service agencies have been repeatedly constrained by the short cycles of funding.

We also recommend that policies for addressing homelessness are based on a regional and cultural perspective. Such a localised approach can work well for Indigenous Australians especially those in regional and remote locations as they apply their close and comprehensive knowledge of the problems to their particular regional problems. The case studies also suggested that local partnerships were more advantageous for servicing homeless people and those at risk compared to a ‘silo’ approach.

Our findings demonstrate the need for expanded programs to support the service agencies in terms of staff development as well as client support programs. As the agencies struggle to meet the accommodation needs of the local Indigenous homeless people we also recommend additional infrastructure for these regional Centres.

An overarching recommendation applies to the term ‘homelessness’ and we recommend that the broadest possible definition of homelessness is required. As our studies demonstrated, many Indigenous people, particularly younger people, are ‘at risk’ of homelessness and can be overlooked in the planning and delivery of services.

Appropriate solutions and effective sustainable outcomes for entrenched social problems such as Indigenous homelessness have been a long-term challenge for
policy makers across Australia over many decades. As the reports here suggest, carefully targeted decentralised programs are required to make the difference to which good policy aspires. Government involvement is essential but it is desired and most effective where it engages the local Indigenous community.
1. Introduction

This is the final report by a group of researchers affiliated with the Aboriginal Environments Research (AERC) and the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland, following the execution of another five successive research reports prepared for FaHCSIA over the preceding two years on Indigenous homelessness in regional Australia. One of our co-authors is also from the Curtin University.

The overall aim of this project was to examine the phenomenon of Indigenous homelessness in Australian regional cities and to explore a range of service responses that have been developed for homeless and public-place dwelling Indigenous people in selected regional centres, so as to assess their appropriateness and effectiveness in responding to Indigenous homelessness.

This report therefore integrates and summarises the findings on Indigenous homelessness in regional Australia, drawing from all five of the earlier reports.

This chapter begins by briefly outlining the challenges for studying Indigenous homelessness to contextualise our research. It sets out the research questions and introduces the locations of the case studies as well as the areas of investigation covered in the reports.

Challenges in Indigenous homelessness research

Important issues of Indigenous homelessness raised in the literature include the nature and extent of the Indigenous Australian population who are homeless or dwelling in public places, and the most effective ways of combating homelessness through policy and practice.

Over two decades, some problems of definition have led to probable underestimations of the number of homeless people and in turn have led to less effective services than desirable. Despite the debate on definitions, the anecdotal literature and the available statistics suggest that centres of Indigenous homelessness have steadily developed in regional cities across Australia over the last 25 years. Earlier research (Memmott et al. 2003) identified 24 regional centres where Indigenous homelessness has been regularly reported by the local media and where programs have emerged (see also Chapter 2 later). Moreover, most Australian homelessness research has been carried out in metropolitan centres leaving a gap of
understanding about homelessness, especially Indigenous homelessness, in regional and remote areas.

Nevertheless a range of service models have arisen separately in response to the many factors related to homelessness in regional areas. As a way of engaging with such service responses and assessing their effectiveness, a series of research questions were formulated to direct our study.

The following questions in the box below guided the program of research during the period 2010-13.

**Research questions for Indigenous homelessness research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Why is it at times necessary to engage special service delivery responses to effectively address Indigenous homelessness and public-place dwelling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What approaches to Indigenous homelessness service delivery have emerged in recent years in different types of regions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>How many rural or remote regions in Australia have a regional centre which display an acute set of social problems arising from homelessness or public-place dwelling Indigenous people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>What are the distinctive characteristics of both Indigenous and mainstream approaches to Indigenous homelessness service delivery in different types of regions? Specifically:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>To what extent are different service delivery approaches specialised or holistic in their approach?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>What types of inter-agency collaboration and integration are taking place in responses to Indigenous homelessness and what is the significance and impact of such collaboration and integration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>To what extent are Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations respectively involved in service responses to homelessness, in what roles and to what effect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How is such service delivery distinctive from mainstream service delivery?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>What has been the impact of funding and policy models on collaborative service delivery?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>What evidence is there of high-quality and effective programs and practices resulting in pathways out of homelessness and public-place dwelling for Indigenous people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>What are the policy, program and practice implications of the findings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To address these research questions within the limited constraints of our research budget, we took into account the central challenges identified in describing the phenomenon of Indigenous homelessness. Based on the previous field experience of the research team we chose three regional centres (Mt Isa, Tennant Creek and Geraldton) and some associated towns and communities to further explain how service delivery can work.

Mt Isa is a mining town and regional centre (population 20,590 at 2011 Census) with a relatively strong ‘two-speed’ economy, a limited supply of housing stock to satisfy the market demand, town planning constraints withholding the expansion of the town, and a three decade history of Aboriginal groups drinking and sleeping in the Leichhardt River which passes through the centre of town. The Indigenous population of the town was estimated at 3,070 in 2011.

Tennant Creek is a mining town whose mining boom of the 1960s to 1980s seems largely passed and is in a state of relative economic decline. Since then the Aboriginal population has increased at a much faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population was given as 1,592 at the 2011 Census and made up 52% of the overall town population (total 3,061), being distributed in public rental housing and in eight Community Living Areas (formerly called Town Camps). The temporal depth of experience of Aboriginal people living in conventional housing extends back for only three generations to the early 1980s. Prior to that people were living in self-constructed humpies or simple tin sheds.

Geraldton is a port and the regional centre of the Gascoyne region in the central west of WA with a population of about 31,350 at the 2011 Census, and displays an expanding diversified economy and growing population.

Mt Isa, Tennant Creek and Geraldton are all regional centres characterized by the regional circular mobility of Aboriginal people cycling in and out from surrounding rural towns and bush communities (or remote discrete settlements). This phenomenon results in much larger Aboriginal populations being present in these towns at particular times, than is indicated by the Census figures, due to uncounted ‘visitors’.

The study of Geraldton was thus broadened to include the towns of Carnarvon and Meekatharra for comparative purposes. Carnarvon lies north of Geraldton and is an old port town whose stable economy is maintained by local primary industries and tourism, but which nonetheless is dependant upon Geraldton (a 4.5 hours drive
away) for the full range of necessary services. Its population in 2011 was counted at about 4,560. Meekatharra lies 400 km inland from the coast and has had a long intermittent history as a gold mining town as well a pastoral service centre, with a vacillating and at times fragile economic history. Its population was counted at about 735 in the 2011 Census (see map in Figure 1).

Whilst Geraldton has by far the largest number of people of the three WA centres (31,350), its Indigenous population was only 9.6% (3010). In contrast Meekatharra had the smallest population of the three centres at 735, but displayed the highest proportion of Indigenous people at 46.4%. Carnarvon’s Indigenous population (1,076) was 23.6% of the total population.

**Table 1: Populations of Study sites according to 2011 Census findings.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town/City</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Indigenous Population</th>
<th>% Indigenous Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mt Isa, Qld</td>
<td>20,570</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek, NT</td>
<td>3061</td>
<td>1592</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton, WA</td>
<td>31,349</td>
<td>3010</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnarvon, WA</td>
<td>4,559</td>
<td>1076</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meekatharra, WA</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Map showing regional city study sites of Mt Isa, Tennant Creek, Carnarvon, Geraldton and Meekatharra.

The five research reports on Indigenous homelessness

Five research reports have contributed to the overall findings in the analysis herein.

The first report is titled ‘Why are special services needed to address Indigenous homelessness?’ and outlines the case for conceptualizing Indigenous homelessness differently from mainstream Australia due to a set of cultural factors that effect the causes, the nature of the manifestation and the design of services concerning this phenomenon. We gloss the name of this report herein as the ‘Cultural Argument Report’. This is the primary question driving the overall study of service delivery in relation to Indigenous homelessness.

The second report for FaHCSIA is titled ‘The challenge of monitoring growth in regional Indigenous homelessness’ and points to the anecdotal evidence that
Indigenous homelessness has been growing across some 24 or so regional cities throughout Australia. However this growth cannot be readily objectified or monitored closely at a national level because the ABS method of reporting findings is often too coarse or general, being aggregated to larger spatial units. We gloss the name of this report herein as the ‘Monitoring Challenge Report’.

The last three reports comprise selected case studies in regional centres which demonstrate particular forms and scales of service delivery and how they are specialized to cope with the cultural specificities of the clients.

The third report is titled ‘No Wrong Door? Managing Indigenous homeless clients in Mt Isa’, and reports on the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in Mt Isa, run by a group of Indigenous staff for largely homeless Aboriginal people. The Centre has a transitional housing program into mainstream rental housing and a managed alcohol program. This third report is glossed herein as the ‘Homeless Centre Report’.

The fourth report is on a Women’s Refuge in Tennant Creek and is titled ‘The Women’s Refuge and the Crowded House’. The Refuge also has a dominance of Aboriginal staff and clients who respond to a variety of hidden homelessness forms in the Barkly Region. We refer to this report herein as the ‘Women’s Refuge Report’.

The fifth report is on the Gascoyne region in WA and is titled ‘Managing the shape of Homelessness in the Western Australian Mid-West Region’. It carries out a comparative study of cross-agency approaches to Aboriginal homelessness services, appraising three different styles of (i) informal coordination, (ii) formal coordination, and (iii) a silo approach, in the respective three towns of Carnarvon, Geraldton and Meekatharra. We refer to this report herein as the ‘Gascoyne Report’.

The five reports are listed below in Table 2 in order of completion. The short titles have been assigned to each report for ease of reference throughout this report.
Table 2: The five research reports upon which the current analysis is based.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Number</th>
<th>Formal Title of Report</th>
<th>Shorthand title of report (for ease of reference herein)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Report 1</td>
<td>Why are special services needed to address Indigenous homelessness?</td>
<td>Cultural Argument Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Memmott, Birdsall-Jones and Greenop 2012)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report 2</td>
<td>The challenge of monitoring growth in regional Indigenous homelessness</td>
<td>Monitoring Challenge Report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Memmott et al. 2012b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report 3</td>
<td>No Wrong Door? Managing Indigenous homeless clients in Mt Isa</td>
<td>Homeless Centre Report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Memmott and Nash 2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report 4</td>
<td>The Women’s Refuge and the Crowded House</td>
<td>Women's Refuge Report</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Memmott et al. 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report 5</td>
<td>Coordination of Services for Aboriginal Homelessness in the Western Australian Mid-West Region</td>
<td>Gascoyne Report</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Birdsall-Jones 2013)</td>
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Chapter Summaries

The following chapters of this report draw almost exclusively on our five research reports, outlining their nature and significance in summary form and addressing the project’s research questions:

Chapter 2 draws mainly from Report 1, and addresses the relevance of special service delivery responses compared to the mainstream approach, to effectively address Indigenous homelessness and public-place dwelling and draws particularly from the Cultural Argument Report but also from relevant sections of other reports [Research questions 1, 8].

In Chapter 3 (and drawing from Report 2), we reflect on the extent of Indigenous homelessness and the challenges of monitoring growth in rural or remote regional centres in Australia as discussed in Monitoring Challenges Report. These centres present an acute set of social problems arising from homelessness or public-place dwelling Indigenous people and so have particular bearings on policy [Question 3].

Chapter 4 draws together the conclusions from our three case study reports (Reports 3,4,5) based on current practice examples to compare the approaches to Indigenous
homelessness service delivery which have emerged in recent years in different types of regions [Questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10]. Specific reference is made to:

- inter-agency collaboration (significance and response);
- impact of funding/policy models;
- role of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and their effects;
- community, mainstream, specialised and/or holistic approaches; and
- evidence of high-quality and effective programs providing pathways out of homelessness.

In Chapter 5 (drawing from Reports 3, 4 and 5) we revisit the Cultural Argument to answer why special services are needed to address Indigenous homelessness.

Chapter 6 puts forward some policy, program and practice implications of the findings from Reports 1 to 5 [Questions 9, 11] and Chapter 7 is the Conclusion to this final report.
2. Indigenous homelessness and public-place dwelling

This chapter partially addresses Research Questions 1 and 2, which ask why it is necessary to engage special service delivery responses to address Indigenous homelessness and public-place dwelling, and how this is distinctive from mainstream service delivery.

Key findings

- Customary cultural practices underlie the particular lifestyles of Aboriginal homeless and public-place dwellers and certain aspects of culture can drive homelessness and public-place dwelling;
- Understanding Aboriginal homelessness requires a cross-cultural perspective; certain aspects of culture can counteract homelessness, for example customary mobility can contribute to homelessness and/or be a consequence of homelessness as well as other related factors, but it is also a significant strategy for maintaining and developing social capital which can be used to exit out of homelessness;
- Based on these understandings, refined categories of Indigenous homelessness can more accurately reflect the reasons for (or pathways into) such homelessness; and
- Spiritual homelessness is a special category of Indigenous homelessness related to detachment from land and kin and the undermining of Aboriginal identity.

Addressing the issues

In our Cultural Argument Report, ‘Why are special services needed to address Indigenous homelessness?’, we addressed the concerns of government policy makers in the field generally as well as relevant administrators and non-government organisations (NGOs) engaged in designing programs and services for Aboriginal homeless and public-place dwelling people.

A short historical contextualisation of Indigenous homelessness demonstrated how it is different to homelessness in other sectors of the community and introduced some of the culturally specific drivers as well as a demographic profile. Indigenous people are over-represented by a factor of four in the Australian homelessness counts by
ABS, even though an undercount of Indigenous homeless people was most likely (Memmott et al. 2012, p.14). Various identified historical camping lifestyles provided a background to the reasons for the currency, within Aboriginal living memory, of the practice of camping which results in many contemporary Aboriginal people readily engaging in camping in public places when no other housing option is easily accessible or when the camping option seems socially attractive.

The Indigenous Homelessness and public-place dwelling categories

The limited number of empirical qualitative studies of Indigenous homeless people over the last 25 years highlight some of the specific multiple causes, conditions and implications of Indigenous homelessness (see Section 2 of the Cultural Argument Report for a review of these studies). In our earlier writing on Indigenous homelessness, we have used the term ‘public-place dweller’ interchangeably with ‘homeless’ although it is important to acknowledge the range of meanings involved. The conventional categories of primary, secondary (incl. ‘rough sleeping’) and tertiary homelessness (for a long time accepted by policy makers in Australia) were reshaped by Memmott et al. (2003, 2012) in the early 2000s and have been subsequently refined to include more nuanced categories and some different terminology, with the aim of targeting the character and needs of Indigenous homeless people more effectively.

We have developed a set of homeless categories to define the specific conditions of Indigenous homelessness from these earlier studies, which we argue is more relevant and useful for policy makers and service practitioners. The categorisation differentiates between (i) public-place dwelling persons, (ii) housed people but who are at risk of homelessness; and (iii) spiritually homeless persons. Within this categorisation, homeless people may be either voluntary or involuntary, and short term or long term homeless. These categorisations were amplified to enable an analysis of the presence or absence of cultural motivations for mobility that result in various forms of homelessness and/or public-place dwelling and to understand the movements of people between the various categories along complex pathways into homelessness (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, pp.24, 25).

Indigenous public-place dwelling is a little understood phenomenon. Many engage in it in a voluntary manner and may be able to withdraw from it voluntarily, whilst for others, withdrawal from this lifestyle may become increasingly difficult. Section 3 of the report presents a more nuanced understanding than previously reported, and is
based on fieldwork and studies over the past several decades, illustrated with case study examples. A relatively common socio-spatial structure that has been recorded in the public spaces of a range of contemporary Australian cities is a set of Indigenous rough-sleeping groups each with some dominant socio-geographic identity i.e. each identifying with a particular place, region or home country, and with a strong leader who maintains a degree of observance of social rules and cohesion amongst the group.

Within such public-place dwelling groups, four categories of people can be identified:-

(i) Voluntary, short-term intermittent public-place dwellers,
(ii) Voluntary, medium-term public-place dwellers,
(iii) Long term (or chronic homeless) public-place dwellers, and
(iv) Reluctant and by-necessity public-place dwellers (see Table 3).

This group pattern is distinctly different from the manifestation of homelessness in many Western and other societies where homeless individuals (or couples) often position themselves as individuals in territorial niches on streets to beg money and food and territorialize their own habitation space apart from (and in competition) with others.

Many Aboriginal housed people are at risk of homelessness which we argue is a second category of homelessness that is often overlooked or under-reported in survey and census data and therefore has not readily been accessible for past policy making (see Section 5 of the Cultural Argument Report).

This category covers Indigenous people who reside in some form of housing but are at risk of losing it or its amenity. They can be divided into four distinct sub-categories:

(i) people lacking secure tenure over their houses or accommodation;
(ii) people whose housing is architecturally sub-standard rendering it unsafe or unhealthy;
(iii) people experiencing crowded housing; and
(iv) dysfunctionally mobile persons being in a state of continual or intermittent residential mobility (see Table 3).

In this context, it becomes clear that Indigenous patterns of mobility are central to understanding the nature of Indigenous homelessness. People maintain active social relations with extended family and kin at places within their cultural region as well as other places further afield, and can seek shelter and food with such people through
either demand sharing or by request. In doing so, they can, through certain behavioural patterns put themselves or their wider household at risk of homelessness in different ways.

Individual cases of Indigenous mobility can be categorised as being either supported by Aboriginal cultural values or not supported by such values. Both of these contexts can generate householder stress if visitor presence contravenes tenancy rules. But in the case of alignment with cultural values, resulting in the householder’s obligation to show respect and share resources with the visitor (as well as likely, their extended kin), the situation can present an even more complicated dilemma for the householder, conflicted between tenancy law (and threat of eviction) and Aboriginal customary law. A nuanced understanding from an insider’s cultural perspective and household rule system is necessary to understand and appreciate this predicament. Again, the Cultural Argument Report incorporates more detailed understandings and examples than have hitherto been reported in the literature for this category of Indigenous homelessness (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, pp.37-46).

A special category of homelessness that we term spiritual homelessness is a complex personal and social phenomenon stemming from the conditions of colonisation and its continuing aftermath of institutionalisation, forced removals and their resulting social and psychological deprivations (see Section 6 of the Cultural Argument Report). This can lead to dysfunctional relationships with both family and country, having significant consequences for people’s ability to find and maintain housing and family relationships. It typically involves alienation from kin and/or home country which can result in an undermining or dysfunctionality of Indigenous identity with a resultant psychological vulnerability. This is in contrast to those long-term public-place dwellers who retain a capacity to return to their home community and socially re-integrate confirming that they are spiritually ‘homed’ (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, pp.47-49).

In section 8 of the Cultural Argument Report we briefly examined cross-cultural differences in the values underlying whether particular Aboriginal lifestyle behaviours that can be associated with homelessness, may or may not be legitimised. Furthermore, we described how this may influence responses to homelessness in positive and negative ways, either by empowering or disempowering Aboriginal social capital and its inherent values. For example, if the alcohol violence of visiting relatives violates local Aboriginal values, there can be an alignment of a household’s and a housing manager’s response goals to remove the tenant. However if a visitor is
a respected kinsperson whose behaviour is non-offending, an attempt to remove them as an unauthorised visitor by a housing manager may offend and shame the householder, depleting their social capital.

Table 3: Indigenous Public-place dwelling and Homelessness Categories.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Sub-Category</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Public-place dwellers (PPD)</td>
<td>Living in a mix of public or semi-public places (as well as some private places, which are entered illegally to gain overnight shelter, e.g. parks, churches, verandahs, car parks, car sale yards (under cars), beaches, drains, riverbanks, vacant lots and disused buildings.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 PPD Voluntary, short-term intermittent</td>
<td>Often staying in conventional accommodation (e.g. a relative’s house), may have their own residence in a rural or remote settlement. When socialising in public urban places, they may or may not decide to camp out overnight, usually with others, despite the availability of accommodation. These people are not actually homeless but may be co-resident with other public-place dwellers in the following categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 PPD Voluntary, medium-term</td>
<td>Reside continually in public places (including overnight): acknowledge they have another place of residence in a home community but uncertain if or when they will return. These people are not actually homeless but may be co-resident with other public-place dwellers in the following categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ This is a revised version of this table adapted from earlier versions – e.g. see AHURI Final Report No. 49 (Memmott et al. 2003).
| 1.3 PPD Long-term (or chronic homeless) | Reside continually in public places (including overnight); unclear whether it is possible for them to readily reconcile with their home community/family due to a range of emotional and behavioural barriers; they have come to regard a beat of public places as their ‘home’. |
| 1.4 PPD Reluctant and by necessity | Residing continually in public places, and who (a) wish to return home but need to remain in urban area due to a service need (e.g. health, housing) or to support a hospitalised relative or similar; or (b) wish to return home but no funds for and/or capacity to organise travel (including substance abusers). |
| 2.0 At risk of homelessness | At risk of losing one’s house or the amenity of one’s house. |
| 2.1 At risk Insecurely housed people | Residing in adequate housing but under threat of loss of housing; lack of security of occupancy; possibly due to circumstances of poverty. |
| 2.2 At risk people in sub-standard housing | People whose housing is of a sub-standard architectural quality; possibly unsafe or unhealthy housing. |
| 2.3 At risk – experiencing crowded housing | People whose house is crowded, resulting in considerable stress to occupants. Residents may be divided into (a) core householders; (b) visitors who have a home, elsewhere; (c) visitors who would otherwise be homeless. |
### 2.4 At risk – dysfunctionally mobile persons

In a state of continual or intermittent residential mobility, including temporary residence (e.g. crisis accommodation), that is a result of personal and/or social problems (e.g. violence, alcohol and substance abuse; lack of safety or security in a social sense; personality or ‘identity crisis’; lack of emotional support and security). These persons may be divided into:

(a) Perpetrators of social problems where mobility arises from their social rejection;

(b) Victims of a social problem whose mobility is aimed at escaping the source of their problem (often a perpetrator);

(c) Individuals in complex state of both being a victim and a perpetrator.

### 3. Spiritually homeless people

A state arising from either:

(a) separation from traditional land;

(b) forced removal from one’s communal places of attachment;

(c) separation from family and kinship networks.

This results in a crisis of personal identity wherein one’s understanding or knowledge of how one relates to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused, or known but unable to be fulfilled.


In our Women’s Refuge Report, we analysed how the female clients of the Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge fit into the above categories – see Table 4. We argued that a large cross-section of the Refuge clients is technically homeless in one sense or another according to these classifications. At the time of writing this research report...
(our #4), a new set of categories on homelessness was published by the ABS in late in 2012 (ABS 2012). In the third column of Table 4 (see below) we set out these new ABS categories for comparison with our own categories.
Table 4: Reasons why women come to Tennant Creek Women's Refuge and how they relate to categories of homelessness and public-place dwelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women's Refuge Client Categories (Memmott et al 2013)</th>
<th>Homelessness Categories of Memmott et al. (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones and Greenop 2012)</th>
<th>New ABS homelessness categories (ABS 2012a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim of DV or FV (primary reason)</td>
<td>At risk of homelessness: Dysfunctionally mobile category</td>
<td>Homeless (lack of 1. security of tenure in the dwelling and 2. control of, and access to social relations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened of potential DV/FV</td>
<td>At risk of homelessness: Dysfunctionally mobile category</td>
<td>Not homeless, instead unstable and at risk of homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled elderly women with coping difficulty in houses</td>
<td>At risk of homelessness, insecurely housed</td>
<td>Not homeless, instead unstable and at risk of homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough sleeper women in need of services</td>
<td>Public-place dwellers (all categories)</td>
<td>Homeless (lack of 1. security of tenure in the dwelling; 2. control of, and access to social relations and 3. Adequacy of the dwelling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient women needing support (eg. stranded bush women)</td>
<td>At risk of homelessness: Dysfunctionally mobile category</td>
<td>Not homeless, instead unstable and at risk of homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women needs ‘time out’ from stressful households</td>
<td>At risk of homelessness: experiencing crowded housing category</td>
<td>If crowding is severe, then homeless; if not then instead unstable and at risk of homelessness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 4 that these new ABS categories are more nuanced than the old division of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. They have in fact
moved much closer to the earlier Memmott et al. categories and bear direct comparison and in some cases reciprocal usage. What is distinctive about the new ABS categories however, is that they go so far as to distinguish the categories as being either ‘homeless’ or ‘not homeless, but ‘at risk of homelessness’. This perhaps arises from the difficulties of enumerating ‘at risk’ people. But it raises questions of how one measures the threshold of moving from being ‘at risk’ into being ‘homeless’ under different circumstances. (One overall impact here may be to reduce the official number of enumerated homeless in Australia.) ABS do state that they will continue to review this classification, sensitive perhaps to it being a potentially contestable categorization in this latter sense.

According to the recently revised ABS definitions, individuals displaced by family violence will not be technically homeless unless they take up rough sleeping in a public or semi-public space, or enter into a severely crowded house, in which case they will then fall into a homelessness category (ABS 2012a). For example, consider the following quote from the ABS (2012b):

A person experiencing the violence who remains in their unsafe home with the perpetrator, could be considered to lack control of and access to social relations. However, assessing these situations in a measurement context is very difficult, and the ABS definition currently excludes such situations from its definition of homelessness and characterises their living situation as being precarious or unstable and being at risk of homelessness. ABS will report the available information on these living situations and continue to develop its statistical measurement in this area.

Thus people experiencing DV and FV are not technically homeless until they leave the situation. Not being officially homeless may mean they are less able to access alternative accommodation. (Also it is important to note that women and children affected by DV/FV have specific accommodation needs depending on whether they require crisis, transition or long term accommodation and on the needs of the children relating to gender, age and other health or cultural aspects). Without suitable accommodation, they are more ‘stuck’ in their violent home. Such a classification is therefore not necessarily helpful in effecting a constructive outcome. Contrast this with people experiencing severe crowding (which is not itself defined by the ABS in its document). The recent ABS (2012c) literature on overcrowding states:

People living in crowded dwellings represent a continuum within the scope of those who are marginally housed. In the context of the elements developed for the ABS definition of homelessness, people living in severe overcrowding are considered to be homeless because they do not have control of, or access to space for social relations.
If crowding is deemed not severe, then those people are thus defined as ‘unstable’ and ‘at risk of homelessness’ but not actually ‘homeless’.

Whichever way the debate may move about the preferred national categorisation of homelessness in Australia, from the perspective of understanding the dynamics of Indigenous homelessness, it is important for service providers to work with the full range of categories as outlined in our reports, including all of the ‘at risk’ categories. This is because of the prevalence of both high regional circular mobility and high intra-city residential mobility as reported in our findings (see later) and the need to understand how these constant residential cycles can regularly destabilize tenancies and move people into frequent in-and-out patterns of risk. This will be discussed further in later sections of this report.
3. The Problem of the extent of regional homelessness

Key findings

- It is not possible from previous publically available (or published) Census details to access a quantitative summary of Indigenous homelessness in Australian regional cities;
- It is therefore not possible to compare Indigenous homeless change rates for regional cities in an accessible comparative manner between census periods; and
- Many housed people are at risk of homelessness which is not accurately revealed in census statistics.

Statistical homelessness and the problems of interpretation

In Report 2: ‘Monitoring Challenge Report’, we examined methodological difficulties with analysing current data on Indigenous homelessness in Australia, and analysed the causes, consequences and possible methodological and policy implications for this metric problem.

Earlier work on response strategies by the first author (PM), starting in 2002, identified a set of Australian regional cities in inner and outer regions, and in rural and remote areas, which have been experiencing problems with public-place dwelling and homeless Indigenous people (see Figure 2). Some 24 locations were identified (excluding capital cities) from a literature search on problem statements, service delivery issues and practices; however many of these literature items were unpublished reports and media items. There was little researched and systematically published material available. In various cases the increased presence of intoxicated Indigenous public-place dwelling people resulted in a media outcry for action and in some cases investigations or strategic planning reports resulted.
Other Indigenous socio-economic circumstances in many of the 24 regional centres are: regional circular mobility whereby there is to-and-fro movement of kin between remote locations and the regional centre; the prevalence of large extended households some of which were suffering from crowding as well as family violence associated with substance abuse; and ‘two-speed’ economies generated by mining booms which were widening the rental costs between public and private rental housing.

Based on this working knowledge of past locations of Indigenous homelessness and public-place dwelling (Memmott et al. 2003b), the authors proposed to FaHCSIA that it would be useful to map the recorded numbers of such people from the 2006 Census data, even though it was acknowledged that these figures were likely to be an undercount (discussed in Memmott et al. 2012b).
The Monitoring Challenge Report aimed to address understandings of Indigenous homelessness in regional Australian towns and cities from the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census. However despite the excellent set of reports based on the 2006 Census and titled ‘Counting the Homeless (State and Territory)’ by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2009), the researchers identified a number of limitations with existing Census data on homelessness and access to this data collection that prevented a complete understanding of the precise extent, location and nature of homelessness in these centres. We explained the form of existing data, the presentation of data within available ABS datasets and used recent examples from fieldwork to show the problems that this can cause for evidence-based policy formulation. We also identified problems of comparability across this data at the scale of regional cities that prevent a more thorough understanding of Indigenous homelessness nation-wide.

The use of geographical units, which include both urban centres and smaller nearby towns as the basis for the presentation of data on homelessness (as discussed in selected case studies), make town-specific data opaque. This hinders the possibility of understanding the differences between regional towns and cities with regards to homelessness and prevents a meaningful analysis of the specific causes of homelessness at local, regional and broader scales.

We also examined alternative sources of data on homelessness and what is possible to gauge from these. For example we used data on the provision of services through Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs to show where Indigenous homelessness may be more prevalent at a broad scale, and used this to demonstrate further the problems with current Census data. (Memmott et al. 2012, pp.18-20.)

At the time of writing the current report, homelessness data from the 2011 Census had been published by the ABS but it did not address this issue. To exemplify, refer to Table 5, which summarizes the available homelessness data for the study regions covered in our three regional case study city reports (Reports 3,4 and 5). The quantitative findings are articulated according to ‘Statistical Areas’ which are too broad to understand what might be happening at a city level within these Statistical Areas. The qualitative divisions are in accordance with the new categories of homelessness adopted in late 2012 by the ABS. As discussed earlier, this created a division between (a) homeless categories – Table 5, and (b), ‘not homeless, but at risk’ categories which are glossed as ‘Other marginal housing numbers’ (see Table 6).
Table 5: ‘Homeless Operational Groups’ for selected Statistical Areas, 2011.
Source: ABS 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Area Level 3</th>
<th>Persons who are in improved dwellings, tents or sleeping out</th>
<th>Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless</th>
<th>Persons staying temporarily with other households</th>
<th>Persons staying in boarding houses</th>
<th>Persons in other temporary lodged</th>
<th>Persons living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings</th>
<th>All homeless persons (Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outback North, Qld</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly, NT</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gascoyne WA</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest, WA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Other Marginal Housing numbers for selected statistical areas, 2011.
Source: ABS 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Persons living in other crowded dwellings</th>
<th>Persons in other improvised dwellings</th>
<th>Persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks</th>
<th>All marginally housed (Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outback North, Qld</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly, NT</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gascoyne WA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest, WA</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

In our Monitoring Growth Report, we argued there is a strong case for all levels of government, as well as NGOs, to be able to accurately monitor where growth in Indigenous homelessness is occurring in regional Australia and where ‘hot spots’ of such growth and associated anti-social behaviour might be. However, we concluded that with the currently available tools (publicly available data sets), it is not readily possible to model Indigenous homelessness for cities, and only for regions with some difficulties. The local detail, and the fluidity and mobility of Indigenous public-place dwelling and homeless people (Memmott et al. 2004, 2006) are not readily captured by and accessible from the five-yearly national census. Only coarse spatial and temporal generalisations are available. The NATSISS mirrors the Census in its approach to counting homelessness, and it too cannot provide detailed data for homelessness in specific locations (Memmott et al. 2012b).
4. Regional approaches to Indigenous homelessness service delivery

Key findings

- Successful regional approaches to service delivery for Indigenous homeless include a focus on Aboriginal cultural aspects and the interconnected nature of complex social problems;
- Aboriginal participation in service agencies can impact positively on the effectiveness of regional service delivery;
- Collaboration between regional service agencies is more effective than a ‘silhouette’ approaches;
- Cyclic evaluation of programs is needed to improve outcomes in the regions;
- A proportion of homeless people are recycling through services, partly due to lack of available housing but also through lack of appropriate support agencies for their complex needs, some of which are regionally specific;
- Diffuse, uncoordinated and overlapping services within a region can lead to unclear lines of responsibilities amongst service agencies; and
- Pathways into homelessness in the regions are not well understood.

Addressing the issues

In regional Australia, various approaches to Indigenous homelessness service delivery have emerged in recent years funded under the National Partnerships Agreement on Homelessness endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008. This chapter discusses current approaches from three regions, which have been the focus of our case study reports. The Homeless Centre Report focuses on the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre (JTHC) in Mt Isa; the Women’s Refuge Report explores the interconnectedness of social issues including crowding and homelessness and impacts on the Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge; and, the Gascoyne Report demonstrates the range of service approaches in that region, in the towns of Carnarvon, Geraldton and Meekatharra. With reference to our research questions, these approaches are compared in terms of:

- Inter-agency collaboration (significance and response);
- Impact of policy and funding models;
- Role of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and their effects;
- Comparison of community to mainstream approach; and
- Evidence of effective regional programs (clients exiting from homelessness).

**Homeless Centre Report**

The Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre is only one of three key centres for homeless Indigenous people in Mt Isa, the others being the Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre (APSCC) known as ‘AP’ and the Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House (KASH). The strong association between public-place dwelling and public drunkenness in Mt Isa is well recognised by these agencies and their supporting services and so their programs primarily target both these areas. For various historical and policy related reasons, each centre has evolved a different approach and mode of operation. Differences between the centres exist primarily in their approach to drinking behaviour which reflects the preferences and needs of particular clients who either choose to attend or who are referred to each centre, but also in the type of accommodation offered. AP and KASH offer short-term crisis accommodation and other support rather than tenancy. Each agency has developed its own role which integrates with other agencies within a much larger plan.

The three centres are now part of a regional or coordinated approach to Indigenous homelessness in Mt Isa set out in the ‘Sheltering the Isa’ Homelessness Community Action Plan. As for other Community Action Plans being implemented in Queensland’s seven homelessness ‘hotspots’, Sheltering the Isa is a place-based approach to be implemented over three years (2010-2013) (Queensland, Department of Communities n.d., p.5). Funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and delivered in partnership by the Department of Communities (DoC)\(^2\) and the Queensland Council of Social Services, the plan represents a partnership model. Each ‘action’ is the responsibility of a lead agency in partnership with other organisations including a date for implementation: one such organisation, the JTHC, being the subject of our Homeless Centre Report.

The Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in Mt Isa attempts to integrate the front-line treatment of Indigenous alcoholism with responses to homelessness. The Centre is unusual in that it not only aims to provide crisis accommodation with the longer term goal to facilitate clients through various stages of housing and eventually to stable urban public housing tenancies, but the JTHC also incorporates a managed drinking

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\(^2\) DoC is now the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability.
program for alcoholic clients. In some ways, the Centre aligns with programs in mainstream and other Indigenous centres but departs from usual practices in other significant ways, most particularly in the managed consumption of alcohol and an Indigenous-oriented approach (Memmott & Nash 2012, pp.34-37). Through its experience of service delivery in Mt Isa, the then DoC recognised a gap in services for homeless Indigenous people with long-term substance abuse problems. The JTHC offers services run by a majority of Indigenous staff and management who incorporate their Indigenous cultural understandings into the daily workings of the Centre and its programs to offer a client-centred, case-managed approach.

*Indigenous Homelessness and mobility in Mt Isa*

Local service agencies are well aware that some Indigenous people in the Mt Isa region are highly mobile, especially at particular times of the year such as mid-August when the annual rodeo is held. Many also visit Mt Isa regularly for a range of reasons, such as health appointments and court appearances as well as recreation and family visits. Whether visiting for short or extended periods, Indigenous people coming to Mt Isa often choose to sleep rough although some do so involuntarily (Memmott & Nash 2012, p.7). As argued elsewhere (e.g. Memmott et al. 2012a), many Indigenous public-place dwellers are not homeless (although they may be at risk). In Mt Isa some choose to sleep rough while away from their home community. The fact that their return to their home communities may be delayed by lack of transport and/or lack of financial support, adds further to the risk. To minimise the risk, local agencies step in.

*Inter-agency collaboration*

In Mt Isa, several services work together daily to provide public-place dwellers with accommodation but JTHC is the only place with a managed alcohol program that can offer both short and long-term accommodation for alcoholic clients. As well as undertaking a moderated drinking program, the clients are supported by a range of health and social services together with education and training programs so that they may progress towards stable tenancies.

While clients are categorised as homeless, they also have a range of complex health issues and other needs. It is significant therefore that JTHC (like other homeless centres in Mt Isa) relies on inter-agency cooperation as part of its case-management for individual clients, as set out in ‘Sheltering the Isa’. The supporting local agencies include the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Services (ATODS), Homeless Help
Outreach Team (HHOT), Riverbed Action Group Outreach and Support Services (RAGOSS), Mt Isa Community Mental Health Services and Mt Isa Sexual Health Services; where clients have access to professional counsellors (such as social workers, psychologists) and also to income and job agencies, such as Centrelink and Job Services Australia. The Queensland Department of Housing, the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Legal Aid, Queensland Transport and the Queensland Ambulance Service are also support agencies.

Both non-Indigenous and Indigenous run organisations in Mt Isa reportedly work well together. The Manager of JTHC commented favourably on the Centre’s dealings with these groups, particularly the first line help teams such as HHOT and RAGOSS. From the preliminary investigations done for the case study we have learnt that with the support from a range of services, individual clients can make certain progress towards rehabilitation and the Centre works well in many ways (Memmott & Nash 2012). For the short, medium and long-term stayers there is quite a range of expectations and need. In the short and medium terms, success focuses on the practical aspects of shelter and reduced risks in terms of drinking behaviour and therefore general safety. For many however, this could be achieved by facilitated return to their home communities. In the medium term and long term, clients’ take-up of training opportunities is significant for setting themselves on a path to successful housing (with a prioritized position on the public rental waiting list), a path that at times is made more difficult due to the short supply of housing exacerbated by the ‘two-speed’ mining economy.

**Evidence of high-quality and effective programs out of homelessness**

The JTHC operates on three core principles: harm minimisation; accommodation leading to housing; and cultural maintenance and the building of social capital and resilience. Our findings suggested that the Centre was able to translate these operating principles into effective service delivery although there were some limitations. Notwithstanding this degree of success, a number of clients were ‘recycling’ though the Centre and other facilities (as illustrated in Figure 3 below), suggesting that for some clients, progression through the JTHC to tenancies was not readily achievable. More research is needed to fully document and analyse the ‘recycling’ phenomenon for Indigenous homeless in the region and its relationship to the availability of rental housing.
Figure 3: Typical movements of Indigenous people through Mt Isa housing and institutionalized residences, including pathways in and out of the Jimaylya Centre (based on 2011 information).

At the time of writing the Homeless Centre Report, spokespeople for some services in Mt Isa said that currently there were no public-place dwellers in Mt Isa because the police and RAGOSS particularly were cooperating to ensure that no one spent a night in the riverbed without shelter. However this vigilance at time lapses and in any case there are regular day-time drinkers both in overt and covert locations. Arguably then the problem of public-place dwelling is much reduced but those people remain homeless according to our ‘at risk’ category of homelessness (see earlier in this report).

After admission to JTHC, the process for homeless clients who may be sleeping rough (or faced with that prospect) is from crisis accommodation, to singles accommodation, to accommodation in a Jimaylya house and then to a public rental house in Mt Isa – the pathway out. The Centre management is realistic about clients’
successes in terms of the pathway, i.e. modification of consumption and the end goal of no drinking or controlled moderate drinking. It remains to be objectively established whether the Centre owes its stability and successes primarily to its programs or more specifically to the long-term commitment and administrative style of the Indigenous founding Manager and his key support staff who continue in their roles.

**Funding and evaluation**

In both regional and urban centres, treatment programs targeting Indigenous Australians are sometimes short-lived (or fail to operate) due to funding constraints and/or inadequate human resources and often are not closely evaluated. JTHC is managed by the Queensland Government’s Department of Communities (now DoCCSD), and staffed by Indigenous people including the manager who are employed by that Department (Memmott & Nash 2012, p.8). Following initial funding for the Centre to open in 2003, the then DoC provided additional funding in 2008 as part of the Department of Communities’ Responding to Homelessness initiative (Qld. DoC, n.d.).

Our analysis revealed opportunities for improved services that would require some additional expenditure and also raised more complex questions around the need and manner of future evaluation of the Centre. It also demonstrated the value of contextualizing and evaluating a service within the local field of service delivery in order to obtain a more holistic and powerful model for explaining the strengths and gaps in urban service delivery. What is clear in this JTHC case study is the presence of cultural factors as drivers of homelessness (circular mobility bringing people regularly into Mt Isa, drinking with kin and countrymen in the river) and also as part of the method of addressing homelessness (cultural maintenance, building of social capital, planned transition from Aboriginal camping into conventional housing, transition from binge drinking style to moderated drinking style).

**Women’s Refuge Report**

The Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge Report provides a qualitative description of the social problems surrounding homelessness together with statistical data on crowding in Tennant Creek today. Although vast in area, the Barkly Region has a total population of only 6823 people including 4718 who are Aboriginal, and of whom 1700 live in Tennant Creek (ABS 2012e).
The Refuge provides services to Aboriginal women from throughout the very large Barkly Region which is characterized by regular circular mobility patterns into and out of its regional centre of Tennant Creek. The Refuge management and staff (majority of ten being Aboriginal women) provide the following key functions: crisis accommodation (eight beds), counselling, outreach support for women and their families and children, and Domestic Violence (DV) and Family Violence (FV) education for the region. Women access the Refuge services primarily as victims (or at risk) of DV or FV, but also because of: lack of transport to return home (i.e. dysfunctionally mobile women); the need for respite from crowded households and very stressful domestic environments; and, the need for survival help within non-functional houses (e.g. disabled women) (see Table 4). These causal categories are often co-existing and represent four types of secondary homelessness according to the homelessness classification system of Memmott et al. (2012) (see also earlier). Due to the relatively small population of the Barkly Region and the social dynamics of Aboriginal peoples, it is not readily possible for women victims to simply avoid or evade their families and husbands. Therefore the clients often return to their problematic circumstances resulting eventually in a cyclic pattern of return visits to the Refuge.

Local agencies and service providers as well as local and state government representatives raised many issues surrounding household crowding, limited public housing, women and children at risk of DV and FV, drug and alcohol problems, chronic illness and disabilities, rough sleeping and lack of support for families. The data collected on clients from the Women’s Refuge and the data on rough sleeping in Tennant Creek demonstrate the pressure on local services which aim to assist local Aboriginal people including visitors from the Barkly Region when they visit the regional centre.

In terms of the anecdotal understandings of household crowding in Tennant Creek there was strong evidence that people’s housing needs are not being met and that the Aboriginal community was experiencing considerable stress which impacted negatively on their health and well-being. Furthermore, our findings suggested a clear link between the reasons why Aboriginal women access the Women’s Refuge and the interconnected and complex set of social problems.

Our crowding study of Aboriginal rental tenancies revealed that there were an average of around ten Aboriginal people per house with a range of three to 25 during an off-peak time of the year in terms of bush visitations. The study also found that
there were high stress levels amongst many households and relatively high frequencies of family violence. Altogether it became clearer why between 13 and 39 adult women arrive at the Refuge seeking help each month.

The study raised the issue of whether there is room for an improvement in how the national Census records visitors in general (by ‘usual residence’ definition), and in particular for Indigenous households. By masking or discounting the number and presence of visitors in regions of high circular mobility, the Census fails to capture the information that is salient to understanding the underlying reasons why social problems (including FV and DV) and personal psychological health problems (including stress) are prevalent and increasing in particular regional cities of Australia.

**Inter-agency collaboration**

Our study suggested that most agencies in Tennant Creek seem to be following a collaborative model rather than a ‘silo’ approach to servicing homeless people and those ‘at risk’ in the Barkly Region, as the Refuge exemplifies.

In general, two sorts of clients use the Refuge. One category is those women seeking respite from difficult living conditions, such as severe crowding, and the other category is victims of DV or FV. Many clients have a drug and/or alcohol problem, but clients have to be sober to visit or stay in the Refuge. If intoxicated, they are rejected and referred to the Sobering Up Shelter run by BRADAAG (open five nights a week, but not open Monday and Sunday). If the person agrees to go to the Shelter, Night Patrol will transport them; if not, then they may be locked up by the police, or they may go elsewhere and continue drinking or seek out family for somewhere to stay.

A particular strength of the Refuge is the maintenance of constructive relationships between Refuge staff and other agencies in Tennant Creek and also with funding bodies. Without further evaluation however, the regional gaps in services cannot be fully understood and appropriately targeted.

**Institutional accommodation in Tennant Creek**

From discussion with service providers in Tennant Creek, it seems that while informal cooperation is a feature of interaction between service agencies in Tennant Creek, there were opportunities for a more coordinated regional approach to prevention and alleviation of homelessness. Various organisations have well-defined commitments for their limited resources but also the accommodation services are not adequate for the housing needs of Tennant Creek.
Apart from public rental housing, the additional institutional accommodation comprised aged care facilities (19 beds), the Women's Refuge (8 beds), alcohol rehabilitation facility (36 beds), youth crisis accommodation (12 beds), student accommodation (34 beds), and acute hospital care (20 beds), as well as 13 dwelling units for transitional rehabilitation accommodation, providing a total institutional accommodation of 129 beds, 25 units and two houses.

**Impact of funding and policy models**

A senior manager at Julalikari Council, an Indigenous housing agency and service provider stated that there were no other housing options for Aboriginal clients in Tennant Creek and that the way of judging housing demand in Tennant Creek needs to be different from how it is calculated on the ‘east coast’. She noted that centralized government asks: ‘Where is the demand in Tennant Creek?’ suggesting that demand is not exceptionally high compared to the worst ‘hot-spots’ in eastern Australia. Until more Aboriginal people are put on the waiting list, the demand figures will not accurately reflect the real level of demand. Nevertheless, waiting periods for community housing in Tennant Creek at May 2012 were: 78 months for a 1 bedroom unit; 67 months for 2 bedroom units; and, 42 months for pensioner units (Memmott et al. 2013, pp.42-43).

The impact of these waiting periods are well understood at the Refuge; the levels of stress arising from high density living, including crowding and other daily stresses of the Indigenous people in Tennant Creek, impact on the levels of DV and FV and the number of women who present at the Refuge as clients. Furthermore, the sustained level of demand on the Refuge has revealed some problems and limitations of its service as follows:

- Regular changes of government policy and funding which result in constrained short-term funding cycles. This ever-present circumstance makes it very difficult to plan forward;
- At peak demand periods, ideal lengths of stay periods are not possible as turnover rate must increase to accommodate women who are at high risk and physically battered;
- Insufficient numbers of beds to respond to peak periods of demand. There is a need for more accommodation as well as more office space for the staff. (There has recently been an attempt to obtain NT Government support for another adjacent house but unfortunately at the time of writing this profile, the attempt had been unsuccessful.)
• A suspected service gap for very young women who are suspected to be incurring DV and FV at rates higher than reflected in the client profile intake; and,
• The lack of younger Aboriginal women on staff and the difficulty of conscripting them (Memmott et al. 2013, pp.60-61).

Such limitations have implications for policy which we address further in Chapter 6 of this report. In short the problem of homelessness in Tennant Creek is under-reported and under-serviced resulting at times in extreme pressure on existing homelessness services such as the Women’s Refuge which requires additional support. Meanwhile the Refuge continues to offer a range of effective services for women in crisis but has relatively limited opportunities to influence change beyond this front-line approach.

Gascoyne Report
This Report by Dr Birdsall-Jones examined, as a case study, the response to Aboriginal homelessness in the context of a designated state housing region, the Midwest Region of the Department of Housing of Western Australia (DoH (WA)). For the case study, the researcher undertook a program of interviews with key practitioners in Meekatharra, Carnarvon and the regional centre of Geraldton to investigate the nature and extent of the phenomenon, commenting on both the strengths and weaknesses of specific programs.

Meekatharra
In Meekatharra there were no public-place dwelling people in the town. However there was a noticeable presence of night-time street roaming among Aboriginal children, reflecting an ongoing, constant problem of substance abuse and associated behaviour in family homes. It is difficult to see who, among the agencies and local government, was properly responsible for developing approaches to this problem. There was no emergency housing or hostel in Meekatharra.

The street-roaming children of Meekatharra did not fall into the categories of homelessness commonly used in the research and policy community. However, they were very near to the homeless state, and the practice of home abandonment could be one pathway into homelessness in later life. For this reason, the term 'peri-homeless' was adopted by Birdsall-Jones as a means of readily identifying children and others (victims of domestic violence in particular) whose homes have become a place of danger, but who have not abandoned their homes as yet. This corresponded to the term employed (see earlier) in the Memmott et al. classification, ‘at risk of homelessness’ – dysfunctionally mobile.
Meekatharra lacks the consultative, cooperative, and culturally based structures necessary to develop a sound, local basis for addressing the needs of peri-homeless children. There have been attempts to develop the structures of consultation, most notably by the Aboriginal women elders’ group. This group sought to take children off the street by taking them to their grandmothers’ or their aunts’ homes. This effort failed largely through lack of funding. This points to a way in which the Department for Child Protection (DCP (WA)) might consider supporting a ‘grass-roots’ Aboriginal community effort to address children’s issues in their town.

**Carnarvon**

The problem of child peri-homelessness was also found to be present in Carnarvon. The problems of peri-homeless children are, in general terms, caused by their parents’ drug and alcohol related and gambling behaviours. When these children resort to night-time street roaming they may be led to commit crimes of property (theft, break and entry, vandalism). When this occurs, it can function to set future behaviour patterns that can only lead to a cycle of arrest, conviction and imprisonment over the individual’s life. One of the drivers of homelessness among Aboriginal men is the potential alienation from home or home community committing a social crime and subsequent imprisonment; a result of this upon release from prison is Aboriginal men’s homelessness. Imprisonment and the subsequent failure to facilitate a way for the perpetrator to resolve the grievance with the victim’s family in a culturally appropriate manner, is not the only driver of homelessness among Aboriginal men, but it is certainly among the common drivers of homelessness.

In 2007, Carnarvon service providers, the police, and local government came together with key members of the Aboriginal community and formed what they called the Alcohol Accord (‘the Accord’). Evidence, was presented by the police showing that nearly all their arrests of Aboriginal people involved alcohol consumption. The reasoning was that if alcohol consumption could be controlled then the arrest and conviction rate of Aboriginal people would decrease. There has been some success from this effort. Chiefly, members of the Accord came to understand that while controlled alcohol consumption was of great importance, there were other community issues that required a coordinated response. Among these issues are the problems of peri-homeless Aboriginal children.
Homelessness, or the child peri-homelessness, is thus part of a complex of other problems\(^3\). This is the view developed by the members of the Accord and it guides the development of the solutions they seek to apply to the problems that develop around that portion of the Aboriginal community who engage in substance abuse. It should be pointed out, that those who engage in substance abuse form a minority in the Aboriginal community. Most Aboriginal people in Carnarvon do not have such problems and devote themselves to living what they term a ‘good life’.

As well, the kin networks that make up the Aboriginal community reach out to the peri-homeless children and the majority of them have accessed the kin-based system of rights and obligations and through this have acquired a stable home and family life in the care of their aunts and grandmothers. The concern of the Accord is that a small minority of children who, for various reasons, have been unable to access the care of their key kinfolk.

In formulating a response to this problem, gender specific youth activities have been established and are available to Aboriginal children in the evening until late. In order to break into the pattern of street roaming, a bus service takes each child to the home that they regard as safe, that is, the home where there is no likelihood of behaviour fuelled by substance abuse.

**Geraldton**

In Geraldton Aboriginal homelessness appears to reach across the spectrum of gender, age, status and kin group. A great deal of the work of the DCP (WA) in Geraldton has been made up of finding emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence, families who have been unable to obtain housing and children who have lost access to the family home for various reasons.

In Geraldton, service providers and representatives of Aboriginal community organisations have established the Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance (MAOA). While the general purpose and goals of MAOA are similar to those of the Carnarvon Alcohol Accord, MAOA is organised on a much more formal basis. As noted in the Gascoyne Report by Birdsall-Jones, members of the organisation take on responsibility for advancing the interests of various sub-groups within the Geraldton Aboriginal community.

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\(^3\) An exceptional program operating in the NW Queensland study region in this regard is the Peacemaking Program on Gununa (Venables 2012).
Inter agency coordination

While the study topic of homelessness may be regarded by some to fall within the rubric of housing research, it soon became clear in Geraldton that the problems raised by participants in the study were not solely matters of housing. Matters of community structure and development, child welfare, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and community education were also salient.

In the Mid-west region of WA, three models of response to Aboriginal homelessness were apparent. In Meekatharra, there appeared to be a ‘silof approach. That is, government agencies, non-government organisations (NGO) and the community apparently had not developed a coordinated approach toward delivering effective, targeted measures to the ways in which Aboriginal homelessness manifested itself in the town.

In Carnarvon, there existed a relatively loose alliance organisation which included the various agencies along with the Aboriginal community, the shire and the police (the Accord). It was a loose confederation but it seemed to suit a small town such as Carnarvon in which people can expect to see each other quite regularly in the normal course of life, exchange views and by this means keep one another informed of the latest developments according to their relevance to their professional interests. The Alliance met irregularly but nevertheless reliably, according to whether or not the members judged there to be an issue that needed attention (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p. viii).

In Geraldton there was a similar sort of alliance which had been formalised through a memorandum of understanding between Aboriginal community organisations, state and federal agencies, NGOs and the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health (CUCRH). This alliance of organisations was called the Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Association (MAOA). Because the City of Greater Geraldton is the regional centre, the regional offices of the state and federal departments are represented. Each member of MAOA had a portfolio, such as Aboriginal men’s health, Aboriginal housing and culture. It was the responsibility of each portfolio holder to advance the interests of the portfolio through lobbying, applying for funding and research. Given the size of Geraldton, and the authority represented there, this was an appropriate model for the city.

There is, however, not a great deal of evidence that the region as a whole was presenting a coordinated response to the matter of Aboriginal homelessness.
Further community development work is required in this regard. This development of better coordination among the towns in the region is necessary in view of the fact that the DoH (WA) has undergone an important organisational shift through the alignment of Aboriginal housing policy and practice with the mainstream. This means that the lines of administration and communication with and within the department must go through the regional office. All aspects of Aboriginal housing including repairs, such as maintenance and tenant management were at the time of writing, being directly managed at the regional office level.

While there was a coordinated inter-departmental administrative response to this in Geraldton, there did not appear to be an inter-departmental response to Aboriginal affairs among the various towns and communities within the region, nor was there evidence of a coordinated response between the regional capital city of Geraldton and the towns of the region.

This was with the partial exception of Carnarvon, where a culture of shared understanding appeared to exist among various practitioners and between the practitioners and the Aboriginal community. However, Carnarvon did not appear to share links of this kind with Geraldton.

With regard to Meekatharra, it is difficult to know what model of coordinated response would best serve the needs of the town and its Aboriginal Community. If a loose confederation of government and NGO services could be developed, this would certainly be a start. However, it must be said that community development of this nature takes time, and effort. Whether or not it comes to fruition depends largely on what Meekatharra is willing and able to accept, and its ability to develop better lines of communication within the town itself (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p.ix).

**Evidence of high-quality and effective programs and practices**

In the WA research sites, only Geraldton clearly experienced pronounced ‘rough sleeping’ (i.e. ‘public-place dwelling’ in accordance with our categories) among the Aboriginal community. Practitioners from DCP and NGOs remarked on the presence of families among the ‘rough sleepers’ (PPDs). A primary concern was the lack of short-term and emergency housing suitable for families. Short-term and emergency housing can be a pathway out of homelessness only if there is long-term, low-cost housing for families to take up following the limited term accommodation. Even when there was low-cost housing available in Geraldton, it was only available on the basis
of the listing of applicants to the WA (DoH) or to MRAC. Even on the priority housing list, it took time for applicants to edge to the top of the list.

In Carnarvon, while there was no ‘rough sleepers’ (PPD) there were peri-homeless children in enough numbers to prompt service providers and government agencies to respond to these children’s needs. Among them the practitioners of these organisations had established evening to late entertainment functions for the adolescents which included transport home. This served to bring the children into contact with practitioners and adults of standing within the Aboriginal community. Familiarity with these adults, Aboriginal elders and agency practitioners alike, had the potential to develop into relationships of mutual trust and caring, and there was community effort to reach out to peri-homeless children. According to practitioners, however, peri-homelessness was to a certain extent limited to those children whose home life was difficult and who lacked kin group support. Because of the specific characteristics of the resulting cohort of children, it was possible to identify them individually, to know their situations and to make ongoing approaches to them through the various outreach programs.

In Meekatharra, there was no ‘rough sleeping’ (PPD) but there was a presence of peri-homeless children that caused practitioners to remark upon it with considerable concern. At the time of the field research for this project there was no particular response to the needs of these children from any of the government or non-government agencies.

Chapter Conclusion

The three case studies in our reports demonstrate the diversity of approaches to regional Indigenous homelessness across Australia where national policies are in place to reduce the number of Indigenous homeless people and those at risk by providing better services. It is clear that the interpretation of needs relate to regional features of Aboriginal social life and aspects of place.

In Mt Isa, the Indigenous ‘culture of drinking’ and practices of mobility place some Indigenous drinkers who visit from other communities, at risk of homelessness. The JTHC has targeted the complex suite of needs that these people experience and supports them in a managed drinking program combined with transitioning through stages of housing and eventually to mainstream tenancies.

In the Barkly Region, the Women’s Refuge services a slightly different client base who are ‘at risk’ of homelessness due to the particular set of social problems that
Indigenous people encounter in their daily living in Tennant Creek. House crowding and potential stressors together with DV/FV or risk of violence are the significant social issues that stretch the services of the Refuge and other agencies to their limits.

In the Gascoyne Region, significant gaps still exist in the services available in the three case study towns and it is not clear what the best approach is for each place. Despite the difficulties it seems that the current interventions are generally heading in the right direction.

Our reports from the different regions highlight several common issues in terms of homelessness and service delivery including: mobility and transience; pathways into homelessness including those ‘at risk’ from FV/DV; the complex needs of Indigenous homeless people requiring a range of support services; and, the lack of data from the records of services which do not take an holistic approach to significant areas of need. Overall, there is a need for further research to understand more fully the nature of regional homelessness and more accurately define and service the areas of need.
5. The Cultural Argument for Special Services to address Indigenous Homelessness

Key findings

- Patterns of Indigenous culture underlie the lifestyles of many Indigenous public-place dwellers and those at risk of homelessness as well as those experiencing spiritual homelessness;
- Cultural factors can contribute to pathways in to homelessness but also to pathways out;
- There are both Aboriginal cultural drivers and non-Aboriginal cultural drivers of Indigenous homelessness;
- Service delivery agents and Aboriginal householders can work constructively together to manage and address household crowding by mutual recognition of one another’s cultural values in evaluating the problem;
- Addressing Aboriginal binge drinking requires understandings of cultural drinking styles;
- The interpretation of what comprises crowding for Aboriginal people is embedded in cultural values and rules. A stress-model of crowding that is culturally informed is preferable to a density-model of crowding in objectively assessing whether crowding exists; and
- One form of cultural driver of Indigenous homelessness is the failure and/or breakdown of customary kinship roles and obligations which can manifest as child homelessness and at-risk street behaviours of children.

Introduction to Indigenous cultural issues

In our first report, the authors sought to explain the many facets of Indigenous homelessness (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012). These broad categories (and a number of sub-categories) of homelessness were identified to make the case that special services are needed to address Indigenous homelessness (Table 3). Here we focus on the findings from our case studies (Reports 3, 4 and 5) that exemplify and justify the need for special services for Indigenous homeless and public-place dwelling people.
Patterns of Indigenous culture, albeit at times dysfunctional, are included in the lifestyles of both public-place dwellers and large households in rental housing, as well as underlying the lifestyles of those who are experiencing spiritual homelessness. These patterns are influential both in terms of contributing to the pathways into the various forms of homelessness and understanding the nature of the lifestyles of these people in their homeless circumstances. Particular aspects of such lifestyles include cultural identity (including land-based identity), kinship practices, alcohol consumption style, forms of family violence, camping behaviours, externally oriented behaviours, socio-spatial residential groupings, circular mobility within socio-geographic (or cultural) regions and associated seasonality influences (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012).

There are of course also non-Aboriginal cultural drivers of homelessness that are structurally based in the wider Australian society, e.g. unemployment, poverty, poor health and education status, housing shortages, the justice system, the welfare system, illegal substance availability, urban drift, housing tenancy conditions, racial discrimination and the deep underlying historical factors of colonial dispossession, frontier violence, and forms of institutional and policy violence against Aboriginal people (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, p.57).

Although definitions of Australian Indigenous homelessness may have become culturally specific (see Chapter 2 and Table 3 earlier) this has not been reflected in many policy decisions, which have tended to move towards mainstreaming. Pathways into homelessness for contemporary Indigenous Australians can involve unique longitudinal factors, including those having an impact from early childhood in, for example, Indigenous settlements and communities that have institutionalized and marginalized histories (late 1890s to 1980s). They can also involve situational factors acting upon the lives of individuals, but which also arise from colonial contact histories and directed cultural change such as the ‘Stolen Generation’ policy. To comprehend the definitions of, and pathways into homelessness, understandings of the cultural and historical backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are necessary. (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, p.10.)

Cultural drivers that influence Aboriginal households to become large households included:

- people’s kin ties and desire for an immersive sociality,
- caring senior women as frequent household heads,
• the cultural trait of demand sharing,
• the cultural trait of mobility in Indigenous communities, and householder’s skills in negotiating and policing cultural rules (Memmott et al. 2011).

Kinship practices, whether they be appropriately or inappropriately enacted according to Aboriginal rules and ideals, include affirming kinship relations (including classificatory kin or ‘skin’ relatives), capitalising on kinship rights when in need of food, shelter or cash (demand sharing), Aboriginal values of respect, avoidance behaviours, mourning behaviours, visiting behaviours, the formation of sleeping groups, choosing conjugal partners and coming-of-age (‘grand tour’) rituals.

One of the characteristic drivers of Aboriginal homelessness is family violence (FV, as listed above) which encompasses spousal violence, same gender violence, gang conflicts and homicides, sexual violence, child abuse and suicide; all enacted at frequencies that are statistically disproportionate with the mainstream, resulting in turn in high rates of family fission and displacement, increased residential mobility of victims, high incarceration rates of perpetrators and the subsequent vulnerability to homelessness (including spiritual homelessness) for prison releasees. Addressing Indigenous family violence is one of the most challenging areas of service delivery in Australia, e.g. as exemplified in the work of the Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge.

Our case study reports provide insights into these cultural dimensions impacting on pathways in and out of homelessness and the homeless lifestyle. In the Cultural Argument Report, we argued the case to recognize situations where Aboriginal community values and government policy values align by generating supportive policies. An example is the many strong Aboriginal householders who take in needy relatives yet run their households in a safe and culturally meaningful way. These people are assisting society in preventing vulnerable people fall into rough sleeper lifestyles and should be praised and supported, not victimized for exceeding their tenancy limits.

Different combinations of services are needed for individuals in the different homelessness categories. The way Indigenous ‘homelessness’ is defined or categorised influences the types of response strategies that are implemented by Indigenous organizations, government and non-government agencies to address this phenomenon (Memmott et al. 2003). The high priority services that public-place dwellers (‘Parkies’ or ‘Long Grassers’) may want or need are not necessarily always concerned with housing or accommodation issues.
A number of critical service response categories to Indigenous homelessness that are at the forefront of good practice, are also culturally distinct, being designed to address and intervene in the types of Aboriginal lifestyle behaviours listed above. Examples include night patrols, shaming processes, imposed Aboriginal rule and value systems, imposed transport of individuals within cultural regions to alternately residential settings, and caring practices by relatives from particular kin categories (Memmott et al. 2012, p.58).

The Homeless Centre Report

*Indigenous styles of drinking*

The Homeless Centre Report demonstrates why it is important to understand aspects of cultural difference when considering the behaviour of Indigenous people in crisis. In rural, remote and urban communities some Aboriginal people engage in heavy drinking in culturally distinctive ways. These styles of drinking are well documented and are characterised by the propensity for a large proportion of Aboriginal drinkers to indulge in binge drinking, the preference for drinking with kin, the propensity for demand-sharing and reciprocal shouting, the expectation that they will not be held accountable for their actions when they are drunk, and the likelihood that people will sleep rough in the place where they have been drinking once they become intoxicated (‘choke down’). Despite a range of government policy initiatives over many decades concerning the consumption of alcohol by Aboriginal people, certain aspects of Indigenous styles of drinking persist and are evident in Mt Isa today.

*The Centre and its clients*

With a culturally distinctive approach, the JTHC offers a range of support services which are tailored to a wide range of needs, particularly education, employment and housing. Interviews with staff together with internal reports from JTHC demonstrate the nature and extent of local client need, staff commitment and other agency support within the challenging fields of Indigenous homelessness and substance abuse in this remote region.

Overall, the approach fits within a socio-cultural model where policies and solutions focus on social and cultural aspects compared with alternative approaches. For several years now the debate on homelessness nationally and internationally has moved away from an ‘individualist’ approach (focussed on the individual factors such as alcohol dependence) to greater emphasis on structural and social factors or social
inclusion models (Greenhalgh et al. 2004, p.10). These kinds of models may be particularly appropriate for addressing Aboriginal homelessness in Australia.

Further evidence-based research could be significant for JTHC’s future since its combined approach to Indigenous homelessness and alcoholism presents an holistic or cultural emphasis. While some researchers such as Gray et al. (2010) and Taylor, Thompson and Davis (2010) prioritise cultural factors in the treatment of alcoholism, for example, others including many Indigenous organisations favour a more mainstream approach. From within both perspectives the experts decry the lack of evidence-based studies to inform Indigenous rehabilitation programs. More specifically, some others call for locally defined and developed Indigenous treatment strategies, e.g. Phillips (2003).

There is increasing evidence that Indigenous people’s experience of homelessness varies in significant ways from non-indigenous people’s experiences and needs. As Memmott, Birdsall-Jones and Greenop (2012) argue, Aboriginal people’s long history of continuing cultural traditions have sometimes been misunderstood when, for example, rough sleepers in Mt Isa have been categorised as ‘homeless’. While technically they may be without a home on the night, they may actually have other prior needs that go unaddressed (such as health, substance addiction and transport) when categorised as ‘homeless’. In this context it is important to view the combined group of services in Mt Isa that target Indigenous people’s needs.

Service Delivery Analysis

The Homeless Centre Report puts forward a preliminary analysis of the Centre’s services based on three core operating principles: harm minimisation, accommodation leading to housing, and cultural maintenance and building of social capital and resilience.

Harm minimisation is contextualised in the comparison between (a) reduction in the supply of alcohol, and (b) reduction in the client’s demand for alcohol, within the field of alcohol rehabilitation. JTHC is significant because it offers the opportunity for both voluntary personal supply reduction and demand reduction, (without sacrificing externally oriented drinking venues and customary drinking group formation), which are not offered in other centres. The JTHC has had many successes in terms of harm minimisation through provision of emergency accommodation and transitional accommodation as well as significant numbers who access services and training. The transitional accommodation can move people through ‘tin shed’ style camping
with external hearths, through personalized single rooms and eventually into conventional two-bedroom houses. Further success can at times be temporarily impeded particularly by the lack of surplus rental housing in Mt Isa and the long waiting times for available tenancies.

During their stay at the Centre, clients have opportunities and challenges to increase their cultural capital and we found that there may be a range of forces operating that deserve further investigation. It seems that not only are there cultural factors that can both facilitate or inhibit rehabilitation, but also, the very attractive features of the institution itself may create a safe haven for a proportion of clients with complex behavioural problems, and thereby inadvertently contribute to a reduced motivation for change amongst certain of these longer-term clients.

The Women’s Refuge Report

Cultural considerations are significant for understanding why women become clients of the Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge and also for understanding the context of their support.

With an average of around ten Aboriginal people per house in Tennant Creek (with a range of three to 25 during an off-peak time of the year in terms of bush visitations), there are high stress levels amongst many households with high frequencies of family violence. As a result, between 13 and 39 adult women arrive per month at the Refuge.

We have adapted Gifford’s diagrammatic theoretical model of crowding (Memmott et al. 2013, Figure 8), to include the salient cultural factors in his discussion. We note that Gifford incorporates culture into his crowding model in two places: (i) cultural factors are implicit as part of the antecedent factors (e.g. physical and social settings character, past personal and group history); and (ii) cultural factors are also implicit as part of the mediating factors shaping response to stress (Memmott et al. 2011, pp.13-14).

With respect to antecedent factors, it is argued that in different cultures, childhood conditioning and socialisation processes equip individuals to adapt to, and to deal with perceived high-density situations in different ways, according to different norms. Thus Rapoport (1976, p.18) and others have argued that being with like people will decrease stress frequency in potentially crowded circumstances. Kinship groups (e.g. extended families, multiple family units) and other culturally homogenous groups are most likely to be socially well-structured. Similarly those individuals within the same
culture will have common methods to mediate situations that are perceived to be stressful and crowded, and to maintain group sanctions over what is appropriate stress-avoidance behaviour. Of the propensity for cultural factors to act as mediating or moderating influences, Gifford (2007, p. 21) writes:

The consequences of crowding and high density depend in part on cultural background. Culture acts as a moderating influence on high density, sometimes providing its members with a shield against the negative effects of high density and sometimes failing to equip them with effective means of coping with high density.

When the Gifford model is applied to Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge (TCWR) and rough sleepers, a number of factors resonate with respect to the cultural norms of crowding and the rules by which crowding is alleviated.

The cultural rules by which Aboriginal communities regulate their households and in particular the sleeping arrangements, have been described for other remote, urban and metropolitan Aboriginal communities. Birdsall-Jones in Memmott et al. (2012a, pp.154-158) describes the rules for appropriate sleeping arrangements in a community in north-west WA, which manage the age, gender and family/partner relationships of the people within the household. The study found that if there was stress then it was likely to relate to the difficulty in achieving appropriate configurations of people or handling alcohol abuse, rather than the overall number of people. The number or density was not the primary consideration in most people’s perception of crowding.

Such rules appear to also operate in the Barkly region. Some of these rules were indicated by the Night Patrollers, e.g. ‘... children keep their rooms when visitors come...’; ‘single men go elsewhere’. Also, according to the Manager of the Refuge, women present in crisis at the Refuge when the Aboriginal norms or cultural rules for the accommodation of people within a household have not been able to be maintained. Typically this is when violence results. More investigation is needed in order to understand the critical combination of rules, available spaces and overall numbers in any given household and the precise circumstances surrounding crowding stress. Meanwhile it seems clear that perceptions of crowding in the town are culturally mediated and that culturally sanctioned rules and behaviours alleviate some of the adverse effects of crowding in households with a strong household-head.

The ABS measures crowding according to the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) using a measure based on the number of people per bedroom,
with caveats on the age and gender appropriate to share bedrooms. This standard does not consider the possibility of culturally specific ways of inhabiting housing where different versions from the CNOS are appropriate, nor that sleeping in spaces other than bedrooms may be acceptable, or at least tolerated in some communities. It is a density-based measure and does not reflect the stress caused by other kinds of non-bedroom crowding. We discuss this at length in Memmott et al. (2012).

Table 7: Number of people per sleeping space (mean and median calculations) for the 80 households surveyed in Tennant Creek.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of people per sleeping space</th>
<th>sample size</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>median</th>
<th>standard deviation</th>
<th>minimum</th>
<th>maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location 1 - Tennant Creek Town</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location 2 - Community Living Areas</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas the ABS definition of crowding uses the number of bedrooms in a household, a different definition of sleeping spaces based on our study uses the number of bedrooms plus any other spaces inside or outside the house that are used for sleeping, including a lounge, dining room, store room, front verandah, back verandah, back yard space (see Table 7).

The Gascoyne Report

In this report the author has sought to demonstrate that (a) Aboriginal homelessness varies from place to place and the way(s) in which it varies, (b) to differentiate between pathways into homelessness and the state of homelessness itself, and (c) to note the commonalities among the research sites regarding the shape, or demographic characteristics of the Aboriginal homeless. These concerns are not mutually exclusive. For example, the presence of children roaming the streets at night is a common concern for all three research sites, and these children must be distinguished as being on a pathway to homelessness as opposed to being homeless per se. They are at risk of homelessness and have become dysfunctionally mobile (see Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012 at Table 10, p. 45) in a way that has previously been unaccounted for in homelessness research (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p. 56).
In the smaller towns of Carnarvon and Meekatharra, these children were firmly identified as having left the family home to avoid adults who were engaged in substance abuse. In Geraldton, participants also discussed children on the street but because Geraldton as the regional centre is so much larger than the two smaller country towns, some participants found it difficult to say whether at least some of them were simply on their way from one place to another, on their way home, or had been driven out of their homes by objectionable adult activities.

In Geraldton, those who spoke with authority about children’s night-roaming were those whose work was on a neighbourhood basis as opposed to the larger field covered by government agencies and service providers. Looking across all three centres, all participants who worked on a neighbourhood basis were Aboriginal and the researcher discussed the situation of night-roaming children in Meekatharra in particular. In the understanding of these Aboriginal participants, the problems faced by the Meekatharra children constituted a worrying example either of cultural breakdown or the breakdown of the family structure. (Birdsall-Jones 2013, pp. 56, 57.)

Generally speaking, one of the most important purposes of Aboriginal family structure is to provide avenues of help for children whose parents are known to be failing to look after their children properly (Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010). It is evident from the data gathered in Meekatharra that this extended family structure was not serving the needs of the children in this particular way (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p. 57).

It has been noted already that Meekatharra lacks the consultative, cooperative, culturally based structures that both practitioners and Aboriginal elders have worked hard to develop in Carnarvon and Geraldton. However, it should be well noted that this is not for lack of trying. The Women’s Program Officer (whose work is discussed in Chapter 4, sub-section Girls and Women of the Gascoyne Report) has sought to foster a culturally based solution to the problem of the night-roaming children by bringing together a number of the Aboriginal women elders of the town. For a time, they were successful in taking children off the street by sending them to their grandmothers’ or their aunts’ homes. Ultimately however, this effort failed but that is not because of a failure of Aboriginal culture but a failure to obtain funding to support the elders’ efforts. Had funding been available, (a) it would have given the women more of a chance both to provide support to the grandmothers who were asked to take on the short term care of children, and (b) it would have provided more of an opportunity to increase the involvement of other community elders in their work.
This latter point is crucial, because elders, both men and women, have great authority and universal respect among the extended family groups of their towns. However, the power that accrues to their authority refers predominantly to their own extended kin group. Within that group, they have both the power and authority to remonstrate with people about their behaviour and they also have the power to tell the children of the family where they should be and how they should behave. However, they cannot necessarily exercise their authority outside their own extended kin group. Not every woman elder in Meekatharra chose to participate in the effort, and so not every extended kin group in Meekatharra was represented within the women elder’s action group. Some people, therefore, would not be told what to do by these women. The second reason for the failure of the group’s effort for the children, the lack of funding, was always going to be difficult as a matter of local politics. It is possible that the women could have enlisted the support of the DCP (WA), but the Aboriginal community of the town would take this as a very hostile action, and the consequences for the women could be serious.

The Areas of Concern about Aboriginal Homelessness in the Gascoyne

In Meekatharra, concern was expressed regarding home abandonment among children on account of a dangerous environment at home. As one practitioner put it:

> It’s not that they are homeless, it’s why would they be at home (Interview, Women’s Service Officer, Meekatharra, July 2012) (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p.57).

Child home abandonment was, generally speaking, the primary concern of all agencies at which interviews were conducted. Child home abandonment is certainly not a new phenomenon, nor is this the first time it has been discussed in the Western Australian context (Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010). However, we have previously seen this problem discussed under the heading of ‘Aboriginal (or Indigenous) youth homelessness’. Identifying child home abandonment as a phenomenon allows us to be more specific about the drivers of the larger phenomenon of Aboriginal youth homelessness in that child home abandonment is one pathway to homelessness. While it has not been identified specifically as such, it is clear from the literature that it occurs in other states of Australia (Allwood & Rogers 2001; Evans & Shaver 2001; Hunter 2006). As a general phenomenon, child home abandonment occurs internationally and for much the same reasons as in the Australian Aboriginal context (Rukmana 2008).
However, child home abandonment has not before been considered as a common problem across an entire region. If this problem is not addressed properly and with dispatch, WA looks forward to a lost generation of human potential among the Aboriginal population of the state. If the problem continues to go unaddressed, then WA will face the cost of significant mental health and welfare expenditure on behalf of this generation many of whom are unlikely to become contributing members of Aboriginal society and society in general. It is emphasised that the lessons of consultation and the acceptance of dedication to a problem for the long term will provide the only viable solutions to Aboriginal child home abandonment.

In Carnarvon, child home abandonment was also of concern. The recommendation was to establish a children’s hostel as a first step. Concern was also expressed regarding cyber-bullying among the adolescents, however, Carnarvon needs support in order to put in place procedures for dealing with this (Birdsall-Jones 2013, pp. 58, 59).

In Geraldton, some concern was expressed about the flow-on effects of better policing of drug use and child abuse in Carnarvon. The point being made was that while Carnarvon was experiencing reduced substance abuse than it had been in the immediate past, these offenders had since moved to Geraldton. The greater proportion of concern however, focussed on child home abandonment and the plight of single men. Single men are the lowest priority for public housing, and no one questioned this. Participants did however point to the current crisis in affordable housing for single men. Funding has been granted to the Bundiyarra organisation to build hostel accommodation, but seeing as the funding was only recently granted, it will be several years before the hostel is established and ready for use.
6. Policy, program and practice implications of the findings – Reports 1-5

Key findings

- Services based on cultural understandings can focus more effectively on the people who need services and the kind of services they need;
- Regional responses to Aboriginal homelessness can target place-based and changing individual needs;
- An holistic approach to homelessness within a region brings better understanding of the social and economic forces operating on Aboriginal people; and,
- Holistic problem planning is best done through collaborative projects (government/non-government organisations/Indigenous bodies) with a high degree of Indigenous control and direction setting.

The Cultural Argument Report

Increasingly since 2000, definitions of Australian Indigenous homelessness in the social science literature have become culturally specific, yet this has not been reflected in many policy decisions, which have tended to move towards mainstreaming.

As discussed earlier, the Cultural Argument Report described aspects of the cultural and historical backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explain possible pathways into homelessness and the ways Indigenous homelessness has been defined; and furthermore, that such pathways into homelessness can involve longitudinal and/or situational factors. For example, the Report explained that there was a continuity of culturally supported camping practices by Aboriginal people in many missions, government settlements, outstations and fringe settlements well into the late 20th century. Today many Aboriginal people who travel into regional cities (and even metropolitan areas) camp with minimal resources (firewood, water, blanket) if no other shelter opportunities are available to them. The re-emergence of informal camping has thus been occurring in many cities over the last few decades. This occurrence is not simply due to a preference for camping, but involves a complex of other causal factors which have policy, program and practice implications.
Redefinition of homelessness categories have allowed better understandings of the pressures on Aboriginal people which can result in homelessness or being ‘at risk’. Policy needs to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the diverse profile types set out within these categories (see earlier). For example, campers or public-place dwellers could be accommodated in temporary visitors’ facilities (as in the Alice Springs Accommodation Park for Indigenous visitors). Similarly, the risk of homelessness for those living in crowded and stressful circumstances could be reduced by policy attention to housing design and cultural protocols.

In the area of data collection, more accurate and reliable measures of crowding stress are required rather than a measure of density. While information about the number of people in houses is significant, there are other social and cultural considerations that policy makers need to understand (the subject of Report 1). Further research and policy debate is required on the nature and treatment of Indigenous spiritual homelessness, for example, in order to target those needs.

In relation to practice response, four categories emerged as having culturally distinct ramifications in relation to Indigenous people, namely: legislative approaches; patrols and out-reach services; addressing anti-social behaviour; and, regional strategies.

In addition, other more conventional approaches to Indigenous homelessness were also deemed useful, including: (a) alcohol and drug strategies including diversionary responses for intoxicated individuals, (b) accommodation strategies and options, (c) dedicated service centres and gathering places, (d) the design of public places to enhance public-place dwelling, (e) public education strategies, (f) telephone information and help services, (g) skills and training for outreach workers, (h) intensive case management, (i) charismatic mentors, (j) philosophies of client interaction that involve empowerment of clients, and (k) partnerships between government and non-government agencies. (Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, p. 54).

Overall, practice strategies and programs to deal with Indigenous homelessness must be selected and combined to suit the local cultural situation and the socio-economic and environmental context which will vary from region to region and from town to town.

The Monitoring Challenge Report

In our ‘Monitoring Challenge’ Report, we proposed and recommended additional methods for measuring Indigenous homelessness including in-depth qualitative
analysis and longitudinal data collection to facilitate deeper understandings of culturally specific aspects of homelessness such as high Indigenous mobility. We also highlighted the possible use of text analysis software to monitor Internet use of keywords in relation to homelessness in particular known geographical areas, to aid in tracking hotspots of activity and interest in homelessness (Memmott et al. 2012, pp. 20, 23).

What is needed is a methodological approach that uses a different conceptual frame for identifying those Indigenous people who are technically homeless, in order to obtain more accurate quantitative and qualitative data. Current approaches to calculating homeless people are based on ideas of homelessness that are not included in current data gathering methodologies. A new methodological approach is required that includes this ‘conceptual frame’ that considers Indigenous mobility, obligations, constructs of home and visitation in order to understand who is ‘homeless’, who is ‘visiting’ and who is adequately housed. To capture the dynamic aspect, a more rigorous longitudinal approach with shorter time intervals between data collection is needed. New tools or methods are required if the ABS or FaHCSIA is to be able to render such a service. And even when such a service becomes available, supplementary methods are required to provide qualitative understandings as well as evaluate the methodological limitations of the quantitative data sets. If ABS is unable to render such a service, it is recommended that FaHCSIA commission consultants to carry out scoping studies of homelessness in regional towns at least once every five years to monitor whether circumstances are improving or deteriorating in the 24 locations identified in Figure 2 (see p.33 this report and Memmott et al. 2012).

The Homeless Centre Report
The Homeless Centre report briefly explained the policy settings which govern service delivery for Indigenous homeless people in the Mt Isa region to contextualise the role of the JTHC. With an unusual approach to homelessness and managed drinking, the Centre fits within the regional homelessness plan, ‘Sheltering the Isa’, as a front-line service as well as a tenancy support and training institution. Under the umbrella policy of The Road Home (FaHCSIA 2008), which sets out a whole-of-government approach, the regional plan targets the causes of homelessness and alcoholism. It indicates a policy framework that values and necessarily relies on local and community-supported solutions, such as the combined approach of JTHC.
Relevant policy changes could focus on early intervention and support of Indigenous people who are at risk of homelessness in Mt Isa. In particular, the Indigenous visitors who sometimes resort to public-place dwelling could benefit from purpose-designed and built visitor accommodation. Also Indigenous tenants of public housing in Mt Isa require further support to reduce the risk of losing their tenancies through crowding and other potential behaviours.

Our study demonstrated the value of contextualizing and evaluating a service within the local field of service delivery in order to obtain a more holistic and powerful model for explaining the strengths and gaps in urban service delivery. A comprehensive evaluation of JTHC would provide such important information gaps. Recommended infrastructure improvements for the JTHC were also outlined in our report.

**The Women’s Refuge Report**

Our report identified several outstanding strengths of the Refuge and its services which suggest areas of policy, program and practice responses. The primary strength is the stable and committed staff, most of whom are Indigenous, together with a strong management team. Notably the Refuge senior staff maintain good relationships with other service organisations and funding bodies as well as having a network of peer support within the practice of service delivery in the NT and further afield. Past clients are a particular strength as they provide a wide network of support including advice or direct action to address community problems as they arise. Further funding and support at local and regional levels are required to capitalise on these strengths and enhance the capacity of the Refuge.

The Women’s Refuge Report identified the pressures under which the Refuge operates (as listed in Chapter 4) and so recommended that policy and practice changes occur with respect of funding cycles and the amount of funding and other support. More specifically, the Refuge would benefit from funding for a period of years (e.g. three to five years) to allow more effective planning and program development, instead of short-term funding cycles. Also as the Refuge is unable to meet current demand for women’s crisis accommodation adequately, it is seeking infrastructure growth to increase the number of beds; and the Refuge needs different types of accommodation to suit women in crisis, transition or with long term accommodation needs and to suit the needs of accompanying children. In tandem
with this, provision is required for more support staff, particularly younger Aboriginal women.

Meanwhile, the Women’s Refuge in Tennant Creek is performing well within the social and economic parameters which are operating today. The stressors on the Refuge are high and show no signs of diminishing, especially while the level of crowding in Tennant Creek Aboriginal households remains as it is today.

Most recent ABS Census figures are misleading and do not reveal the full extent of this complex and multifaceted problem. Most remarkably, the figures do not suggest that there is a crowding problem in Tennant Creek. The Refuge case study however suggests otherwise. The power of the Women’s Refuge case-study is the description of a good practice service which gains support by tapping into the social connectedness of its client population and members of their extended families, thereby building social capital. Until the policy and funding bodies understand more fully the details of Aboriginal crowding and homelessness in the region, the Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge will remain under-resourced and oversubscribed. Similarly, until the full extent of household crowding is understood especially in relation to cultural factors, the resourcing of Aboriginal housing will continue to be considerably below requirements for people in the Barkly region, many of whom will continue to live in crisis conditions. Urgent infrastructure improvements for the Women’s Refuge were also outlined in our report.

The Gascoyne Report

The Gascoyne Report provides empirical support for the contention that appears in Report 1 for this project where we note that:

> The emergent recommendation then is that housing managers, town authorities (Council, police etc.) should … seek ways to work with Aboriginal leaders to deal with homelessness issues…(Memmott, Birdsall-Jones & Greenop 2012, p.57).

The policy and practice related reasons for the contrasting situations of Aboriginal homelessness in the WA Mid-West region arise out of the degree to which coordination exists among the various agencies and government structures in the town and their willingness to involve the Aboriginal community of the town in the process. This approach can take a relatively long time to establish, and bringing the community into the decision-making process must be an integral component in the design of community consultation. As noted by Simmons and Birchall (2005):
More and more, public service providers have begun to abandon their previous attempts to “bolt” user participation on to existing administrative practices, and to adopt a more collaborative approach (p.262).

Carnarvon is an example of good practice in service delivery because local government, state and federal agencies, NGOs and the Aboriginal community have learned that in order to accomplish a productive, usable product, they must engage with one another actively from the start. Geraldton has formalised this practice with a Memorandum of Understanding between MAOA and the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health (CUCRH), which is supported by federal and local governments and by CUCRH (MAOA 2012) (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p. 59).

The presence of public-place dwellers or ‘rough sleepers’ varies among towns and according to season. There are practically no public-place dwellers in Carnarvon, but there are young people of all ages roaming the town at night, either as a matter of recreation or because their homes have become too dangerous for children due to adult drug and alcohol abuse in the home. Secondary homelessness is the most prevalent expression of homelessness in Carnarvon. This is owing to loss of the public housing home for any of a number of reasons, or visitors to households who come from the north or from the inland Aboriginal community of Burringurrah. Participants expressed the need for short-term hostel type accommodation in order to relieve household crowding due to visitors (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p.60).

Geraldton did at one time have an identifiable group of homeless men, but neither this particular group nor any other has been seen for some time. Geraldton has the same kind of secondary homelessness as Carnarvon, and has insufficient short-term low-cost accommodation to alleviate the household crowding that results from this. Like Carnarvon, Geraldton has children on the streets at night. Unlike Carnarvon however, the size of the city prevents practitioners from readily finding out why they are on the streets and thus can come to no informed decision that would enable the children to stay home in the evening. For Geraldton, therefore, some in-depth research is required involving youth workers in order to find out who among the night time street children are actually homeless, who have abandoned their family home, and those who are simply out for the sake of amusement.

Regarding Meekatharra, the data reveals a grim picture of child home abandonment owing to an unsafe home environment caused by drink and drug parties. The lack of coordination among the various services in town does not cause this problem but it does prevent a coordinated, effective solution being developed to bring this problem under control.
With regard to the question of the application of the findings made in this study to other regional centres, the key message lies in a coordinated response of the relevant agencies in the town that includes the Aboriginal community as an integral part of the decision-making process, and not as an ‘add-on’ to a pre-existing process. Finally, all parties must be prepared to remain committed to the process for the long term. None of the problems of any kind of homelessness will be solved by one single measure in a single year funding cycle. Rough sleepers need accommodation, but they also need ongoing support and counselling in order to retain that accommodation. Children who have abandoned the family home may need to be made wards of the state but this will not solve the problems of their parents who would vehemently obstruct their children (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p.60) from becoming state wards. Both the children and their parents need to have the realistic hope of being reunited as a family.

The approach which offers the least chance of success is the ‘silo’ approach, in which agencies remain apart and uncommunicative with each other when addressing the same problems, with the result that the problems in particular cases become a cascade of problems that overwhelms the situation with the result that it becomes virtually unresolvable. (Birdsall-Jones 2013, p.61.)

Policy direction

The findings from the Reports can be viewed in the light of recent commentary by prominent Indigenous leaders, such as Noel Pearson (Pearson 2010) and Peter Yu (2012) who have demonstrated long-standing commitment to Indigenous initiatives especially in relation to social issues. In particular they advocate local Indigenous participation in data collection, program planning and service delivery.

The direction for policy outlined in our Reports is in line with national (and also international) trends aimed to decentralise State responsibility for service delivery generally and particularly in relation to the provision of social services for Indigenous Australians. The role of the State need only reach to where local Indigenous capacity cannot extend (Moran & Elvin 2009). Otherwise known as ‘subsidiarity’, this principle for framing policy fosters Indigenous engagement at each stage of development and at all levels of implementation.

Such a localised approach can work well for Indigenous Australians especially those in regional and remote locations as they apply their close and comprehensive knowledge of the problems to their particular regional problems. The case studies
also suggested that local partnerships were more advantageous for servicing homeless people and those at risk compared to a ‘silos’ approach.

Appropriate solutions and effective sustainable outcomes for entrenched social problems such as Indigenous homelessness have been a long-term challenge for policy makers across Australia over many decades. As the reports here suggest, carefully targeted decentralised programs are required to make the difference to which good policy aspires. Government involvement is essential but it is desired and most effective where it engages the local Indigenous community. This does not preclude strong partnerships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous individuals and groups.
7. Conclusion

In our first report (Cultural Argument Report), the authors sought to explain the various forms of Aboriginal homelessness. We identified various categories of homelessness among Aboriginal people according to each category’s characteristics, its cultural justification and its non-cultural justification according to type.

The second report (Monitoring Challenge Report) pointed to the anecdotal evidence that Indigenous homelessness has been growing across some 24 or so regional cities throughout Australia, but this growth cannot be readily objectified or monitored closely at a national level because the ABS method of reporting findings is often too coarse or general, being aggregated to larger spatial units.

The following three reports comprised case studies in regional cities which demonstrated particular forms and scales of service delivery and how they are specialized to cope with the cultural specificities of the clients.

The third report (Homeless Centre Report) focused on the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in Mt Isa, run mostly by Indigenous staff for homeless Aboriginal people with a transitional housing program into mainstream rental housing and a managed alcohol program.

The fourth report (Women's Refuge Report) profiled a Women's Refuge in Tennant Creek including Aboriginal staff and clients, and its responses to hidden homelessness in the Barkly Region. This report also analysed the findings from the crowding survey carried out as part of the case study.

The fifth report (Gascoyne Report) presented a comparative study of cross-agency approaches to Aboriginal homelessness services in the Gascoyne (or Mid-west) Region of Western Australia, outlining three different styles of (i) informal coordination, (ii) formal coordination, and (iii) a silo approach, in the three towns of Geraldton, Carnarvon, and Meekatharra respectively.

Two significant findings from the Women’s Refuge Report further frame our concluding remarks. The first concerns the Aboriginal construct of crowding, a form of secondary homelessness, which draws from earlier AHURI research by the authors who have utilized a social science theory of crowding and applied it to a cross-cultural context, namely that human stress arises from particular situations of human density to constitute crowding. Yet in traditionally oriented Aboriginal households where a strong value of sharing with and respecting kin prevails, large
households can often exist without loss of control by the householder, and crowding may not technically exist from a scientific or household perspective. However perceived (or actual) crowding can readily occur when there is loss of control of household behaviours and transgression of rules about the allocation of individuals into sleeping groups (both often arising from substance abuse). By contrast, the Australian Government applies a density rule of a threshold of two persons per bedroom to assess crowding on a national scale (using the Canadian National Occupancy Standard).

The ABS Census also deliberately excludes Aboriginal visitors when calculating household size, yet residential mobility is very high amongst traditional Aboriginal societies and visitors are a frequent phenomenon. These factors explain why the 2011 ABS Census fails to accurately model the extent of Aboriginal crowding in a regional centre like Tennant Creek where the authors’ survey found a mean of 9.9 persons per house (including visitors) as opposed to the official ABS density of 2.9, yet only 50% of these large households perceived themselves to be crowded due to the reasons above. It can be seen that the researchers’ culturally sensitive findings on households, crowding and homelessness are quite at odds with the official census findings yet the latter is partly relied upon by the government to guide allocation of national funding to services for the alleviation of homelessness.

**Significance of culture**

Special service delivery responses are required in order to effectively address Indigenous homelessness and public-place dwelling. The reason for this may be found in the distinctive social reality of Aboriginal culture. The Aboriginal cultural response to homelessness reflects the way in which the kin-based system of relationships involving rights and obligations is structured to facilitate the rescue and protection of homeless kinfolk. In general terms, this system is well placed to offer a first response to homeless kinfolk and, also in general terms, Aboriginal people can access this system for both short and long-term solutions to homelessness. What this has meant is a high rate of secondary homelessness within Aboriginal communities relative to that which occurs in the wider society. This group has come to be referred to as the ‘hidden homeless’.

Services to the homeless cannot hope to provide aid and shelter for the totality of Aboriginal homelessness, nor it must be said, can the Aboriginal system. In order to arrive at a sustainable, constructive response to Aboriginal homelessness, it is necessary to develop policies and services that function to liaise with the local
Aboriginal community and to do so in a way that recognises the distinctions and connections among local Aboriginal groups. By providing a response to Aboriginal homelessness that reaches out to the Aboriginal community, agencies can offer a service that is culturally aware and therefore better understood and accepted by Aboriginal homeless people and their kin.

**Policy issues and recommendations on Indigenous homelessness**

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) ending in 2014 is the main national policy and funding initiative aimed at reducing homelessness. No further funding had been announced by the time of writing which was significant in the light of our study findings with respect to funding cycles, regional focus for service delivery, expanded support programs and definitions of homelessness.

Following on from our case studies we recommend that funding bodies institute three-year block funding as service agencies have been repeatedly constrained by the short cycles of funding. We also recommend that policies for addressing homelessness are based on a regional and cultural perspective. Such a localised approach can work well for Indigenous Australians especially those in regional and remote locations as they apply their close and comprehensive knowledge of the problems to their particular regional problems. The case studies also suggested that local partnerships were more advantageous for servicing homeless people and those at risk compared to a ‘silo’ approach.

Our findings demonstrate the need for expanded programs to support the service agencies in terms of staff development as well as client support programs. As the agencies struggle to meet the accommodation needs of the local Indigenous homeless people we also recommend additional infrastructure for these regional Centres. An overarching recommendation applies to the term ‘homelessness’ and we recommend that the broadest possible definition of homelessness is required. As our studies demonstrated, many Indigenous people, particularly younger people (and children), are ‘at risk’ of homelessness and can be overlooked in the planning and delivery of services.

Appropriate solutions and effective sustainable outcomes for entrenched social problems such as Indigenous homelessness have been a long-term challenge for policy makers across Australia over many decades. As the reports here suggest, carefully targeted decentralised programs are required to make the difference to
which good policy aspires. Government involvement is essential but it is desired and most effective where it engages the local Indigenous community.
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