



## Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendation

### 74. Support design and innovation for infrastructure

*That the work of the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs in the design of items specifically for infrastructural and technological innovations appropriate to remote communities, and that of similar research units, be appropriately encouraged and supported.<sup>1</sup>*

<b>Background<sup>2</sup></b>	The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) highlighted severe deficiencies in housing infrastructure for Aboriginal people in remote and rural communities, including inadequate water supply, sanitation, electricity, and waste disposal systems. It stressed the urgency of comprehensive solutions involving improved operations, better training, and the adoption of appropriate and innovative technologies such as solar, wind, and non-waterborne sanitation systems. The Commission called for strong policy frameworks and substantial investment to address these critical infrastructure shortfalls.
<b>Intent</b>	Support development of infrastructure and technological innovations tailored for remote communities.
<b>Responsibility</b>	The Commonwealth and all state and territory governments.
<b>Key contacts</b>	Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Aboriginal Housing Victoria.
<b>Key action taken</b>	
<b>2005 Review<sup>3</sup></b>	<p>Recommendation 74 was <b>not assessed</b>. It was deemed the sole responsibility of the Commonwealth Government in the Victorian Government 1996-97 Implementation Report.</p> <p><b>Review Team</b></p> <p>The Review Team did not agree with the government assessment. They considered the intent of Recommendation 74 relevant to Victoria, and that research and design of innovative technology and infrastructure for Aboriginal communities should be supported.</p>
<b>2018 Review<sup>4</sup></b>	<p><b>Commonwealth Government</b></p> <p>Deloitte concluded that the Commonwealth Government had <b>fully implemented</b> Recommendation 74 by funding the Centre for Appropriate Technology since the RCIADIC. Founded in Alice Springs in 1980, the Centre for Appropriate Technology supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas by developing and delivering fit-for-purpose</p>

<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Final Report, 1991) vol 2, 449 ('RCIADIC').

<sup>2</sup> Ibid vol 2, 447-449 [18.6.30].

<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal Justice Forum (Vic), Department of Justice (Vic), *Victorian Implementation Review of the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Review Report, October 2005) vol 1, 191 ('2005 Review').

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Report, August 2018) 150-151 ('2018 Review').

## 74. Support design and innovation for infrastructure

	<p>technologies, infrastructure, and technical training to promote sustainable and enterprising communities. Its initiatives included installing HotSpots in Central Australia, introducing solar power at the Oriners Ranger Base, and rolling out the BEEBox to assist regional households in lowering energy consumption.</p> <p>The National Indigenous Infrastructure Guide also aimed to raise awareness of infrastructure issues affecting regional and remote Aboriginal communities.</p> <p><b>Victorian Government</b></p> <p>Deloitte found the Victorian Government had <b>fully implemented</b> Recommendation 74 through funding projects nominated by Aboriginal communities and organisations. The 2017 State Budget included a \$15 million Aboriginal Infrastructure Fund for projects nominated by Aboriginal communities and organisations.</p>
<p><b>Since then</b></p>	<p><b>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Homes Victoria)<sup>5</sup></b></p> <p>The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) provided the same response for several recommendations covering many programs and funding initiatives related to the provision of housing and infrastructure. Only the most relevant information is below:</p> <p><b>Building Works housing stimulus package to upgrade and maintain housing</b></p> <p>The \$528 million Building Works housing stimulus package aims to upgrade and maintain more than 23,000 social housing units across Victoria and build 168 new social housing homes. This includes \$35 million for upgrades and maintenance of properties for Victorian Aboriginal communities. This stream of funding is led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) who are working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver 28 new Kids Under Cover studios, hostel and energy efficiency upgrades, maintenance and refurbishment works to approximately 2000 properties. The Building Works stimulus package will also support the development of new community housing and funding upgrades for AHV properties as part of the community housing program delivery stream.</p> <p>A further \$5.85 million was allocated from the package for maintenance and upgrades to approximately 1,500 AHV owned properties. In addition, this program provided \$4.29 million for construction of two properties which delivered 12 new dwellings as well as \$3.31 million for construction of four new dwellings for Aboriginal men exiting the justice system.</p>
<p><b>Evidence of impact</b></p>	
<p><b>Authorising documents</b></p>	<p>None identified.</p>
<p><b>Outputs</b></p>	<p>The response from DFFH regarding outputs is provided above.</p>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p>	<p>Thirty-five million dollars from the Building Works housing stimulus package is for Victorian Aboriginal communities. Led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria in partnership with Aboriginal</p>

<sup>5</sup> Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Homes Vic), 'DFFH (Homes Vic) Review of Housing Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody' (Response to AJC Request).

## 74. Support design and innovation for infrastructure

Community Controlled Organisations, the funding is supporting delivery of 28 new Kids Under Cover studios, hostel and energy efficiency upgrades, maintenance and refurbishment works to approximately 2000 properties.

It is unclear to what extent this funding is supporting development of infrastructure and technological innovations for rural or regional Aboriginal communities in Victoria.

### Community views

#### Darren Smith, CEO, Aboriginal Housing Victoria

*Aboriginal Housing Victoria is not just a housing provider; we are the custodian of housing assets for the Aboriginal community. . . This transfer of title ensures that Aboriginal Housing Victoria is in the best place to align our housing assets to the needs of the Victorian Aboriginal community in the long-term.<sup>6</sup>*

#### Aboriginal Housing Victoria

Members of the AJC Project and Aboriginal Housing Victoria teams met in July 2024 to discuss implementation of this recommendation. AHV noted the:

- Absence of remote housing in Victoria according to Commonwealth Government definitions of remoteness, but presence of regional and rural housing.
- Changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) and minimum standards for rental properties.
- Property upgrades under the Aboriginal Rapid Response Housing Program to align with cultural sensitivities, sustainability standards, and community empowerment principles.<sup>7</sup>
- \$35 million for upgrades and maintenance of properties for Aboriginal people across Victoria. AHV is working with ACCOs to deliver new Kids Under Cover studios, hostel and energy efficiency upgrades, maintenance and refurbishment works to 2000 properties.
- The need for greater Aboriginal community engagement and integrated responses when there are changes to the minimum standards for housing.

### Related recommendations

None identified.

### Assessment summary<sup>8</sup>

Recommendation 74 was intended to support development of infrastructure and technological innovations tailored for remote Aboriginal communities. When this recommendation was made, the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs was looking at innovative ways to design infrastructure and use technology in remote communities, like making sure houses had access to clean water, solar panels, and lights that could operate without being connected to an electricity grid. In the 2005 Review, the Victorian Government considered this recommendation the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, but the Aboriginal-led review team

<sup>6</sup> Victorian State Government, 'Next Stage of Aboriginal Housing Handover Commences' (Media Release 23 July 2017) <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/next-stage-aboriginal-housing-handover-commences>>.

<sup>7</sup><https://jimsconstruction.com.au/aboriginal-housing-victoria-project#:~:text=Aboriginal%20Housing%20Victoria's%20groundbreaking%20Rapid,the%20beautiful%20state%20of%20Victoria.>

<sup>8</sup> Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, Online, 24 July 2024) ('Working Group Meeting (24 July 2024)'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Project Team, Online, 12 February 2025) ('AJC Meeting (12 February 2025)').

## 74. Support design and innovation for infrastructure

did not agree. They felt that innovative technology and infrastructure for Aboriginal communities in Victoria should be encouraged and supported.

When asked about this recommendation in 2024, Homes Victoria focused on the Building Works housing stimulus package which included \$35 million for upgrades and maintenance of properties for Aboriginal communities. Led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) this funding is being used to work with ACCOs to deliver new Kids Under Cover studios, energy efficiency upgrades, maintenance and refurbishment works to about 2000 properties. However, it is unclear to what extent this funding is supporting development of infrastructure and technological innovations for rural or regional Aboriginal communities in Victoria. (AHV noted the absence of remote housing in Victoria, according to government definitions of remoteness, but similar challenges faced to build and maintain housing in rural and regional areas.)

*What upgrades have actually been done for the houses of Aboriginal families, what technological innovations have been made? Have improvements been made to houses in isolated and regional areas?*  
(Chris Harrison, Co-chairperson, AJC)

Minimum standards for rental properties are changed via the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)*. When these standards change, there is a need also for upgrades to AHV properties. The Rapid Response Housing initiative, a key component of the Aboriginal Housing Victoria Project, focuses on cultural sensitivity and sustainability standards to address the unique needs and heritage of the Aboriginal community.

In our communities, the need for property maintenance and repairs is much greater than what can be fixed in reasonable timeframes. Landlords aren't accountable and there's insufficient follow-through on legislative changes. There is also a lack of community engagement in relation to design and innovation for housing and infrastructure.

*When government talk about consultation with community around housing they don't talk to the Traditional Owners. They need to go out and see people that are suffering in these bloody houses, and how they don't get looked after, how their homes are half painted, doors aren't fixed. Go and see those people.*  
(Jemmes Handy, Chairperson, Loddon Mallee RAJAC)

There needs to be greater Aboriginal community engagement and integrated responses when there are changes to the minimum standards for housing. This will ensure minimum standards are met, landlords are accountable and Aboriginal households aren't left to deal with the burden of properties lacking basic efficiency and sustainability measures:

*Energy is a big issue for mob in Victoria, whether they live in homes that rented privately or through government housing. A lot of Victorian homes are not insulated correctly, which drives up energy costs and creates a massive issue for people who are trying to pay for energy. People can get into serious financial hardship with trying to pay for energy bills which can impact other areas of their lives. . . Even though there have been changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, there's still no accountability for people who don't abide by the by the act. You can take your landlord to VCAT, and they might be ordered to do something, but if they don't abide by the order, you need to take further legal action. Nobody has money to be able to do that unless you've got a great lawyer through VALS or through Victoria Legal Aid. It's very hard and costly.* (Samantha Rudolph, VACCHO)

Recommendation 74 remains relevant given ongoing issues with housing standards, sustainability, and community consultation. Further work could improve Aboriginal housing outcomes and self-determination.

## Assessment of Recommendation 74

**Is the intent of the recommendation accurately described?**

Yes  No

**Does the action taken align with the intent of the recommendation?**

0 – No action taken

1 – Action taken is of little relevance to the intent of the recommendation

2 – Action taken partially aligns with the intent of the recommendation

3 – Action taken fully aligns with the intent of the recommendation

**1**

(Score out of 3)

**Is there evidence of the desired impact or outcome/s?**

0 – No evidence

1 – Evidence of output rather than outcome

2 – Some evidence action contributed to outcome/s

3 – Clear link between action and impact or outcome/s

**0**

(Score out of 3)

**How relevant is the recommendation in the current context?**

0 – No relevance – refers to practices, agencies or laws that no longer exist

1 – Low – some relevance, but most aspects of the recommendation no longer apply

2 – Moderate – remains relevant, but some aspects of recommendation no longer apply

3 – High – entirely relevant to current context

**2**

(Score out of 3)

**Does full implementation have the potential to reduce incarceration, increase safety in custody and/or progress Aboriginal self-determination?**

0 – No potential to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes

1 – Low – potential to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, but none of the three identified

2 – Moderate – potential to progress one or two of the outcomes identified

3 – High – potential to reduce incarceration AND increase safety in custody AND self-determination

**1**

(Score out of 3)

## Potential actions for further work

### Enhance community engagement

Ensure better engagement with Aboriginal communities, especially tenants and Traditional Owners, regarding housing and infrastructure needs.

### Expanding housing initiatives statewide

Broaden the reach of existing successful projects (e.g., elders' villages, Village 21, Kids Undercover Studios) to cover both regional and metropolitan areas, ensuring consistent access to culturally appropriate housing for Aboriginal communities across Victoria.

Focus on sustainable technologies to improve housing affordability and liveability.

### Review sustainability and long-term outcomes

Ensure the \$35 million for housing upgrades is spent effectively on infrastructure, not non-infrastructure costs.

### Strengthen legislation enforcement

Revise the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) to improve enforcement and landlord compliance.

## Moderate priority for further work

### Relevance and potential impact

		Low (0-2)	Moderate (3-4)	High (5-6)
Extent of action taken and evidence of outcomes	High (5-6)			
	Moderate (3-4)			
	Low (0-2)		Rec 74	

## Bibliography

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