

Home Environment

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders face significant disadvantage in terms of the quality and availability of housing and basic facilities. Many Indigenous people live in houses that are overcrowded or in need of repair. Relatively more Indigenous people are homeless than non-Indigenous people. Relatively few Indigenous people own or are purchasing their own homes. The health and safety of people living in poor housing conditions is also of concern.

Overview

Addressing the problem of overcrowding in Indigenous households and providing environmental infrastructure and other essential services, are priorities for the Queensland Government. These are essential to the successful achievement of health and other targets endorsed by the Queensland Government.

The measures which will be used by the Queensland Government to monitor progress, as well as the strategies which it believes will best address the gap between the

housing situation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, are presented below.

There is no COAG target or Q2 target which is directly addressed by this strategic action area. However, improvements in this arena may have long-term impacts on a number of the COAG targets. For example reductions in overcrowding in housing and enhancements in environmental health may result in better health outcomes.

PROGRESS MEASURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overcrowding in housing
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce overcrowding and improve utilisation of social housing• Bring Indigenous housing into a robust tenancy management system• Ensure all Indigenous people have access to housing and related infrastructure that meets regulatory standards• Increase opportunities for Indigenous home ownership



The Evidence

Access to housing

Persons living in overcrowded households

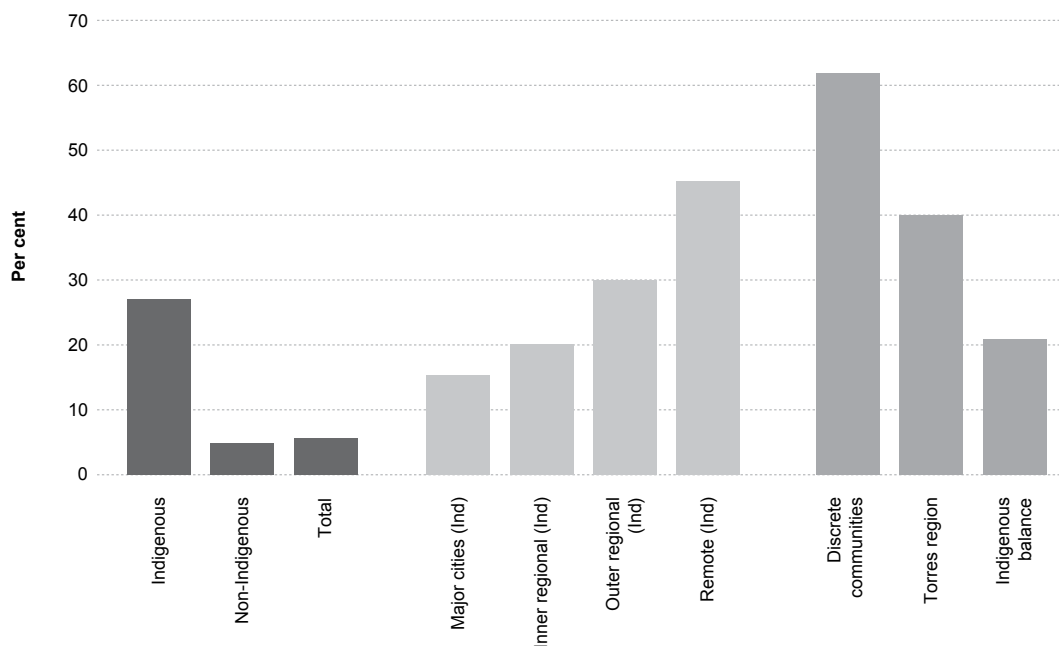
In 2006:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders were at least five times more likely to be living in an overcrowded household than were non-Indigenous Queenslanders – 27.0 per cent compared with 4.8 per cent¹: see Figure 5.1
- 13.6 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in Queensland were overcrowded (requiring additional bedrooms).² This equated to 27.0 per cent (29,900 persons) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders residing in overcrowded households

- the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders living in overcrowded households increased with remoteness, ranging from 15.4 per cent in major cities to more than twice that in remote areas (45.2%)
- the proportion of persons living in overcrowded households was highest in the discrete Indigenous communities with more than one in every two persons living in an overcrowded household (61.9%).

Overcrowding places increased stress on kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities as well as on sewerage systems such as septic tanks. Overcrowding increases the risk of the spread of infectious diseases such as meningococcal disease, rheumatic fever, tuberculosis, skin infections and respiratory infections.³

Fig 5.1 Percentage of persons living in overcrowded households, Queensland, 2006.



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006 (unpublished data)
Based on Canadian National Occupancy Standard

¹ ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006.
² Based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard.

³ Howden-Chapman P and Wilson N 2000. Housing and health. In: Howden-Chapman P and Tobias M (eds). Social inequalities in health: New Zealand 1999. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Home Environment

Key Queensland Government actions to close the gap

Housing outcomes

The Queensland Government is committed to Indigenous families living in appropriate housing with access to all basic services, having improved housing amenity and living environments and reducing overcrowding, particularly in remote areas and discrete communities.

During 2008, the Queensland Government, along with other states and territories, has been negotiating with the Australian Government for a new national affordable housing agreement and specific National Partnership Agreements (NPA) including for social housing and homelessness and a specific NPA for Indigenous housing to contribute to closing the gap in housing.

The Department of Housing's goals are to deliver integrated social housing and housing services to low income households for the duration of their need, provide support for low to moderate income households in the private market, and help build sustainable communities.

During 2007/08, the Department of Housing assisted almost 259,600 Queensland households by providing 78,108 households with social rental housing and helping 181,489 households access or sustain private market tenure. This included assisting more than 18,103 Indigenous households and 25,086 households with a person with a disability.

In the remote Indigenous communities, the Department of Housing has a number of initiatives to improve housing, including the **Housing Improvement Program for Indigenous communities**, which aims to close the gap through increasing the supply and improving the standard of housing, and improving housing asset and tenancy management. Under this

program, \$76.8 million was allocated in 2007/08 (including \$4.8 million under the Government's Rural and Remote Indigenous housing initiative) to:

- complete construction of 24 dwellings, replace 32 dwellings and perform 272 upgrades to dwellings
- commence construction of 69 dwellings and begin upgrade work on another 158 dwellings (in 2007/08 major upgrades resulted in 87 dwellings returned to housing stock)
- purchase 46 dwellings outside of Indigenous communities
- conduct maintenance on 4,092 dwellings.

In 2008/09, \$90.2 million (including \$25 million under the Rural and Remote Indigenous housing initiative) will be invested to:

- complete construction of 103 dwellings, and begin constructing another seven
- replace 35 dwellings
- purchase 14 properties outside communities
- maintain more than 4,200 dwellings
- complete 271 upgrades.

The Department of Housing is currently:

- working with individual Indigenous councils to develop **Housing Improvement Plans**. These plans provide strategies aimed at enhancing the quality of houses and extending the life of housing as well as providing a focus for improving governance, tenancy and property management



- delivering the **Fixing Houses for Better Health** program under an agreement with the Australian Government. This program involves assessing dwellings on the basis of healthy living practices. In 2007/08, health and safety repairs relating to electrical, plumbing, general maintenance and gas works were undertaken in 318 dwellings in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama
- supporting good tenancy management practices to improve utilisation of social housing assets. In 2007/08, the Queensland Government provided **tenancy management services**, including housing allocations, rent collection and arrears management for the rental premises in the communities of Kubin, Lockhart River, Napranum and Wujal Wujal, resulting in a 20 per cent increase in the monthly rents collected. Hope Vale divested tenancy management to the Department of Housing in March 2008 and Doomadgee divested in July 2008. In 2008–09 the Department of Housing will begin managing rental units at Doomadgee and anticipates finalising an agreement with the Australian Government to begin tenancy management of units at Aurukun. It will also introduce the 25 per cent rent policy and other social housing policies in remote Indigenous communities.

Across Queensland, the **Healthy Indigenous Housing Initiative** aims to close the gap by improving governance in the Indigenous community housing sector. In 2007/08, three housing officer workshops were conducted focusing on providing housing officers with tools, resources and support to better deliver tenancy and property management services in their respective communities. **Tenant Awareness Kits** containing maintenance and repairs fact sheets were developed for residents of Indigenous communities.

The Queensland Government supports home ownership as a choice for Indigenous people. The *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* was amended, effective from July 2008, enabling **99 year private residential provisions on Deed of Grant in Trust communities**. This will enable community members to purchase existing social housing and will provide community members with the opportunity to lease vacant land and

build their own homes. The Queensland Government is working through issues of home ownership such as land administration prior to implementation.

Essential infrastructure and environmental health initiatives

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Recreation (DLGSR) has an integral role in developing sustainable and healthy communities and improving quality of life for all Queenslanders. The **Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure Program** expended \$46.4 million in 2007/08, and a further \$47.3 million will be spent in 2008/09, to address environmental health infrastructure issues including improving water supplies, sewerage schemes, waste systems and development of capacity and expertise of the Indigenous workforce in managing sustainability.

DLGSR also provided \$1.7 million in grants to the remote communities through the **Indigenous Environmental Health Worker Program** in 2007/08, and \$2.3 million in 2008/09, to develop and deliver community environmental health programs. This program, which is run jointly with Queensland Health, provides funds to employ an Environmental Health Worker and associated expenses such as training and equipment. Thirty out of 34 communities now employ an Indigenous Environmental Health Worker.

To ensure affordable access to energy supply, the Queensland Government pays a monthly subsidy through the Department of Mines and Energy to **Ergon Energy Queensland** to support the **uniform tariff policy**. This Community Service Obligation compensates customers for the difference between the standard notified tariff and the actual cost of supplying electricity in regional Queensland. This is especially significant in 34 isolated networks, many associated with the remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait communities, which have significantly higher costs than the main state electricity system.

The Department of Main Roads provides **road and transport infrastructure** of an appropriate standard which increases the ability of residents in the state's remote Indigenous

Home Environment

communities to travel for work and other needs and enables tourism in those areas. This supports a number of economic benefits from increased tourism to reduced freight costs.

Funding of \$13 million for 2007/08 was allocated under the Indigenous community component of the **Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme** to seal town streets in the Torres Strait Islands and assist Cape York communities with flood damage restoration works.

Queensland Transport is providing funds of \$6.2 million for a **jetty and barge ramp** and \$1.7 million for **channel dredging** on Palm Island, providing a safe means for passengers to board the ferry. The jetty and barge ramp are completed, with the channel dredging to be completed in early 2009. **Boat ramps** are also being provided in Seisia (work in progress), Mapoon (materials fabricated) and Claudie River at Lockhart River (completed) at a total cost of approximately \$770,000.

In 2007/08, under the **Supporting Animal Management in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Local Governments** action plan, Queensland Health provided \$2.1 million to support the care and management of domestic and feral animals in 25 communities to reduce animal-related health risks.



CASE STUDY: Housing improvement program, Kowanyama

Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council was allocated funding for four additional houses in 2007/08 and a further \$5 million in 2008/09 to respond to high levels of overcrowding in the community. Based on identified community need, funds were directed to factory-built housing to deliver housing quickly into the community. Each house will include concrete paths, carport and paved driveway, washing lines and fencing, and will be designed to ensure access for tenants with physical mobility difficulties.

Kowanyama has also been selected as one of the communities to participate in the Fixing Houses for Better Health (FHBH) initiative, funded by the Australian Government. The first stage housing survey component of the FHBH resulted in 350 immediate repairs and 3,317 work orders being issued for electrical, plumbing, general maintenance and gas works. This stage of the project employed 15 local Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) workers.

The second stage was completed in coordination with the Queensland Department of Housing's maintenance program to deliver specific health and safety improvements including smoke detectors, residual current devices and gas compliance. Twenty-six local CDEP participants and one Newstart participant gained full-time employment for stage 2 of the project.

In stages 1 and 2, \$348,000 was spent repairing or replacing taps and shower fixtures, unblocking drains, sinks and toilets, reporting on all solar hot water systems and installing isolation valves to residences where none were present. Further funding was spent on electrical work.