

Indigenous Housing Western Australia

Indigenous households in WA face particular challenges in exercising their rights to appropriate and affordable housing. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, language, literacy, cultural practices and discrimination all contribute to insufficient housing options for Indigenous peoples in WA. The current state of Indigenous housing is inadequate, with significant overcrowding and existing housing stock in desperate need of repair and maintenance, especially in remote communities.

Stats and key issues:

- In 2006, there were 70,966 Indigenous people in WA, representing 3.4% of the total population of the state. WA has the third largest Indigenous population among the states and territories with 14% of the Indigenous population of Australia residing in WA.
- In WA, 34.4% of the Indigenous population reside in the Perth metropolitan area, 22.9% live in regional areas, and 45.6% live in remote areas.ⁱ
- 76.6% of Indigenous people rent their homes (32% from the Department of Housing and 23% from a community housing agency); 18.4% are home owners or are purchasing their homes.ⁱⁱ
- Indigenous people experience homelessness at higher rates than the non-Indigenous population (1.9% of Indigenous population compared to .5% of the non-Indigenous population). At the time of the 2006 Census, over 9,000 Indigenous people experienced homelessness in Australia, which included 1,496 people in WA. The majority of the Indigenous homeless population in WA (57%) were considered to be experiencing 'secondary homelessness', which includes people living in temporary shelters or living with others because they do not have adequate housing of their own.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In 2006, over 8,000 Indigenous households were in housing stress (paying more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs). In WA, 55.6% of Indigenous people not in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance were in housing stress; 20% were paying over 50% of their income on housing costs resulting in extreme housing stress.^{iv}
- In 2006, 20,739 Indigenous households were overcrowded. This includes 2,615 Indigenous households in WA, representing 16% of the total Indigenous population in WA.^v
- The AIHW estimates that 38% of units managed by Indigenous Community Housing Organisations are in need of major repairs or replacement.¹
- The movement of Indigenous households throughout WA affects housing outcomes. Many Indigenous people in remote communities travel to regional and urban centres to access employment, visit friends and family, go shopping, and access health and education services.¹ This movement, whether short or long term, may lead to shifting household composition, interruptions in schooling for children, and overcrowding in Indigenous households.



Shelter WA

Promoting Affordable Housing for all Western Australians



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Stats and key issues continued:

- Indigenous households often face discrimination securing housing in the private rental market. Although racial discrimination is illegal, private landlords are not prohibited from discriminating against people based on income (ie Centrelink recipients) and household composition. Discrimination is also allowed where rooms of a person's home are sublet.

Key Government Roles and Agency Responses

The **WA Department of Housing** (DoH) operates several programs to assist Aboriginal people access private and public rental housing and home ownership including shared equity schemes.

With the **Residential Tenancies Act** legislation coverage into remote Aboriginal Communities from July 1 2010 and DoH assuming authority for the tenancies and property management of Aboriginal community dwellings, the DoH is developing a strategy to support and facilitate remote Aboriginal communities through the transition.

The **WA Department of Indigenous Affairs** (DIA) key functions are to develop strategic policy to guide, coordinate and inform service delivery to Indigenous people.

The **Equal Opportunity Commission of WA** (EOC). In 2004 the EOC and the then Department of Housing and Works (DHW) carried out an inquiry about issues facing Aboriginal people in public housing. 165 recommendations were made in the report "*Finding a Place*", these are currently being implemented and monitored by a joint EOC and DoH committee.

ⁱ This includes 17.1% in remote areas and 28.5% in very remote areas. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009) Indigenous housing needs 2009: a multi-measure needs model. Cat. No. HOU 214. Canberra: AIHW. These figures differ from those of the DIA because of categorizing the metro and Wheatbelt together. According to the DIA (based on the 2006 Census), the number and percentage of Indigenous population located in WA regions, from largest to smallest is as follows:

- Metro/Wheatbelt – 29,076 or 41% of WA Indigenous population;
- West Kimberley – 9,475 or 13.35%;
- Pilbara – 7,464 or 11%;
- Gascoyne/Murchison – 6,774 or 10%;
- Southern – 6,280 or 8.9%;
- Goldfields – 6,231 or 8.89%;
- East Kimberley – 5,666 or 8%.
- NB - the total number of Aboriginal people living in rural and/or remote regions is 41,890 and a greater number than is living in Metro **Source:** *Government of Western Australia, Department of Indigenous Affairs: Facts at a glance; Indigenous Demographics* <http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Documents/Information/demographics.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Birdsall-Jones, Christina and Cororunna, Venessa (2008), The housing careers of Indigenous urban households, AHURI WA Research Centre, Final Report No. 112, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/p80317/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2009. Indigenous housing needs 2009: a multi-measure needs model. Cat. no. HOU 214. Canberra: AIHW.

^{iv} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2009. Indigenous housing needs 2009: a multi-measure needs model. Cat. no. HOU 214. Canberra: AIHW.

^v Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2009. Indigenous housing needs 2009: a multi-measure needs model. Cat. no. HOU 214. Canberra: AIHW.