


Yoorrook Justice Commission

Witness Statement of Hon. Harriet Shing
Minister for Housing

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HON. HARRIET SHING MP

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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WITNESS STATEMENT OF THE HON. HARRIET SHING


- i I, Harriet Shing, Minister for Housing, Minister for Water and Minister for Equality of 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne in the State of Victoria, affirm and say as follows:

Scope of statement

- ii I make this statement to the Yoorrook Justice Commission (the **Commission**) in my capacity as Minister for Housing. I commenced in this portfolio on 2 October 2023.
- iii My statement includes an annexure with responses to questions 18 to 30 addressed to me and issued by the Commission on 8 May 2024.
- iv In preparing this statement, I have consulted with subject matter experts within Homes Victoria and the broader Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the **Department**). This statement is also informed by my engagement with First Peoples including members of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. I confirm the contents of this statement are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.
- v The Department has provided information to the Commission on First Peoples' social housing as part of the Department's response to a Request for Information (**RFI**) from the Commission.¹ I have drawn on this data to inform my statement. Where I have done so, I have referenced the relevant part of the Department's RFI response. I have also read and had regard to the Background Papers² that the Department has produced to the Commission relevant to my portfolio.
- vi I use the term First Peoples with the same meaning as is set out in the Commission's Letters Patent unless the context requires otherwise. An example of this is where I refer to the organisation Aboriginal Housing Victoria. I also use Traditional Owner(s) to mean an Aboriginal person(s) who has traditional connections to an identified geographical area of Country.
- vii My statement is structured as follows:
- (i) **Part 1: Acknowledgments**: In this Part, I provide my acknowledgment of and respect for the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country.
- (ii) **Part 2: Role and Responsibilities of the Minister for Housing**: In this Part, I set out my Parliamentary and Ministerial experience and responsibilities, including in my capacity as the Minister for Housing.
- (iii) **Part 3: The History of First Peoples Displacement**: In this Part, I provide an overview of the effects of Crown proclamation of sovereignty and control of First Peoples' land and housing, and the resulting displacement of communities and its impacts.

1 DFFH.0024.0001.0073

2 DFFH.0016.0001.0009, DFFH.0016.0001.0022, DFFH.0023.0001.0051, DFFH.0023.0001.0012, DFFH.0023.0001.0026 and DFFH.0023.0001.0042.

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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- (iv) **Part 4: First Peoples' Housing Needs:** In this Part, I provide an overview of the data indicating the demand and overrepresentation of First Peoples in social and affordable housing.
- (v) **Part 5: The Work to Address Injustice:** In this Part, I outline the progress towards addressing these injustices with reference to the vision, goals and strategies in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort; Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home - The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort)*.
- (vi) **Part 6: The Path Forward:** In this Part, I identify the key commitments and reform opportunities within and beyond my portfolio to realise the vision of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.

PART 1 - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. With deep respect, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which I live and work. I acknowledge and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.
2. I acknowledge the ongoing strength and leadership of First Peoples in preserving and protecting the world’s oldest living culture. For tens of thousands of years, First Peoples in what is now known as Victoria have practised their laws, lores, customs and languages and nurtured Country through their spiritual, material, and economic connections to the land, skies, and waters.
3. First Peoples in Victoria hold knowledge, stories, cultural practices, and ongoing connection to the land. Prior to colonisation, First Peoples created and nurtured deep and permanent connection to Country.

PART 2 – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING

4. I have held the position of Minister for Housing since October 2023. I have also been the Minister for Equality since June 2022 and the Minister for Water since June 2022.
5. As the Minister for Housing, I have statutory responsibilities for parts of the *Housing Act 1983 (Vic) (Housing Act)* and parts of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)*.
6. Alongside the Treasurer, I play a key role in the overall operation and effectiveness of the housing system in improving housing outcomes for Victorian communities. I share responsibility with the Minister for Planning, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the Commonwealth Government in improving affordability and access to private rental housing. I also have a role in advocating for improved access to home ownership for First Peoples to the responsible State and Commonwealth Ministers.
7. I have portfolio responsibilities for social housing, including public and community housing, and a component of affordable housing, as well as for the homelessness service system. I am responsible for Homes Victoria, which is the government agency responsible for managing Victoria’s social housing portfolio. Homes Victoria sits within the Department. The Department

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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consists of approximately 7,300 staff. This includes 190 First Peoples staff across the Department, including Homes Victoria.³

8. The Housing Act sets out my functions and powers in relation to the Housing portfolio, with Homes Victoria subject to my direction and control. There are numerous delegations in place under the Housing Act that provide decision-making powers to Homes Victoria and subsequently Department employees for operational decisions that do not require my input.
9. Under the Housing Act, I appoint the Chair and members of the Homes Victoria Advisory Board, in line with Cabinet processes and guidelines on board composition and diversity. This includes my responsibility to appoint a First Peoples member on the Homes Victoria Advisory Board.⁴
10. In my role as Minister for Housing, I also have a role in engaging with and advocating for the needs of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations or **ACCOs** and First Peoples housing organisations in national housing and homelessness policy, funding, and delivery settings. I aim to do this through my role as Victoria's representative on the Housing and Homelessness Ministerial Council (**Ministerial Council**), chaired by the Commonwealth Minister for Housing. The Council oversees housing and homelessness initiatives to improve the supply and affordability of housing across Australia, including overseeing the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.


PART 3 – THE HISTORY OF FIRST PEOPLES' DISPLACEMENT

11. The Background Paper 'Land held and managed by Homes Victoria',⁵ sets out the key events in the establishment of the colony of Victoria and the ways in which First Peoples were dispossessed of their traditional lands, and as a result, their homes. I set out some key points below.
12. As the Commission has heard, colonisation has had catastrophic impacts on the lives of First Peoples' families and communities, dispossessing First Peoples of their families, lands, laws, cultures, and traditions, including through violence perpetrated at individual, societal, legal and systemic levels. Importantly, colonisation had, and continues to have, a profound impact on housing outcomes for First Peoples.
13. I understand from engaging with and listening to First Peoples that the concept of a "home" includes First Peoples' physical, social, spiritual, and cultural connection to Country, and to their extended kinship systems. First Peoples' traditional knowledge and practices across many generations have included drawing on Country to create homes to meet cultural and kinship needs and aspirations.
14. Colonisation resulted in First Peoples' land and homes being stolen. The Commission has heard extensive evidence about the incredible speed and violence of colonisation in what is now Victoria, which saw the mass theft of First Peoples' land. As a result of colonisation, First

³ Data at April 2024 via Corporate Delivery Services team (190 First Peoples staff across DFFH including 17 executive level. This includes 11 First Peoples staff within Homes Victoria, including 2 executive level)


⁴ The Residential Tenancies, Housing and Social Services Regulation Amendment (Administration and Other Matters) Act 2022 (the Act) enshrines First Peoples representation on the Homes Victoria Advisory Board.

⁵ DFFH.0016.0001.0009

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Peoples were forced into homelessness, a concept grounded in colonisation that had profound and lasting impacts on First Peoples’ communities.

15. Since colonisation, First Peoples have been systematically excluded from the management, allocation, and ownership of land for housing, which has contributed directly and indirectly to multi-layered, persistent, and intergenerational exclusion and disadvantage. Historically, State and Commonwealth legislative, strategic, and policy settings have underpinned adverse housing outcomes for First Peoples.
16. Upon the proclamation of sovereignty and Crown ownership of the lands of the colonies, the Crown assumed ownership and control of Country. First Peoples’ deeply held cultural and spiritual connections to the land were disrespected and disrupted, resulting in communities and kinship ties being eroded, separated, and broken. This history has never been properly addressed or acknowledged by the Government.
17. From 1835, powers were introduced for Government officials to remove First Peoples from Country and into reserves, as control and ownership of the land around them was assumed by settlers in the State of Victoria. Between 1837 and 1849, First Peoples were forced from their Country – the Country to which they belonged, as it belonged to them – and were forced to live on missions, stations and reserves under the control of the State. Living conditions were poor and First Peoples’ lives were highly regulated and controlled. There was insufficient space for extended families, and facilities were inadequate. First Peoples were denied the connection between culture, community, identity and Country, and efforts to create or sustain this connection were actively suppressed.
18. These inhumane systems and injustices devastated the identities, lives, and futures of First Peoples in Victoria. I acknowledge the immense strength, will, and advocacy by the First Peoples who lived on these missions and protested the poor living conditions, resisting this control despite the risks. Despite this dislocation and dispossession, First Peoples’ spiritual connection to Country, culture, and community remained unbroken, as it remains unbroken to this day.
19. The Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines was established in 1860 to manage the stations and housing for First Peoples. ‘Protection’ meant total and utter control by the government of the day over First Peoples’ lives. This prevented First Peoples from practising their culture, their language, owning a home, accessing wages, education, employment and parenting or even seeing their children. In the late 1800s, official policies of absorption were introduced to “assimilate” First Peoples into the general population. Assimilation policies devastated First Peoples’ communities causing intergenerational cultural, economic, and social damage that is still experienced to this day.
20. Until 1950, First Peoples were systematically excluded from State housing policy, and the Housing Commission of Victoria resisted government directives to accept the responsibility for housing First Peoples in need. In 1951, only two State-owned houses had been allocated on a trial basis for the housing of First Peoples. I recognise this is a reprehensible injustice by the State.
21. In 1957, the Aborigines’ Welfare Board was established to supervise the implementation of the assimilation policy. Housing was a major focus of the Board, but provision of public housing for First Peoples came with an inherent risk of children being removed from their families due to the racist policies and laws permitting the forced removal of First Peoples children from their families. This was in addition to a lack of understanding and consideration of cultural, family,

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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and community dynamics. The Board contracted the Housing Commission of Victoria to build transitional housing for First Peoples, but due to the extremely poor quality and unsuitability of this housing, these schemes were abandoned.

22. The 1967 Referendum amended the Commonwealth Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for and recognise First Peoples in the Australian Census. Following this, “Aboriginal Affairs” and housing for First Peoples were specified in government policy for the first time.

PART 4 – FIRST PEOPLES’ HOUSING NEEDS

23. Access to a safe, secure, affordable, and accessible home is fundamental to the realisation of individual needs and aspirations. A home is essential for physical and mental health. It is also essential for safety and privacy, and for educational, social, economic, and cultural participation. A home is connected innately to a sense of identity, and of belonging.
24. First Peoples’ culture and connections to place and Country are enduring. Housing for First Peoples and the processes by which they access this housing should enable this connection to Country and culture to thrive. It is a matter of continuous shame that in this state – and more broadly around Australia, First Peoples do not have reliable recognition of need, or access to a safe, secure, and affordable home.
25. First Peoples are significantly overrepresented in homelessness and social housing services, face barriers to accessing private rental, and experience lower rates of home ownership than non-First Peoples. I recognise that this overrepresentation is a direct result of colonisation, dispossession and ongoing systemic and structural injustices and disadvantage, including in the application of discriminatory laws and policies. This is based in the historical policies and legislation that have excluded First Peoples from economic participation and prevented the creation of intergenerational wealth. Beyond these systemic and legal barriers, the impact of persistent racism and exclusion further compounds disadvantage, and disconnection.


First Peoples’ housing breakdown

26. Australian 2021 Census (**2021 Census**) data⁶ below shows the breakdown of First Peoples’ households in Victoria:
- 12 per cent lived in social housing;
 - 39 per cent lived in private rental;
 - 45 per cent owned their own home (outright or with a mortgage); and
 - 4 per cent recorded as “other”, not stated or homeless.

First Peoples experiencing homelessness

27. A general picture of the high levels of homelessness among First Peoples can be ascertained from two main data sources. Firstly, 2021 Census data showed that in Victoria, 1,109 First Peoples were identified as ‘homeless’ on Census night. This included:


⁶ <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/first-nations-tenure?IBMID=41>

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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- a. 72 First Peoples living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
 - b. 624 First Peoples in supported accommodation (funded by the Department)
 - c. 101 First Peoples staying temporarily with other households
 - d. 90 First Peoples living in boarding houses (including rooming houses)
 - e. 128 First Peoples living in other temporary lodgings
 - f. 92 First Peoples living in 'severely' crowded dwellings
28. While these derivative statistics provide an indication of the number of First Peoples living in insecure circumstances on the night of the 2021 Census, it can be reasonably assumed that the actual rates of homelessness are higher.
29. Secondly, the rate of First Peoples seeking homelessness services provides further data about First Peoples' homelessness. In 2022-23, First Peoples were 13 times more likely than non-First Peoples to seek assistance from homelessness services.⁷ In the same time period, around 11,500 First Peoples (representing close to 12 per cent of all people) sought assistance through specialist homelessness services. First Peoples were in different forms of housing tenure when they sought homelessness services in 2022-23, including:
- a. 3,095 First Peoples (27%) in private housing (compared to 2,593 or 24% in 2019-20)
 - b. 2,045 (18%) First Peoples in public or community housing (compared to 2,050 or 19% in 2019-20)
 - c. 601 (5%) First Peoples coming from institutional settings (compared to 642 or 6% in 2019-20)
 - d. 1,064 (9%) First Peoples in no shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling (compared to 1,132 or 11% in 2019-20)
 - e. 1,891 (16%) First Peoples were in short-term temporary accommodation (compared to 1,345 or 12% in 2019-20)
 - f. 1,706 (15%) First Peoples couch surfing or with no tenure (compared to 1,779 or 17% in 2019-20).
 - g. The remaining First Peoples with an 'other' housing situation or 'not stated'.
30. The number of First Peoples seeking homelessness services who are women and girls and are 'sleeping rough' remains a source of enormous concern, and evidence of multiple failures in historical and current systems of law, service delivery and support. 'Sleeping rough' refers to someone who is living on the street, in parks, cars, or who is 'occupying' vacant properties for temporary shelter. Of those 'sleeping rough' who accessed homelessness services in 2022-23, 43 per cent of First Peoples were female.⁸ In the same year, the majority (63 per cent) of the

7 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 164

8 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 164 (b)

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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nearly 1,931 young First Peoples aged between 16 and 24 presenting alone to youth-specific and generalist homelessness services were female.⁹

31. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-23 showed that every day in Victoria, there was an average of 86 unassisted requests for homelessness services. The majority (73 per cent) of unassisted requests included a request for housing or accommodation support, including 41 per cent seeking short-term or emergency housing. While the data on unassisted requests does not capture whether these requests were for First Peoples, it nevertheless indicates the scale of the general shortage of housing and accommodation options.¹⁰
32. This data is indicative of a woefully inadequate system and response to the problems of homelessness and requests for help. The homelessness figures for First Peoples – each one representing a person's lived experience of deprivation are both symptomatic and emblematic of the impact of colonisation, dispossession, and the multiple and intersecting experiences of disadvantage that First Peoples continue to face within systems that are failing to sustain or support them.

First Peoples living in social housing

33. Data from the 2021 Census shows that 12 per cent of First Peoples in Victoria lived in social housing¹¹ compared to 2.5 per cent for all Victorians.¹²
34. Data as at March 2024 shows 4,099 First Peoples households living in public housing, and up to 1,699 First Peoples households in properties owned by Aboriginal Housing Victoria¹³. This is compared to data at 30 June 2023, where there were 3,767 First Peoples households living in public housing and up to 1,632 First Peoples households in properties owned by Aboriginal Housing Victoria.
35. Data as at March 2024 shows 5,222 new First Peoples households waiting for social housing, and 1,272 First Peoples applicants wanting to transfer from one property to another.¹⁴ In 2022-23, there were 1,066 social housing allocations to First Peoples households.¹⁵
36. Social housing provides an essential safety net for households in need, especially those who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness and people with additional support needs. The current supply of short- and long-term rental housing, including emergency, transitional and affordable housing, is not meeting the demand for social housing expressed by First Peoples.
37. This is particularly important where the existing supply of housing does not adequately meet the diverse and intersecting needs of some First Peoples, which can include victim survivors of family violence, people transitioning from custodial settings, young people, people living with a

9 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 238 - DFFH Homelessness Information Tool – extracted March 2024.

10 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/data> Data tables: Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23, in the UNASSISTED tabs 1 and 4.


11 <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/first-nations-tenure?IBMID=41>

12 <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/tenure?WebID=110>

13 <https://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-housing-victoria-limited>

14 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 10

15 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 9

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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disability, older First Peoples, families interacting with the child protection system, and those with complex mental health issues.

- 38. I have sought and continue to seek to understand First Peoples’ lived experience of social housing, the systems and programs that do work, those that don’t and those that are missing altogether. In 2022, the Department started including specific questions to understand the suitability and cultural safety for First Peoples through the public housing resident survey. These results, which are part of the Department’s RFI response, demonstrate the need to improve First Peoples’ experience of housing and dedicate more supports to keep people in their homes. I further address this below.

Older First Peoples’ households

- 39. In March 2024, there were 877 First Peoples aged 55 and over who lived in public housing, and 694 First Peoples applicants aged 55 years and over on the Victorian Housing Register (through which people apply for long-term social housing). Of these, 502 were new applicants and 192 were seeking a transfer.
- 40. In 2022-23, 816 First Peoples aged 55 and over sought homelessness services in Victoria, from a total of 11,291 people aged 55 and over. In the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, nearly 1 in 4 (23 per cent) older First Peoples (aged 50 and over) reported they had experienced homelessness during their lifetime.¹⁶

First Peoples living in private rental housing


- 41. Data from the 2021 Census shows that 38 per cent of First Peoples in Victoria lived in private rental, compared to 25 per cent of non-First Peoples. This is a seven per cent increase from 31 per cent in 2011, compared with a three per cent increase for non-First Peoples in the same time period.
- 42. In 2022-23, around 11,500 First Peoples clients seeking homelessness services in Victoria. Of this, around 3,000 or 27 per cent of First Peoples seeking homelessness services were living in private housing, which includes private rental. This was an increase from 2019-20, where around 2,000 or 19 per cent were living in private housing.
- 43. Demand for homelessness services and social housing can be correlated in part to the lack of affordable options in the private rental market. These barriers not only create adversity for First Peoples already living in private rental housing, but also demonstrate that without accessible pathways to affordable housing options, including social housing, many First Peoples are unable to achieve mobility or their housing aspirations.

First Peoples and home ownership

- 44. According to the 2021 Census, the majority of First Peoples in Victoria lived in homes that they did not own, while the majority of non-First Peoples owned their home¹⁷. In Victoria, 45 per cent of First Peoples households (where at least one person identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) owned their home outright or with a mortgage. This has increased over time, up from

16 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/population-groups-of-interest/indigenous-australians#Housing%20and%20living%20arrangements>

17 <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IQS2>

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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43 per cent of First Peoples households owning a home in 2016. However, rates of home ownership for First Peoples are markedly lower than non-First Peoples households, with 68 per cent of non-First Peoples households owning a home according to the 2021 Census.¹⁸


45. Launched in 2020, '*Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*' is a self-determined framework that is designed so that First Peoples can achieve significantly improved housing outcomes in a generation. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* identifies the challenges and opportunities in respect of housing for First Peoples, which are summarised further below. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* identifies that First Peoples' lower rates of home ownership significantly limit the opportunity to create and sustain home ownership and intergenerational wealth.

PART 5 – THE WORK TO ADDRESS INJUSTICE

46. State and Commonwealth Governments hold and control the legislative, funding, governance, and policy levers to improve First Peoples' housing outcomes, as well as those across housing, social security, taxation, planning and other systems. I understand that the current level of control held by governments is one of the greatest obstacles to self-determination. This includes the roles and functions of my portfolio as Minister for Housing.
47. In this part, I summarise the key work done to address housing injustice. However, at the outset it is important to recognise that while there has been a measure of intentional and meaningful progress to identify, recognise and address past injustices, First Peoples face systemic and persistent barriers to housing outcomes and maintaining self-determined power in decision-making. Through the Commission's hearings to date, I have heard that many of the issues that arose from colonisation are still felt by First Peoples today.
48. I understand self-determination to be the guiding principle for First Peoples' housing in Victoria as prescribed in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (**VAAF**).¹⁹ Under the VAAF, self-determination is to be applied in prioritising ownership of First Peoples' assets, and transferring power, control, funding, and data to First Peoples organisations. My responsibility, commitment and obligation as the Minister for Housing is to enable this self-determination, and to facilitate agency and control of First Peoples' housing and supports related to housing or homelessness, by and for First Peoples' communities.
49. This includes modifying existing systems or creating new systems that meaningfully and enduringly enable self-determination. Later in my statement, I present key examples of self-determination, not least of which include delivering on the approaches set out in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.
50. I am committed to working with and alongside First Peoples so that self-determination is embedded in order to improve housing outcomes that ensure respect and protection of identity, culture, community, and connection to Country.

¹⁸ <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/2>

¹⁹ Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018 - 2023


Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Creation of Aboriginal Housing Victoria

51. Aboriginal Housing Victoria is the largest Aboriginal community housing organisation and registered housing agency in Australia. It is an important example of First Peoples community-led work to address the injustice caused by colonisation.
52. In 1981, the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (now known as Aboriginal Housing Victoria) was established. Its establishment was the culmination of decades of advocacy from First Peoples' communities for improved housing conditions and outcomes.
53. While the lasting impacts of colonisation have continued to severely limit First Peoples' housing outcomes, the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (the **Housing Board**) represented the first step towards self-determination for First Peoples' housing in Victoria.
54. The Housing Board's aim was to 'develop and manage the provision of housing assistance to the Aboriginal community in a manner that delivers accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing that meets the social, cultural and economic aspirations of the Victorian Aboriginal community'.²⁰ With its constitution approved by State Cabinet in 1980, the Housing Board's initial goal was to support the management of the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program, which at the time was operated by the Housing Commission of Victoria.²¹ The Housing Board's longer-term goal was First Peoples' community control and ownership of this program.
55. Developed with the Victorian Government, the Housing Board's 2000 Strategic Plan articulated steps to realise self-determination and community ownership of homes for First Peoples. These steps included the establishment of strong governance arrangements, followed by the transfer of tenancy management, property management (management transfer) and then property ownership (title transfer) from the Director of Housing to the Housing Board.
56. In 2005, the Housing Board and the Director of Housing entered a Memorandum of Understanding to give further structure to the transfer of management and ownership from the Director of Housing to the Housing Board. This Memorandum explicitly recognised the benefit of greater measures of self-determination for First Peoples' by promoting socio-economic independence and ensuring that culturally appropriate housing is provided to First Peoples in culturally appropriate ways.
57. In 2009, the Housing Board became a registered community housing provider under the Housing Act. This meant that the Housing Board was eligible to receive government funding to grow community housing for First Peoples. In 2016 the Housing Board became the registered Housing Association known as Aboriginal Housing Victoria - with the authority to own, maintain and develop a community housing portfolio.
58. Aboriginal Housing Victoria's work has become central to improving housing and homelessness outcomes for First Peoples in Victoria, alongside other First Peoples organisations that deliver housing and homelessness services. I commend the unwavering leadership, work and advocacy of these organisations - and the people within them - to achieve the vision of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.

20 Aboriginal Housing Victoria 2000 Strategic Plan – not publicly available. Available through Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

21 Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2004), *More Bees with Honey: A History of the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria 1981-2004*

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Commonwealth agreements and Transfer of Properties

59. I refer to the Background Paper ‘First Peoples Housing – Commonwealth and State Programs, Initiatives, Funding and Reporting’²² that sets out the history of Commonwealth and State agreements relating to social housing and homelessness assistance and dedicated housing for First Peoples in Victoria, including Closing the Gap targets.
60. In 2001, Commonwealth and state and territory housing ministers agreed on a ten-year vision for Indigenous housing, *Building a Better Future: Indigenous housing to 2010*.²³ This informed the strategic plan that aimed to improve the assistance provided to First Peoples in Victoria.
61. From July 2016 to July 2018 across three tranches, 1,448 properties were transferred to Aboriginal Housing Victoria from the Director of Housing to Aboriginal Housing Victoria. At the time, the total assets transferred were valued at \$409.4 million. This process – led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria – represented one of the most significant financial and formalised commitments to self-determination that the Victorian Government has undertaken to date.
62. In 2021, Victoria achieved the 2031 Closing the Gap Target 9A that 88.8 per cent of First Peoples live in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing.²⁴ Further to this, the Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan has been extended from 2023 to June 2025 to allow time for ongoing consultation with First Peoples stakeholders to self-determine the next steps in the development of a new implementation plan. I am determined that this Plan will address the six housing-specific actions under Outcome 9 as outlined in the Department’s response to the Commission’s Housing RFI.²⁵

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort

63. Since February 2020, *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* has set the direction and strategies under a 20-year agenda for improving housing outcomes for First Peoples in Victoria. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* translates to ‘Every Aboriginal Person has a Home’. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* was developed by First Peoples for First Peoples, led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria and funded by the Victorian Government. It is community owned. The Department and I are guided by this framework and will be guided by it into the future, through the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (the **Forum**).
64. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* lays the foundation for First Peoples housing and homelessness reform in Victoria. Importantly, it projects First Peoples households will grow from 23,000 to more than 50,000 by 2036 (an increase of 27,000 households over 20 years from 2016). The delivery and accessibility of these homes must not rely solely on housing assistance and social housing.²⁶ This goal must be achieved by increasing First Peoples’ access to affordable housing, private rental, and home ownership. The five goals in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen*


22 DFFH.0023.0001.0042

23 https://www.healthabitat.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Building-a-Better-Future_Australian-Housing-Ministers-Ten-Year-Statement-of-New-Directions-for-Indigenous-Housing_2010.pdf

24 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 107

25 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 104

26 Demographic projection in https://vahhf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/victorian-aboriginal-housing-and-homelessness-framework_complete_26_02_20-2.pdf

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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maar-takoort and the contribution of the Victorian Government to achieve these outcomes are detailed below.

65. The implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* is driven by the Forum. The Forum is constituted by ACCOs that provide housing and homelessness services in Victoria, along with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Trusts with an interest in housing and homelessness. These organisations come together to progress the strategies in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.
66. Aboriginal Housing Victoria chairs and provides the secretariat for the Forum, with dedicated funding provided by the Department. In line with advancing self-determination, the Forum is led by First Peoples organisations, and while not a formal member, the Victorian Government and the Department has been invited to attend and seek decisions at every Forum. This includes the Department attending the Forum to seek direction, provide data and information, and contribute to decision-making where required.
67. I recognise and commend the leadership of the Forum, the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Implementation Working Group (**Implementation Working Group**) and Koorie Caucus members who lead the self-determined governance that has driven progress to date. The Chief Executive Officers of Aboriginal Housing Victoria and Homes Victoria also co-chair the Implementation Working Group. The Forum publishes an annual report card on progress to realising the goals of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.
68. In the four years since implementation began, priorities have been identified through the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Implementation Working Group Work Plan. Since 2020, the Victorian Government has played a part in implementing the strategies to address the five goals and 18 strategies in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*. The progress towards realising the goals in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are detailed below.

Progress towards realising the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* goals

Progress towards Goal 1 – Secure housing improves life outcomes

69. The objectives of Goal 1 in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are:
- (i) Embed housing goals and targets in major Government strategic frameworks for Aboriginal people and mainstream policies where relevant.
 - (ii) Establish secure, affordable housing as the foundation for breaking cycles of disadvantage and homelessness.
 - (iii) Make housing the platform for the fulfilment of life aspirations and successful education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.
 - (iv) Sustain tenancies through culturally strong, Aboriginal-focused systems and practices.
70. Social housing, which includes public (State-owned and managed) housing, mainstream community housing and First Peoples' housing, plays an important role in providing First Peoples with secure housing.
71. Households can apply for (subject to eligibility requirements) and be allocated long-term social housing through the Victorian Housing Register, either as priority applicants (who are experiencing homelessness, experiencing family violence, have disability needs or significant

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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support needs, or who need to move for medical needs) or general (Register of Interest) applicants.


72. The Victorian Government has committed to 10 per cent of net new housing through the Big Housing Build, and 10 per cent of housing through the Social Housing Accelerator and the Regional Housing Fund to be dedicated for First Peoples' housing. These initiatives are detailed below under Goal 2.
73. In recent years, an increasing number of First Peoples have been allocated social housing. In 2022-23, there were 1,066 social housing allocations for First Peoples households (685 public and 381 community housing), which made up approximately 15 per cent of all allocations. This was higher than the previous year in 2021-22, where there were 733 social housing allocations (537 public housing and 196 community housing) for First Peoples households, which made up 13 per cent of all social housing allocations. On average, households housed via the priority access or priority transfer category on the Victorian Housing Register waited an average 18.1 months for housing, against a target of 10.5 months in 2022-23.²⁷ This is clearly unacceptable.
74. The Victorian Public Tenants Association is the independent, incorporated not-for-profit organisation recognised as the peak body representing people who live in public housing and people on the Victorian Housing Register. The Department has provided funding to the Association's Aboriginal Advocacy Program that appoints identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tenant Advocate roles for First Peoples social (public and community) housing renters²⁸. These roles provide additional support to assist First Peoples renters to access available supports through outreach work, telephone assistance and advice, culturally appropriate referrals, and advocacy to government. This is an example of an initiative that supports sustaining tenancies through culturally strong, First Peoples-focused systems and practices. Additional initiatives aimed at sustaining tenancies are included below under Goal 2.

Progress towards Goal 2 – Build supply to meet the needs of a growing Aboriginal population

75. The objectives of Goal 2 in *Mana-na woorntyeen maar-takoort* are:
- (i) Build the supply of homes owned by Aboriginal people and community.
 - (ii) Build 5,000+ social housing properties by 2036; 300 houses per annum to meet future demand.
 - (iii) Meet supply needs for transitional and (crisis) short-term and special needs housing.
 - (iv) Support Native Title and Treaty to grow affordable housing.
76. *Mana-na woorntyeen maar-takoort* sets the objective to grow social housing for First Peoples by 300 properties per year up to 2036. The Victorian Government has committed to increasing access to social housing options through dedicating 10 per cent of net new homes in through the Big Housing Build for First Peoples. The commitment to 10 per cent of new housing for First Peoples has continued through the Regional Housing Fund and Social Housing Accelerator.
77. To date, there are 1,023 new dedicated First Peoples social housing homes that have been funded over four years from 2023-24 to 2026-27, against the target of 300 homes per year set

²⁷ DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 79


²⁸ DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 15

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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by *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.²⁹ I recognise that this is below the number of homes called for in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.

78. These 1,023 new homes are being funded by State and Commonwealth programs as set out below:
 - a. The Big Housing Build (10 per cent of net new dwellings allocated for First Peoples housing) – 820 homes – funded by the State Government;
 - b. The Social Housing Accelerator (10 per cent allocated for First Peoples housing) – 73 homes – funded by the Commonwealth Government; and
 - c. The Regional Housing Fund (10 per cent allocated for First Peoples housing) – 130 homes – funded by the State Government.
79. Of the 1,023 funded homes that are dedicated for First Peoples, 109 are completed or due for completion in 2023-24, with more homes already contracted for delivery.
80. Regarding allocations to social housing through the Big Housing Build, as at 31 March 2024, 474 First Peoples households have been provided new homes. This includes First Peoples who have been allocated new public housing and mainstream community housing (which are additional to the dedicated First Peoples’ housing commitments in the programs above).
81. We are also actively working with the Forum and the Commonwealth to maximise First Peoples’ housing through the Housing Australia Future Fund (the **HAFF**). This fund aims to build 40,000 homes across Australia, with a total investment of \$10 billion over 10 years. I have written to the Commonwealth advocating for dedicated funding for First Peoples’ housing and in support of a dedicated National First Peoples’ Housing and Homelessness Plan, and I continue to advocate for this outcome in a range of forums, including at the most recent Ministerial Council in late May.
82. The first round of the Commonwealth’s HAFF did not include specific targets for First Peoples’ housing, however, I am aware that there were submissions lodged for dedicated First Peoples’ housing in Victoria. The Department is working with the Forum and engaging with Housing Australia to influence the direction to be taken for future rounds, and pressing for a dedicated target, as the Victorian Government has adopted through its social housing investment. I have also sought inclusion of First Peoples’ housing supply and progress to be included as a specific matter for discussion at the next Ministerial Council later in 2024.
83. Building the supply of social housing must also meet First Peoples’ cultural needs including connection to kinship and Country. This is why the Department seeks the views of the Forum in determining where to target new supply. The Department has committed to regular data sharing and provides the Forum with Victorian Housing Register data on First Peoples’ housing preferences and needs, including location and number of bedrooms. This is used to inform First Peoples’ housing organisations’ planning and service delivery, and where new supply should go.

29 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 1

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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84. I am aware that the Forum is currently working to provide the Department with its views on where new dedicated First Peoples homes are to be built under the Social Housing Accelerator and Regional Housing Fund.

Progress towards Goal 3 – Open doors to home ownership and private rental.

85. The objectives of Goal 3 in *Mana-na woom-tyeen maar-takoort* are:

- (i) Increase uptake of private rental.
- (ii) Support to get established in your home.
- (iii) Create opportunity for ethical investment in affordable rental
- (iv) Make home ownership available to more people.

First Peoples living in private rental housing

86. Addressing the challenges faced by First Peoples in accessing and maintaining private rental housing requires coordinated and whole-of-government action. In recent years, the Victorian Government has introduced new initiatives specifically for First Peoples households in private rental as well as new programs and services for all households, which First Peoples can access.
87. Since December 2020, First Peoples who are at risk of becoming homeless have had access to flexible funding and support to apply for or sustain private rental housing, through the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program. The Department funds this program, with \$5.84 million committed in 2023-24.³⁰ This support is provided by eight ACCOs in 10 locations across Victoria, with Aboriginal Housing Victoria providing state-wide program coordination. The program's principles and guidelines were developed in line with *Mana-na woom-tyeen maar-takoort* objectives.
88. To date, 1,941 First Peoples households have been supported through this program,³¹ with the program now having the capacity to support approximately 1,000 First Peoples households per year.³² This support includes payment of rent in advance, in arrears or subsidised rent of up to \$7,000 per household; covering costs associated with accessing private rental such as establishing a new tenancy, and those of furniture, appliances, removalists and connecting utilities.³³
89. First Peoples are also able to access other rental assistance programs available to all households (which are subject to eligibility criteria) and funded by the Department. These programs include the Private Rental Assistance Program (which operates like the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program) and RentAssist bond loans (in place since 1989). While these programs are not First Peoples-specific, cultural safety must be further embedded to increase First Peoples' participation.

30 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 206

31 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 207

32 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 206

33 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 213

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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90. RentAssist bond loans are available to households who meet the income and asset eligibility criteria for Priority Access on the Victorian Housing Register. To date, 5,924 First Peoples households have accessed loans through this scheme, making up five per cent of all households assisted. In the period between April 2022 and April 2024, 553 First Peoples received loans, making up 6.6 per cent of total recipients. There are currently 2,052 active loans for First Peoples.³⁴

First Peoples and affordable housing

91. The Homes Victoria Affordable Housing Rental Scheme, developed through the Big Housing Build, provides affordable rental homes for low to moderate-income households who are struggling to find suitable tenancies in the private rental market. Through the scheme, households get three-year fixed-term tenancies with rental prices set at a 10 per cent discount on market rent and capped at 30 per cent of median income to ensure affordability.³⁵ The scheme is allocated to households via a ballot process. Of the 89 First Peoples who applied for properties through the scheme,³⁶ as at March 2024, eight First Peoples households (of 228 households in total) have secured affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Rental Scheme.
92. Unlike allocations of social housing, which occur through the Victorian Housing Register, eligible households can access the Affordable Housing Rental Scheme through a ballot system, with affordable housing properties listed on the Homes Victoria website, the realestate.com.au platform and through direct email marketing. The Department is engaging the Aboriginal Housing Reference Group (as part of the Forum) to promote the Affordable Housing Rental Scheme within its community networks, to increase First Peoples' uptake of the scheme, and to build better awareness of the ballot process.
93. As identified in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, affordable housing - a discrete option from social and private rental housing - must form part of the range of housing options available to First Peoples into the future. I am committed to understanding the experience of First Peoples renters engaged in the Affordable Housing Rental Scheme and to identify future First Peoples affordable housing approaches that are delivered by the ACCO sector. This will occur through two main avenues. Firstly, the Department is collecting data on its Affordable Housing Rental Scheme to inform its future evaluation. The evaluation will consider First Peoples' access to the program.
94. Secondly, the Department will be imminently releasing a request for proposal for further affordable housing to be managed by community housing providers under the Big Housing Build. This request for proposal will include a target for dedicated affordable homes for First Peoples to be delivered by First Peoples community housing providers.


Improving First Peoples' access to home ownership

95. First Peoples are also accessing Victorian Government programs aimed at supporting home ownership for Victorians yet to enter the property market, such as the Victorian Home Buyer Fund (the **Home Buyer Fund**). The Home Buyer Fund has specific eligibility for First Peoples – a 3.5 per cent deposit (compared to a 5 per cent deposit for non-First Peoples) and the ability to

34 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 223

35 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 229

36 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 232

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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access a shared equity contribution of 35 per cent (compared to 25 per cent for non-First Peoples)³⁷. While this program does not fall within the remit of my portfolio, it represents important and much-needed steps by the Victorian Government to improve rates of home ownership. I recognise that the Department does not currently offer dedicated initiatives to increase First Peoples' home ownership.

Progress towards Goal 4 – An Aboriginal-focused homelessness system

96. The objectives of Goal 4 in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are:
- (i) Rebuild an Aboriginal homeless service system from the ground up.
 - (ii) Provide tailored support for those at high risk.
 - (iii) Increase supply of crisis and transitional housing.
97. The Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific Homelessness System in Victoria (the **Blueprint**)³⁸ focuses on the realisation of Goal 4 within *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* of creating a First Peoples' focused homelessness system in Victoria. Developed by the Forum and in place since August 2023, the Blueprint sets out a vision for an Aboriginal-specific, integrated homelessness support system that is person-centred, culturally safe, and underpinned by self-determination.
98. The Blueprint sets out outcomes to be achieved, namely, that:
- a. people are housed in safe and culturally appropriate accommodation
 - b. people are empowered and supported to move beyond homelessness and regain independence
 - c. holistic, integrated and client-centred supports are available to individuals in need, and
 - d. all organisations in the sector are culturally safe, capable and highly collaborative.
99. The Blueprint also outlines the approaches needed to achieve an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system and details the desired service arrangements and system management approaches. The service arrangements include screening, entry points, housing pathways and supports, including for First Peoples exiting the homelessness system. The focus for system management in the Blueprint is on cultural safety; stewardship, funding, and monitoring; capacity building; cross-sector collaboration; and data and information systems.
100. The Blueprint Steering Committee (the **Committee**) has been established to oversee its implementation and is a sub-committee of the Implementation Working Group. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, co-chairs the Committee with an independent co-chair nominee appointed by the Forum members. The Committee's membership comprises representatives from the Forum, mainstream homelessness service providers and peak bodies, and other staff from Homes Victoria and the Department. Other stakeholders are invited to attend the Committee meetings as required.
101. The Department is working towards the direction in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* to achieve 10 per cent of homelessness funding being dedicated to First Peoples homelessness

³⁷ <https://www.sro.vic.gov.au/homebuyer>

³⁸ <https://vahhf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Blueprint.pdf>

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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services, including a commitment to meet this annually from 2024 to 2029

representing 5.38 per cent of the total homelessness budget. This figure has grown compared to 2021-22, when \$12.3 million, or 2.91 per cent, was committed to dedicated First Peoples homelessness services.

102. The 2024-25 Victorian Government State Budget includes \$16.1 million in new funding over four years for more dedicated First Peoples' homelessness services. This will further address the target that 10 per cent of the homelessness budget is for dedicated assistance for First Peoples.
103. The two First Peoples-specific homelessness Entry Points commenced in January 2024 and have been designed, and continue to evolve, in line with the directions of the Blueprint and the Committee members. These are located in metropolitan Melbourne through Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation (**Ngwala**), and in regional Victoria through Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative (**Wathaurong**).
104. The Entry Points provide culturally appropriate intake, assessment and planning responses through multidisciplinary teams to better support First Peoples experiencing homelessness. Ngwala and Wathaurong are leading these initiatives, supported by Aboriginal Housing Victoria, to ensure that they are being delivered in a culturally appropriate and self-determined way.³⁹ An evaluation of the Entry Points is being commissioned and these insights will inform refinement as identified, and potential expansion of the model.
105. The Victorian Government is also establishing the Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative to improve housing outcomes for First Peoples exiting correctional facilities. This initiative is being developed to provide support for First Peoples aged 18 years and over, who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness upon release. The program is to be delivered by ACCOs and supports those in contact with the justice system to access or sustain safe and culturally appropriate housing upon release.
106. Since February 2024, \$385,000 has been provided to the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited to deliver the program in the North-East Metropolitan area of Melbourne. The second location is being determined by the Forum and will commence once an organisation has been identified to deliver the program.⁴⁰


Progress towards Goal 5 – A capable system that delivers Aboriginal housing needs

107. The objectives of Goal 5 in *Mana-na woom-tyeen maar-takoort* are:

- (i) Create a strong and viable Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector.
- (ii) Make the mainstream housing and homelessness system culturally safe.
- (iii) Build a systems-based partnership between the mainstream and Aboriginal housing and homeless systems.

³⁹ DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 15

⁴⁰ DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 15

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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A strong and viable Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector

108. The Victorian Government is continuing to support capacity-building measures for ACCOs to deliver homelessness services through the Victorian Indigenous Statewide Homelessness Network.⁴¹ Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that deliver homelessness programs are engaged in the Network, that is delivered by Ngwala. The Network provides advocacy, support, and training that aims to ensure First Peoples communities in Victoria have access to safe and sustainable housing options.
109. Funding has also been provided to enable ACCOs to become First Peoples community housing organisations, registered with and regulated by the Victorian Government under the Housing Act as either housing providers or housing associations. This is being achieved through the Community Housing Sector Development Fund, with \$2.8 million or 47 per cent of the fund dedicated to building the capacity of First Peoples organisations.⁴²
110. This has led to growth in the number of First Peoples' housing organisations registered. There are now three registered First Peoples' community housing organisations in Victoria: one Registered Housing Association (Aboriginal Housing Victoria Limited) and two Housing Providers (Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, and Aboriginal Community Housing Victoria Limited (an arm of Community Housing Victoria Limited). These organisations are critical to the growth of First Peoples-owned and -managed community housing in Victoria.

A culturally safe mainstream housing and homelessness sector


111. The Community Housing Industry Association Victoria's *Community Housing Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework* (the **Framework**) is contributing to the goal of a capable system that delivers First Peoples housing needs. The Framework also complements *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* and was developed under the leadership of a steering committee chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of Aboriginal Housing Victoria.⁴³ It aims to improve cultural safety in mainstream community housing for First Peoples.
112. The Framework offers the community housing sector practical resources for embedding cultural safety in community housing organisations, with the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria offering cultural awareness training and consultancy support to assist organisations to implement the Framework. The Framework is currently being evaluated by the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria. The Department will look to these findings and will work with the Forum to address any recommendations.
113. Furthermore, the Council to Homeless Persons *Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework for the Specialist Homelessness Sector* has been informed by the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* governance groups, including the Forum.⁴⁴ It is designed to assist specialist homelessness services to deliver culturally safe services for First Peoples.

41 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 171

42 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Paragraph 60

43 <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202109/Part%201-Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20cultural%20safety%20framework-20190620.pdf>

44 <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Aboriginal-Homelessness-An-Aboriginal-Cultural-Safety-Framework-for-the-Specialist-Homelessness-Sector-4th-draft-with-hi-res-pic-attribution.pdf>

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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PART 6 – THE PATH FORWARD

114. While substantive progress has been made towards realising the vision and goals articulated by First Peoples' communities in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, significant work remains to deliver its 20-year agenda, as directed by the Forum. Action is required in relation to social housing, homelessness services, private rental and home ownership and in the systems and authorising environments that surround it. It is important that First Peoples can access safe, secure, and appropriate housing across the spectrum from transitional and crisis accommodation right through to home ownership.
115. My priorities for the path forward will continue to be shaped and guided by the Forum's leadership and the vision, goals, strategies, and approach of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* as an ongoing commitment to First Peoples' self-determination. My priorities for the immediate future to complement and support implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* are set out below.


Leveraging Commonwealth investment

116. Alongside Victorian Government investments through the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund, Commonwealth investments have been important for growing the delivery of First Peoples' housing. I recognise that while 1,023 dedicated homes are funded to 2026-27,⁴⁵ this still falls short of the 300 homes needed per year that *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* calls for.
117. I am committed to bridging this gap in the short- and longer-term, and to reducing the impact of workforce and material shortages across the building and construction sector within the Housing portfolio. This includes delivering more housing and whole-person support for First Peoples living in social housing. I have written to the Commonwealth Government to call for a separate First Peoples' Housing and Homelessness Plan and dedicated funding targets. This is important to ensure that First Peoples' acuity of need is recognised in the programs delivered under a range of initiatives including youth housing, women's housing, and homelessness and dedicated programs for victim survivors of family violence.

Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF)

118. I will also support the Forum to work with Housing Australia to negotiate arrangements for First Peoples-specific housing supply under the HAFF. A percentage of the HAFF should be dedicated for First Peoples' housing, and I will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for this. I have written recently to the Commonwealth Government on this matter, and I will continue to raise this in upcoming Ministerial Council meetings.
119. The HAFF operates on an 'availability payment' system which means that organisations bidding to use this fund will need to take on debt. I understand the Forum has raised concerns about this and is actively considering how to address this to ensure First Peoples' housing organisations can maximise HAFF investment. It is essential that any path to increasing First

45 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 1

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Peoples' housing is financially sustainable, particularly for enabling the growth of ACCOs and dedicated First Peoples' housing providers.

120. With affordability a key barrier to securing stable private rental housing, it is critical to recognise the importance of sufficient levels of Commonwealth Rental Assistance, and income support measures, alongside taxation settings. I note that Commonwealth Rental Assistance increased by 10 per cent in the recent Commonwealth budget.
121. My next priority is to advocate for new affordable housing properties being delivered under the HAFF, to be prioritised for First Peoples' households. I will continue to raise this at Ministerial Council meetings with my Commonwealth and interstate counterparts.

Driving housing outcomes beyond social housing

First Peoples' home ownership

122. Historically, efforts in housing have focused on growing the supply of social housing and more recently affordable rental housing under the Big Housing Build, alongside support for people experiencing homelessness. It is crucial that further steps are taken by the State, as set out in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, to establish home ownership initiatives and ensure existing programs are working to meet the needs of First Peoples.
123. As *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* identifies, increasing home ownership is important for meeting demand for First Peoples' housing, as well as addressing intergenerational disadvantage and inequity. This includes removing financial barriers and increasing access to enabling processes, and education about home ownership schemes. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* also proposes customised home ownership schemes with broad eligibility for First Peoples including higher income earners, people who have previously owned a house but no longer do, and possibly extended families who have the capacity to buy jointly.
124. I am determined to work with the Forum to understand First Peoples' barriers to home ownership and advocating to my Ministerial colleagues in the Victorian Government to identify more opportunities for First Peoples' access to owning their home, that build on the Home Buyer Fund.
125. I am also commissioning the Department to explore the costs, benefits and implementation approach for a home ownership scheme for young First Peoples who are exiting care services. I have asked the Department to present me with options in the next financial year on a business case with costs for enabling access to home ownership for First Peoples exiting care using the Department's existing housing assets.
126. Realising greater levels of home ownership will require a sustained and coordinated effort within and across the multiple portfolios in the Victorian Government, and with the Commonwealth Government. I welcome the Commonwealth's recent announcement of the Help to Buy scheme that is currently under consultation and will enable more Victorians to enter home ownership sooner. I intend to work with the Commonwealth to ensure that First Peoples' communities have well-supported access to this program. I will continue to communicate any insights from the Forum to the Commonwealth as they identify barriers to accessing these programs or improvements that can be made to increase its equitable implementation for First Peoples.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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First Peoples in private rental housing

- 127. More needs to be done to ensure that the 38 per cent of First Peoples living in private rental housing (according to the 2021 Census), live in housing that is safe, secure, and affordable, and that First Peoples have mobility to access suitable housing as their needs change. This includes addressing the important issues identified in the 2022 *Aboriginal Private Rental Access Project Report - 'Excluded from the Start'* (**Excluded from the Start**), commissioned by the Victorian Commissioner for Residential Tenancies. The Project Report made a number of findings in relation to the barriers experienced by First Peoples in accessing private rental housing.²⁵ Concerningly, this included findings of direct and structural racism and discrimination in the residential real estate industry. The Project Report also noted perceptions that living in social housing may further stigmatise First Peoples in their private rental applications.⁴⁶
- 128. This work requires a whole-of-government response to deliver on the recommendations in the Policy Report arising from Excluded from the Start.⁴⁷ These recommendations are a feature of the Victorian Government’s approach to working with the Forum to deliver much-needed reforms.
- 129. I will continue to prioritise efforts for new forms of affordable housing to deliver outcomes for First Peoples. This includes dedicating First Peoples affordable housing as part of future requests for proposal under the Big Housing Build as outlined earlier in my statement. This will be in addition to the 820 homes to be delivered for First Peoples through the Big Housing Build.
- 130. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* also calls for support for First Peoples to sustain their tenancies through culturally strong, First Peoples’-focused systems and practices. In line with this, and to deliver on key recommendations from the Excluded from the Start Policy Report, the Department has allocated a further \$400,000 in funding in 2023-24 to support First Peoples tenants to stay in social housing through the Indigenous Tenancies at Risk and Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk programs. This commitment is on top of the annual funding committed to these programs⁴⁸, bringing the total allocation for these programs to \$2.1 million in 2023-24.
- 131. With locations determined by the Forum, the expansion of the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program to 10 geographical areas in 2023-24 is consistent with a government-wide effort to address barriers faced by First Peoples in accessing and maintaining private rental housing, as set out in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* and Excluded from the Start. Despite this, I recognise that this program is not currently available in all Department local areas and that this will require additional resourcing to achieve state-wide coverage in the future.
- 132. The seven Department local areas that the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program is not available in include Ovens Murray, Outer Eastern Melbourne, Inner Eastern Melbourne, Hume Merri-bek, Wimmera South West and Central Highlands. With this in mind, the Department has allocated an additional \$440,000 for the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program in 2023-24 to address demand in the program, bringing total investment to \$5.84 million.

46 <https://www.rentingcommissioner.vic.gov.au/rental-reform/the-aboriginal-private-rental-access-project>

47 <https://www.rentingcommissioner.vic.gov.au/the-aboriginal-private-rental-access-project-report-and-recommendations-have-been-delivered>

48 DFFH.0024.0001.0073 Table 15

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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Homelessness service investment

- 133. The recent 2024-25 State Budget delivers \$16.1 million in dedicated new funding to address First Peoples’ homelessness. I will work with and be guided by the Forum and the Committee on where this funding should be spent. This will further increase the proportion of dedicated funding in the homelessness budget for First Peoples to further the objectives of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.
- 134. In addition to the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program and the Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk and Indigenous Tenancies at Risk programs, the Department has provided additional funding in 2023-24 for ACCOs through the Housing Establishment Fund as well as additional funding for capacity building for the workforce to improve cultural safety. This additional funding of \$1.68 million in 2023-24 across these programs [REDACTED]


Improving cultural safety

- 135. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* articulates the need for culturally safe service provision to be embedded across all services that engage with and support First Peoples. It is not sufficient to rely on ACCOs to be the sole deliverer of culturally safe services within the social housing and homelessness system. To meaningfully address First Peoples’ homelessness, First Peoples must be able to access culturally safe services. Ensuring that mainstream services are culturally safe also reduces the cultural load and workforce fatigue of ACCOs.
- 136. It is essential that this gap is addressed in line with the goals of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, and to enable the growth and existing leadership of ACCOs and First Peoples’ housing organisations. Achieving this will require structural reform, additional funding by State and Commonwealth Governments, and strong partnerships with community that are based in respect, trust and action.
- 137. At present, the work of the Council to Homeless Persons and the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria in developing cultural safety frameworks to support the sector is aiming to address this gap. However, I acknowledge that there is no ongoing funding for the delivery of cultural safety work in the mainstream housing and homelessness sector.

Social Housing Regulation Review

- 138. The Victorian Government commissioned an independent Social Housing Regulation Review (**The Review**). The Review aims to identify future regulatory arrangements that will best support the long-term interests of social housing residents and their communities. The Review Interim Report⁴⁹ also highlights issues with cultural safety, noting that there are no cultural safety performance standards that apply to all social housing providers to better meet the needs of First Peoples. Engagement with the Forum will be crucial to ensuring First Peoples’ needs are addressed as per the Review findings and recommendations.
- 139. This Review’s Final Report will be released in the coming months. The Final Report is a significant body of work, with policy, operational, administrative, and funding implications. Responding to the Review requires time to consider how to transform and best support the

49 <https://engage.vic.gov.au/download/document/23341>

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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growth of the social housing sector and enable a greater focus on renter outcomes. The Victorian Government's consideration has needed to incorporate developments that have occurred since receiving the Final Report, including Commonwealth announcements relating to the HAFF.

Enabling the leadership and growth of First Peoples' housing

140. Informed by the views and priorities of the Forum, I recognise that continued investment is required to provide the policy leadership, governance and other supports needed for the implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*. This must go beyond the funding committed over three years to support the implementation and stewardship to deliver *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*. It will also involve continued investment in building the capacity of First Peoples' community-controlled organisations to become registered community housing providers.
141. An optimal homelessness service system is one where First Peoples'-controlled services can provide tailored, person-centred and accessible support to those who need it. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* and the Blueprint set the path to rebuilding a First Peoples' homeless service-system from the ground up. To achieve this, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Ngwala Wilumbong and Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative are now members of the recently established Ministerial Reform Homelessness Advisory Group so that First Peoples' needs and aspirations will contribute to the reform approach.

Transfer of housing Assets to First Peoples


142. Based on the historical transfer of ownership of public assets to First Peoples through Aboriginal Housing Victoria, I have requested advice from the Department on a pathway for further housing asset transfers to registered First Peoples' housing organisations, which will be shaped by the views and perspectives of the Forum and First Peoples renters.
143. As a first step, we are delivering the Aboriginal Public Housing Management Transfer Pilot, which will transfer up to 50 properties from the Department to registered First Peoples' housing organisations over 12 months. This is being guided by the directions of the Forum and the views and aspirations of First Peoples renters, and procurement is expected to commence in the coming months.

Commitment to Treaty


144. I affirm my commitment to Treaty with First Peoples in Victoria, as an embodiment of First Peoples' self-determination, and my commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Treaty is an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the unique status, rights, cultures and histories of First Peoples, and come to grips with the history we share to create a better future together. I welcome the opportunity for Treaty to present a future where this State is unified in protecting the rights of First Peoples' connection to Country, culture and community.

Conclusion


145. It is an honour, significant responsibility, and privilege to make this statement as part of the Commission's inquiry in relation to social injustice in housing and homelessness. I do not make this statement lightly, and nor do I underestimate the opportunities that exist to improve - with the best degree of permanence achievable - outcomes and systems.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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146. I have the deepest respect for First Peoples' enduring cultural and spiritual connection to Country. Colonisation and the dispossession of First Peoples from Country and thus from a physical and spiritual place to call home has cast a long and painful shadow on our history. Changing the systems that have perpetuated this vulnerability, disadvantage, insecurity, and indignity is a necessary step towards healing. This requires a recognition of the damage that has been done.
147. I have reflected on the voices of First Peoples, including through the work of the Commission, and am motivated and guided by the dignity and determination with which they speak of the trauma of dispossession and colonisation. I am continually humbled by the fortitude, grace, stamina, stewardship, and insight of the many First Peoples who work tirelessly to ensure that those in their communities are housed safely, securely, and with dignity. I am determined to work to ensure that their calls for justice are heeded through the work of the Commission and beyond.
148. However, this should not be the sole responsibility of First Peoples, including First Peoples working in the Department, to drive the necessary reforms and changes to the housing system. This is a collective responsibility, and it is paramount that the Victorian Government does not contribute to the increasing cultural load experienced by First Peoples in Victorian workplaces. In practice, this requires adequate investment, support and sufficient resourcing from the Victorian Government. It requires partnerships, to reduce the cultural load, and to amplify the impact of self-determination.
149. I have heard the calls from community for our government systems to better work together. It is a source of shame to hear that First Peoples across a number of priority cohorts including victim survivors of family violence, people transitioning from custodial settings, young people, people living with a disability, older First Peoples, women, families interacting with the child protection system, and those with mental health issues are not receiving the tailored housing services they need.
150. The housing system, while still requiring significant reform, relies on the Victorian Government working effectively with the intersecting social assistance systems that aim to improve outcomes for First Peoples. This includes family violence, justice, youth, aged care, disability, and mental health. I am determined to work with the other Departments and Ministerial colleagues across these portfolios to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to addressing the health, wellbeing and social needs of First Peoples, whereby safe and secure housing is reflected as an upmost priority. Safe and secure housing is the foundation for prosperous healthy futures for First Peoples, their families, and their communities.
151. While progress is being made to recognise both past and ongoing injustices perpetrated by the State in relation to housing, including through meaningful commitment to truth telling proposals to create a path forward, I accept and agree that there is so much work still to be done. Addressing critical gaps in social housing and homelessness services and ensuring these are culturally safe for First Peoples is important but only part of the solution. Investment and reform are required across the entire system to ensure that First Peoples can access and enjoy mobility within private rental housing and home ownership. I am determined to be a contributor to redressing the past and ongoing injustices and impacts of colonisation on First Peoples.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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ANNEXURE TO
WITNESS STATEMENT
OF
HON. HARRIET SHING MP

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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Question 18

What investments are being made in homelessness services that: a. specifically assist; and b. respond to the specific cultural needs, of Victorian First Peoples?

Response to Question 18 (a) & 18 (b)


1. There are two ways to show investment in First Peoples homelessness services in Victoria. The first way is through what is dedicated in the base and overall budget for homelessness services. The second way is to highlight new investments that have been dedicated to address First Peoples homelessness in recent times.

Dedicated funding for First Peoples homelessness within the overall budget for homelessness

2. In the overall homelessness budget, there is dedicated funding provided to ACCOs and three mainstream homelessness service providers to deliver culturally appropriate services for First Peoples.
3. *Mana-na woor-n-tyeen maar-takoort* specified that the First Peoples' share of homelessness funding should be equivalent to the proportion of First Peoples homeless clients as a proportion of all homeless clients (10 per cent at the time). The Department has committed to achieving this target which is confirmed in Homes Victoria's 2024-29 Corporate Plan.
4. The percentage of homelessness funding dedicated to First Peoples has increased from 2.91 per cent (2.91%) in 2021-22 since the implementation of *Mana-na woor-n-tyeen maar-takoort*.
5. [REDACTED] This represents 5.38 per cent (5.38%) of the overall homelessness budget.
6. The breakdown of funding from 2021-22 to 2023-24 for dedicated responses for First Peoples experiencing, or at risk of homelessness is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Funding for First Peoples homelessness services and comparison over time

Program	Total 21/22	Total 22/23	[REDACTED]
<i>Aboriginal client support including multi-disciplinary support</i>	\$2,173,029	\$2,228,224	[REDACTED]
<i>Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk</i>	\$1,614,747	\$1,655,762	[REDACTED]
<i>Aboriginal youth client support</i>	\$2,021,905	\$2,073,262	[REDACTED]
<i>Aboriginal Rental Private Assistance Program</i>	\$2,148,796	\$2,339,225	[REDACTED]

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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Program	Total 21/22	Total 22/23
Brokerage (flexible funding all-entry point, Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative, Aboriginal Tenancies At Risk, Creating Connections)	\$64,798	\$32,892
Children's service	\$444,323	\$455,608
Capacity building	\$614,273	\$854,247
Youth Refuge	\$2,156,768	\$2,228,706
Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) including Covid-19 HEF and H2H HEF	\$750,966	\$127,577
Flood relief	\$0	\$409,950
Entry point - new and existing funding	\$266,405	\$273,172
Total First Peoples homelessness funding committed	\$12,256,010	\$12,678,624

*Brokerage funds of \$400,000 for Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk program are included in the Brokerage line item, a flexible fund designed to be tailored to the needs of the household.


- As part of the 2024-25 Victorian State Budget, announced on 7 May 2024, \$16.1 million is dedicated to addressing First Peoples' homelessness over four years [redacted]. The use of the funding is to be determined by the Forum and the Blueprint Steering Committee (the Committee).
- In addition [redacted] is allocated to a First Peoples response to *Homes First*, a new program that succeeds the *From Homelessness to a Home* program.

Question 19

How is the State of Victoria tracking against performance measures set out by the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement? (p.3)

Response to Question 19

- The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement reflects a shared commitment to improving social housing and addressing homelessness for Australians. It is used to assist people through the provision of social housing and homelessness services, including the provision of crisis and transitional accommodation, long-term social housing, regular upgrades, maintenance, builds and acquisitions and other preventative services. Victoria is expected to receive \$436 million in 2023-24 from the Commonwealth, in line with the Commonwealth

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Budget 2024-25⁵⁰. The agreement includes a set of national performance indicators, which are published in the annual Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services. The current Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria is reflected in Schedule E2, which was signed in June 2023, and operates until 30 June 2024. Schedule E2 is published on the Federal Financial Relations website.⁵¹

10. Under the Agreement framework, State outputs require to have a housing and homelessness strategy, contribute to data improvement activities, and provide an annual Statement of Assurance, which is published on the Federal Financial Relations website.⁵² Table 1 to Schedule E2 to the Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria (pp 2-5) identifies the specific strategies and reforms for housing and homelessness in Victoria.
11. Victoria met its output requirements under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement in 2022-23 and is anticipated to meet these again in 2023-24.
12. Under the Agreement, First Peoples are prioritised through:
 - a. Outcome (d) improve housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians (at [15(d)] p 4)
 - b. National performance indicator (n) as an increase in the proportion of Indigenous Australians purchasing or owning their own home (at [31] p 9). A report against this indicator is in the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services.⁵³
13. The Statement of Assurance in 2022-23 includes a breakdown of homelessness expenditure for First Peoples, with Victoria contributing \$16.2 million, and the Commonwealth committing \$13.3 million towards First Peoples' homelessness and family violence services in Victoria.⁵⁴
14. Victoria reports in addition to the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement on First Peoples housing progress, by providing data through the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Annual Report Card. This report card is prepared and released by Aboriginal Housing Victoria. This report card contains measures that have been chosen and reflect the key priorities of First Peoples.⁵⁵
15. As part of negotiating a new Commonwealth-State funding agreement, the Minister for Housing advocated for dedicated funding for First Peoples housing and homelessness services through her membership on the Ministerial Council.

⁵⁰ <https://budget.gov.au/content/bp2/index.htm>


⁵¹ <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/national-housing-and-homelessness-agreement-0>

⁵² https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2021-07/NHHA_Final.pdf

⁵³ https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2021-07/NHHA_Final.pdf

⁵⁴ National Housing and Homelessness Agreement – Victorian statement of assurance for the 2022-23 financial year – not publicly available. DFFH.0025.0001.0001

⁵⁵ <https://vahhf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/VAHhf-Annual-Report-Card-2022-V4.pdf>

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Question 20

How are 'First Order' principles being embedded under the Big Housing Build, Social Housing Growth Fund? (p.24)


Response to Question 20

16. The Big Housing Build First Order Principles (**the Principles**) have been developed in consultation with and were approved by the Forum in October 2021. The Principles are applied to the Social Housing Growth Fund, a component of the Big Housing Build, and are as follows:
 - a. Aboriginal self-determination is the guiding principle
 - b. Recognise and advance Aboriginal rights to land and natural resources
 - c. Build economic self-sufficiency
 - d. Enable Aboriginal people to make decisions from a position of well-being and empowerment
 - e. Support and advance Aboriginal 'community ownership and responsibility for their own affairs and their own Communities'
 - f. Aboriginal land and resources remain in Aboriginal hands. Delivery of the program offers the option for land and resources to be owned and remain in the control of Aboriginal communities.⁵⁶

17. Through the dedicated Social Housing Growth Fund - Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round, the Principles are embedded as mandatory criteria in the Request for Proposal. This requires those applying for grants (or respondents) to comply with the Principles in their proposal. If compliance is not achieved, respondents do not proceed to the evaluation phase. Where respondents are successful and are awarded funding through this round, the Principles are included in the terms of the funding deed, which is a legal agreement requiring compliance.

18. For other Social Housing Growth Fund Rounds (for example, the Mental Health Supported Housing Round), projects that support First Peoples are prioritised by applying the Principles as weighted criteria. In these rounds, respondents can include ACCOs and non-First Peoples housing providers, who are required to demonstrate how they aim to satisfy the Principles.

⁵⁶ The Principles are also listed in the Department's Social Injustice (Housing) RFI Response at paragraph 38, DFFH.0024.0001.0073.

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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Question 21


What is being done to address the high proportion of First Peoples waiting for allocation on the Victorian Housing Register? (p.5)

Response to Question 21

19. There are three main strategies used to address the high proportion of First Peoples waiting for allocation to long-term social housing on the Victorian Housing Register as set out below:
- a. increasing the supply of dedicated First Peoples social homes
 - b. supporting First Peoples to live in private rental accommodation and keep First peoples in homes
 - c. increasing allocations to long-term social housing for First Peoples.


Increasing the supply of dedicated First Peoples social housing

20. The Department has a target in Homes Victoria's Corporate Plan to deliver at least 1,500 dedicated social housing properties for First Peoples by 2029 (with these to be owned and operated by First Peoples organisations). This number of homes is premised on Objective 2.2 in *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* to build 300 houses per year to meet future demand of at least 5,000 social housing properties by 2036.
21. Currently, 1,023 dedicated First Peoples' social homes are funded to be delivered to address the high proportion of First Peoples waiting on the Victorian Housing Register from 2023-24 to 2026-27. These new homes are funded by State and Commonwealth programs as set out below:
- a. The Big Housing Build, including the Social Housing Growth Fund (10 per cent (10%) of net new dwellings allocated for First Peoples housing) – 820 homes
 - b. The Social Housing Accelerator, funded by the Commonwealth (10 per cent (10%) allocated for First Peoples housing) – 73 homes
 - c. The Regional Housing Fund (10 per cent allocated for First Peoples housing) – 130 homes.
22. In addition, the Department understands that there are funding submissions from ACCOs to the Commonwealth Government for more dedicated First Peoples-specific housing under the HAFF. This will likely yield further growth in dedicated First Peoples' social housing in line with the housing targets set by *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*.
23. Progress against the Big Housing Build – First Peoples targets is provided as part of the response to Question 27.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Supporting First Peoples to live in private rental and stay in homes

24. *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* sets out that First Peoples aspire to live in other segments of the housing market outside of social housing.
25. The Department funds programs that support First Peoples to enter and maintain private rental tenancies, including the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program, Private Rental Assistance Program and RentAssist Bond loans scheme.
26. The Private Rental Assistance Program helps over 12,000 people a year to find and maintain tenancies in the private rental market. Funding is provided for practical assistance for families, such as to cover costs such as rent, bond, household items and removalists. First Peoples can access the Private Rental Assistance Program, subject to eligibility criteria, noting there is a dedicated Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program as described below.
27. The Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program is delivered by eight ACCOs and has supported over 1,900 First Peoples households since the program began in December 2020.
28. Like the mainstream program, First Peoples can access the following services through the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program:
 - a. To pay rent in advance or arrears (which must be reviewed to determine affordability).
 - b. Rental subsidies (maximum package of \$7,000 per household with greater packages subject to local area approval). This is in addition to Commonwealth private rental assistance if the household is eligible.
 - c. Guarantees to cover any loss of rent or damage costs that are not covered under insurance or the bond.
 - d. Costs associated with accessing private rentals such as storage costs, transport rental inspections, or payment of bond (however, the RentAssist Bond Loans scheme should be first used whenever possible).
 - e. Costs associated with establishing a new tenancy such as furniture, appliances, removalist costs or utility connection.
 - f. Landlord incentives – this may include minor works to the property that will benefit the tenant. For example, modifications for a tenant with a disability to make the property accessible.
29. The Department monitors demands on this program and has recently identified that additional funding is needed to address the needs of First Peoples. This has led to the budget being increased by \$440,000 in 2023-24 and it now totals \$5.8 million. This funding is flowing to funded organisations by 30 June 2024.
30. The Department administers the RentAssist bond loan scheme. This scheme is not specific to First Peoples, nor does it have a First Peoples specific component. This scheme can be used to access both private rental and community housing properties. The Department provides bond

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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loans based on the actual size of the rented property (number of bedrooms) and the number of people who will live at the property.

31. From April 2022 to April 2024, 8,030 bond loans have been provided by the Department. Of this number, 533 (or 6.6 per cent) have been for clients who identify as First Peoples.

Increasing allocations to long-term social housing


32. There is a focus on increasing allocations to long-term social housing and changing policies and procedures to support increased access. In 2022-23, there were 1,066 social housing allocations to First Peoples households, an increase from 733 in 2021-22. The proportion of long-term social housing allocations made to First Peoples is also growing, from 13.2 per cent in 2021-22 to 14.9 per cent in 2022-23.
33. An example of how the Department changes policies and procedures includes recent work to shift the family reunification category on the Victorian Housing Register to further up the prioritisation scale. The intended effect of this change is that First Peoples families should wait a shorter period for long-term social housing, noting that waiting times are influenced by a range of factors. These factors include demand and supply; applicant preferences; and any special accommodation requirements that applicants may hold.
34. Allocation trends and the proportion of allocations being made to First Peoples across public housing are monitored by the Department. These are reported on a quarterly basis to the Forum for transparency to First Peoples organisations.
35. In addition, all community housing providers (including First Peoples' dedicated providers) participating in the Victorian Housing Register are provided with an end-of-year allocation summary report. This includes data collection on the proportion of homes they have allocated to First Peoples compared with other agencies to benchmark their progress and drive their accountability for housing First Peoples. The Department intends to provide the Forum with mainstream community housing allocations data at the June 2024 Forum, following this being requested at the last Forum.

Question 22

What is the current implementation status of recommendation made by the Aboriginal Private Rental Access Project titled "Excluded from the Start"? (p.2)

Response to Question 22

36. The *Aboriginal Private Rental Access Project report - Excluded from the Start* was commissioned by the Consumer Policy Research Centre and conducted by researchers at the Centre for Urban Transitions, Swinburne University of Technology, on behalf of the Office of the Residential Tenancies Commissioner, Victorian Legal Aid and Aboriginal Housing Victoria.
37. The report and recommendations were delivered in August 2022 and endorsed by the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Implementation Working Group Koori Caucus. The project

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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recommendations are currently being implemented with oversight by the Aboriginal Private Rental Access Committee⁵⁷ (which provides advice to the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies) with a term through to December 2024.⁵⁸ The four recommendations and progress to date are described below.

Recommendation 1 - A Funded Mentorship Program:

38. That Homes Victoria, in partnership with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum, including Aboriginal people with lived experience in trying to access private rental, investigates the feasibility of a funded program of Aboriginal housing mentors or support officers to augment existing programs that assist Aboriginal renters to access private rental housing, including young people seeking their first rental home.

Progress against recommendation 1

- 39. An investigation of the feasibility of Aboriginal housing mentors will take place as part of the evaluation of the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program. The design stage of an Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program evaluation has commenced with the results of the evaluation expected to be completed in early 2025. It is proposed that this evaluation explores the role of First Peoples with a lived experience of the private rental market, being a component of the future Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program. The Department will work in partnership with the Blueprint Steering Committee to determine the scope of the evaluation, and the procurement process, so all elements to be investigated are captured.
- 40. The Department is aware that Aboriginal Housing Victoria has recently worked with the Real Estate Institute of Victoria to start a traineeship program to support First Peoples train to become real estate agents.

Recommendation 2 - Expansion of the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program:


41. That Homes Victoria extends the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program and identifies any further measures to enhance the effectiveness of the program in partnership with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum.

Progress against recommendation 2

42. The Department has expanded the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program. At the time the recommendation was written, the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program was funded across five Department local areas. In 2023-24, Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program was expanded to be delivered in 10 Department areas in both regional and metropolitan Victoria by eight ACCOs.

⁵⁷ <https://files.rentingcommissioner.vic.gov.au/2024-04/Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20Aboriginal%20Private%20Rental%20Access%20Committee.pdf>

⁵⁸ <https://www.rentingcommissioner.vic.gov.au/the-aboriginal-private-rental-access-project-report-and-recommendations-have-been-delivered>

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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43. Initially the agencies delivering Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program were funded for a period of 24 months to December 2022. Since the report, this program will be funded on an ongoing basis.
44. To support the ongoing funding of Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program, an external evaluation of the program will commence. This evaluation will inform key components including areas of demand and assistance provided to First Peoples.
45. The design stage of an Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program evaluation has commenced with the results of the evaluation to be completed in early 2025. It is expected that the evaluation will cover whether the program should be expanded statewide.
46. Demand on the program is monitored and the Department takes action to deal with pressures. For example, in 2023-24 an additional \$440,000 was provided across all agencies delivering the program.

Recommendation 3 - Sustainability of Private Rental Tenancies:

47. That Homes Victoria reviews and enhances the use of flexible funds to assist access to, and sustainability of private tenancies for Aboriginal renters.

Progress against recommendation 3

48. Current programs such as the Housing Establishment Fund, Private Rental Assistance Program, Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program and Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk can all be used to support First Peoples into the private rental market.
49. In 2023-24 the Department has provided six additional ACCOs with Housing Establishment Funds. This brings the total of ACCOs that receive Housing Establishment Funds in 2023-24 to 13. The Department is working so that all homelessness-funded ACCOs who receive homelessness funding also receive funding through the Housing Establishment Fund. Funding will flow to new providers in June 2024.
50. The Department is also improving homelessness services activities for implementation on 1 July 2024. This will give services that provide the aforementioned programs more flexibility to provide the support that best meets the needs of First Peoples renters, by changing Departmental funding and reducing flow-on reporting requirements.

Recommendation 4 - Dedicated First Peoples Dispute Resolution Support:

51. That Homes Victoria with the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victoria Legal Aid review the access of Aboriginal renters to existing tenancy advice and support programs, to improve Aboriginal access and better integrate supports including representation during dispute resolution.

Progress against recommendation 4

52. The Department remains committed to undertaking this review with the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victoria Legal Aid. To progress this recommendation, the

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Department commenced discussions from March 2023 through the Aboriginal Private Rental Access Committee, which includes the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Legal Aid and Consumer Affairs Victoria. This includes identifying within the four agencies what First Peoples' data exists that identifies barriers to accessing existing tenancy advice and support programs.

53. It is proposed that the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program evaluation will explore the interaction of this program across other tenancy advice and support programs across other tenancy advice and support programs. The findings from the evaluation will be carefully considered to inform further improvements in accessibility and service integration across tenancy advice and support programs.
54. The Department has funded the Victorian Public Tenants Association to assist First Peoples renters in social housing tenancies, which includes public housing. The Victorian Public Tenants Association Aboriginal Advocacy Program provides additional support to assist First Peoples renters access available supports through outreach work, telephone assistance and advice, culturally appropriate referrals, and advocacy to government.
55. The Department regularly reviews the demand and capacity of its existing programs and is committed to increasing access to culturally appropriate tenancy support for Aboriginal renters. We have focused our efforts on doubling the locations where the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program is delivered to ten Department local areas across the state. This program provides First Peoples with support to maintain their tenancies, including supporting tenants during dispute resolution.

Question 23

What funding and resources have been allocated to support same?

Response to Question 23

56. In 2023-24, eight ACCOs were funded to deliver the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance program across 10 locations. [REDACTED] is being invested to expand the program to 10 areas. This includes a recent allocation of an additional \$440,000 to address demand in the program.
57. The program provides flexible brokerage, an Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program plus support worker and an Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program broker position. A statewide coordinator role is also funded and sits with Aboriginal Housing Victoria. This program coordinator role takes actions to improve First Peoples' access to private rental and break down systemic barriers.
58. The locations, funding and service providers who deliver the program are outlined in the table below.


Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Table 2: Funding for Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program by service provider

Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program Provider	Location	Funding in 2023-24 estimate
Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative Limited	Loddon	
Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Limited	Outer Gippsland	
Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative Limited	Mallee	
Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation	Bayside Peninsula	
Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Limited	Goulburn	
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-operative Limited	Inner Gippsland	
	Brimbank Melton	
	Western Melbourne	
Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited	North East Melbourne	
Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative Limited (in start-up phase)	Barwon	
Aboriginal Housing Victoria Limited	State-wide coordinator	

59. The budget for 2024-25 for the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program will be in line with the funding invested in 2023-24. Budgets are being finalised in advance of the 2024-25 financial year.


Question 24

What is being done to address the high number of hearings on the Residential Tenancies List at VCAT? (p.1)

Response to Question 24

Whole of Government response to rental disputes

60. The Victorian Government is establishing Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria as part of its commitments under Victoria’s Housing Statement. Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria will a one-


Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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stop shop for renters, agents and landlords to resolve tenancy disputes over rent, damages, repairs and bonds. It will provide a clearer pathway to settle tenancy issues in a faster, fairer and cheaper way thus freeing up VCAT for more serious or complicated matters. There will also be a dedicated renting taskforce to crack down on offences like renting out properties that don't meet the minimum standards.

61. Additionally, the Victorian Government has committed to further renter protections under Victoria's Housing Statement, including:
- a. Restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements, to address an emerging trend which has seen some landlords evict tenants at the end of their first fixed-term lease in order raise the rent substantially when re-listing the rental property. If agents or landlords are issuing a new lease after they have evicted previous tenants on their first fixed-term one, they will have to offer the property at the same rent for at least 12 months.
 - b. Banning all types of rental bidding, to ease the pressure on prospective tenants and reduce competition. In 2021, it became illegal for real estate agents or landlords to solicit or encourage higher offers than the advertised price of a rental property. However, a tight rental market with vacancy rates at record lows has put an incredible amount of pressure on prospective tenants, with people increasingly making their own unsolicited bids, either to pay more weekly rent or to pay more than four weeks in advance, to try and give their applications a competitive edge.
 - c. Increasing the notice period for rent increases and notice to vacate periods to 90 days. For families with children, eviction notices can be particularly traumatic and this change will give renters more certainty, easing the stress they face.

Department response to mitigate disputes going to VCAT for First Peoples renters

62. The Department is committed to sustaining First Peoples' public housing tenancies with a focus on early intervention strategies, active engagement with renters (including any services that support them) and referrals to culturally appropriate mainstream services where renters are not supported. This is practically achieved through engaging with renters about tenancy issues and how to resolve them. The Department also places an emphasis on keeping renters informed about changes that may affect their tenancy.
63. There are three broad reasons the Department would take a public housing renter to VCAT including rental arrears, renter property damage, and tenancy breaches and disputes (behaviours of concern).
64. When managing any such legal proceedings that might be initiated by the Department, it aims to create consistent practices that align with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic), the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) and the Victorian Model Litigant guidelines.
65. In line with the governing operational guidelines and supporting legislation, the Department will only refer a matter to VCAT and undertake repossession of a property from a public housing

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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renter as a last resort and where remedial options have been exhausted.⁵⁹ Prior to issuing a Notice to Vacate, staff must undertake a human rights impact assessment, present the evidence, and seek approval from senior staff of the Department to commence the VCAT process to regain possession of the property. This ensures that all necessary steps are taken to safeguard the rights and interests of tenants while adhering to legal and procedural requirements.

66. The Department funds dedicated programs to support First Peoples to maintain their tenancies including the Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk Program and the Victorian Public Tenants Association Aboriginal Advocacy Program.
67. These programs offer independent advice and support to First Peoples renters at risk of eviction from Aboriginal Housing Victoria and public housing. Funding is provided to ACCOs and homelessness service providers.
68. The Victorian Public Tenants Association Aboriginal Advocacy Program provides additional support to assist First Peoples renters to access available supports through outreach work, telephone assistance and advice, culturally appropriate referrals, and advocacy to government.


Question 25

What supports are currently provided to facilitate Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to become registered housing agencies? (p. 13-24)

Response to Question 25

69. The Victorian Government provides funding to ACCOs through the Community Housing Sector Development Fund. This fund aims to build the capacity of the First Peoples community housing sector. To date, the Community Housing Sector Development Fund has allocated 47 per cent of its \$6 million allocation towards building the capacity of the First Peoples community housing sector.
70. The Department's RFI Response (paragraph 60 of the RFI) details the initiatives delivered through this fund to date. Projects that are being delivered include:
 - a. a feasibility project that analysed eight ACCOs' financial and organisational capacity to become registered housing agencies and explore development opportunities with their existing assets (land and property).
 - b. the Supporting Aboriginal Registration project, which aims to increase the number of registered housing providers by establishing a two-year position to support ACCOs and Traditional Owner groups to navigate the registration process and grants program.

⁵⁹ <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/tenancy-management-manual-tenancy-breaches-operational-guidelines-word>

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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- c. a grants program to build internal business capacity towards developing proposals for the development of land. This aims to reduce barriers for ACCOs participating in the Big Housing Build.

71. The Fund projects are expected to be delivered by the end of 2026.

Question 26

Has there been an increase in ACCOs becoming registered Community Housing Agencies since the creation of the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework? (p.5)

Response to Question 26


- 72. Prior to the release of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* in 2020, there was one registered ACCO. Following the release of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* in 2020, Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative and Aboriginal Community Housing (Victoria) Limited have become registered housing providers. This brings the total number of First Peoples' organisations registered to three.
- 73. The Department understands that there are several First Peoples' organisations interested in, and or actively working towards registration. These organisations can be supported by a dedicated Aboriginal Registration Interpreter role employed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria. Please note this position works into the Housing Registrar (Department of Treasury and Finance) to support First Peoples' organisations to achieve registration.

Question 27

What is the current status of the Aboriginal Big Housing Build?

Response to Question 27

- 74. There is a target under the Big Housing Build for 10 per cent of net new housing (820 properties) dedicated to First Peoples housing. Of these dwellings:
 - a. 420 social housing homes are to be delivered through the Social Housing Growth Fund. To date 315 homes have been contracted; and a further 58 homes will be contracted by 30 June 2025.
 - b. 400 homes will be acquired or built by the Department and be placed with First Peoples housing providers for management [REDACTED]. To date 109 homes have been delivered and have been placed with providers for First Peoples to move into. Sites are currently being determined for the balance of these homes.
- 75. Across the Big Housing Build project in totality, as at 31 March 2024, 474 First Peoples have been housed through Big Housing Build properties.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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76. In addition to the Big Housing Build, 130 new First Peoples homes will be delivered through the Regional Housing Fund and 73 new First Peoples homes dedicated from the Social Housing Accelerator program funded by the Commonwealth. This will provide a total of 1,023 new First Peoples homes from 2023-24 to 2026-27.

Question 28

What is the current status, membership and activity of the Aboriginal Big Housing Build Reference Group? (p.7)


Response to Question 28

Aboriginal Big Housing Build Reference Group

77. The Aboriginal Big Housing Build Reference Group is a sub-committee of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum and has been renamed the Aboriginal Housing Reference Group (**Reference Group**). This subgroup of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum advises the Department, the Housing Registrar, and other government stakeholders on programs that aim to grow the supply of Aboriginal housing, which include:
- a. Delivery of the Big Housing Build First Peoples housing targets. For example, the group developed the First Order Principles for the Big Housing Build.
 - b. Supporting the design and guiding program delivery of the Social Housing Accelerator Program, Regional Housing Fund and the HAFF. For example, the group is currently determining where new homes should be targeted across the state to recommend an approach to the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. The Department will use this advice to guide procurement.
 - c. Sector capacity building activities and approaches, including registration support and assistance. For example, the Reference Group is helping to build sector awareness and understanding of the HAFF to determine viable opportunities to access housing investment.

Membership and status of the Reference Group

78. In 2023, the Reference Group met eight times. There have been two meetings in 2024, most recently on 9 May 2024.
79. The Reference Group meetings are held every two- to- three months, or on an as needs basis to progress key work at the discretion of members and the AHHF.
80. Membership consists of the following members and additional representatives are invited to meetings when necessary, including representatives from the Department of Treasury and Finance (including the Housing Registrar), and Housing Australia:
- Homes Victoria (Co-chair)
 - Aboriginal Housing Victoria (Co-chair)

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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- Ballarat District Aboriginal Co-operative
- Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative Limited
- Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative
- Mallee District Aboriginal Services
- Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Limited
- Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation
- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
- Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative
- Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative Limited
- Njernda Aboriginal Corporation
- Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative
- Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Co-operative Limited

Question 29

What work is being done to identify and protect the specific cultural rights and needs of Victorian First Peoples residents of the properties impacted by the proposed program of works (including to maintain community cohesiveness, identity and access to services)?

Response to Question 29


81. The Department’s relocation manual sets out operational guidelines on how all households who need to relocate because their homes are being upgraded or redeveloped are supported. The core principle is to relocate households based on their needs and preferences. The other important principle is the importance of upgrading and redeveloping homes so that renters have the best standard of accommodation possible.
82. First Peoples households who are affected are provided with a dedicated relocation support officer to provide support and answer any questions they may have about the relocation process.
83. When first contacting an affected household, it is protocol that a relocation support officer will ask the household members whether they identify as First Peoples, if not identified already. This is done so that the specific cultural rights and needs of First Peoples will be considered in the relocation process. This is also done as First Peoples may not have identified as being First Peoples when applying for public housing.
84. When interacting with First Peoples households, relocation support officers are required to ask a specific question about the person’s connection to Country. This question is part of the renter relocation form. This helps the Department understand the household’s preferences. In addition to the uniform right of return, the Department will actively support the maintenance of connection to Country, including where desired, and possible, transfers to Country.

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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- 85. The Department provides all renters, including First Peoples, the opportunity to select where they wish to live based on public housing 'broad band' areas. Within these 'broad bands', renters can select a suburb which they wish to live in.
- 86. The Department works with support services to address the needs of affected First Peoples households through connecting them with ACCOs. Where consent is given, First Peoples can remain connected with services and their community while in temporary housing.

High-rise redevelopment relocations

- 87. As part of the high-rise redevelopment program, the Department has identified all First Peoples households that may be subject to relocation over the life of the 30-year program of redevelopment.
- 88. The Department will work with ACCOs to further support First Peoples households as the high-rise redevelopment program evolves. A dedicated service will be established and funded to support First Peoples households to understand and exercise their rights during the relocation process, and to express their housing needs and preferences. It is anticipated that this may include a dedicated information and advice service delivered by a First Peoples organisation. The Department will work with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum on the approach to be taken. The service is expected to commence by early 2025.
- 89. In total, as at February 2024 there are [REDACTED] living in the 44 high-rise towers [REDACTED]. As noted above, this is a 30-year program of redevelopment. The first tranche of high-rise towers to be redeveloped by 2031 are two vacant towers in Carlton, 33 Alfred Street North Melbourne, 12 Holland Court Flemington and 120 Racecourse Road Flemington. [REDACTED] in the five towers.
- 90. The Department will embrace the principles of First Peoples' connection to community, heritage and Country; value of community identities, histories and cultures specific to each site, and supported connections; and consultation with Traditional Owners to ensure their connection to Country is respected and honoured.
- 91. The Department's relocation team will continue talking and working with First Peoples households so they are connected with cultural supports, on their request, to assist throughout the relocation process and settle into a new home.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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Question 30 (a) (b)

What is being done to ensure that adequate and appropriate housing is available to First Nations individuals seeking to depart custodial settings, including to: a. ensure that parole and bail applications are not denied on the grounds of unsuitable post-release accommodation); and b. support reunification with children?

Response to Question 30(a)***Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative***

92. The Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative commenced in March 2024. It is intended that the program be delivered in two Department local areas. Once fully operational, the program will support up to 20 people at any one time. The program is currently being delivered in the north-east Melbourne local area. The program is based on two staff with brokerage available to assist people to obtain housing post-release. ACCOs will determine how the investment is used to achieve outcomes.
93. The Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative supports First Peoples (aged over 18) exiting custody or remand (including those on parole or bail) to access housing. The program prevents homelessness and builds the foundation for successful community reintegration. Program workers actively engage with clients within 10 weeks of their release to understand their housing and broader, related needs and secure a suitable living arrangement.
94. Participants in the program can access existing housing and homelessness resources like the Private Rental Assistance Program or the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program to secure housing. Participants are also connected to other housing and homelessness supports.
95. The Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative guidelines outline that the needs and goals should be identified by the client and the Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative worker who is responsible for coordinating referrals to the identified specialised supports.⁶⁰
96. The Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways initiative worker is based within the community and can outreach to all Victorian prisons. All First Peoples over 18 years of age who plan to reside in the north-east Melbourne area on their release are eligible for support through this program.
97. Funding for an additional regional area is available and the Department is working with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum on its preferences for allocation of funding. Once this consultation process is finalised the Department will progress the allocation to expand the program.

⁶⁰ Homes Victoria - Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative Program Guidelines. Not publicly available. DFFH.0025.0001.0009

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative


98. Where First Peoples are exiting custody to an area where the Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative is not in operation, or if they prefer a non-Aboriginal specific service, the mainstream program, the Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative program is available to provide support.
99. The Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative provides pre-release housing support for those with a housing need who are incarcerated at all publicly-owned Victorian prisons as well as the Fulham Correctional Centre and Thomas Embling Hospital. The Corrections Housing Pathways worker provides referrals to the appropriate specialist homelessness support service or homelessness entry point in the area the person wishes to return to on their release.

Transitional Housing Management Joined Up Initiatives

100. There are two state-wide joint initiatives between the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Justice and Community Safety which use transitional housing management program properties for people exiting custody. Both initiatives are not specific to First Peoples.
101. The first initiative provides access to 48 transitional housing management properties for participants of the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Reconnect program. This program assists people who may have parole and bail applications, with access to transitional housing and support. Although it is not targeted to First Peoples, Aboriginality is one of the prioritisation measures to allocate these properties. Allocation and support of people into this program is led by the Department of Justice and Community Safety.
102. The second joined-up initiative provides access to 43 transitional housing management properties for young people (aged 16 to 24 years of age) exiting custody on a youth justice order. This partnership provides support over a two-year period to ensure that young people can successfully sustain housing and establish independent living.

Baggarrook Aboriginal Women's Transitional Housing Program

103. Baggarrook is a residential facility that provides short-term transitional housing and intensive case management to Aboriginal women exiting prison who are at risk of homelessness.
104. The program is delivered in partnership between the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Housing Victoria. The Department of Justice and Community Safety is the lead agency, with capital funding from Corrections Victoria provided to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (formerly Department of Health and Human Services) for the design and construction of the facility.
105. Through Baggarrook, women can access safe transitional accommodation with individualised and targeted service provision. This integrated housing and support model incorporates culturally appropriate services, support and transition planning into safe and secure accommodation.

Signature		Witness	Matthew Dawson
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- 106. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Housing Victoria also support women exiting prison with a transitional residential program to build independent living skills and confidence. This includes legal services, connections to community, maintaining cultural ties, and access to other services.
- 107. The Department has a peppercorn lease with Aboriginal Housing Victoria for the tenancy arrangements. In 2023-24, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, was also provided with \$280,000 in operational funding through Corrections Victoria.

Response to Question 30(b)

Prioritising family reunification in the Victorian Housing Register

- 108. All applicants, including First Peoples who are exiting custody, and who need long-term social housing to support reunification with children can apply through the Victorian Housing Register and be prioritised based on the family reunification category. Reunification is also being elevated within the Victorian Housing Register to ensure its importance is better reflected in the ways that housing is allocated.
- 109. This category typically applies to people who require stable, affordable housing for their children to be reunited with them, or whose children are not living with them for the sole reason that they do not have appropriate housing in which to live.
- 110. As at 30 March 2024, [REDACTED]


Sign here: 

Print name: Harriet Shing

Date: 03/06/2024

Witness signature: *Matthew Dawson*

Date: 03/06/2024

Signature		Witness	<i>Matthew Dawson</i>
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