



## Key recommendation from National Shelter's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing roundtables

Over the past three years National Shelter has been running a process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing stakeholders to support the sector to navigate the transition of responsibility for oversight of their housing organisations from the Commonwealth to states and territories. The process has included three annual roundtables and has also drawn on ongoing communication with key stakeholders and state-based projects such as Queensland Shelter's *Shape of Indigenous Housing in Queensland* project. National Shelter's overarching aim has been to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations to continue and expand their role in providing housing to their communities.

The transition process has been fraught. Having faced decades of shifting government approaches, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders have been reluctant to engage. They report communications from government officials as unclear, inconsistent and at times disrespectful. Stakeholders are also frustrated that while general community housing providers are being funded and encouraged to innovate and grow, they have been stuck in limbo unless they sign up to state and territory systems that don't offer the flexibility required for their models. In particular, they have identified lack of flexibility on rent models and tenant profiles as barriers to working with government as well as cultural sensitivity and adequate recognition of and funding for the broader roles played by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Meanwhile, the emerging National Regulatory System for not-for-profit housing providers has the potential to be game-changing for the entire sector. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing providers and for the governments who have struggled to engage with them, it provides an opportunity to reframe the challenges and find a way forward.

To this end, National Shelter recommends that FaHCSIA fund a capacity building project to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations to engage with the opportunities presented by the new environment.

The aims of such a project would include:

1. Building trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations and all levels of government to create positive and productive working relationships;
2. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Housing to become registered in the new National Regulatory System, providing high levels of assurance to government and allowing organisations to participate in development and growth opportunities;

Key elements of the project would include:

1. A national gathering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations to foster engagement and build momentum for participating in capacity development. Such a gathering could be timed to work in with the National Housing Conference 2012;
2. Develop and promote appropriate and workable rent models, staffing structures, and approaches to asset and tenancy management;
3. Development of business models that work with the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations and allow them to leverage their assets and grow their portfolios;
4. Support organisations to work towards regional mergers, where appropriate.

National Shelter believes that it is essential that this project be delivered by the non-government sector. The project could be shaped and guided by the newly formed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Alliance made up of the core participants of the National Shelter roundtables. The Community Housing Federation of Australia would be well placed to develop models and tools necessary to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations to achieve these development aims.

#### **Appendix A – Record of Roundtable 2012**

#### **For further information, please contact:**

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