

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HOUSING ASSOCIATION

**PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION
2024 - 2025**

JANUARY 2024
ROB MACFARLANE



NATSIHA
National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Housing Association

INTRODUCTION

THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HOUSING ASSOCIATION (NATSIHA) WELCOMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THIS PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION ON ITS PRIORITIES FOR THE 2024 - 25 BUDGET



NATSIHA seeks commitments from the Australian Government through the 2024-25 federal budget for the successful implementation of the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan (HSSP), and to advance the broader agenda of Closing the Gap in First Nations housing.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- NATSIHA calls for stewardship of all government funding across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing continuum.
- Funding for the delivery of the First Nations Housing Sector Strengthening Plan Agreed by Joint Council in 2022.
- 22% of all government funded Housing and Homelessness programs to be channelled towards a peak led delivery of First Nations housing and homelessness solutions, in-line with clauses 55a and 55b of the Close the Gap Agreement.¹
- NATSIHA/Jurisdictional First Nation Housing Peak led rollout of maintenance and upgrade programs.
- The development of a 10-year business case, including the supporting strategy and economic model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing, Homelessness and enabling Infrastructure across all jurisdictions.
- NATSIHA calls for an additional \$450 million in homelessness support to respond, and to meet the current and growing demand of individuals and families seeking support.

To address these challenges comprehensively, this budget submission is delineated into three key categories: delivery, pilot, and seed initiatives.

ABOUT NATSIHA

As the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and a member of the Coalition of Peaks, NATSIHA remains steadfast in addressing the housing needs specific to our communities. Our dedication lies in ensuring safe, secure, and culturally appropriate housing solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families.

We empower our communities to shape housing solutions that cater to emergencies and diverse housing needs across the spectrum. Collaborating with State and Territory Peaks, our aim is transformative change in housing and infrastructure, combating homelessness and housing insecurity. We advocate for equity dismantling systemic barriers along the way. NATSIHA's strategic approach significantly impacts the "Closing the Gap" priorities. Through targeted efforts and collaborative partnerships, we actively seek and implement innovative solutions to housing challenges.

NATSIHA's Strategic Pillars are:

- **First Nations Housing Excellence:** Driving National Leadership: Championing excellence in First Nations Housing to reshape narratives and enact policy shifts, ensuring equitable solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- **Empowering Communities:** Empowering First Nation communities through strengthened representation, sustained collaboration, and targeted capacity-building, fostering self-determination and improved outcomes across the housing continuum.
- **Systemic and Structural Reform:** Urgent systemic reform, re-imagining funding for swift community impact and leveraging diverse partnerships to forge a more just and equitable future.

NATSIHA operates under a federated model and supports the work of State Peak organisations. NATSIHA endorses the pre-budget submissions of the Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA), Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland (ATSIHQ) and Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) and submits our submission to support and compliment these submissions.

BACKGROUND

In Australia, access to housing is a fundamental human right, yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to face significant disparities in realising this basic right. Despite ongoing initiatives and policies targeting housing challenges, the persistent hurdles in accessing suitable housing remain. The ramifications of inadequate and overcrowded housing extend beyond mere physical structures, exerting profound effects on the health, education, and overall well-being of First Nation individuals and communities.

There's nothing noble or romantic about it now. It's a disgrace to all of us. White Gate is one of Alice Springs' squalid and shameful town camps. I've been to slums in India and Myanmar, and Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, as desperate as this. But they weren't on the outskirts of a prosperous regional city in a wealthy developed country.

Rachel Perkins

THE HOUSING EMERGENCY FACED BY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA

The housing crisis confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia is a pressing and multi-faceted emergency. In almost every measurable aspect, the nation is contending with severe housing challenges, with the impact particularly pronounced for First Nation communities.

A persistent cycle of broken promises and systemic neglect has left these communities in a perpetual struggle, depriving them of the fundamental human right to shelter and security on their ancestral lands. The ramifications of this neglect are starkly evident, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience homelessness at a staggering rate almost ten times higher than the broader community.

In 2021, the severity of the housing shortage manifested in over 4,500 households facing overcrowding, underscoring the urgent need for intervention. On Census night in the same year, 24,930 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were counted as experiencing homelessness, painting a distressing picture of the extent of the crisis.²

Of particular concern is the rising number of First Nations women and girls seeking assistance, which surged to 16,535 per month in March 2023. This represents a stark increase of 29% from 12,808 in March 2018, as reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.³ The alarming statistics underscore the critical need for decisive action and strategic interventions to address the deep-rooted housing emergency faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

Australia faces a distinct health challenge with trachoma persisting, and preventable issues like Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) and Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) disproportionately affect First Nation children, particularly in remote areas. ARF, stemming from strep A infection, poses a significant risk for young individuals aged 5-14, leading to long-term RHD damage. Effective prevention necessitates a focus on quality housing, recognising that enhanced living conditions are pivotal in addressing these health challenges. This aligns with Close the Gap Target 9, making quality housing integral to tackling health disparities and fostering equitable health outcomes for First Nation communities.^{4,5}

Investing in housing now is an imperative step towards establishing a core foundation that transcends just shelter. It is an investment in the future, providing today's young people with a greater opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities. By addressing the acute housing crisis faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we are not only fulfilling a fundamental human right but laying the groundwork for strong, resilient communities.

Amidst a national housing crisis, the insufficient allocation of resources for First Nations housing poses a direct threat to the success of the Closing the Gap agreement. The current strategy of direct funding for remote Indigenous housing is proving non-competitive and inadequate, risking a widening gap in housing conditions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Failure to prioritise these investments not only perpetuates the housing crisis in First Nations communities but also undermines the national commitment to reconciliation and equality.

This budget submission underscores crucial focus areas designed to fortify the First Nations Housing Sector, enhance housing accessibility and quality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, and align with the priorities of Closing the Gap. These critical issues directly align with the pillars of NATSIHA's published strategy.

OUTCOMES

DELIVER

First Nations Housing Sector Strengthening plan

\$94,854,700 million for the delivery and Implementation of the endorsed plan to develop resilient, responsive housing sector that effectively meets diverse community needs, embracing self-determination and aligning with Closing the Gap priorities. This strategic plan serves as a potent force for positive, community-driven change, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future.

First Nations Community Housing Upgrades

A 10 year program investing \$1,335,473,000 to upgrade and maintain 13,182 houses within the First Nation Housing Sector. The structured approach includes Needs Assessment, transparent funding allocation, a grant application process, and robust Monitoring and Evaluation. Technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives will enhance ATSICCHOs' management capabilities, fostering collaboration and partnerships.

Global Indigenous Housing Conference

\$150,000 investment of the Global conference which aims to deepen international relationships by fostering collaboration and understanding. Addressing housing issues through the lens of UNDRIP principles, the event seeks to generate actionable insights and promote the development of culturally empowering housing policies on a global scale.

PILOT

Peaks led Delivery

The delivery of \$200 million in maintenance and upgrades provides an opportunity to monitor peaks led delivery to identify efficiency savings.

Authorising Environment

The approach will further pilot the development of a cross functional authorising environment to ensure that both community and government risks are managed proactively. First Nation Peak led delivery of First Nations housing and homelessness solutions.

SEED

Business case

The efficiencies that are expected through peaks led delivery are expected to double the value for money for Government.

Economic modelling

The piloting of the approach will enable the development of a 10-year business case (with economic modelling) to transform delivery of First Nations housing.

DELIVERY

1. HOUSING SECTOR STRENGTHENING PLAN

The Housing Sector Strengthening Plan (HSSP) is a collaborative initiative shaped in consultation with the First Nations Housing Sector and officially endorsed by the Joint Council on August 26, 2022.

The primary objective of the HSSP is to fortify all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations (ATSICCHOs), ensuring they stand on a foundation of strength. The aim is to enable these organisations to deliver sustainable, culturally empowering community housing that effectively addresses the housing needs of tenants, families, and communities while providing assurance to governments and stakeholders.

This strategic HSSP lays out 14 priority actions that will be the focal point over the next three years to catalyse transformative growth and development within the sector. NATSIHA assumes a unique and pivotal role in facilitating this transition, collaborating closely with the sector, relevant state and territory peaks, and governments. Through this concerted effort, the HSSP aims to foster a housing sector that is resilient, responsive, and in alignment with the diverse needs of the communities it serves.

By embracing self-determination and aligning with the critical priorities of Closing the Gap, the HSSP serves as a driving force for positive, community-driven change.

2. FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY HOUSING UPGRADES

In August 2022, NATSIHA conducted a national consultation with state and territory peaks and key stakeholders for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations. Identified through this consultation was a lack of funding to address housing conditions aligning with NRSCH registration and the National Tenancy Agreement Act/s.

Approximately 13,182 houses have been identified for an upgrade program, necessitating national and state funding contributions. To support the 13,182 First Nation Housing Sector with \$1,335,473,000 over 10 years.

Several coordinated implementation steps can be taken:

- **Needs Assessment:** Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment engaging with ATSICCHOs directly to identify specific requirements and challenges.
- **Funding Allocation:** Allocate the annual disbursement based on needs, considering factors such as ATSICCHO numbers, program scale, and geographical distribution.
- **Grant Application Process:** Establish a transparent grant application process with clear guidelines and eligibility criteria.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for accountability and impact measurement.
- **Technical Assistance and Capacity Building:** Offer technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives to enhance ATSICCHOs' ability to manage their housing programs effectively.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Foster collaboration with stakeholders to leverage additional resources and support for ATSICCHOs.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Continuously review and refine the program based on feedback and changing needs, ensuring effectiveness.

A small part of the costing considers Health and Safety issues, prioritising tenants' safety during the program identification stage. Data Collection funding is incorporated to identify priorities for a pilot program, with additional funding needed for the Joint Council's Sector Strengthening Plan.

Effective Upgrades and Maintenance programs, managed across states and territories, rely on annual funding appropriations to ensure tenant safety and create employment opportunities. NATSIHA and Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory are in consultation to jointly deliver a pilot program with sufficient funding allocation. This is an annual program with a yearly evaluation.

3. GLOBAL INDIGENOUS HOUSING CONFERENCE

The Global Indigenous Housing Conference in October 2024 will be a pivotal forum for international discussions on housing challenges within First Nation communities. With a focus on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the conference aims to deepen international relationships by fostering collaboration and understanding. This conference is being designed with a global team of First Nation Housing leaders, and currently has initial funding from the USA and is looking for investment from other global collaborators.

PILOT



PEAKS LED DELIVERY INCLUDING

- Peaks led community collaboration in solution design and delivery
- Cross functional authorising environment
- Data collection to inform economic modelling

NATSIHA is the nominated First Nations lead, and Co-Chair of the Housing Policy Partnership (HPP), an innovative partnership model for the delivery of housing outcomes to close the gap in housing. This collaborative venture signifies a forward-looking approach, aiming to redefine how housing policies are formulated and implemented. Within the framework of this collaboration, negotiations are underway to shape a new set of outcomes that will characterise the next evolution of the NHHA, to understand broader funding implications.

This partnership model represents a departure from conventional approaches, leveraging the collective expertise of NATSIHA, the First Nations Housing Sector and government to craft a more inclusive, adaptive, and effective strategy for addressing housing and homelessness challenges. The ongoing negotiations on outcomes demonstrate a commitment to reflecting contemporary needs and evolving priorities in the evolving landscape of housing policy. This collaborative effort is not only a testament to the dedication of both entities but also a proactive step towards shaping a housing agreement that is responsive, equitable, and tailored to the unique needs of the communities it serves.

This comprises the following asks from State Government;

Peaks led community collaboration in solution design and delivery

- Collaborating with State Governments, jurisdictional peaks identify high-need areas using available data.
- Following the identification of high-need areas, jurisdictional peaks will form a local working group to validate specific community needs through a “Ground Truthing” exercise. This step is essential before developing any solutions for implementation. The process extends to facilitating jurisdictional peaks in collaboratively exploring solution designs and implementation plans with the local working group, ensuring a thorough and community-focused approach.

Cross functional authorising environment

- The HPP will serve as a collaborative platform for both the government and the community to convene, strategise, and prioritise efforts for achieving positive outcomes in First Nations housing.
- The new approach will follow best practices, moving from a structured mindset to a more flexible, step-by-step process. This method releases funds gradually, helping streamline operations, minimise waste, and use resources more efficiently.

Data collection to inform economic modelling

- Data collected from the pilot will enhance our understanding of crucial elements, including costs, benefits, and savings. This information will be instrumental in constructing an economic model, facilitating informed decision-making for fund allocation.

SEED

DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS CASE:

NATSIHA will lead the development of a First Nations housing strategy and business case to provide a central overview of the work and funding required to Close the Gap in First Nations housing.

The strategy development process will be guided by insights derived from Proof-of-Concept work, facilitating the creation of a well-defined, budgeted, and validated work plan.

The business case will outline the prerequisites for fostering and empowering continual collaboration between community and government in the design and delivery of First Nations housing initiatives. This includes specifying the ongoing authorising environment necessary to sustain this collaborative approach.

Components of the Business Case:

- First Nations Housing and Homelessness Strategy:** Holistic housing and homelessness strategy for First Nations people and communities to enable joint delivery of outcomes.
- Sector Strengthening:** The business case will outline strategies to enhance the First Nation Housing sector’s capacity, efficiency, and sustainability.
- Maintenance and Upgrades:** The business case will detail strategies for systematic improvements in all existing homes, ensuring they are safe, accessible, appropriate and meet the national standards. This will involve outlining plans for routine maintenance, energy efficiency upgrades, and the integration of modern amenities.
- New Builds:** The business case will present a thorough plan for new builds, covering the identification of suitable locations, incorporation of sustainable design principles, and consideration of community-specific needs. This ensures that the housing strategy actively contributes to the expansion of housing availability and choices for First Nations communities, aligning
- Infrastructure Development:** In alignment with Closing the Gap Target 9B, which emphasises the importance of infrastructure development, NATSIHA’s business case will articulate practical plans for the establishment of essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity. This crucial component is designed to foster the creation of sustainable and inclusive environments that contribute to the overall well-being of First Nations communities.

BENEFIT MAP

	Can secure appropriate affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need	Enjoys long and healthy lives	Children are born healthy and strong	High quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education	Children thrive in their early years	Students achieve their full learning potential	Further education pathways	Youth are engaged in employment or education	Strong economic participants and development of people and their communities	Adults are not over-represented in the criminal justice system	Young people are not over-represented in the criminal justice system	Children are not over-represented in the child protection	Families and households are safe	People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing	People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters	Cultures and language are strong, supported and flourishing	People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision making regarding their own lives.
SECTOR STRENGTHENING	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADES	x	x	x		x		x	x	x		x		x	x			x
NEW BUILDS	x				x		x	x	x		x		x	x	x		x
INFRASTRUCTURE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x

ECONOMIC MODEL

First Nations housing has linkages to a broader range of economic benefits than general housing investment.

Central to our strategy is the robust support provided by the development of an economic model. This model holds significant weight as it not only brings clarity to the additional benefits associated with First Nations Housing developments but also plays a pivotal role in quantifying these advantages through a rigorous Return on Investment calculation. By underlining the importance of this economic model, we emphasise its role in providing a clear and compelling rationale for supporting and investing in First Nations Housing developments.

First Nations housing has linkages to a broader range of economic benefits than general housing investment. Our economic model aims to show how investing in better housing can lead to positive outcomes across multiple social and wellbeing domains. By clearly understanding these connections, we get a clear picture of how focusing on housing can make our communities better in many ways.

FUNDING NOW

SUMMARY OUTLINE OF NATSIHA'S REQUEST

- \$94,854,700 million to be paid in financial year 2024 –25 to fund NATSIHA's delivery of the National Joint Council Agreed Housing Sector Strengthening Plan over years 2024, 2025 and 2026
- 22% of funding from new National Housing and Homelessness agreements (approximately \$340 mill based on current funding levels) to be channelled towards a peak led delivery of housing and homelessness solutions, including but not limited to the establishment of community-led authorising environments across all jurisdictions.
- \$1,335,473,000 over 10 years to support a NATSIHA/Jurisdictional Peak Led roll out of maintenance and upgrades to 13,182 houses.
- \$200 Million dollars committed under HAFF to be provided to NATSIHA/AHNT for remote repair and maintenance in the Northern Territory.
- \$5 million to seed fund the development and best practice modelling of an overarching National First Nations Housing and Homelessness Strategy (this is separate to our NATSIHA Business Strategy, NHHA) which will include a 10-year business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing, Homelessness and enabling Infrastructure across all jurisdictions.
- \$300,000 investment into the Global Indigenous Housing Conference, matching USA investment into the delivery, Australian representation and attendance of the conference held in October 2024.
- \$450 million in homelessness support to respond to, and to meet the current and growing demand of individuals and families seeking support.

APPENDIX

ENDNOTES

End notes link to webservice

- 1 CLOSE THE GAP AGREEMENT (PAGE 10)
- 2 HOUSING CIRCUMSTANCES OF FIRST NATION PEOPLE - ABS DATA
- 3 AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE
- 4 SOLUTION TO PREVENT TRACHOMA - FRED HOLLOWS FOUNDATION
- 5 THE RHD ENDGAME STRATEGY

LIST OF ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

1. Sector Strengthening Plan funding breakdown by priority
2. NATSIHA Strategy
3. National Upgrade Program – Indicative annual program overview

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