



Northern  
Territory  
Government

# HomeLands

## POLICY

A shared responsibility



# Homelands - a shared responsibility

The Northern Territory Government acknowledges the importance of Aboriginal people's cultural connections to their traditional lands, and the contribution that homelands and outstations make to the economic, social and cultural life of the Northern Territory.

Homelands and outstations are small Aboriginal communities where residents live in order to fulfil their cultural obligations to their inherited country and its underlying traditional law. Homelands can provide social, spiritual, cultural, health and economic benefits to residents. They enable residents to live on, and maintain connections with their ancestral lands.

Homelands give life and meaning to large areas of the country. They make Australia a richer, better place; culturally and spiritually, both in history and individual imagination.

Approximately 10,000 Aboriginal Territorians live on more than 500 homelands and outstations across the Territory. The government is committed to improving services and living conditions on homelands. This will require the joint efforts of governments, landholders and residents. We all share responsibility for the future of homelands, and need to work together to achieve the best possible results for homelands.



## Policy context

The Northern Territory Government is committed to working together with Aboriginal communities to move the Territory forward and to achieve an unprecedented level of social cohesion.

The government is committed to growing a three hub economy, based on mining and energy, education and tourism, and food and exports. Opportunities to participate in these sectors exist on many homelands where there are jobs in land management and ecotourism, coastal security, Indigenous art; and in emerging industries such as carbon trading.

The Government is committed to improving

housing, education and health across the Territory, including on homelands. Shifts in technology make servicing scattered communities more reliable and effective than before.

All Australian Governments, including the Northern Territory, are signatories to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). The agreement specifies targets for Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage and sets out principles for service delivery to be applied when designing and delivering services for Indigenous people. Service delivery to outstations and homelands will be aligned with the NIRA principles of priority, Indigenous engagement, sustainability, access, integration and accountability.

1. The ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008 estimates that approximately 40% of the Territory's population identify as living on homelands or traditional country. Not all of these live in outstations.  
2. Schedule D, National Indigenous Reform Agreement



## Policy principles

The principles underpinning this policy are:

1. Recognise Aboriginal people's relationship to country and promote cultural connections and maintenance through homelands and outstations.
2. Support the right and authority of Aboriginal people to own, live on and develop their lands.
3. Promote the health, well-being and economic benefits associated with homelands living and recognise the holistic benefit of outstations/homelands.
4. Improve the certainty and transparency of service delivery and funding from all levels of government to outstations and homelands.
5. Encourage homelands residents to participate in education and economic development to increase employment, business participation, ownership and wealth, self-sufficiency and independence.
6. Clarify expectations of outstations and homelands residents and service providers regarding support and service delivery and improve transparency and accountability
7. Strengthen engagement between governments, outstations / homelands residents, service providers, land owners and key Indigenous groups.



## Strategic framework

### 1. Housing and other homelands infrastructure

#### a) Housing

The Northern Territory Government is committed to working with residents and service providers to improve housing conditions on homelands. The government recognises that ownership of assets and infrastructure on homelands remains with the landholder, which in the majority of circumstances is an Aboriginal Land Trust. Homelands residents generally do not have formalised tenancy arrangements, and in some situations there is no certainty regarding expected levels of service delivery or clear definitions of the obligations and responsibilities of the residents.

Government will continue to provide funding to assist homelands residents and service providers to repair and maintain houses where homelands are used as principal places of residence or where formal programs delivering ongoing, social, cultural and economic development activities are run.

The types of services, standards and levels which will be delivered to homelands will be developed in consultation with service providers and residents. Buildings will be gradually improved through asset management planning.

#### **Homelands Extra Allowance**

The Northern Territory Government acknowledges that historically the level of funding available to homelands has been inadequate to meet the repairs and maintenance requirements of many of the homelands' dwellings.

Government will therefore supplement housing repairs and maintenance through the Homelands Extra Allowance which will also meet the broader aims of government in improving living conditions on homelands including better health and education outcomes and greater opportunities.



The Homelands Extra Allowance of \$5 200 per eligible homelands dwelling will be paid to service providers to carry out repairs and maintenance work.

Homelands residents can apply for the Homelands Extra Allowance. Each application is required to meet the following **eligibility criteria**:

- The house and homeland is funded through the Housing Maintenance Program in the current financial year.
- The house is the applicant's principal place of residence and the applicant is not listed as a tenant of Territory Housing, or owns their own home.
- Children who live permanently on the homeland attend school.
- The applicant must be engaged in either paid work, community jobs schemes, training, registered volunteer work, receipt of an age, disability or carer's payment, self-employment, and/or membership of community boards and committees.
- The applicant did not earn more than \$60 000 in the last financial year.

#### (b) Municipal and essential services

Government will continue to make funding available to assist in delivering essential services to eligible homelands and outstations. This funding will be delivered in a transparent way to ensure that both residents and service providers have a clear understanding of expected levels of service delivery and the responsibilities of residents. Service providers will develop Service Delivery Plans to clarify roles and responsibilities and expected levels of service delivery. Funding will be delivered with appropriate controls to meet the expected levels of public accountability.

Eligibility criteria will be agreed with the Australian Government and will include factors such as access to potable water and support from a suitable organisation.

Municipal and essential service funding will be allocated according to published guidelines, taking into account relative disadvantage.

#### (c) Residential service fees

As part of sharing responsibility for living on homelands, the Government expects homelands residents to contribute to the upkeep of their dwellings and homelands.

The Northern Territory Government will conduct a review of homelands residential service fees to determine an appropriate fee structure based on what is affordable for residents and what is reasonable for the level of services that are received.

#### (d) Asset management planning

Government will assist homelands residents and service providers to develop Asset Management Plans for homelands. Asset Management Plans will be used to guide future investment decisions, including the use of the Homelands Extra Allowance.

Asset Management Plans will cover communal infrastructure such as essential services, educational and health facilities; as well as houses.

Government will continue to work with key Indigenous groups such as land councils, the Aboriginal Benefits Account Advisory Committee, service providers and homeland residents on regional and private sector approaches to infrastructure enhancement for homelands.

#### (e) New homelands and dwellings

Government will focus its support on existing homelands used as a principal place of residence or as a location for sustainable, on-going, social, cultural and economic development programs.

The government recognises that traditional owners may wish to establish new homelands or build new dwellings, and is not opposed to Aboriginal people establishing and maintaining new, economically sustainable homelands. Support for servicing such activities will be subject to negotiation between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, traditional owners, land councils and residents.





## 2. Service delivery

Homelands residents have the same rights as all other people living in the Northern Territory. Government will continue to provide services to homelands based on these fundamental rights.

Government services will be provided from regional centres and/or in-situ delivery models. In particular, government will work with homeland residents to ensure every child from a homeland is attending school (either directly or through remote technologies), every day of the school year.

Government will work to provide long-term certainty and clarity for residents of homelands about the ongoing support available from governments.

Government will seek to partner with a strong network of service providers with clear roles and responsibilities, delivering quality services through best-practice systems, measured against transparent, minimum service standards.

The Department of Local Government and Community Services has established a dedicated Homelands Unit which will lead whole of government implementation of this policy, and which will administer funding and oversee service delivery for housing and municipal and essential services to homelands residents.

## 3. Economic development and employment

Government will continue to work with all stakeholders including homelands residents on ways to more effectively target recurrent and capital resources available for homelands.

Government will support homelands residents seeking to establish plans for independently maintaining and developing their homeland, including planning the level of private investment required to sustain their homeland infrastructure over the longer term.

Government will target support from relevant programs to foster initiatives that create jobs and provide economic independence for homelands.

## 4. Connecting with residents

Government is committed to strengthening relationships with homelands residents, and their service providers.

As part of its role as the lead agency for homelands policy, the Department of Local Government and Community Services will convene annual Homelands Advisory Forums to enable homelands residents to identify and discuss service delivery and policy issues, and to develop agreed ways forward.

The department will meet regularly with homelands service providers with a view to strengthening relationships and improving transparency and service delivery standards.

## 5. Performance Monitoring

Government acknowledges the importance of collecting and utilising accurate information about homelands to inform governments, service providers and residents about the best way for homeland residents to access services.

The government will work with service providers to ensure there is improved accountability and transparency. Service Delivery Plans, which will incorporate Asset Management Plans, will be available to homelands residents and performance information including funding amounts will be made publicly available.

Government policies and programs for homelands will be regularly reviewed in consultation with Aboriginal leaders, Traditional Owners, homeland residents and homeland service providers. This policy will be reviewed at least once in the term of this government.

Performance Indicators will be developed for the overall Homelands Policy and for each of the associated programs.

For example:

- Percentage of eligible homelands receiving services that meet the objectives and standards set in funding agreements or other arrangements.
- Percentage of eligible homelands receiving regular, clear and transparent information on funding and service performance.
- Percentage of homelands with service delivery and asset management plans in place.

## 6. Program guidelines

To improve transparency and accountability, government will consult with service providers to develop clear program guidelines. Program guidelines will be publicly available and will include:

- funding commitments, formulae, accountability requirements for repairs and maintenance funding, municipal and essential services funding and the Homelands Extra Allowance.
- asset management and service delivery plans.
- role of service providers/service standards and expectations.
- resident responsibilities.
- residential service fees.