

**Media Release:
Shocking rates of Aboriginal homelessness and overcrowding must be
examined by Royal Commission**

10 November 2016

Aboriginal and human rights organisations have said high rates of homelessness and overcrowding must be considered by the NT Royal Commission as key drivers of Aboriginal children entering the child protection and youth detention systems.

The joint submission to the Royal Commission by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT, the Human Rights Law Centre and Danila Dilba Health Service highlights that the Northern Territory has the highest rates of homelessness and overcrowding in the country, and Aboriginal families and children make up 98 per cent of those living in severely overcrowded houses in the Northern Territory.

CEO of the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, Priscilla Collins, said that the connection between the abysmal state of housing in the Northern Territory and the rates at which children are entering the child protection and youth justice systems cannot be overlooked.

“Aboriginal people are disproportionately impacted by the sub-standard state of housing in the Northern Territory. We cannot turn a blind eye to an underlying driver contributing to the high rates of Aboriginal children going into the child protection and youth detention systems,” said Ms Collins.

“Homelessness and overcrowding places additional pressure on relationships and makes it harder for parents to protect and provide for their children. We need better housing policies and more investment in housing infrastructure that responds to the needs of Aboriginal families,” said Ms Collins.

Two reports in the last 10 years, *Growing Them Strong, Together* and *Little Children are Sacred*, have highlighted the need for more housing and improved living conditions as part of the response to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal children going into the child protection system. Muriel Bamblett, one of the authors of *Growing Them Strong, Together*, identified housing as a top priority in her evidence to the Royal Commission.

John Paterson from Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory said that adequate housing is an essential condition for promoting child health, development and wellbeing.

“Adequate housing is essential to the health and development of Aboriginal kids. Responding to the disproportionate rates of Aboriginal homelessness and overcrowding in the Northern Territory must form part of any prevention and early intervention response. The health and wellbeing of the current and next generations of Aboriginal children depend on it,” said Mr Paterson.

A decade ago, the United Nation’s expert on housing reported that Indigenous people faced a ‘severe housing crisis’ in Australia.

Adrienne Walters, Senior Lawyer at the Human Rights Law Centre noted that it is ten years since the UN expert visited Australia, and the crisis of overcrowding and homelessness in the Northern Territory remains the worst in Australia.

“Adequate housing is a basic human right. This is an issue that governments have neglected for too long. The government should commit to doing all that it can, in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organisations, to reduce Aboriginal homelessness and overcrowding,” said Ms Walters.

The submission to the Northern Territory Royal Commission was endorsed by NT Shelter and the Children in Care and Youth Detention Advice Service. It is available [here](#).

For further comments or queries please contact:

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