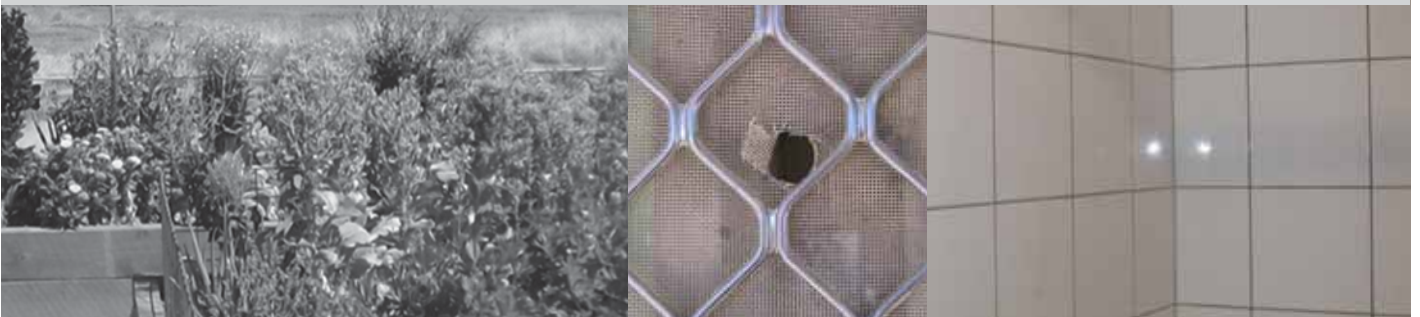


# HOUSING EXPERIENCE

Post Occupancy Evaluation of Alice Springs  
Town Camp Housing 2008–2011



**FINAL REPORT**  
September 2013



**Centre for  
Appropriate  
Technology**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
Purpose of the Post Occupancy Evaluation	1
Method	1
Findings	2
Recommendations	3
<b>2 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 The Need for a Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE)	7
2.2 The Nature of the POE	7
2.3 Tangentyere Housing Upgrades	8
2.4 The Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP)	9
2.5 The Alliance Model	10
2.6 Scale and Design	11
2.7 The Shift to Public Housing	11
2.8 Housing Governance Structure	14
2.8.1 Tenancy Management Officers (TMO) and Tenancy Managers	17
2.8.2 Housing Reference Groups structure	18
2.9 Housing Reference Groups	18
<b>3 METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 Town Camp Selection	20
3.2 Household Selection	22
3.3 Flyer and Consent Form	22
3.4 Participant Numbers	22
3.5 Stage 1	24
3.5.1 Interviews	24
3.5.2 Household Surveys	26
3.6 Stage 2.1	26
3.6.1 Interviews	27
3.6.2 Stakeholder Interviews	28
3.7 Stage 2.2	28
3.7.1 Interviews	29
3.7.2 Household Surveys in Stage 2.2	31
<b>4 EVALUATION: THE HOUSING EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1 Household Composition	35
5.1.1 House Boss	36
5.1.2 Family and Visitors	36
5.1.3 Housing Experience	37
5.2 Design	37
5.2.1 Cultural & Social Fit	40
5.2.1.1 Yards – part of social and cultural fit	43
5.2.2 Overcrowding	46
5.2.2.1 SIHIP Strategy to Tackle Overcrowding	47
5.2.3 Responsiveness to climate	49

5.2.4	Economically Sustainable	51
5.2.4.1	Alliance Contracting	52
5.2.4.2	Ritek Walls	53
5.2.4.3	Screen doors and external lights	54
5.2.4.4	Quality of workmanship	55
5.2.4.5	Infrastructure and building program	56
5.2.5	Support for Healthy Living	57
5.2.5.1	SIHIP and Healthy Living Practices	58
5.2.5.2	Bathrooms	60
5.2.5.3	Toilets	63
5.2.5.4	Kitchens	65
5.2.5.5	Laundries	68
5.2.6	Accessibility	71
5.2.7	Safety and Security	73
5.2.8	Feeling and Housing Experience	77
5.3	Maintenance	81
5.3.1	Tenant Experience	84
5.3.2	Interviews	86
5.3.3	Surveys	89
5.3.4	New Houses	89
5.3.5	Alliance Refurbished Houses	91
5.3.6	Alliance Rebuild	91
5.3.7	Tangentyere Rebuilds	95
5.3.8	Feeling & Housing Experience	97
5.4	Tenancy Management	98
5.4.1	Tenancy Management Reform	99
5.4.2	Housing Reference Groups	100
5.4.3	Emergent Themes in Tenancy Management	101
5.4.4	Findings	101
5.4.4.1	Tenancy Rules and Regulations	101
5.4.4.2	Housing Allocation	105
5.4.5	Control	106
5.4.5.1	Tenancy Support Programs	108
5.4.5.2	Tenancy Support Programs in the Town Camps	109
5.4.6	Rents	110
5.4.7	Inspections	112
5.4.8	Feeling and Housing experience	113
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>116</b>
6.1	Conclusions	116
6.2	Recommendations	120
<b>7</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>136</b>
8.1	Appendix 1 –Interviews	136
8.2	Appendix 2 – Surveys	170
8.3	Appendix 3- Newsletters	187

## Acronyms

<b>ACG</b>	Allen Consulting Group
<b>AG</b>	Australian Government
<b>ASTP</b>	Alice Springs Transformation Plan
<b>CAAHC</b>	Central Australian Affordable Housing Company
<b>CAT</b>	Centre for Appropriate Technology
<b>CHLP</b>	Critical Healthy Living Practices
<b>CO</b>	Commonwealth Ombudsman
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments
<b>CTC</b>	Council of Territory Cooperation
<b>DOH</b>	Department of Housing (NT)
<b>DHLGRS</b>	Department of Housing, Local Government and Remote Services (NT)
<b>FAHCSIA</b>	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Cth)
<b>FHBH</b>	Fixing Houses for Better Health
<b>HRG</b>	Housing Reference Group
<b>ICHO</b>	Indigenous Community Housing Organisation
<b>IHANT</b>	Indigenous Housing Authority of the NT
<b>MHBH</b>	Maintaining Houses for Better Health
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NIHG</b>	National Indigenous Housing Guide
<b>NPA</b>	National Partnership Agreement
<b>NPARIH</b>	National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing
<b>NT</b>	Northern Territory
<b>NTER</b>	Northern Territory Emergency Response
<b>NTG</b>	Northern Territory Government
<b>POE</b>	Post Occupancy Evaluation
<b>PSHO</b>	Public Safety Housing Officer
<b>R&amp;M</b>	Repairs and Maintenance
<b>RPHMF</b>	Remote Public Housing Management Framework
<b>RTA</b>	Residential Tenancies Act
<b>SIHIP</b>	Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program
<b>TA</b>	Territory Alliance
<b>TC</b>	Tangentyere Council
<b>TH</b>	Territory Housing
<b>TMO</b>	Tenancy Management Officers
<b>TSP</b>	Tenancy Support Program

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **Purpose of the Post Occupancy Evaluation**

In 2008, following lengthy negotiations between Tangentyere Council and the Australian Government, the largest building program in the history of the Alice Springs Town Camps had begun. The building was implemented under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) and involved multiple parties, including the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, and housing construction through Tangentyere Council and Territory Alliance. At the start of the project there were 199 houses in Town Camps; by April 2013, the NT Government reported the completion of 86 new houses, built for an average price of \$450,000, and 196 renovated houses. The renovations were further split into Tangentyere or Territory Alliance 'rebuilt', involving substantial work with an average cost of \$200,000, and 'refurbishments', known as 'refurbs', focusing on health hardware and functionality, at an average cost of \$75,000. In all, over \$100 million was assigned to Alice Springs Town Camps housing and infrastructure. In return town campers agreed to 40-year leases over the town camp areas in all but one case, which although acquired by the Australian Government was included in the building program.

To begin assessing the value of the building program for the Town Camps in the context of any future building development, Tangentyere Council sought to have a long-term post occupancy evaluation (POE) conducted soon after the housing was completed. Following a tender process, the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), based in Alice Springs, was awarded a contract in late 2011 to undertake an 18 month evaluation that would include three rounds of interviews with town camp residents, building surveys, interviews of other participants, analysis of context and recommendations for Tangentyere Council to consider.

The evaluation was to examine the quality of as-built construction and technology for all houses; value for money in procurement and project management; opportunities for healthy practices; and assessment of tenant expectations, perceptions and satisfaction with the design and technology of the houses. These issues were to be explored in the context of the principles established under the 40 year leases between the Tangentyere Housing Associations and the Australian Government, and associated outcomes, particularly an improvement in standard of living, compliance with the SIHIP guidelines and National Indigenous Housing Guide, and improvement in housing and tenancy management regimes.

## **Method**

The evaluation was conducted through a representative sample of housing types across a representative selection of the 17 affected Town Camps. Six Town Camps were selected in consultation with Tangentyere Council. They included the two biggest

camps as well as medium and small camps, a range of geographical language groups, and camps with varied lease structures. Within each camp, a sample of each of the housing types (ie new, rebuilt or refurb), were identified, and as many occupants as possible interviewed within a four week period to establish as robust a baseline as possible, given the expectation of attrition in numbers over the course of the year due to assumed mobility and other changes in household composition or interest. In all, 53 households were interviewed and surveyed in the first stage, and 38-39 of those 53 in the second two stages, which provided a sound basis for evaluating the housing conditions and changes in householder perceptions.

A mixed method was used to examine the quality of construction and residents' relationship to their housing over a one year period. Three rounds of interviews at 6 month intervals, from March 2012 to April 2013, recorded occupants' use and perception of their houses, and their relationship with the property and tenancy management regimes that were a part of the changes. A comprehensive technical survey detailing the housing fabric was also carried out in the first stage of fieldwork. The survey was then modified for the third and last stage one year later to record how each surveyed house was wearing in design and construction, and how occupants were using or adapting the houses to their needs within the confines of what were new tenancy rules.

The interview questions were developed in collaboration with members of the Tangentyere Research Hub, and the interviews conducted by a mix of CAT and Tangentyere research staff. The surveys were conducted by CAT staff with technical housing design or building expertise. CAT staff then interviewed housing providers and SIHIP participants, and undertook historical and policy and other analysis to be able to situate the findings in the broader context.

## Findings

Initially the POE was primarily focused on the house construction story and how tenants were perceiving the designs and renovations in relation to their daily and aspirational needs. It became clear in the first round of interviews that the new tenancy and property management regimes were as much a part of occupants' experience of their new or renovated houses as the physical house itself. Housing had moved from being a noun to a verb; the evaluation was not just of housing, but of the 'housing experience'.

The majority of householders were 'happy' with their houses, content, that is, to have a new or fixed up house that in most cases seemed more secure. Whether these perceptions will be sustained is not, however, guaranteed. Alongside the positive responses were concerns expressed by tenants, and reflected in the evaluation team's analysis, about the inappropriate orientation of many new houses; problems developing from the adaptation to desert conditions of new house designs based on



the tropical north; difficulties with the specified Ritek walls; and many examples of poor construction and inappropriate hardware. Issues such as inadequate storage, problems with poorly developed yards and inconsistent adherence to healthy living practices emerged. These issues have been noted in previous POEs of Indigenous housing, and yet remain unresolved even in this program, despite the wealth of knowledge gathered over 30 years of appropriate Indigenous housing development in remote Australia.

Many occupants also endorsed aspects of the new tenancy requirements, reflecting the shift from community to public housing, which assisted particularly with visitor management and household maintenance through regular inspections. Nonetheless, aspects of the other parts of the housing experience, in property and tenancy management, were also problematic. These were particularly with regard to continued house crowding, which was barely remedied by the new houses; how housing allocation was determined (who gets to live where?); and the lack of transparency or response in the tenancy and property management process (who should pay for what damage and how can we get it fixed?). Residents did not know the status of their complaints and had to phone on a number of occasions to remind the property managers about their problems, while the overly bureaucratic procedures for the approval of repairs and maintenance delayed works on the ground. A majority of the residents felt that Tangentyere Council's prior running of the repairs and maintenance program was better than the current system as it had been more immediate, responsive, and transparent. The lack of clarity, timeliness and agency in these arrangements consistently diminished the occupants' experience of their houses.

Despite such causes for discontent, there was evidence of adjustment and adaptation and increasing levels of comfort by the occupants over the 12 month period. Greater certainty or improved communications about the tenancy and property maintenance regimes will allow tenants more room to re-engage with the houses they are occupying whether or not they are brand new tenants or, as is the case in some instances, where they have occupied the house for over 20 years.

## **Recommendations**

The evaluation led to many recommendations for Tangentyere Council's consideration, ranging from a broad review of management regimes to the very specific review of specifications for toilet paper holders. Over 30 recommendations include:

- » Review the property and tenancy management regimes to be more supportive in matters such as allocation, response times and long-term tenancies;
- » Use local liaison such as Tangentyere Council to assist in improving the housing experience, including tenancy support, repairs and maintenance, town camp resident involvement in decision-making and advocacy;

- » Improve outdoor amenity in the yards including drainage, fences and shade trees using participatory design approaches;
- » Use participatory design processes in any further adaptations or new building
- » Review the role and effectiveness of prescribed healthy living practices hardware in the context of daily use;
- » Adapt laundries in refurbs and rebuilds to enable adequate space requirements;
- » Work to improve storage and space options across all housing types, particularly in laundries and kitchens;
- » Improve the quality of insect screen doors, toilet paper holders, floor waste grates;
- » Make Housing Reference Groups more transparent and accountable, give them more than an advisory role in allocation;
- » Ensure a 12 month defect liability period from contractors;
- » Provide better coordination and scheduling of infrastructure works with building works.

In making these and other recommendations, the evaluation team sought to identify recommendations that could be acted on by the participants in the housing experience, namely the tenants, the service providers and the representative bodies, as well as the levels of government that have made and will continue to make the investment in housing in Indigenous communities. The recommendations are thus accompanied by suggested actions for levels of government, service providers, Tangentyere Council and residents that may contribute to continuing improvement of housing experience for the Alice Springs Town Camp residents.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, the Alice Springs Town Camps have developed through successive housing programs and tenure arrangements into substantial communities forming part of the Alice Springs town fabric. The Town Camps are unique, housing Aboriginal people from many central Australian language groups, providing permanent homes for generations of residents and temporary accommodation to many visitors from surrounding remote communities, who are visiting family, or seeking services, entertainment or refuge.

The Town Camps have comprised up to 20 locations within and around the town of Alice Springs. Between 1979 and 1988, 15 Special Purpose leases or Crown Leases in perpetuity were granted and held by Housing Associations. The leases entitled residents of 17 camps to residence in perpetuity, providing legal tenure to the land they were living on, which in turn allowed them to obtain infrastructure (power, water) and housing (the NT Government would not provide services where there was no permanent tenure of land, as was the case at two of the camps). Approximately 1,600-2,000 people are resident in the Town Camps. During football tournaments and other events, the population may increase to as much as 3,500 people (Foster et al. 2005; TC 2008). The camps are vulnerable to the ongoing policy changes in Indigenous affairs, where events such as the Intervention, housing reform, local government reform, and changes in infrastructure and service provision, all increase uncertainty of tenure and alter the patterns of visitor behaviour.

The complexity is manifest in the evolution and sustainability of the Town Camp housing; design and construction has continued to change, frequently seeking to be responsive to residents' needs, to be culturally and environmentally appropriate and affordable. At other times, Town Camp housing responses have been driven by governmental imperatives such as increasing the number of houses to meet demand. The housing quality is profoundly affected by a combination of factors, many framed by the government agendas, such as crowding, visitor numbers, mainstreaming housing and welfare, as well as varied quality in construction, mixed quality service provision, generational differences, changes in income and governance structures.

The accretion of housing development over 30 or more years was accelerated in 2007 as a consequence of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the NTER or the Intervention), and policies such as the National Indigenous Reform Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH). Through these policies, the Commonwealth Government committed to investing \$1.7 billion over 10 years (2009-2018) on improving Indigenous housing in the NT (AG 2011a; Scullion 2007). The money was contingent on the Government being able to acquire long-term leases of 40-99 years on the land on which the houses would be built, primarily in remote communities.

For the Alice Springs Town Camps, the Commonwealth Government in 2008 offered Tangentyere Council \$50 million in return for signing unconditional subleases for the 17 camps under lease for 99 years, with an immediate commitment of \$5.3 million for design documentation and construction of 50 or more major housing upgrades. However, objections to the Commonwealth's offer from Tangentyere led to further negotiations, a move by the Commonwealth Government to compulsorily acquire the camps, and eventually an agreement in December 2009 of \$100 million over 5 years for housing and infrastructure in return for signing 40 year subleases. Fourteen of the 15 Housing Associations that held the perpetual leases signed the 40 year leases. The Ilpeye Ilpeye Housing Association chose to have their land acquired by the Commonwealth Government under the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (NTNER Act). Through this acquisition, the underlying tenure of Ilpeye Ilpeye changed from community lease to freehold held by the Commonwealth. Any underlying native title was preserved, as were existing tenancy agreements were preserved, with the land leased to the NTG while negotiations for a housing model were under way, and SIHIP funding extended to Ilpeye Ilpeye. In June 2013, Ilpeye Ilpeye and the Commonwealth Government agreed a subdivision process that supports development of infrastructure and the delivery of municipal and essential services (<http://www.indigenous.gov.au/landmark-agreement-paves-the-way-for-home-ownership-in-the-ilpeye-ilpeye-town-camp/>).

As a result of the lease agreements, Town Camps could expect a transformation of living conditions, giving 'children in the camps a better chance at a safe, healthy and happy life' (Macklin et al. 2009). The agreed \$100 million was allocated through the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP), which was working throughout the NT, to the Alice Springs Transformation Plan (ASTP), which sought to 'normalise' or transform the Town Camps into becoming 'normal suburbs' with appropriate infrastructure and services (AG 2011a p. 5).

Parallel with the development under the Intervention and SIHIP, local government and housing reform was occurring in the NT. This altered the landscape of tenancy and property management significantly, in a shift from community housing to a public housing model, along with a change to how residents' interests in housing issues and allocation are represented. In the aftermath of the SIHIP building program, 86 new houses had been built and 196 houses rebuilt or refurbished in the Town Camps.<sup>1</sup> Of the rebuilt houses, 61 were done by Tangentyere; Territory Alliance built or refurbished all of the others. New houses were built for an average price of \$450,000; the 'rebuilt' were substantial renovations with an average cost of \$200,000; the 'refurbishments', known as 'refurbs', focused on health hardware and functionality at

<sup>1</sup> These numbers reflect the NTG's figures at April 2013 of houses built or renovated under the SIHIP program (NTG 2013a). Territory Alliance were originally to build 85 houses - the number most cited in the ongoing reviews- but another was added following a fire in Ilpeye Ilpeye. Work on housing is ongoing in the town camps, and definitions of 'renovations' can vary, leading to different totals at any time of the houses being renovated or managed., eg CAAHC was managing only 278 houses in September 2013 due to household attrition (pers. comm 23 September). For the purposes of this report, the figures from April 2013 will be used as they represent the minimum number completed by Territory Alliance and Tangentyere 2008-11.

an average of \$75,000 per house. It is in this context that Tangentyere Council, which has worked with and overseen the Town Camps since 1977, sought an independent post occupancy evaluation, which could advise the Council on the success or not of a program on this scale and inform future housing and infrastructure development.

## **2.1 The Need for a Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE)**

The scale of the building works in the Alice Springs Town Camps was unprecedented. Prior to the building program there were 199 houses. Following the completion of the program, there were 282 houses that were either new or had been rebuilt or refurbished by Tangentyere Council or SIHIP's Territory Alliance. The investment promised to address housing shortages and much needed upgrades, to create 'safer and healthier environments for families and children' (FaHSCIA 2009).

The process of exchanging leases for the housing and infrastructure works was a fraught one. At the end of it, Tangentyere asked what town campers 'got' in exchange for their hard-won leases. What were the impacts of the program on health and wellbeing, how was it affected by mobility patterns, how appropriate, culturally and financially, was the health hardware used, and had the relinquishment of leases in return for a house increased or diminished a sense of individual agency? In other words, did the investment deliver outcomes in standards of living, improvements in property and tenancy management, and did they comply with now well-established Indigenous design and environmental health guidelines?

What, in short, might be learned that can guide future negotiations between Town Camp residents, their representatives and Government, both the NTG and the Commonwealth Government? In this context, Tangentyere sought an independent post-occupancy evaluation that would begin to help Tangentyere address questions such as these.

## **2.2 The Nature of the POE**

The Tangentyere post occupancy evaluation was a variation of the standard approach. Post occupancy evaluation, described generally, is a 'systematic evaluation of opinion about buildings in use, from the perspective of the people who use them. It assesses how well buildings match users' needs, and identifies ways to improve building design, performance and fitness for purpose.' (<http://www.postoccupancyevaluation.com/>). The description by Zimring (2002 p. 307) refines this: that is, the POE is 'a systematic assessment of the process of delivering buildings or other designed settings or of the performance of those settings as they are actually used, or both, as compared to a set of implicit or explicit standards, with the intention of improving the process or settings.' It is the acknowledgment of both the process and the standards that are important; in the Tangentyere POE, the process of delivery was as important, if not more so, than the buildings themselves, and the efficacy of the standards used in the building program is crucial for informing standards used in future building

programs. In addition to evaluating the houses in relation to the occupants' opinions, this evaluation sought also to refer to the complex conditions of town camp housing – social, political, economic – that make up what we are calling the 'housing experience'. This extends beyond assessing the building's procurement, design, and performance and includes the maintenance and tenancy regimes that have such impact on how town camp residents feel about their houses. Thus the evaluation set out to examine:

- » The quality of construction
- » Value for money , particularly in procurement and project management
- » Opportunities for healthy living practices
- » Assessment of the tenant's expectations, perception and satisfactions with the design and technology of the houses.

These issues, as well as those of housing and management regimes and appropriate housing, have all been addressed in the course of the POE, although the study was limited in its capacity to assess value for money in the conservative sense of the concept (ie utility derived from the money spent) due to limitations on information that was made available to the evaluation team. Nonetheless, observations in this area were possible within the context of the assessment of quality and tenancy management.

There have been POEs done over the years (Fletcher and Bridgman 2000; Memmott et al. 2000; Morel and Ross 1993) and the parameters of appropriate housing for Aboriginal people in remote and other locations such as the Town Camps have been well established. The current study among other things will help update the current understanding of the impact of changing policies on housing development. It will also serve as a means for Tangentyere Council to take lessons from these recent housing initiatives to advocate for further improvements in the procurement of housing as well as the formulation and delivery of housing-related services to its constituents.

## **2.3 Tangentyere Housing Upgrades**

Prior to the commencement of SIHIP housing, housing upgrades were begun by Tangentyere under the funding offered as a concession to Town Camps in June 2008 as part of the negotiations with the Commonwealth over leasing arrangements. The budget of \$5.83 million was administered by the NT Government's Territory Housing (TH) under the then Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services, which at the time of writing had become the Department of Housing (DoH).<sup>2</sup> The funding involved the upgrade of a minimum of 50 existing houses in 16 of Alice Springs town camp communities. The duration of the project was September

<sup>2</sup> Since beginning the POE, there have been shifts in the nomenclature of NT Government Housing agencies. By September 2013, Territory Housing is a part of the Department of Housing and responsible Public Housing, Remote Indigenous Housing and Seniors Housing. However, as the POE surveys were framed in terms of Territory Housing rules, and residents continue to refer to 'Territory Housing', for the purposes of this report this name will be used interchangeably with DoH to refer to the NTG agency perceived as responsible for town camp housing.



2008-June 2010 with the express purpose of improving accommodation and living conditions in the Town Camps. The scope of works for each camp was clearly delineated by Territory Housing from the start and a detailed project specification which specified all the finishes and fitments was annexed to the agreement (A Broffman 2012, pers. comm., 3 August).

At the same time, and in response also to the NT local government and Indigenous housing reforms taking place, Tangentyere Council established the Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (CAAHC) with the assistance of the Commonwealth Government, to deal independently with housing management services to Town Camps and for the maintenance and upkeep of the Town Camp housing stock, including those delivered under SIHIP (Macklin et al. 2009).

## **2.4 The Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP)**

The Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) was developed in the context of the NTER (The 'Intervention'), the National Indigenous Reform Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), under which \$ 1.7 billion was committed over 10 years to housing and infrastructure in the NT. Following the agreement between the Town Camp Housing Associations and the Commonwealth Government in December 2009 to provide 40 year subleases (with the exception of Ilpeye Ilpeye, which although under different arrangement was also to be under SIHIP), \$100 million was allocated for housing and infrastructure over 5 years through the SIHIP to the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, which was seeking to 'normalise' Town Camps and overseeing the process.

SIHIP adopted an Alliance contracting method, through which a consortium of partners delivers major capital works through cooperative work practices and collective sharing of rewards and risks. The model used in the NT included Aboriginal training and employment benchmarks. The SIHIP Housing in the Town Camps was undertaken by Territory Alliance, one of the three contractors originally awarded SIHIP work.

The effectiveness of the alliance model has been analysed elsewhere, both generally and with specific reference to its use in the NT context. See particularly Davidson et al (2011 pp. 75-107). Despite the size of the budgets and the controversy that surrounded the program in the context of the Intervention, Davidson et al found alliance contracting to have some advantages, particularly with regard to the economies of scale.

The Alliances were guided in their design decisions by a set of design and performance guidelines, developed by Territory Housing in association with engineering consultancy GHD. In addition to outlining the standards required, including the healthy living practices of the National Indigenous Housing Guide,

and cost and size of houses, the guidelines also referenced over 30 years of building with Indigenous communities, addressing cultural and social fit, safety and security, 'visitability', and responsiveness to climate. The guidelines evolved with the project, and were particularly affected by a review of costing in 2009 where, for example, as the full picture of infrastructure conditions and the costs of remote building emerged, the cost estimates for each house type needed to be adjusted against realistic building costs in remote areas. The design and performance guidelines developed for SIHIP are addressed in greater detail under Section 5.2.

This meant, among other things, that the cost of building a new house was revised to include the additional costs. Costs for refurbishment and rebuilding houses was also upwardly adjusted and rather than ensuring adherence to the nine healthy living practices outlined in the National Indigenous Housing Guide, it was resolved to focus only on the four critical healthy practices.

As of May 2013, 903 new houses had been built and 2,765 houses refurbished and rebuilt across the Territory (NTG 2013b). Of these, the Alice Springs Town Camps have received 86 new houses and 196 rebuilds and refurbishments, with 135 of the latter completed under the Alliance and 61 completed under Tangentyere Council (NTG 2013a).

This POE provides further insight into the effectiveness of the design and materials used in the program in context of the design guidelines and healthy living practices.

## **2.5 The Alliance Model**

SIHIP adopted the alliance contracting method, through which a consortium of partners delivers major capital works by working cooperatively, sharing rewards and risks, creating consensus around decisions and ensuring transparency in costs and payments. The alliance contracting method is thought to benefit from collective innovation in design and construction methodology that results in cost savings without compromising goals. It also included Indigenous training and employment benchmarks.

A set of housing and infrastructure design guidelines and performance specifications for new and upgraded housing was developed for the SIHIP housing (Davidson et al. 2010; GHD 2008a; 2008b; Porter 2009b). The guidelines were based on and consolidated a considerable body of research and experience that has accumulated over 30 years of Indigenous housing design in Australia. The Guidelines were extensive, and were revisited throughout the program following reviews (ANAO 2011; GHD 2008a; 2008b). The SIHIP housing in the Alice Springs Town Camps was undertaken by Territory Alliance, one of the three alliance contractors originally awarded SIHIP construction works in the NT.

POEs were planned as an intrinsic deliverable to the SIHIP program (GHD 2008b p.65) in the review Stage. It is hoped that this POE will add to understanding of the effectiveness of the alliance model.

## **2.6 Scale and Design**

The scale of the building program 2008-2011 has been the largest to date in the history of the Town Camps. Although between 1978 and 1981, 84 new houses were built (Coughlan 1991 p. xciv), it did not include the extensive rebuilding, refurbishing and infrastructure work which is a feature of SIHIP. For most of the 30 years of the Town Camps, building and renovation was incremental, with a few houses added each year (maximum of 24) which were funded through variations of Federal and Territory agency programs such as the Aboriginal Development Commission, the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) and IHANT (Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory). By contrast, the Territory Alliance and Tangentyere building program, between 2008 and 2011, constructed 86 new houses, rebuilt or refurbished 196 houses and commenced infrastructure upgrades in many of the camps. The scale of the project as well as the new alliance contracting method promised an economy of scale and collaborative gains from the SIHIP procurement process. This would be at the cost of individualised design considerations and consultations that have been a feature of Tangentyere's design and housing history. Nonetheless, the program drew on a significant archive of housing design in Aboriginal communities, including the Tangentyere models, to develop its guidelines. Appropriate design was not totally lost to scale.

The building program of 1978-82 involved about 30 house designs across 14 camps (Memmott 1989 p. 122). The developed designs were in response to town camp needs, including central Australian climatic conditions and specific cultural requirements of the residents. The pressure to meet targets led to design flaws (Memmott 1989), a problem that seems to have resurfaced with SIHIP as well, 30 years later. Again, by contrast, there were only 8 design models developed for new houses in the SIHIP designs (TA 2012. Pers. comm. 4 May). Of the many questions driving this POE, then, one is that of the balance, if it exists, that needs to be found between appropriate design and large-scale production in the specific context of the Alice Springs Town Camps.

## **2.7 The Shift to Public Housing**

Housing in the Alice Springs Town Camps had been managed by Tangentyere Council as a community housing management program since the 1970s. Tangentyere Council is an umbrella organisation for Alice Spring's Town Camp Housing Associations and was responsible for the delivery of housing maintenance and management, tenancy and rental management and essential services.

Prior to 2008, community or social housing was the norm in remote NT Aboriginal communities, with all housing funds channelled into housing stock managed by Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOS). The 2001 Housing Ministers' recommendations in 'Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010 (HMAC 2001) advocated a 'sustainable and active Aboriginal community housing sector acting

in partnership with governments' which as Porter points out, was never formally repudiated (Porter 2009a). Nonetheless, despite the absence of evidence that the NT Government's housing agencies could outperform ICHOS in providing housing and property and tenancy management, public housing arrangements were adopted in the NT in 2008, with Territory Housing forming the central agency for the delivery and management of public housing services (Porter 2009a). During 2008-09, approximately 4000 dwellings were transferred from Aboriginal housing organisations to Territory Housing, which grew the new arm of Remote Indigenous Housing in recognition of the difference between urban and remote public housing. This was and is a reversal of trends happening elsewhere in Australia, where State Housing Authorities are moving away from public housing responsibilities (Jacobs et al. 2011).

The shift to public housing occurred in the context of a number of policy developments at Federal and Territory levels, including:

- » Undermining or loss of bilateral housing agreements between Territory and Federal governments, loss of administration and planning functions with events such as the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 2004, and replacement of IHANT, which administered Aboriginal Housing in the NT, with NT Indigenous Housing Advisory Board (NTIHAB) as adviser in 2005, which was in turn disbanded in 2007.
- » The 'Closing the Gap on Aboriginal disadvantage' policy articulated in December 2007 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Working Group on Indigenous Reform, reflected in the NT's 'Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage: a generational plan of action' which emphasises statistical 'equality' in standards of living between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, particularly in the area of housing conditions and crowding. It was envisaged by the government, that by lifting Indigenous housing to public housing standards, it would help to achieve that statistical equality through the standardisation of amenity.
- » Ministers for Housing and Indigenous affairs in 2006 indicating a new system of Aboriginal housing with a Commonwealth policy role and centralisation of housing responsibility.
- » The review and abolition of Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP), replaced by the Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation (ARIA) Program and a Memo of Understanding (MoU) between the Commonwealth and the NT in May 2007.
- » In June 2007, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), or Intervention, began which included the compulsory acquisition of five-year leases of prescribed townships on Land Rights Act Land, community living areas and others. With regard to the Town Camps, the Commonwealth Government

could exercise the powers of the Northern Territory Government to forfeit or resume ‘Town Camps’ leases during the five-year period of the emergency response. If necessary, the Commonwealth could acquire freehold title over town camp areas.

- » In September 2007, an MoU between the NT Government and Commonwealth transferred \$793 million in funding to the NT Government on the basis that the ‘Australian government will have no further responsibility for the delivery of Indigenous housing, municipal, essential and infrastructure services in the NT from 1 July 2008, with the NTG assuming responsibility for all remote Indigenous housing, and the NT Residential Tenancies Act to apply to all tenancy agreements’ (AG and NTG 2007).
- » In April 2008, SIHIP, which had been conceptualised first in 2005-06 (Davidson et al. 2011 p. 76) was announced, with funds allotted under the MoU and a contribution from the NTG. The funds for new housing in Aboriginal communities were dependent on the leases being granted by the Aboriginal land owners to the Commonwealth Government.
- » On 1 July 2008, local government reform was also implemented in the NT, which transformed over 60 community councils into eight ‘super shires’, while leaving intact the municipal councils including Alice Springs. Prior to 2008, many Aboriginal community councils had operated as ICHOs; following the reforms, Aboriginal housing became public housing under the NTG, which contracted the responsibility for the tenancy and property management to the new Shires. Housing decisions were made by the NTG/Shires, to be advised by Housing Reference Groups. Although the developments in the Town Camps and remote communities was not identical, there was some considerable overlap, particularly with the development and perceptions of the HRGs (Christie and Campbell 2013). The disruption caused by the local government and housing reforms in the remote communities may well have had an impact on the Town Camps, but in the context of the Intervention and shifting or reducing services to the remote communities, it is but one of many variables that contributed to influxes in visitor numbers and subsequent pressure on housing and infrastructure.

Arrangements for Alice Springs Town Camps followed a different trajectory; prior to the Intervention, in May 2007, the Town Camp Housing Associations through Tangentyere had rejected the March 2007 offer of \$60 million dollars by the Commonwealth Government for housing and infrastructure in exchange for 99 year leases, on the basis that the loss of land and control was not worth it. In 2008 the Commonwealth Government offered \$50 million dollars, with an immediate commitment of \$5.3 million dollars, in return for unconditional subleases of 99 years.



Further negotiations, including a threat by the Government to compulsorily acquire the camps, led to an agreement with 17 of the 18 Housing Associations on 3 December 2009 of spending \$100 million over 5 years in return for signing 40 year subleases (with the exception of Ilpeye Ilpeye Housing Association, which agreed with the Commonwealth Government that the land be acquired in exchange for the negotiated opportunity to subdivide and own housing blocks). At the same time, the Executive Director of Township Leasing, the Commonwealth agency responsible for the leases, signed a Housing Management Agreement with the Northern Territory Government which covered tenancy management and repairs and maintenance of housing in the Town Camps. The agreement was for an initial period of three years, with the Northern Territory Government being required to put the Agreement to tender within two years and six months of the commencement of the sublease.

The Town Camps were further brought 'into line' with remote communities when the Remote Public Housing Management Framework (RPHMF) was introduced on 1 July 2010 to the Town Camps. The framework included rental arrangements, new tenancy agreements, arrangements for repairs and maintenance through service organisations and housing inspections. Community Housing Officers, community consultations and Housing Reference Groups are also included in the framework. (See, eg, [http://www.housing.nt.gov.au/remotehousing/managing\\_and\\_maintaining\\_housing](http://www.housing.nt.gov.au/remotehousing/managing_and_maintaining_housing).)

The major changes with regard to the everyday lives of the Town Camps brought in with the shift to public housing were the introduction of new rules and a property management system that requires permission from the NT Department of Housing, either locally or from Darwin for major repairs. The importance of these factors in the POE became increasingly evident, and became an important part of this project in evaluating the housing experience of public housing tenants in the Town Camps.

At a more general level, the shift to the public housing model meant the loss of control or input of local councils, in this case, Tangentyere Council. The impact of this on Aboriginal communities, and the concern about the disempowerment represented by the Housing Reference Groups, has already been the subject of a number of studies (Christie and Campbell 2013). These issues have also had an impact on the results of the POE – the residents' satisfaction or not with their new or rebuilt housing is intertwined irremediably with their relationship with the reformed tenancy and property management arrangements forced on the Town Camps.

## **2.8 Housing Governance Structure**

The NTG's Department of Housing (DoH) is currently responsible for the management of town camp housing in the community Living Areas through a sublease arrangement between the NTG and the Office of Township Leasing of the Commonwealth Government. All other areas, such as open space, roads, parks and community centres,



within the Living Area boundary reside with Department of Lands and Planning. 'During the sublease negotiations the Housing Association identified areas known as community land. The sublease allows the Housing Association to take a lease over the community land should it want. Under current arrangements the community land resides with Department of Lands and Landing until a respective Housing Association enters into leasing arrangements with Executive Director over the community land' (OTL 2010 p. 12).

Until late 2012, DoH had contracted out the responsibility for both tenancy and property management to Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (CAAHC) for a period of 2 years. The contract with CAAHC does not cover Ilpeye Ilpeye, who opted for acquisition and whose housing was to be managed directly by the DoH.

At the expiry of the contract with CAAHC in November 2012, DoH re-tendered the housing management contract for the Town Camps. While CAAHC retained responsibility for tenancy management, the Ingkerreke Outstations Resources Services agency was awarded the contract for property management. The basis for this decision is unclear; it may have been prompted by the industry trend since 1993, led by the Industry Commission Inquiry into Public Housing, to separate out the functions of property management and tenancy management to achieve greater transparency in operations, and improved coordination between agencies. The effectiveness of this model is not proven, however (Arthurson 2003 p. 27), and the decision to split the management for the Town Camps could be interpreted as much a political as a functional decision (J Berriman & M Davidson, pers. comm., 07 August).



Figure 1 Community housing management under Tangentyere Housing

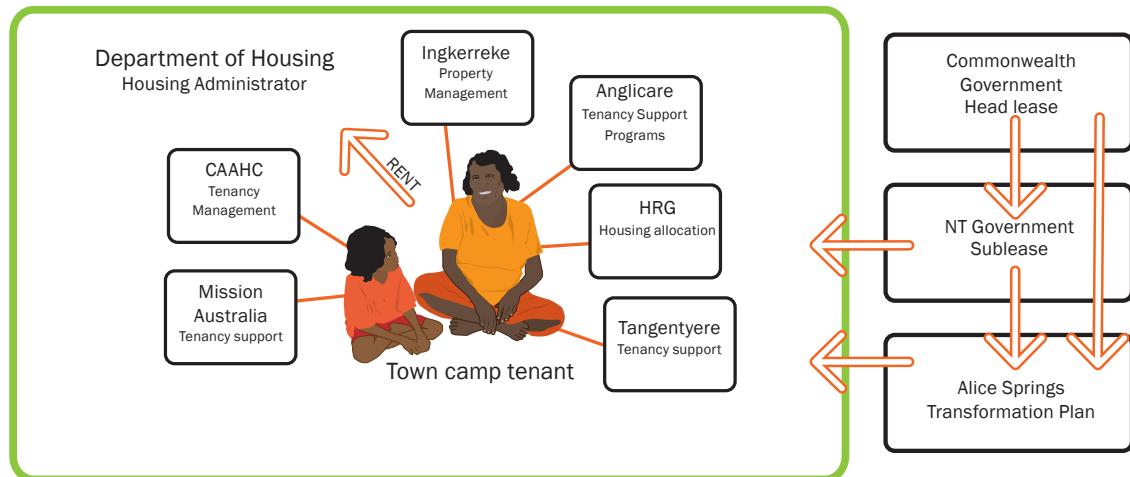


Figure 2 Public housing management under Department of Housing / Territory Housing

The service level agreements between DoH, Ingkerreke and CAAHC do not provide the contracted companies any discretionary powers in the jobs they carry out. All decisions on tenancy and property management are finally made by the DoH and executed by CAAHC and Ingkerreke. Staff from CAAHC (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers. comm., 07 August) described their tenancy manager's role as the 'meat in the sandwich' between the tenant and DoH. (Refer Figure 3.)



Figure 3 Property Management - Community housing model (left) & public housing model (right)

Under the current arrangements, Tangentyere Council no longer has any direct involvement in the town camp housing except through the Board of CAAHC, which was founded by Tangentyere Council. However, as an Aboriginal community council, collectively representing the interest of the Alice Springs Town Camps, Tangentyere runs several programs and services in the Town Camps including a tenancy support program (TSP) for DoH.

### 2.8.1 Tenancy Management Officers (TMO) and Tenancy Managers

TMOs form the frontline of the tenancy management framework. According to DoH, there is one TMO for 50 houses in the town camps (S Harley 2012, pers.comm., 26 July). As per CAAHC figures, on an average there are 2.6 rental accounts for each property or 130 rental accounts per TMO. Up until the separation of property and tenancy management roles late in 2012, the role of TMOs was to maintain and manage tenancy data which included:

- » Property management
  - » Recording and reporting maintenance issues
  - » Keeping tenants informed on the progress of their complaints
- » Tenancy management
  - » Allocation
  - » Rent collection and monitoring rent arrears and debts
  - » Assist tenants to sign up residential lease agreements or fill out housing application forms
  - » Provide property condition reports to tenants at the time of signing up and termination
  - » Make home visits regularly
  - » Conduct quarterly tenancy inspections
  - » Identify tenant related damage, visitor management.

All TMOs currently operate under the supervision of a tenancy manager.

### 2.8.2 Housing Reference Groups structure

Under the reformed governance arrangements for public housing, each town camp is represented by an advisory body for housing issues called the Housing Reference Group (HRG). The HRG advises DoH on social and cultural matters related to housing. The HRG is made up of representatives of the town camp with different interests and is undertaking a role previously performed by the Housing Associations. The members of the HRG are drawn from different cultural and family groups. An important role of the HRG is to advise DoH on housing allocations. The role and functioning of HRGs is critically discussed later in the report under Section 5.4.2.

HRG meetings are meant to be organised quarterly. The affairs of the HRG are managed by the Community Engagement Officer. The tasks include coordinating HRG meetings, developing and tabling an agenda, undertake and distribute minutes of the meeting, managing the housing application waiting lists and all related communications with the community, HRG and the tenancy managers. However, under the 2013 Draft policy for Remote Housing (NTG-DoH 2013a p. 7), DoH is to assume the primary role of managing the affairs for the HRGs.

Further details on the background of Housing Reference Groups are discussed in the next section.

## 2.9 Housing Reference Groups

Following local government and housing reform in the NT, Housing Reference Groups (HRGs) were set up in 73 NT communities, Town Camps and other living areas to:

- » 'provide advice to government on cultural and family-related matters that affect decisions about housing in the community. This can include:
  - » local community concerns and aspirations relating to housing
  - » job and training opportunities generated through housing construction and maintenance
  - » long term planning and housing needs.
  - » Government will work with the Housing Reference Groups to ensure that housing decisions are fair and housing is provided to those families in the community that are most in need.'
- ([http://www.housing.nt.gov.au/remotehousing/housing\\_reference\\_groups](http://www.housing.nt.gov.au/remotehousing/housing_reference_groups))

The HRGs are made up of community representatives from different cultural and family groups representatives of 'special interest' groups, such as people working with youth or in aged care. Many of those on HRGs were previously on community councils or, in the case of the Town Camps, on the Housing Associations.

The success of the HRGs has been mixed, with a heavy onus on HRG members to participate, but without decision-making powers. The difficulties for the groups were noted in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Report (2012 pp. 27-30); difficulties included poor communications from FAHCSIA and Territory Housing with the HRGs

regarding the latter's functions or use of interpreters where needed and overreliance on the HRGs even though they had no decision-making power or remuneration. Christie and Campbell (2013) further documented the complexities of the HRGs in the NT. Christie and Campbell interviewed Aboriginal residents in remote communities in the Top End and communities in Central Australia, including the Town Camps. The remote communities and Town Camp HRGs share many of the same experiences, or struggles, of their role in decision-making. For the Town Camp tenants and the issues dealt with by the HRGs, there is a particular emphasis on visitor management or housing allocation as reflected in the following:

‘When elders or traditional owners or people with special interests are excluded from decision making, and the ‘wrong’ people are allocated housing, serious social problems can develop ...

And also if that person is related to that person, or family member, he or she got to have some respect to come into town, and talk to that person; ... who's the boss, who's the leader of this town camp. You can't just go in and just throw the swag and just lie [down] and just drink. Those people have got to have some respect.

At KL, some people from G and L were given houses to live in, where my brothers lived for a long time, and now there's all fighting, ambulance and police every night, unhealthy, and my mob had to go back to B.

I explained to them, if you see mob in your place, overcrowded, just tell them to leave because you have to look after your kids and look after the old people, don't know where they're from, they have to go back to their family member'. (p14).

The HRGs were a small part of the post occupancy evaluation, but their authority, or lack of it, remains a substantial factor in Town Camp residents' recent housing experience.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This section of the report details the methods that were selected and employed for data collection in the three stages of the project which included a round of fieldwork for each Stage. It also explains the choice of methodology that was selected. Interviews were conducted in all three stages of the project, and house surveys were conducted in Stages 1 and 2.2.

It includes the explanation of the rationale for the selection of the Town Camps as well as households within each camp.

#### 3.1 Town Camp Selection

The Town Camps selected for the evaluation matched all or most of the following criteria, which were developed in consultation with Tangentyere researchers, CAAHC, Tangentyere Design and the Tangentyere Chief Executive:

1. Samples of each type of housing - new, rebuild by the Alliance and Tangentyere, and refurbishment
2. Representation of language groups living in Town Camps.
3. Sample of different leasing arrangements (40 year and 99 year leases)
4. Sample of Town Camps undergoing infrastructure upgrades
5. Presence of active Housing Reference Group
6. Sufficient number or proximity of houses to enable surveys within limited time available
7. Number of visitors (based on previous mobility studies). This has a direct bearing on housing maintenance. Thus two camps – Karnte and Ilperle Tyathe – were selected, although neither has examples of refurbished houses
8. Location of camps around Alice Springs.

Thus the following six camps were selected for the POE:

Camp	Reasons
1 Ilperle Tyathe (Walpiri) – North side	Language – Warlpiri Location High number of visitors
2 Nyewente (Trucking Yards/Truckies) - West side	– Language - Arrernte/Luritja Size Infrastructure upgrades
3 Ewyenper-Atwatye (Hidden Valley) - East side	Language – Arrernte, Warlpiri Size Infrastructure upgrades
4 Akngwerthnarre (Larapinta Valley) - West side	Language – Arrernte, Pertame, Luritja. Pitjantjatjara Size
5 Ilpeye-Ilpeye (Golder's) – East side	Language - Arrernte Acquired.
6 Karnte - South side	Language- Pitjantjatjara Luritja, Location High number of visitors

Table 1 Selected town camps



## Alice Springs Town Camps

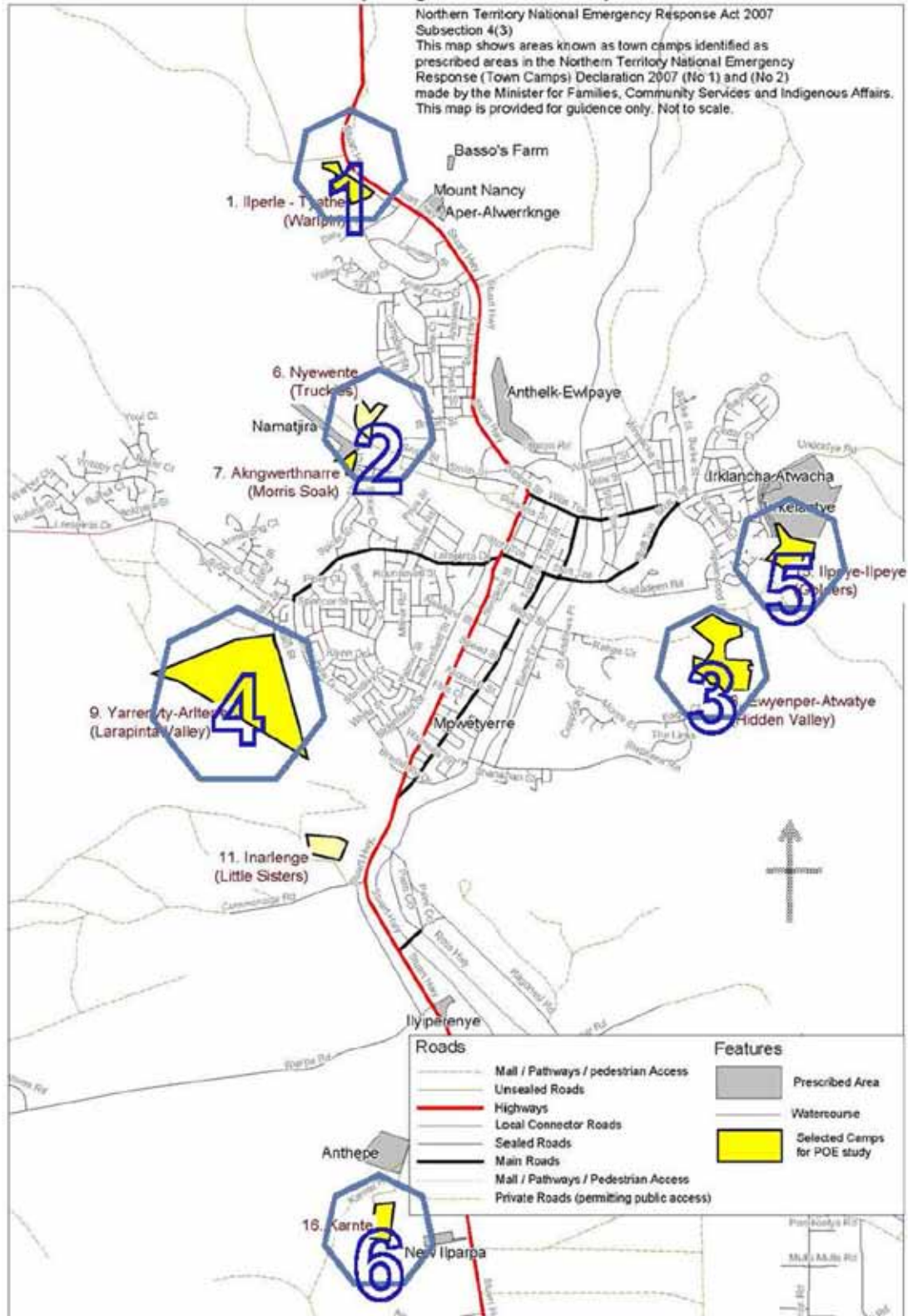


Figure 4 Selected town camp locations

### 3.2 Household Selection

In order to maintain the statistical sample, the evaluation team mapped out the number of houses in each category in each camp that would need to be included. Further, the team identified a mix of houses in each camp, within the categories, based on location in the camps to try and get a cross section of co-located houses from different categories as well as spread out, to test, if possible, whether co-location had an impact on how tenants viewed their houses.

At the beginning of the Stage 1 interviews and surveys, the evaluation team drove around each camp in turn, and spoke with residents of the identified houses, where it was deemed culturally appropriate and safe, to determine if the resident was willing to be interviewed and had the authority to do so. It was noted that a number of the selected houses were empty during the day as the residents were, eg working, at school, visiting family. The evaluation team made follow up visits or otherwise organised to meet with residents outside of working hours to try to ensure as broad a spread as possible of occupations and income sources across the households.

	Alliance New	Alliance Refurbished	Alliance Rebuild	Tangentyere Rebuild	Total
Stage 1	20	5	17	11	53
Stage 2.1 (interview only)	13	5	12	9	39
Stage 2.2	11	5	15	7	38

Table 2 Households interviewed and surveyed

### 3.3 Flyer and Consent Form

Between each stage of the project, flyers about the evaluation and findings from the previous stage were distributed to mailboxes and in person where possible to the Town Camps chosen for the study. Households in Stage 1 were chosen based on house type (see next section on location choice) and availability and willingness to participate.

The project design was explained to interviewees, who signed consent forms and gave permission to be interviewed, for photos and for part or full survey of their houses. The researchers returned to the same 53 houses that compromised the baseline study in Stage 1 in Stages 2.1 and 2.2 for interviews and surveys.

### 3.4 Participant Numbers

The POE required both quantitative and qualitative methods to be able to assess the housing fabric and tenant use respectively, with the latter requiring reasonable depth. Deeper engagement requires more time and is usually associated with working with smaller sample sizes (Mayoux 2006 pp. 118-123) that results in greater reliability of information. The evaluation team sought to ensure a credible number and cross section of housing types, determining initial numbers on the assumption that the

number of participants would dwindle over the length of the study. Accordingly in stage 1, an effort was made to cover as many households in the selected camps as possible in the 4 weeks scheduled for the first round of fieldwork. This was done to offset the expected participant attrition in the subsequent rounds of fieldwork and to ensure that a good sample size was available to us through fieldwork rounds 2 and 3.

In Stage 1, 53 households were interviewed, with 38 and 39 households interviewed in Stages 2.1 and 2.2 respectively. All 53 households were visited in the latter stages, but not all householders remained available for interview. The number of households by stage represented approximately 13% of town camp households, a representative sample that reflected the four different housing types under review. (By comparison, an earlier major POE of Indigenous housing conducted in 2000 had included 33 houses from six communities representing over 6000 people (Fletcher and Bridgman 2000; Memmott et al. 2000)). The reasons for attrition included the following:

- » houses were empty, 1 house boss refused to be interviewed, 11 house bosses were not available (tried more than 3 times).

The breakdown by camp is as follows:

- » Hidden Valley: 1 house boss refused to be interviewed, attempts to speak with 5 house bosses - attempted more than 3 times for each house boss
- » Karnte: 1 house empty due to death, attempts to speak with 2 house bosses - attempted more than 3 times per house boss
- » Illpeye Illpeye: Attempts to speak with 1 house boss - attempted more than 3 times
- » Larapinta: 1 house empty, attempts to speak with 1 house boss - attempted more than 3 times
- » Trucking Yard: 1 house empty, attempts to speak with 2 house bosses - attempted more than 3 times per house boss.

Town camps	Stage 1	Stage 2.2
Hidden Valley	13	7
Karnte	8	5
Illpeye Illpeye	8	7
Warlpiri	2	2
Larapinta	11	9
Trucking Yard	11	8

Table 3 Households interviewed and surveyed by town camp and stage

### 3.5 Stage 1

The baseline study in Stage 1 included surveys of the houses and interviews with residents, in collaboration with the Tangentyere researchers.

#### 3.5.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interview questions that focused on residents' perceptions and experience of their housing were developed in collaboration and workshopped with experienced staff of the Tangentyere Research Hub and with the input of experienced research academics Paul Memmott (University of Queensland) and Will Sanders (ANU). The interview questions are at Appendices 1, 2 and 3. The semi-structured approach was chosen to accommodate the various cultural protocols and language differences that were involved in varying and unpredictable degrees, and it contributed to the principles of a participatory approach.

Interviews were conducted by two research teams in Stage 1, each comprising a CAT and a Tangentyere researcher.

	new houses (20)	TA rebuild (17)	Tang rebuild (11)	refurb (5)
Gender of interviewees*				
M	45%	12%	36%	40%
F	55%	88%	64%	60%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Age of interviewees				
20-30	35%	41%	18%	20%
31-40	25%	18%	9%	40%
41-50	25%	18%	36%	20%
51-60	15%	6%	27%	-
60+	-	18%	9%	20%
total	100%	100%	99%**	100%
Household Income				
newstart	25%	12%	9%	40%
Carer payment	5%	-	-	-
Disability	25%	24%	36%	-
Employment	20%	12%	18%	40%
Parent	25%	41%	18%	-
Age pension		18%	18%	20%
total	100%	107%***	99%**	100%
Number of adults				
1	10%	12%	9%	20%
2	45%	53%	36%	60%
3	35%	12%	27%	
4	5%	17%		20%
5		6%	9%	
6	5%			
7+			18%	
total	100%	100%	99%**	100%
Number of Children				
1	35%	12%	18%	40%
2	5%	29%	18%	40%
3	15%	18%	9%	
4		12%	18%	17%
7+			9%	
Total # HH	55%	71%	72%	80%
Number of bedrooms				
2	65%	18%	45%	
3	35%	41%	36%	40%
4		31%	19%	60%
5				
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Time in house				
Less than 3 months			9%	
3-4 months	40%	24%	18%	20%
6-11	20%	40%	9%	20%
12 months	40%	18%	9%	60%
9-12 months				
12-18 months			9%	
18 months - 2 years		18%	27%	
Over 2 years			18% (1 over 20 years)	1 over 25 years
total	100%	100%	99	100

\* Some interviews were conducted with couples.  
\*\* Percentages rounded to nearest decimal point.  
\*\*\* More than one income stream reported per house

Table 4 Household demographic – Stage 1

### 3.5.2 Household Surveys

CAT staff developed an extremely detailed technical survey to assess the condition of the houses and their surrounds. The survey was then reduced to ensure that it could be conducted within reasonable time after the interviews to minimise the extent of intrusion on householders while still providing a useful technical picture of the houses. The survey for this stage covered: compliance with guidelines (SIHIP & National Indigenous Housing Guide); infrastructure details; visible state of repair (as against reported state of disrepair available with CAAHC); effective use of provided spaces within the cultural context; quality of as-built construction and technology; provision of facilities for healthy living practices (health hardware); visible improvements or decline in standard of living (based on pre-identified visual indicators).

The researchers covered 53 households in Stage 1.

### 3.6 Stage 2.1

The method for gathering the data for this stage involved a mix of open-ended questions and structured questions. In contrast with the previous round, which included a semi-structured interview and a survey of the houses, only interviews were conducted in Stage 2.1, as it was unlikely that another household condition survey at 6 months would yield much useful information and further risked relationships with householders sensitive to the intrusion that surveys can represent.

Researchers from the Tangentyere Research Hub were again at the centre of developing the questions, carrying out the fieldwork and in assisting with the analysis of the data. New researchers with the Tangentyere Research Hub, who had never previously conducted fieldwork, were initiated into the data collection and interviewing process. To accommodate the researchers' and residents' schedules, including children's school schedules and data entry needs, interviews were conducted during the first half of the day, Monday-Thursday, unless residents requested an interview at another time.



Figure 5 Tangentyere Research Hub and CAT researchers workshopping interview questions



### 3.6.1 Interviews

For consistency with Stage 1, the questions for the Stage 2.1 interviews were organised under the themes used in Stage 1.

1. Household
2. Design
3. Feeling
4. Maintenance
5. Tenancy Management.

Due to the character of many of the responses in Stage 1, which were sometimes limited in detail because of either the question or the uncertainty of the interviewer, the research team thought that the researchers would engage more deeply and conversationally with respondents around the issues that were under scrutiny in this Stage. That is, it was found that respondents in the interview seldom offered qualifications to their responses which limited the emergence of issues for further exploration. In critically analysing the survey and interview process used in Stage 1, the researchers felt that more time was needed to be devoted to talking through and around each question (keeping most questions open ended). Accordingly, the following modifications were made:

- » The number of questions was reduced to relieve pressure on the interviewers and respondents
- » The survey was not conducted in this round since it was unlikely to yield much information about the house conditions. Further, it added to the pressure of time and served as a distraction for the respondents, in part due to the perception of its invasive nature, which also impacted the respondent's willingness to be interviewed.
- » The researchers relied on tenants reporting damage to the house or breakdown of fixtures since the Stage 1 interviews in March 2012.

The choice of focus for Stage 2.1 was influenced by the issues that emerged from the analysis and findings of Stage 1, as reported in June 2012. The following areas were flagged for investigation:

- » Had householder's relationships – including perceptions, adaptation and occupancy rates - with the houses changed after 6 months?
- » How did residents cope with the cold of the winter months within the house? (This aspect of the evaluation overlapped with the study (Horne et al. 2013) being conducted by RMIT in the Town Camps on responses to climate change.)
- » Evaluating the qualitative performance of the house against changing needs and requirements

- » Processes of housing allocation were to be discussed in greater depth with HRG representatives, Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services (DHLGRS), Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (CAAHC).

### **3.6.2 Stakeholder Interviews**

In order to gather a diversity of perspectives on the housing issues in Town Camps, we included a wide range of stakeholders directly involved in delivery and management of town camp housing. Accordingly we interviewed and talked to a number of institutional actors, who were a part of the process, including:

- » Territory Alliance (TA)
- » Territory Housing (TH)
- » Tangentyere Design (TD)
- » Alice Springs Transformation Plan (ASTP)
- » Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (CAAHC)
- » Two Housing Reference Group (HRG) representatives from one camp.

Information collected in the discussions with stakeholders prior to the second round of fieldwork influenced interview questions related to the effectiveness of tenancy and property management in particular but also helped to formulate the approach to 'housing experience' and the final stage of the project.

The researchers were only able to interview 39 of the original 53 households. The final number of interviews was affected by factors such as availability of the house boss, inaccessibility to the Town Camps during traditional ceremonies or simply disinterest expressed by house bosses directly or indirectly in participating in the interview.

## **3.7 Stage 2.2**

In order to acknowledge participation in the project, and to keep participant interest alive for the third round of interviews, the evaluation team organised barbecues for the original stage 1 participants in five of the six Town Camps prior to the last round of fieldwork. It was an opportunity for the team to reconnect with those who had been previously interviewed and to inform them of the impending interviews and surveys. In the case of Ilpeye Ilpeye, the opportunity arose to interview some of the house bosses whilst at the barbecue. At Warlpiri camp, with only 2 participants, it was decided to give power cards as a token and gesture of gratitude for agreeing to talk to us and allowing us to survey their houses.

Although it is not obvious whether there was a link between the barbecues and cooperation in stage 2.2, the barbecues were welcomed. At Ilpeye Ilpeye, it was clearly advantageous to have most of the residents gathered around the barbecue, but it should be noted that Ilpeye Ilpeye is amongst the smaller and more compact camps

in Alice Springs and therefore not representative of all camps, especially the larger more spatially dispersed camps such as Larapinta and Hidden Valley. The barbecues were proportionately less successful in the larger camps on this score. Also, cultural protocols between family groups may have precluded a larger turnout in these camps despite holding them in a neutral communal gathering space.



Figure 6 Barbecue at Ilpeye Ilpeye (above and top right) & Karnte (top left)

### 3.7.1 Interviews

As in Stage 2.1, questions were once again developed around the five key themes that were identified in stage 1, namely Household, Design, Feeling, Maintenance, and Tenancy Management.

As in the previous stages, a set of draft questions were trialled and workshopped with the experienced Tangentyere researchers to shape the final set of questions.

The aim of the interviews in stage 2.2 was to:

- » Note changes that had occurred in the households and personal circumstances over a 12- month period since the Stage 1 interviews
- » Record the tenant's attitudinal changes towards the design of the house, if any, and their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their house
- » Understand people's housing priorities by noting design adaptations or adaptations of convenience that tenants had made to 'improve' their houses, or by noting why they had not made any or noting barriers that restricted them from making any adaptations
- » Delve into how they felt about their new, refurbished and rebuilt houses as well as infrastructure works after having lived there over a year
- » To find out if they felt secure/safe in their houses and in the camp and if not, why not
- » Document tenants' experiences with the reformed property management systems implemented in the wake of SIHIP
- » Record tenant's reactions towards the reformed tenancy management arrangements under SIHIP especially with regard to housing allocation, tenancy rules and regulations and tenancy support.

Unlike the previous rounds of fieldwork, only one Tangentyere researcher was available to accompany the CAT research team. This was on account of other large collaborative research projects that were running concurrently during the fieldwork of this project during February-March 2013 that were making competing demands on the Tangentyere Research Hub. This required some flexibility for the CAT researchers in contrast with the methods and timings put into practice in Stage 2.1, and the CAT researchers revisited households in the afternoon if possible as well as conducting interviews on Fridays. Once again, on the advice of the Tangentyere researchers, the 'three strikes' policy applied. That is, if a tenant was unavailable three times for an interview for whatever reason, including bad timing, other asserted priorities or absence from the house, the researchers did not continue to seek out the tenant. Out of the original 53 households, the researchers managed to interview and survey 38 households in Stage 2.2.

It is fairly common to have some degree of attrition with respondents in longitudinal studies conducted over extended periods of time. This can be exacerbated in Indigenous communities where mobility of residents can be very high. In expectation of this effect, the POE started with a higher number of interviews than necessary, in order to maintain a good sample through the 12 months of the project. In fact, in this instance, the researchers felt that mobility was probably not a factor as much as interview 'fatigue', both from this project and other research projects simultaneously vying for town camp resident's time and attention.

### 3.7.2 Household Surveys in Stage 2.2

Conducting household surveys in Stage 1 took roughly 45 minutes per house; this was a detailed and technical survey which was necessary to set up the baseline data. Due in part to the disruption it caused the tenants, and in part due to the logistics involved in Stage 2.2 with the reduction in Tangentyere researcher support, it was decided to reduce the survey size. That is, in Stage 1, the Tangentyere researchers conducted interviews while the technically qualified CAT researchers carried out the survey, which helped to reduce the burden of time and inconvenience on the household. In Stage 2.2, it was incumbent on the CAT researcher/s to undertake both tasks sequentially rather than in parallel, which would have doubled the time allocated for each house and the imposition on the householder.

As a result, and based on the extensive data collected in Stage 1, a single page 'snapshot' of house condition was created for each of the 53 houses surveyed. The snapshot recorded the defects and problems noted as well as those reported by tenants in Stage 1, including photographs of the defects. In Stage 2.2, the CAT researchers re-visited each of the problems for each house and noted if they had been fixed or become worse since documented 12 months earlier.

The second part of the survey process was similar to the one conducted in Stage 1, but with less detail, eg it listed the condition of the ceiling, but without breaking it down into its components such as cornices and paint finish. The purpose of this section was to identify any new or unrecorded problems with the house that may have surfaced since Stage 1. The surveys were also used as a means to note any adaptations that residents had made to their houses that may have been missed during the interview.

The snapshot tool was very useful for several reasons. The data collected through this process provided material to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the repair and maintenance services offered to the tenants, and respondents were pleased that the CAT researchers were aware of and enquiring after specific issues with their houses.

A copy of a typical survey, including the house snapshot, is available in Appendix 8.



## 4 EVALUATION: THE HOUSING EXPERIENCE

This evaluation evolved over 18 months from a focus primarily on houses to become what we have called the 'housing experience', in recognition of the role of property management and tenancy management in the residents' experience of their houses. This approach is not unprecedented; the complexity that tenancy brings to Indigenous housing has long been recognised.

Helen Ross (2000 p.7) cites Turner's 1972 essay titled 'Housing as a Verb', in which Turner draws attention to the process of housing activities such as the selection of tenants, supporting tenants, collecting of rent and managing and maintaining the house. By extending the definition of housing beyond the physical artefact of the house, its design, construction, financial viability and procurement, to include the everyday lived experience of tenants in their dealings with housing administrations, Turner shifted the dominant focus in housing away from the providers and professionals to the tenants. It focussed on what it meant and felt to be living in the house and simultaneously interacting with allocation processes, rules and regulations, repairs and maintenance regimes that are a part and parcel of dwelling in public housing. Along with how tenants experience the house or the house-tenant relationship, is the relationship between the tenant and the agency that manages the houses that they occupy - these relationships, along with the physical entity of the house, shape and form the housing experience.

Birdsall-Jones and Corunna (2008 p.1) suggest that housing experience can be a useful tool in developing housing policy, especially in the Indigenous context. Although their work is premised on the concept of Indigenous housing careers in public housing, they suggest that housing careers are influenced by the relationship between Indigenous people as tenants and the public housing agency. They emphasise conflict in this relationship as a shaper of Indigenous housing careers that are usually related to housing-related debt, wait listing for allocation, repairs and maintenance and a demand for transparency in processes. They claim, 'Where the resolution of these issues remains the current concern of the individual's life, the housing [experience] is subsumed in the constant effort to obtain a resolution.' In this conflict-ridden environment, the design of the house, and overarching policy concerns become a tangential concern for the tenant (Ross 2000 p. 13).

To review Indigenous housing in the context of housing experience and life crises becomes all the more relevant because some life crises (experience of violence, illness, spousal death) impact the tenant's ability to cope with housing issues. Life crises can be abetted by 'poor housing or inappropriate programs for support', preventing tenants from pursuing activities that may improve their housing experience (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008 p. 2). Support programs for public housing tenants were



a part of SIHIP's tenancy management mandate to enable and facilitate a smooth transition for tenants from a community housing model to a public housing model. Maladjustment in this transition or poor house quality backed by poorer repairs and maintenance services could heighten stress on the tenant.

Over the years, Tangentyere Council has emphasised the importance of architectural design in Aboriginal housing and has maintained an in-house design section, today called Tangentyere Design, almost since inception (Ross 2000). They have also endorsed the need for greater one-on-one consultation between prospective tenant and designer for the best housing outcome. Tangentyere Council have promoted the idea of self-management of Town Camps as well as provided the services to its tenants to support it. Accordingly, Tangentyere Council took a holistic view to housing under SIHIP and sought an independent evaluation of the housing provided under the program. It was Tangentyere Council's hope that the evaluation process would deliver lessons for them as well as to inform their future approaches to housing in the Town Camps in areas such as:

- » Improving building material specifications
- » More inclusive consultation
- » Stable tenancy management
- » Culturally appropriate housing design
- » Community planning.

The brief also highlighted the need to equip Tangentyere with evidence for making improvements in:

- » Housing allocation
- » new and renovation construction priorities
- » Tenancy management
- » Repairs and maintenance.

The initial design bias in stage 1 of the project reflected the standard POE approach as well as the design/architecture background of the client and primary CAT researchers. However, this initial focus shifted as the project advanced and the tenants revealed the extent of their concerns and preoccupations with the SIHIP housing process.

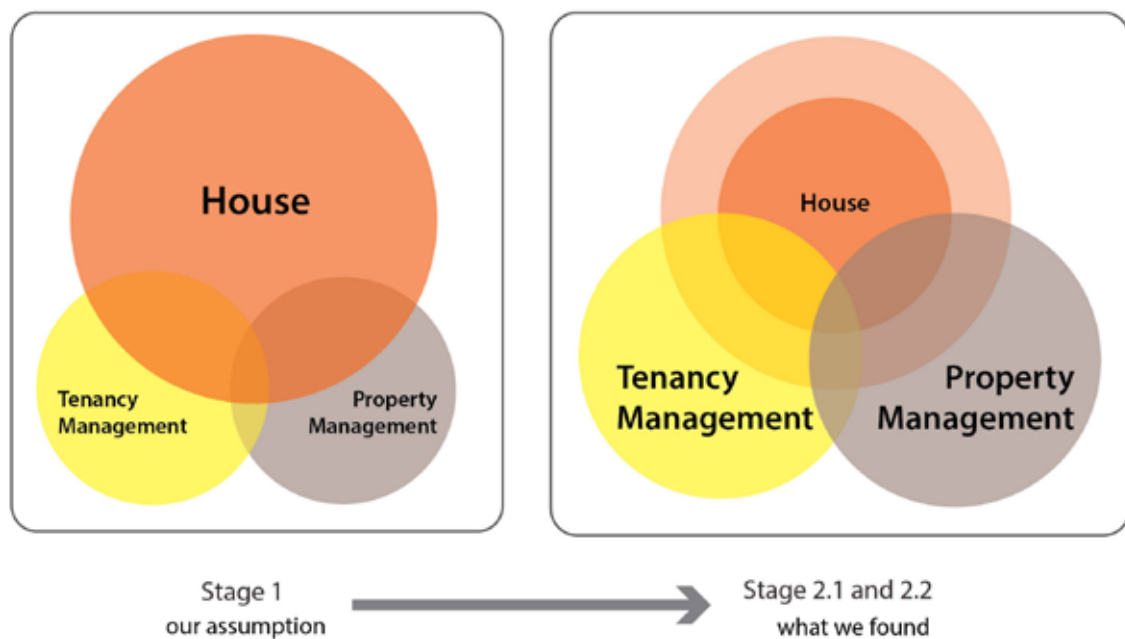


Figure 7 The Housing Experience

While undertaking the POE, it became clear between Stage One and Stage 2.2 that the emphasis of household concern had shifted from the house itself to the issues of property and tenancy management. The experience of the house was not just about the physical design and condition, but the relationship of that to the management regimes contributing, or not, to the quality of life sustained within its walls. We have labelled the collective impact of the house and its management on the tenant as the ‘housing experience’. We assumed at the start of the project, that the house in all its physical dimensions was the dominant paradigm by which the Town Camp tenants experienced housing. However, as the project advanced, it became evident that the consequences of property management and tenancy management strictures were dominating the consciousness of the tenants and foreshadowing the qualities of the house itself. We have further hypothesized, that if the role of property and tenancy management became less prominent in the town camp resident’s consciousness, the design of the house and its physical form will become increasingly important to the tenant at the cost of its management.

In the following analysis of the components of the POE – design, property and tenancy management – we include results from both surveys and interviews. In some areas we reflect specifically on how the ‘feeling’ part of the interviews relates to a component of design, for example, and similarly to the notion of the housing experience overall. In this way we hope to reflect some of the complexity of conditions, human and physical, and support multi-layered recommendations.

The aim of this report is to, ‘[Re] view housing in the context of people’s daily lives.’ (Ross 2000 p. 13). We have, in this instance, and at the request of Tangentyere Council, reviewed new, rebuilt and refurbished housing under SIHIP in the Alice Springs Town Camps using the lens of housing experience as described above.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the report deals with and discusses our findings in Stage 2.2 while simultaneously comparing the findings in Stages 1 and 2.1.

The discussion draws extensively on housing literature to tease out issues and to compare our findings with recent and less recent research activities.

The discussion follows the order of four of the five interview themes in all three stages, namely Household (Composition), Design, Maintenance and Tenancy Management. The fifth 'theme', Feeling, has application across the latter three areas, and has been incorporated in the discussions of Design and Property and Tenancy management, along with reflections on how these contribute to the Housing Experience.

### 5.1 Household Composition

Recording changes in households provides an overview of the changes or continuity occurring in the tenancy composition of the households that have been interviewed over 12 months. Apart from signalling rates of mobility within the town camps, it was hoped it might also provide insights in differences in perspective depending on a tenant's length of tenure.

In Stage 2.2, the survey and interview process covered a total of 38 houses in the selected six town camps that had also participated in Stages 1 and 2.1 of the project. Although there was considerable overlap, not all of the households interviewed in Stage 2.2 were the same as those interviewed in Stage 2.1.

House Type	Stage 1	Stage 2.1 (interview only)	Stage 2.2
Alliance new	20	13	11
Alliance rebuild	17	12	16
Alliance refurb	5	5	4
Tangentyere rebuild	11	9	7
Total	53	39	38

Table 5 House types covered across the 3 stages

Camp	Stage 1	Stage 2.2
Hidden Valley	13	7
Karnte	8	5
Illpeye Illpeye	8	7
Warlpiri	2	2
Larapinta	11	9
Trucking Yard	11	8

As noted in Section 3.4, and in the stage 2.1 report (2012b p. 12), the reduction in numbers of house bosses interviewed and houses surveyed between Stage 1 and stage 2.2 can be attributed to unavailability of house bosses for the interview, inaccessibility to the Town Camps during traditional ceremonies or disinterest in participating in the research project.

#### 5.1.1 House Boss

House bosses were the same in the majority of the households interviewed. Only 3 of the 38 households interviewed reported a change in the house boss. In one instance, the brother of the previous house boss had moved in from interstate, while in another, a sister had moved in because the original house boss had moved interstate. This is not significantly different from stage 2.1, where only 2 households reported a change in house boss. In sum, less than 10% of households interviewed had changed house boss over the course of the project, indicating a high degree of stability for the main tenants.

#### 5.1.2 Family and Visitors

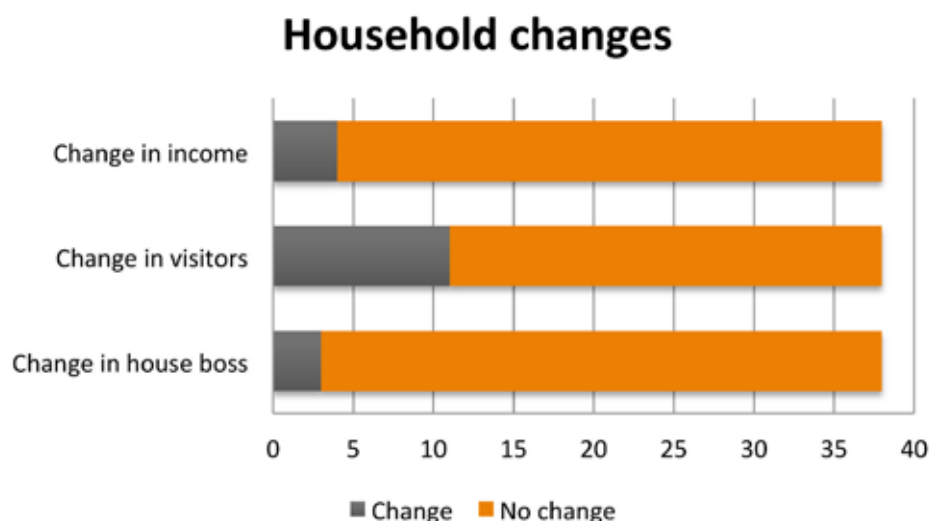
There were 11 changes recorded to the family composition in the households. The changes related to the arrival of extended family. Similar changes and of similar magnitude were also noted in stage 2.1.

Twenty-three of the interviewed households reported visitors. However, in almost all cases the respondents said that visitors only came for short visits especially during the football season. The respondents were keen to point out that the changes on account of visitors were not permanent but temporary, suggesting that despite the identified issues of visitor management discussed later in this report, residents were reluctant to have anything but short term visitors documented early in the interview, possibly for fear of consequences, eg paying more rent.

### 5.1.3 Housing Experience

Visitors form an integral part of Aboriginal life in the town camps and impact household composition. As discussed in detail in Section 5.2.2 of this report, many tenants were reluctant to report visitor activity in their homes to the interviewers. This response was partly instigated by the tenancy regulations that restrict the duration of stay for visitors, but can also potentially lead to an upward revision of rents that are based on household composition rather than the size of the asset, namely bedroom numbers.

Overall, there were limited changes in the households over the period of the POE. The changes related primarily to the movements of extended family and visitors. It is the impact of the latter on the tenants' housing experience, in relation to spatial issues (the house), wear and tear (property management) and housing rules (tenancy management) that is elaborated on throughout the following discussion of findings.



Graph 1 Changes in households

## 5.2 Design

The interview questions in the design section of the questionnaire were developed to understand what aspects of the house suited the householder's needs. The questions were also devised to capture what didn't work and to both observe and understand the adaptations that residents were making in their houses to cope with any unsuitability of the design of the house. The interviewers wanted to know about the changes that residents would make to their houses and yards to make them more liveable and to their liking. This question is thus focused on both what adaptations people have already made and what they would do if they were given \$1,000 to make modifications to the house to make it more suitable to their needs.

The surveys and interviews were designed to work in tandem. Through the surveys it was anticipated that the researchers would identify practical solutions that residents have already implemented to overcome difficulties resulting from the house design, eg positioning a plastic milk crate near the hand basin to enable the shorter women residents to look into the mirror that was placed too high in the bathrooms and toilets of a new house. Another tenant installed blinds on the veranda to block headlights of turning cars in one of the camps (see Figure 8).



Figure 8 Tenant adaptations observed during the survey

The survey also identified things that were not working in terms of the house design, eg the inadequacy of storage identified in Stage 1 resulted in the kitchen benches often being used as storage surfaces rather than work benches (CAT 2012a) (Figure 9). This observation was echoed in residents' verbal commentary on the inadequacy of storage in the house.



Figure 9 The impact of inadequate storage



The Design section also dealt with aspects of building materials, fittings and design specifications that the designers and contractors had jointly developed for the houses, and which have a direct impact on housing durability. For example, although at first many respondents reacted negatively to the tiled floors as being too slippery when mopped in Stage 1, there was a perceptible shift towards appreciating the tiled floors as a trouble free, easy to clean floor covering in Stage 2.2. On the other hand, the screen doors that were identified to be flimsy in Stage 1 proved to be as fragile as predicted.

It should be noted that the DoH's Housing Services Operational Policy Manual (NTG-DoH 2013b) includes a list titled 'Expected life span of items within public housing', which is compiled based on DoH's normative estimates of how long building items ought to last under optimal conditions that are not explained. Lists such as this can form the basis of determining whether requirement of repairs are a consequence of building age or damage inflicted by the tenant, which in turn could have a significant impact on shaping the repairs and maintenance policies, especially where the onus on pre-emptive maintenance is shifted away from housing management and onto the tenant (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers. comm., 07 August), and justified as a part of the 'normalising' process. (Donald and Canty-Waldron 2010 p. 17; NTG and AG 2012). Greater transparency and clarity about what constitutes tenant-related damage in particular contexts would assist both housing managers and tenants, rather than using optimised lists of what lifespans are such as that in the operational manual.

Durability is a critical element in the SIHIP design guidelines and is embedded in the key design objectives of economic sustainability (GHD 2008b p. 12).

The guidelines listed the following design objectives:

1. Cultural and social fit
2. Safety and security
3. Responsive to climate
4. Support for healthy living
5. Accessibility
6. Economically sustainable
7. Environmentally sustainable.

Although the Alliance new houses represented an opportunity to apply all the above guidelines into their design, the rebuilt and refurbished houses only had a limited scope for this application. Accordingly, the refurbished and rebuilt houses had a separate list of design guidelines that aimed to address the following objectives:

1. Health and safety items
2. Retrofit for thermal comfort
3. Water and energy efficiency
4. Maintainability
5. Suitable external living areas.

The ability to achieve some of the objectives of each of the house types may also have been affected by the big difference in budgets for each of the house types evaluated. While the new houses had an average budget of \$450,000 each, the houses earmarked for rebuild received only \$200,000 or 44% of that sum, while those listed for refurbishments only received about \$75,000, or 16% of the amount budgeted for a new house. Given the emphasis on making the houses safe to live in, it appeared that by the time the contractors had fixed up wiring and plumbing issues in the house, insufficient budgetary allowance remained for other design and house features. It appeared to us that the brunt of this was borne by the external living areas, the dangers of which were flagged by others, including Davidson et al. (2011).

### **5.2.1 Cultural & Social Fit**

The discourse around Aboriginal housing alludes to a link between housing and lack of care for houses on account of a misfit between users and housing needs (Lea and Pholeros 2010 p. 189). Memmott (1988 p. 34) refers to this discourse as ‘the white mythology’ of Aboriginal housing but hastens to add that it remains unclear if the destruction is brought about in ‘response to poor architectural design, a by-product of other social or personal problems, or the result of a more complex situation involving a culturally different set of values and attitudes about material things’. Sanders (2000 p. 239) and Ross (2000) have observed that for Indigenous Australians, housing and their living environment is not accorded the high priority that non-Indigenous Australians place on it. For non-Indigenous Australians, Sanders says, ‘The symbol of neglect, the humpy, is ... replaced by the symbol of assistance, the newly built house’, but for Indigenous Australians land, not housing, remains the focus of Indigenous political activism. What non-Indigenous Australians may construe as Indigenous wilful neglect of their largesse may in fact only be an honest reflection of Indigenous priorities. It remains unclear if a cultural approach to house design will result in better maintenance of houses or if indeed building more houses will lead to better living conditions for Indigenous people (Steyer 2012).

There is other literature that links house design with domiciliary behaviour to the use of space by specific Aboriginal groups such as Yolngu (Fantin 2003) or Warlpiri (Keys 2003). Lea and Pholeros (2010 p. 190) dispute the link between cultural practice and poor house conditions and attribute house hardware dysfunction to poor quality control during construction and poor ongoing maintenance regimes. They believe that

there is need for greater diligence on the part of the designer towards the design and functioning of 'health hardware'. The GHD guidelines, however, seem to have been influenced by an approach '...to delivery and performance of housing that is premised on longevity of housing stock, cultural fit of design to lifestyle and the physical and mental health and wellbeing of households – one that builds rather than undermines human capacity and social capitals in communities.' (Memmott 2008 p. 64)

The SIHIP Design Guidelines (GHD 2008a pp. 11-19) recommend the need for designers to have 'a clear understanding of the culturally distinctive aspects of everyday domestic behaviour by Indigenous individuals and groups which impact on physical developments'. It cites Paul Memmott (in GHD 2008a) who advises that poorly designed houses have a detrimental effect on their user's health, both physical and mental. Under the objective of 'Cultural and Social Fit', the GHD guidelines identify 5 aspects of house design that were to be addressed by the SIHIP designers:

- » Maintaining and upholding spatial relations between families, clans and landholding groups
- » Family and household structures and groupings
- » Use of domiciliary spaces
- » Overcrowding
- » Remoteness.

'Overcrowding' is dealt with in Section 5.2.2 of this report.

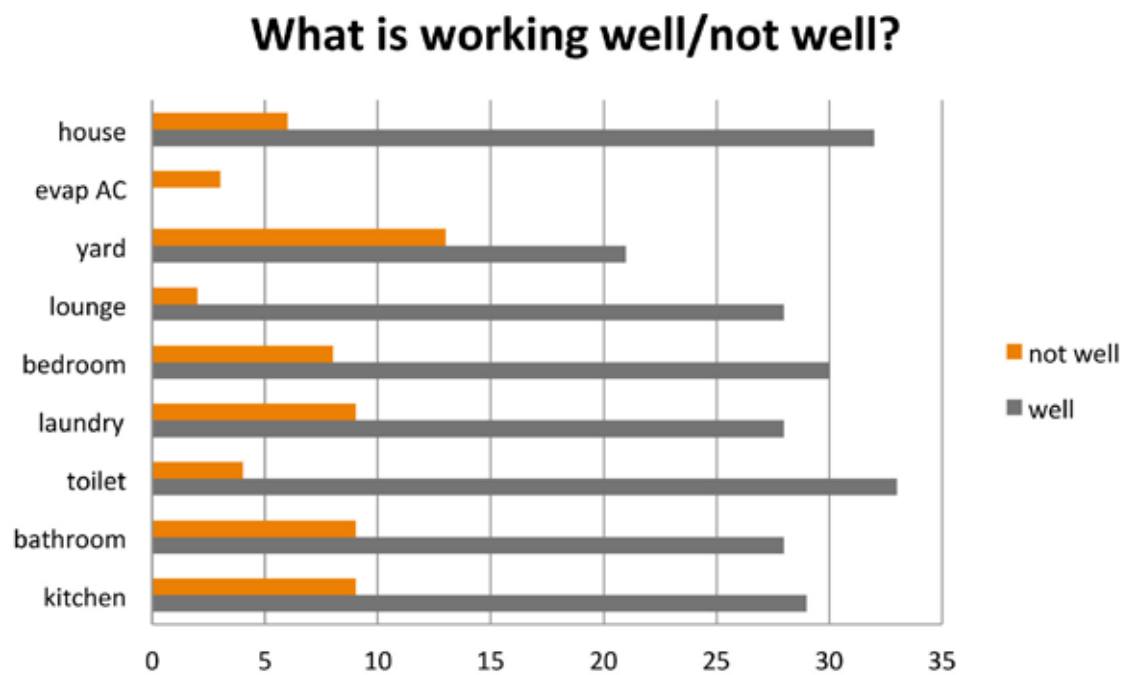
An overwhelming majority of those interviewed in Stage 2.2 said that they were happy with their houses. Of the 6 house bosses who said that they were unhappy with the house, 3 lived in Alliance rebuild houses, 2 in Alliance refurbished and 1 in a Tangentyere rebuild. None of the residents of the Alliance new houses expressed dissatisfaction. In Stage 1, we attributed the satisfaction to having access to basic shelter or a house. In Stages 2.1 and 2.2, we tested this hypothesis further to see if the initial euphoria related to having a house had worn off and people had started to become more critical or more adjusted to their houses.

Overall, in Stages 2.1 and 2.2, we found people in the new houses to still be happy with their houses, and any dissatisfaction expressed was less about the house or its design and more to do with not having been allocated the house that they wanted. Notably, there was a significant leap with residents of Alliance and Tangentyere rebuilds who were feeling 'more comfortable' in their houses since the Stage 1 interviews (CAT 2012b p. 17).

Of the 6 households that expressed displeasure, in at least 2 cases it was attributed to the house not having been fixed up properly, but 'only refurbished'. In one case the resident was unhappy with the design of the house, while one resident said that

they found their house too big. No reasons were given as to why the resident in the Tangentyere rebuild house was unhappy with it. Two of the discontented residents are from Ilpeye Ilpeye, three from Trucking Yards and one was from Hidden Valley. No distinct pattern of dissatisfaction could be traced across the Town Camps or house type.

Despite the majority being generally happy with their houses, many respondents identified some problems with the house that they did not feel happy with. There were no clear patterns discernible in the reported problems that could be identified with a specific house type or for that matter a specific camp. The complaints were specific to the house, its orientation or neighbours, location in a camp of choice, or dissatisfaction with the house size or allocation procedures.



Graph 2 What is working well or not working well?

Most people (33 of 38) identified toilets as working well for them. Respondents, in almost equal numbers approximately 80%, also said that they were happy with their kitchens, bathrooms, laundries, bedrooms and lounges.

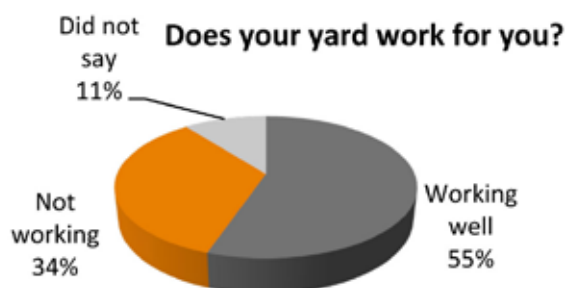
To the question of whether the house suited them and their families, 31 responded affirmatively while 6 responded negatively. The positive and negative responses were mainly to do with the size of the house and yard that accommodated or did not accommodate the family. The importance of accommodating family in their houses holds high priority in the minds of the residents. This need to accommodate visitors has to be reviewed against the wider literature around house crowding in Indigenous communities and Indigenous wellbeing. For instance, Memmott et al (2012 p. 8) have

recognised the perception of spatial adequacy as an important determinant that can generate or eliminate physiological and psychological stresses associated with crowding. As discussed in section 5.2.2 on overcrowding, many of the respondents expressed a desire to improve the outdoor living areas, including verandas and yards, to better accommodate their visitors.

In sum, 'cultural and social fit' appeared most relevant in relation to accommodating visitors and the yards; issues of location and allocation speak more to the tenancy process than the house design itself.

#### 5.2.1.1 Yards – part of social and cultural fit

The significance of yards and outdoor living space for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders has been well-documented and researched over the last 40 years (Memmott 1988 p. 40-41; Ross 1987; Tonkinson and Tonkinson 1979 p. 199). More recently, a study that investigates how Aboriginal residents of the Alice Springs Town Camps stay warm or cool in the context of potential extreme weather events lists sitting outside in the shade of trees as the most preferred practice for keeping cool (Horne et al. 2013 p. 22). The residents also stated a preference for sitting outside wrapped in blankets sitting around a fire near the house to keep warm (Horne et al. 2013 p. 30). In either case, being outside performs a role beyond simply the function of keeping cool or warm.



Graph 3 Satisfaction with yards

Of the items identified as not working well in their houses, yards were named by 13, or over one third of the respondents in Stage 2.2. However, 21 respondents also said that their yards worked well for them. Nearly all the interviews were conducted in the yard in the shade of a tree or the veranda. It was evident in several houses that the residents had gone to some length to make the outdoors more amenable for outdoor living. This is not new. Ross (1987 pp. 65-66) observed an Aboriginal preference for unrestricted vision to survey the country, see activities in the immediate vicinity of the house, enable communication with others and enhance the ability to supervise children outdoors. All of these activities are inextricably linked to and amenable to

outdoor living. It has also been suggested that living within a house is restrictive for Aboriginal residents since it compromises their ability to control their physical and social environment (Reser 1979). Game cooking is another activity, both in the bush and in Town Camps, that requires a roasting pit rather than a stove which is quite simply provided outdoors. Outdoor game cooking is a social activity, like a barbecue, that attracts extended family and kin to share food.

Memmott (2003 pp. 33-35) has concluded through his observations that Aboriginal people prefer to spend time outdoors. He explains that this practice enables the individual to note activities, conflicts and social relations that play themselves out around the domiciliary space and that are likely to impact his/her life. The emphasis on the design of outdoor space and semi-enclosed spaces like verandas therefore continues to feature prominently in Aboriginal domiciliary consciousness.



Figure 10 Adaptations in the yard to improve amenity

The condition of fences and gates in the yard were a source of dissatisfaction for 11 of the 13 and four of those belonged to Hidden Valley. Hidden Valley is the site of some major infrastructure works and it was assumed at the time of the interviews (March 2013) that new fences and gates would be installed on the completion of the works, which was the case in Trucking Yards. Trucking Yards was the first camp where infrastructure works were completed, and the fences and gates were fixed once yard boundaries had been redrawn, established and roads completed.

There was considerably less dissatisfaction with the yards since the Stage 2.1 interviews, in which all respondents expressed a desire to improve their yards. Fifteen respondents in Stage 2.2 said that they would like to make improvements in their yards such as putting in plants and cleaning up; 29 respondents said that they would like to spend the hypothetical \$1000 for home improvement on their yards. In response to the question on what they had done to improve their house and yard, 28 respondents had performed yard-related activities such as cleaning up or putting in plants.

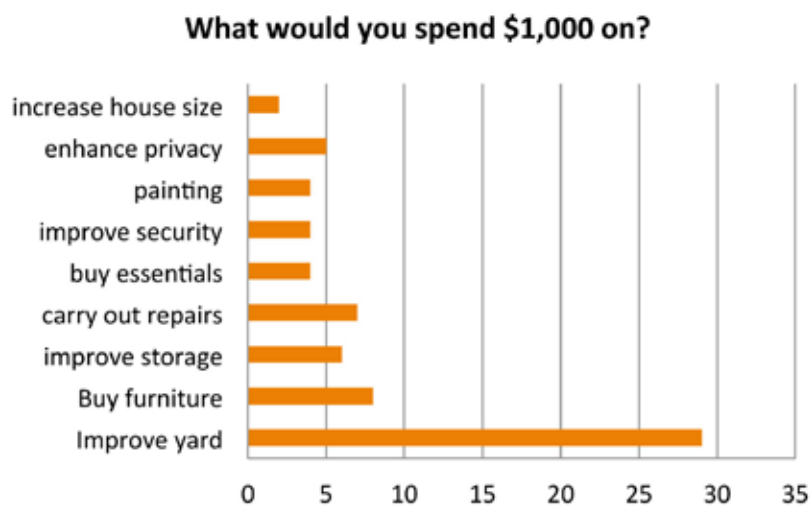




Figure 11 The impact of infrastructure works on fences



Figure 12 Improving outdoor living conditions in the yards



Graph 4 Responses to the question 'What would you spend \$1000 on?'

The redrawing of yard boundaries in Trucking Yards led to several yards becoming bigger than the original yard and rendering them harder to maintain for some households. A few residents complained that they did not get any help for cleaning up the yard and a couple of the households said that the infrastructure contractors did not clean up after themselves nor level the ground in yards when they left the site. It was also noted in the survey that in several instances, only the front fence had been replaced while the side and rear fences had been left untouched regardless of their physical condition. It is unclear if this approach of only partially fixing fences was precipitated by a lack of funds for the yard, or an outcome of the contractual obligation where only fixing and making good the front fences was included in the infrastructure contract while the side and rear fences did not feature in the house contract.

The demand for tidying up the yard, planting trees and fixing fences remains high on the priority of most interviewed residents in that order. This is a further reconfirmation of the importance of outdoor living areas for sustaining Aboriginal lifestyles as discussed in the Stage 2.1 report (CAT 2012b p. 16) and reconfirmed in Memmott et al (2013 p. 145).

On the issue of levelling in the yards, as observed in Stage 1 and Stage 2.2, drainage remains an issue in a few houses. This may have been exacerbated by the lack of levelling work carried out in the yards. There was severe ponding in at least three houses surveyed, which poses a serious health risk for residents. Much of the problem of drainage was noted in the Stage 1 report (CAT 2012); however, the infrastructure works have aggravated the situation in Larapinta Valley, particularly for one house where water has accumulated in a pond on three sides of the house, which is a risk to both house and health of the residents. Despite reporting the problem to the Department of Housing, no action had been taken at the time of the interviews. It is conceivable that these problems will be solved before the contractors leave the site; however, damage to the building fabric and to people's health may have already occurred.

With regard to making improvements in the house and yard, there were at least 26 respondents who said that they wanted to make improvements related to the yard. This included, in order of preference, putting in plants, cleaning up and buying garden tools. The reason attributed for not acting on their desire for improvement was mainly attributed to 'no money' and 'Territory Housing Rules'.

### **5.2.2 Overcrowding**

This section of the report deals with the issue of overcrowding. Reduction in overcrowding is a critical factor for the success of SIHIP. Reduction in overcrowding was one of the key planks on which the Commonwealth Government launched the housing program. One of the aims of Stage 2.1 was to ascertain from residents of the Town Camps if the combination of new houses (including the rebuilt or refurbished),

tenancy management and property management had contributed to the reduction of overcrowding in houses.

One of the key contributors to overcrowding in Aboriginal homes is visitors, especially in regional population centres prone to mobile population influx (Habibis et al. 2011 p. 18), which is inadequately reported in NATSSIS figures (Memmott et al. 2011). Visitors seek or demand hospitality that the tenant is culturally obliged to honour (Birdsall-Jones and Corunna 2008 p. 30). The issue of visitors is complicated. It appeared to the researchers throughout the project that the respondents were not very forthcoming on information on visitors. Most acknowledged that they had visitors, but invariably several, if not most, respondents said – ‘... we get visitors during the footy season. They come for the weekend and go back to the community.’ This response points in part to the seasonality of visitors in Alice Springs Town Camps. It could also point to a reluctance to provide information about the actual length of stay of visitors to the researchers, possibility suggested by a Tangentyere researcher’s interpretation of respondents’ behaviour and physical expressions, such as an averted gaze. The reasons for such reluctance could be attributed to a number of factors, including: stricter tenancy rules, caution around strangers, and concern about higher rents if there are more tenants in a house.

It should be noted also that long-term visitors aren’t necessarily welcome – a previous study on mobility found that there is an expressed desire amongst town camp residents for a maximum of 2-3 nights (Foster et al. 2005 p. 44).

In some interviews in Stage 2.1, the reference to visitors elicited comment about visits by family. Foster et al (2005 p. 38) do not make a strong definitional distinction about types of visitors, commenting that the bulk of the visits in their mobility study in the Alice Springs Town Camps study were attributed to ‘family visits’.

A reasonable proportion (nearly 44%) of the respondents in stage 2.1 expressed increased stress on account of visitors. The bulk of this stress was related to alcohol or drug related behaviour disrupting their usual life in the house. However, several respondents also cited the financial burden of supporting visitors as a contributor to stress.

### **5.2.2.1 SIHIP Strategy to Tackle Overcrowding**

To tackle the issue of severe overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities, SIHIP and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), identified the following objectives through the remote Indigenous housing program:

- » address the housing shortage in remote indigenous communities
- » address severe overcrowding
- » address homelessness
- » address poor housing conditions.

The NPARIH assumes that acute housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities leads to overcrowding, homelessness and poor living conditions. Overcrowding also results in poor housing condition due to user fatigue and pressure on the housing fabric that is poorly constructed (Lea and Pholeros 2010 p. 189). The degeneration of the house condition could also be explained by the lack of personal control that the house boss feels as a consequence of crowding (Memmott et al. 2012 p. 6; Reser 1979). NPARIH therefore seeks to curb overcrowding through tenancy management and reducing its impact on the house fabric and health hardware through design and extending its life through reformed property management. The post occupancy evaluation sought to understand from respondents if they felt that the new and reformed housing arrangements have led to a reduction of overcrowding and improved housing conditions in general.

The 2013 review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) (FaHCSIA 2013 p. 7) claimed that the provision of 843 new houses and 3255 refurbishments between 2008-2011 has made a significant contribution to the reduction of overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities. We were not, however, able to get confirmation from the residents and house bosses whether they perceived that there had been a reduction in overcrowding. As Memmott et al (2012) have demonstrated, the concept of crowding is culturally determined.

NPARIH uses an 'average occupancy per remote dwelling' benchmark to assess the performance of the program based on the Australian Census (ABS) data. This is a rather simplistic metric for measuring overcrowding whereby increasing the housing or bedroom supply would overcome the unmet demand that leads to overcrowding. Memmott et al (2012 p. 9) and Davidson et al (2011) find that the density model of crowding is the dominant paradigm that drives housing typology. The three-bedroom house is the prevalent house type in Indigenous communities and is offered as the norm and marketed as a panacea for overcoming overcrowding. Furthermore, Birdsall-Jones and Corruna (2008 p. 30) and Memmott et al (2012 p. 3) have challenged the density measure for crowding and have suggested further quantitative and qualitative investigation of crowding and its causes prior to developing housing strategies to overcome crowding. Other studies have also critiqued the Australian Census and found many disadvantages (Dockery and Colquhoun 2012 p. 7-8).

Despite the various arguments for or against the density model for assessing crowding, the GHD guidelines recommend the design to cater for 12-16 permanent residents to cope with the impacts of overcrowding on the building fabric and hardware (2008a p. 16).

While it became evident that the additional housing in the Alice Springs Town Camps resulted in better accommodating formerly multigenerational households, with at least one generation relocating to a new house, the evaluation confirmed

Habibis et al's (2011) observation that the vacuum and space created by this relocation of residents within the camps attracted more visitors from remote areas. This was especially the case with the houses of some of the elderly residents of the Town Camps. Some of the families, who had moved into their own houses, said they did not want any visitors in their own homes but were happy for their parents to fulfil customary obligations towards kin. The findings of this study confirms the findings of the Birdsall-Jones and Corruna's study (2008 p. 28) in WA that '...it is incumbent on the older generation to help out their own children when they are grown, and this can be generalised to include the children of one's siblings [or to fulfil customary obligations towards kin from remote areas]'. Refer to Dockery and Colquhoun (2012) for a systematic and comprehensive review of the Indigenous mobility literature and to Foster et al (2005) for a study of mobility within the Alice Springs Town Camps. The impact of visitors on crowding and tenancy management measures to tackle the issue will be discussed under the Tenancy Management section of this report.

Most of the respondents were reluctant to speak of visitors, as was noted earlier. It was the houses of the elders in the Town Camps that attracted the visitors. Depending on the closeness of the relationships of the visitors to the house boss, they were accommodated inside or on the verandas. Several respondents said that they wished to put up blinds on the verandas for the comfort of their visitors. The reasons ranged from privacy to keeping the cold and dust out of their visitors sleeping quarters. In response to the question on 'What changes would you make to deal with visitors?' nearly 50% of the respondents identified changes to their yards as a means to accommodate their visitors. The solutions for accommodating visitors ranged from building a bough shed to improving the amenity of the existing verandas. However, security too was an important aspect to be considered with regard to visitors, where several respondents wanted lockable storage to protect their valuable belongings, or preferred to sleep in the lounge for better surveillance when they had visitors. Some residents also said that they would like to discourage visitors by putting up higher fences and putting up signs.

### **5.2.3 Responsiveness to climate**

A study was conducted on the impact of the design and material selections of the dwellings on the internal comfort levels of new SIHIP houses in the Top End of the NT (Martel and Horne 2012). The study examined the thermal performance of 10 house designs, many of which are similar to the floor plans of new SIHIP houses in the Alice Springs Town Camps, using AccuRate v.1.1.4.1 software for modelling. All of the SIHIP design houses performed well, achieving 7-star rating, for the hot humid tropical conditions of the Tiwi Islands and Wadeye in the NT. The study found that the insulation and high thermal mass of the SIHIP houses were a significant contributor to their good thermal performance (Martel and Horne 2012). This study should be



extended to evaluate the thermal performance of the SIHIP/Alliance new houses in Central Australia, and also for the refurbished and rebuilt houses done both by the Alliance and Tangentyere.

Territory Alliance (Geoff Barker, pers. comm., 24 July 2012) asserted that their houses performed very well climatically in Alice Springs. Amongst the successes of their design in response to climate were the 1200mm wide overhangs and 20 degree roof pitch that provided shading for the walls. Territory Alliance also claimed that the insulation provided both in the walls and the roof and the sealed eaves ensured better thermal performance than conventional open eaves. Territory Alliance further stated that in order to adapt their designs to Central Australia they went through a process of 'early works' by building and trialling some house designs in advance of the program rollout. The outcomes of these trials showed that the houses were not meeting BCA unless more insulation was added. They also established a Design Reference Group which included the Tangentyere Executive committee, ASTP and Territory Housing. Barker (2012, pers.comm., 24 July) said that although there were many commonalities in the design for the Top End and the designs for Central Australia, Territory Alliance had been locked into a modular plan from the Top End for economic reasons too.

Despite the provision of houses, Memmott et al (2013 p. 144) found that there was a marked preference for residents to spend time in the shaded areas rather than the interiors of the house. Memmott et al feel that preferences for, '... external orientation, and camping in yards and on verandas' are domiciliary behaviours that are worth encouraging and that well-designed housing and yards can support these behaviours as suitable and sustainable response to arid environments.

The RMIT thermal performance study refers to a 'modular design methodology' that was employed by SIHIP to overcome and accommodate climate difference (Martel and Horne 2012 p. 37). How this methodology works is not clear in the report and nor has its effectiveness been tested in Central Australia. In the initial rounds of consultation, many respondents felt that the design of the houses was more suited to tropical humid climes rather than the extreme seasonal variations typical of arid and dry climatic conditions of Central Australia.

Based on interviews conducted in Stage 2.1 (CAT 2012b p. 17), almost all respondents said that their houses were cold in winter, but 'they coped alright with it.' They resorted to a raft of adaptation practices, both social and physical, for coping with comfort. Some of these social practices for keeping warm or cool in the context of the Alice Springs town camp housing are further discussed in two recent reports (Horne et al. 2013; Memmott et al. 2013). There was a mixed reaction to the installed heaters in the Tangentyere rebuilds. The thermal performance of Ritek walls also remains unknown in the Central Australian context, despite its acceptable performance, according to Horne study, in the Top End. Other aspects of the Ritek walls will be discussed further under the section on Repairs and Maintenance.



It was evident on the Alliance refurbished and rebuilt houses that windows had been retrofitted with external shades to cope with solar penetration as well as to provide shade to the walls. Similarly, a few of the Tangentyere rebuilt house walls were retrofitted with a second ventilated custom orb skin to act as a shading device for exposed walls. Evaporative air conditioners were provided to all of the houses and most residents were happy with the air conditioners and their performance. However, the most common issues were with the installation. The most widespread problem was associated with the air conditioner bleed off that stagnated in the yards on account of poor drainage. Tangentyere had developed a means of utilising the bleed off effectively for the irrigation of plants, which failed in some cases because the completed houses remained vacant for several months and the plants did not get watered (A Broffman 2012, pers. comm., 3 August).

As noted in the Stage 1 project report, it did not appear that there was any attempt to orientate new buildings and verandas to facilitate thermal comfort in the summer or winter. It was therefore common to see that some households responded by putting up shades: the Tangentyere rebuilds had already provided canvas blinds on indoor windows to assist with privacy, which also helped with thermal comfort. In sum, it would appear that the new houses were not built to be as responsive to climate as they could have been in either orientation or design.

#### **5.2.4 Economically Sustainable**

Economic sustainability of housing can be hard to define. However, in the case of the GHD guidelines, economic sustainability is closely linked with house durability, ie 'All developments must be designed for long term durability' (GHD 2008b p. 12). This has had a direct impact on tenancy management and on maintenance arrangements that were to form a part of the transition from the existing community housing to public housing models. It also resulted in the abandoning of the 'soft' housing outcomes approach as discussed by Horne et al (2013) towards a 'hard' asset-management approach.

Martel et al (2012) have published a study comparing housing procurement methods for achieving soft (non-housing) outcomes for Indigenous communities. They found in each of their three case studies that the procurement methods adopted had privileged housing outcomes rather than non-housing outcomes for Indigenous communities. SIHIP represented one of the case studies in both the original stage as well as the post-review stage. The authors identify the tendency of the Commonwealth government as clients who favour procurement strategies that can simply measure housing or hard outcomes (number of houses, cost), at the cost of the hard-to-measure amorphous non-housing or soft outcomes (consultation, training, employment). The study finds that in the second or post-review Stage of SIHIP, the Commonwealth Government's procurement strategy veered towards 'a more quantitative assessment

of dwellings produced or refurbished and dollars spent' at the expense of user satisfaction. The study found the quality of construction to be 'high' across the case studies including SIHIP. This was attributed to effectively shared design and performance guidelines in the alliance procurement method (Martel et al. 2012 p. 31).

However, our finding was that although the construction quality was good for some aspects of the new houses and rebuilt or refurbished houses (such as flooring and kitchen benches), there was a lack of consistency with other house components such as fences and repair works carried out in the refurbished and rebuilt houses. Furthermore, we find that the curtailed defects liability period of 6 months (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 24 July) (CTC 2012 p. 35), in the SIHIP project, compared to the usual 12 months does not lend itself to supporting durability and long term work quality. Also, as 'cooperative risk sharing approaches in [SIHIP] reduce competition amongst building contractors', (ANAO 2011; Martel et al. 2012 p. 32), this not only impacts the costs but is also likely to have an impact on quality of materials as well as workmanship.

#### **5.2.4.1 Alliance Contracting**

In an AHURI study analysing socioeconomic spinoffs from aligning contracting methods with community needs (Davidson et al. 2012), the alliance contracting method was found to be a suitable contracting method for 'long-term, large-scale projects' with an evolving scope. It was thought to be better placed than other contracting methods like lump sum contracts in sharing the risk as well as in achieving training and employment outcomes for communities. This optimism, with regard to socioeconomic benefits to the community, is not shared by a number of stakeholders.

The theoretical benefits of the strategic alliancing model that was recommended to the state and federal governments by the consultancy Connell Wagner for SIHIP needs to be weighed against practice. For instance, the transparency which is a critical ingredient of alliance contracting for achieving 'value for money' (Davidson et al. 2011 pp. 80-82) proved to be elusive. Despite attempts to get costing from Territory Alliance and DoH, for the POE, we were unable to make much headway. The Council of Territory Cooperation and the Office of the Northern Territory Coordinator General for Remote Services (CTC 2012 p. 86; NTG-DoH 2012) noted a lack of transparency with regard to SIHIP's financial information, but which was made available to the Council for Territory Cooperation (CTC) after making recommendations in their preliminary reports. It also became common knowledge that it took a review of the SIHIP procurement method to revise and reduce overhead administrative costs from 11.4% to 8% (AG and NTG 2009). The Coordinator for Remote Services noted that, '... relying on large construction companies, which have considerable overheads, in preference to building on the capacity and perhaps the regionalisation of Aboriginal Housing associations, as in Western Australia, is yet to be tested' (NTG-DoH 2012

p.195). Clearly, the method did not prove to be as cost-effective or self-regulating as was originally touted to be. The Auditor-General (ANAO 2011), at the request of the Senate, found the program to be slower than agreed and also found that construction costs in Central Australia were higher than estimates for equivalent jurisdictions elsewhere, which were been attributed to 'teething' problems (NTG-DoH 2012). Territory Alliance was expected to deliver 85 (later 86) new houses, and 135 rebuilt and refurbished houses in the Alice Springs Town Camps against the package budget of \$65.6 million allocated (ANAO 2011 p.84). However, no costs for the completed package had been made public late in 2012 to assess how efficient the alliance contracting method has been in the delivery of Indigenous housing, which in turn made impossible a comparison of the success of this method against the lump sum, local contractor approach followed by Tangentyere in its rebuild program.

In the light of SIHIP-implemented tenancy and property management reforms that demands increased tenant accountability and responsibility for house maintenance (FaHCSIA 2013, p.13), poor decision-making at the design stage in material selection and poor construction are likely to have a direct financial impact on tenants. This is exacerbated by the emphasis by the Department of Housing through their service level agreement with CAAHC and Ingkerreke on recovering repairing and maintenance costs from tenants through the identification of tenant-related damage. This arrangement represents a significant departure from the community housing model where tenants did not pay (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers.comm., 07 August). The issue of the consequences of poor quality construction has been the subject of much discussion, particularly through the work of Healthabitat and Paul Pholeros, who argue that the cause of poor housing conditions cannot rest squarely on Aboriginal residents but must primarily be borne by poor construction quality to begin with (Lea 2010). This issue will be discussed in further detail in the section dealing with repairs and maintenance.

#### **5.2.4.2 Ritek Walls**

Territory Alliance trialled a new proprietary wall system for both internal and external walls that has never been used in Town Camps or remote communities. The technical specifications and details of the wall system can be found in their manual (Ritek 2009). Ritek XL walls consist of prefabricated panels of fibre cement sheet formwork into which in situ concrete is pumped. The fibre cement sheet formwork is integral to the finished concrete wall, which is finished with base coat, top coat and paint. According to their manual, Ritek do not take responsibility for the performance of the joints. The 1.2m wide panels form series of vertical joints between adjacent panels of fibre cement sheet to be finished with jointing tape as recommended. The wall system complies with the prevalent Australian Standards regulatory regime that applies to concrete structures (AS3600).

Despite the focus in the SIHIP Design Guidelines on durability and robustness as well as an emphasis on whole-of-life costs to achieve economic sustainability, the choice of Ritek walls in the new houses will have proved to be rather costly for Territory Alliance. From the earliest stages of the Alice Springs project, there were problems with the Ritek walls and cracks appeared very soon after buildings were handed over to residents (CAT 2012a; Horn 2012). Territory Alliance conceded that the walls had problems, but countered that Ritek were repairing the walls at their own expense despite being outside the defects liability period (G Barker 2012, pers. comm., 24 July)(Horn 2012). This explanation was offered as a means to reassure Territory Alliance's and Ritek's commitment to the ideals of alliance contracting method as well as SIHIP. It is telling that that the cracking was not picked up during the curtailed defects liability period of 6 months from hand over. That the cracks were noted within 12 months of hand over, which is the conventional defects liability period for building contracts, suggests that it may have made better economic sense to keep the 12 month defects liability period. Although Ritek have made repairs at their own expense, it is worth noting that neither Ritek nor Territory Alliance are legally bound to do repairs in the future or past the 6 month mark since hand over. In Stage 2.2 of this evaluation, we found the wall cracks to be less visible on account of the repairs, but in numerous instances, the cracks had reappeared despite the repairs. It is unclear how often Ritek are willing to fix walls at their own cost; suffice to say that the Department of Housing is eventually likely to bear the burden of the repair cost in the absence of any legal understanding with Territory Alliance after the defects liability period. This situation does not augur well for the whole-of-life cost computations that the procurement process was meant to extend.

Furthermore, poorly fitted doors stops did not prevent door handles and key holes in the breezeways from hitting the Ritek wall and causing holes to form readily, demonstrating how Ritek walls are quite susceptible to impact damage. The need for speed for erecting walls has compromised durability in this instance and long term value, despite Alliance claims that the damage was caused by temperature extremes and was 'cosmetic' (CTC 2012 p 35).

#### **5.2.4.3 Screen doors and external lights**

The installed screen doors and external lights clearly did not meet the SIHIP performance guidelines for either TA new or rebuilt and refurbished houses. (Heavier screen doors were used in the Tangentyere rebuilds (pers. comm. September 2013), but the surveys and interviews did not yield enough data to make a robust comparison for the purposes of specific recommendation.) Over the lifecycle of the house, they are likely to be a drain on R&M resources for their frailty both for the screens (which are not 'Crimsafe or equivalent') or the quality of the door itself. In several instances, it was evident that people trying to break into the houses targeted the screen doors, especially in the laundries of the new houses.

#### 5.2.4.4 Quality of workmanship

There was little difference in the quality of workmanship or materials in the different house types between camps. The poor condition of one Alliance refurbished house in Ilpeye Ilpeye stood out amongst all houses that were surveyed. In this particular house, the builders had left the job incomplete (especially painting, flooring, exhaust fan and skirting boards) claiming to the tenant that the completion would be taken care of in the 'second Stage' of SIHIP. It appeared that the job had been very hastily terminated rendering it unuseable, according to the tenant, but incomplete and definitely below public housing standards. The rough in for the installation of the exhaust fan had been abandoned without either fixing up the rough in or by installing an exhaust fan. The tenant responded by first stuffing the gaping hole with an old towel to keep the dust and cold out and subsequently, 12 months later, by hanging a painting over the hole (see Figure 13). Nothing had been done to fix the house in the intervening period. This sort of approach to maintaining housing assets is detrimental to extracting life out of an asset, even though this was not found to be the case with most of the other houses. It is hard to understand how an incomplete job received an occupancy certificate or for that matter how the Department of Housing allocated the house to a rent-paying tenant without fixing it up first. This has a range of implications for tenancy and property management that shall be taken up later in the report.



Figure 13 Incomplete work and tenant's response





Figure 14 Poor quality of workmanship in Warlpiri Camp

In Warlpiri Camp, we found the quality of workmanship and care to be wanting. There appeared to be a greater emphasis on providing damaged walls, doors and external columns with a fresh coat of paint<sup>3</sup> rather than extending the life of the building fabric itself. This approach to repairs does not extend the life of a house but only gives the impression that some work has been done on it, which defeats the purpose of the guideline related to economic sustainability. As only 2 houses (Alliance rebuild and Tangentyere rebuild) were surveyed in Warlpiri Camp, we cannot generalise that the condition of the Alliance or Tangentyere rebuild houses in that camp is significantly different from other camps. However, the design of the houses encountered in Warlpiri Camp was unlike any designs that we encountered in any of the other camps. The age and condition of the legacy housing stock in Warlpiri camp, and therefore the higher costs required in their refurbishment to a uniform standard, may have contributed to the poorer quality of workmanship in both TA and Tangentyere houses.

#### 5.2.4.5 Infrastructure and building program

It is common practice in the construction industry to prioritise infrastructure works, especially in-ground services and civil engineering, over building works. This is done for a number of reasons including Occupational Health and Safety issues, accessibility to the site, disruptions and inconvenience to those living on or in the vicinity of the

<sup>3</sup> Territory Alliance (Barker 2012 pers. comm.) explained external painting as follows '...[external painting is] of low importance when it comes to the NIHG however it can play a significant role in improving the sense of 'change', 'improvement' and a new 'connection' between housing residents and management. This is an area of importance that many recognise and put up as a high priority because people mention it regularly but in terms of 'Functionality' it is a low priority. I think there needs to be some balance with regard to items of work that have a 'psychological' impact on occupancy. BUT functionality MUST come first.'



construction site. Stakeholders such as Territory Alliance, Department of Housing and the Alice Springs Transformation Plan declined to comment on the practice adopted in the Alice Springs Town Camps where the houses were completed and allotted first followed by infrastructure works, other than to offer expediency to meet targets as an excuse for the unusual sequencing of infrastructure works. It was evident in at least one town camp (Larapinta Valley) that damage to an underground water supply pipe due to road construction had inundated a yard in an occupied house. Apart from the health implications and inconvenience inflicted on the tenant, the water was affecting the recently refurbished building fabric itself. Similarly, the poor drainage levels in several yards surveyed had a direct impact on the building fabric because storm water runoff, a leaking irrigation pipe or tap or the air conditioner bleed off stagnated at the edge of the building. Such an approach to construction priorities shortens the lifespan of a building rather than extends it. The impact of the limited work in the yards is discussed further in Section 5.3.



Figure 15 Water pooling in the yard

### 5.2.5 Support for Healthy Living

It is well established in health and wellbeing literature that housing and infrastructure conditions play a key role in influencing health outcomes of people (Robinson and Adams 2008). It has also been noted that poor housing and overcrowding in Indigenous communities leads to poor health outcomes for its residents (ANAO 2010 p. 13). Based on these findings and through their experience of working in APY lands, Healthabitat developed programs such as Housing for Health (HfH) and Fixing Houses for Better Health (FHBH) that has led to 'the environmental health' housing design paradigm for Indigenous housing, and the production of the National Indigenous Housing Guide (Memmott 2004; Memmott and Go-Sam 2003).

While housing and infrastructure are critical environmental factors that affect people's health, Bailie and Wayte (2006) have further identified the 'inadequacy' in the condition of the house as a contributor to poor health in Indigenous communities. The housing discourse in remote Indigenous communities has been largely framed through a housing and health lens by the nine 'healthy living practices' since the mid-1980s. Government policy has continued to back an approach that seeks to promote functioning 'health hardware' in Indigenous dwellings as the primary means to better Indigenous health despite conclusive evidence that functioning health hardware alone cannot lead to improved health outcomes in Indigenous communities. Bailie et al (2010) have concluded that, '... building programs need to be supported by a range of other social and behavioural interventions for potential health gains to be more fully realised.' Bailie et al (2011) also find that poor child health, for instance, has multiple causes that housing programs that primarily target functioning health hardware cannot influence. Other contributing factors to poor child health in Indigenous communities include household crowding, and poor social, economic and environmental conditions that need addressing simultaneously with the building programs.

To take this argument further, Ross (1987 p. 149) in her study of housing for Aboriginal people in Falls Creek commented that any attempts to improve health must involve more than simply providing health hardware or facilities. The facilities must take into account the ways in which Aboriginal people use the facilities in conjunction with a program to encourage safe and healthy use of the facilities.

These arguments endorse the broader 'housing experience' premise that frames this report; while the physical house and the functioning of its hardware plays a significant role in the health and wellbeing of its residents, there is also a need to incorporate the social and economic aspects of the housing experience for sustainable health outcomes.

#### **5.2.5.1 SIHIP and Healthy Living Practices**

The National Indigenous Housing Guide (NIHG) represents the touchstone for the SIHIP Design Guidelines to support healthy living. NIHG stipulates the top priorities for making houses safe from life-threatening risks faced by tenants, which include (CoA 2007 p. 13):

- » electrical safety, to avoid electrocution
- » fire prevention, detection, and means of escape in the event of a fire
- » gas leaks, explosions or severe breathing difficulties
- » structural collapse.

NIHG also identifies the health hardware required to support nine healthy living practices (CoA 2007 p. 13):

1. The ability to wash people, particularly children (B1)
2. The ability to wash clothes and bedding (B2)
3. Removing waste safely from the house and immediate living environment (B3)
4. Improving nutrition: the ability to store, prepare and cook food (B4)
5. Reducing the negative effects of crowding (B5)
6. Reducing the negative contact between people and animals, insects and vermin (B6)
7. Reducing dust (B7)
8. Controlling the temperature of the living environment (B8)
9. Reducing trauma, or minor injury, by removing hazards (B9).

In principle, the demand in the SIHIP program to make houses safe for tenants was more pertinent for the refurbished and rebuilt houses because the ageing building fabric of the existing houses needed a safety upgrade before the health hardware could be upgraded to support the healthy living practices in NIHG. The SIHIP guidelines relied on NIHG to prioritise the scope of works for each refurbished or rebuilt house as follows (GHD 2008a p. 2-4):

- Priority 1 – rectify any unsafe conditions
- Priority 2 – improve and/or provide additional wet areas
- Priority 3 – replace existing wet areas
- Priority 4 – refurbish or replace internal kitchen
- Priority 5 – improve house and yard liveability
- Priority 6 – Improve the liveability of internal spaces.

Priorities 5 and 6 were accorded a lower significance because they represent an indirect impact on resident health, even if they play a significant role in the sense of wellbeing of Indigenous residents as discussed earlier in Section 5.2.1. Territory Alliance’s audit of existing houses and their categorisation for refurbishment or rebuilding were based on this assumption of priority. Against the nine healthy living practices, the SIHIP guidelines and the alliances, including Territory Alliance, prioritised the following four healthy living practices as ‘Critical Healthy Living Practices’ (G Barker 2012, pers. comm., 23 April), which are also the first four healthy living practices listed in NIHG (CoA 2007) :

*B1 Washing People* – translated into ‘improve and/or provide additional wet areas’ or ‘replace existing wet areas’, specifically bathrooms.

*B2 Washing clothes and bedding* –translated into ‘improve and/or provide additional wet areas’ or ‘replace existing wet areas’, especially laundries.

*B3 Removing waste water safely* - translated into 'improve and/or provide additional wet areas' or 'replace existing wet areas', specifically toilets, general drainage and kitchen sinks

*B4 Improving nutrition* – the ability to store, prepare and cook food –translated into 'refurbish or replace internal kitchen'.

According to Territory Alliance (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 23 April) , the scope of the refurbishments was tempered by a 'decreasing scale of priority [of Healthy Living Practices] – critical to possible, depending upon the [s]cope, [p]riorities and [b]udget.' The remaining healthy living practices (B5-B9 in the list above) were considered a reduced priority and were subject to available or remaining funding. Territory Alliance further conceded that the actual condition of the 'legacy status' of many dwellings was underestimated and resulted in a reduced scope, an experience that they claim was also shared by Tangentyere in the refurbishments. This was a Territory-wide issue, not just in the Alice Springs Town Camps. There have been reports from other communities where SIHIP works were carried out (eg Santa Teresa) where residents were '...unable to access any meaningful details on the pre-SIHIP survey or the actual work budgeted and completed on each house' (Laurie 2011 p. 34) . The POE team were unable to get this information from Territory Alliance or Department of Housing: however, Tangentyere Council provided drawings and details of refurbishment works that they carried out. With regard to the Alliance's new houses, there was greater opportunity to achieve all healthy living practices through their design than in the rebuilds and refurbs, but the comparative effects on health could not be a part of this evaluation. To date , the only existing, specific evaluation of health outcomes of the implementation of healthy living practices is the extensive study undertaken by NSW Health of the relationship of hospital separations and housing type (NSWHealth 2010). This study demonstrated a significant reduction in hospital separations for residents of housing that had been fixed up according to the healthy living practices, but it was not possible within the scope of the POE to test whether similar results might be found in the Town Camps.

#### **5.2.5.2 Bathrooms**

The NIHG recommends the following for the design of wet areas:

- » large enough to suit a large family and separated from the laundry and toilet to enable simultaneous use by several people
- » locate in a way to ensure privacy for users and not opening off public areas
- » locate the wet area to catch the sun
- » provide adequate ventilation
- » ensure that wet areas are accessible to people with disabilities.

From the interviews we found that nearly 75% of the respondents felt that their bathrooms worked well for them. The bulk of the complaints had to do with general repairs and maintenance aspects of the bathroom such as low pressure in the showers, leaking drains, loose or broken shower roses, a lack of shower curtain rails, and mouldy ceilings. There were only three issues raised with regard to the design of the bathrooms by the residents. However, there were other issues also identified through the survey process that are discussed in greater detail below together with the issues raised in the interview.

Of the 11 Alliance new houses covered in Stage 2.2, there were only 2 complaints about the bathroom. While one was about the floor drain not working, the second was the lack of enclosure in the shower area causing water to splash everywhere. Although shower curtain rails were provided in all the new houses, very few of the surveyed house residents had installed shower curtains which are to be installed at the user's expense. One resident who was happy with his bathroom said that he needed his broken shower rose replaced.

Of the 16 Alliance rebuild houses, 11 of the residents said that their bathrooms worked well for them. The complaints related to leaking taps, low water pressure in fixtures, a leak in the basin drain, mouldy ceiling and a broken shower rose. One resident expressed a preference for the hand shower and was disappointed that it had been replaced by a fixed overhead shower. At least two residents displayed a dislike for tubs in their bathrooms – one was happy that his tub had been removed and the other unhappy that it had not.

All the four interviewed residents of the Alliance refurbished houses were happy with their bathrooms.

Four of the seven Tangentyere rebuild households interviewed were pleased with their bathrooms. The complaints related to bathrooms were related to a loose shower head, low pressure in the shower and badly located shelving that was a potential risk for children to bump their heads.

In the main, it could be concluded that the new and refurbished bathrooms were performing well in all the house types for their users. The issues with the bathroom were mainly to do with routine maintenance. There was no discernible pattern to issues specific to or across Town Camps.

From the surveys it was evident that tubs in the bathrooms were likely to become a liability not just for residents, but also for asset management. Apart from using up valuable space in the bathroom, the tubs became a place to store discarded clothes or laundry. They are harder to clean and maintain than a shower. With regard to washing babies and convenience, the Housing Guide suggests that the laundry trough offers a better option for washing babies because parents can bathe their children while standing and the risk of drowning is considerably reduced. A laundry trough also needs less water than a tub to perform the same task. The installation of tubs should thus be considered in the context of actual use. As observed, it seemed that the tubs



were being used to overcome the inadequacy of storage, a problem that is likely to be intensified by crowding. It is for this reason as well that the views of householders regarding tubs and their perceived utility be taken into account while planning and designing bathrooms.

The ventilation of the bathrooms, particularly in the Alliance and Tangentyere rebuilds as well as the Alliance refurb, appeared to be inadequate. Mouldy ceilings and walls were a fairly common occurrence in many of the bathrooms visited. Where it is not possible to provide sufficient natural ventilation to the bathroom, an exhaust fan may be considered.



Figure 16 Bathrooms: mouldy ceilings



Figure 17 Heat pump hot water system

Availability of hot water, particularly in the winter, is critical to washing bodies and is specified as an important component for wet areas in NIHG. Many of the refurbished legacy houses are installed with solar hot water systems on their roofs. Some residents in the earlier fieldwork rounds had complained to the researchers about maintaining water temperatures in the shower, especially when there were numerous bodies to wash in the house. It was evident that the system had not been designed for peak demand times and of a suitable volume to meet visitor induced household needs. The tenants said that they had to continuously boost the hot water supply and the timer switch on the system made it very difficult to shower. This would have affected their energy bills too, although nobody made reference to increased energy costs in these households. There were no complaints from the new house residents with



regard to the electrically operated heat pump hot water system in their houses. None of the residents of the new houses complained of inflated energy bills on account of the electrical hot water system.

In some of the Tangentyere rebuilds, we found that the plastic floor drain grates were more susceptible to damage than the Alliance specified steel grates. Similarly, the floor grading in some of the rebuilds was haphazard and in at least 2 Tangentyere rebuilds we found that showers were not accessible to people in wheelchairs, especially in the home of an elderly couple. The issue of accessibility was a problem in many of the legacy houses and is discussed later in section 5.2.10.

The quality of workmanship on the repaired tiled flooring of some of the bathrooms was less than optimal. The floors had been finished rather crudely with mismatching tile colours and sizes that should not have been acceptable to the housing managers.

Fixtures and fittings were not securely fixed in some bathrooms. Taps were found to be wobbly and hand basins were coming off the walls. From a maintenance and cost perspective, it may be more desirable to provide separate hot and cold water faucets as in the Tangentyere dwellings rather than the single lever faucets installed in the Alliance dwellings. Replacing washers are much easier in separate faucets. Moreover, in the event of failure, at least one of the taps is still operational.



Figure 18 Bathroom floors: accessibility, workmanship and floor grates. Poorly fixed hand basin.

### 5.2.5.3 Toilets

The SIHIP guidelines list some key issues to be addressed in the design of toilets. It specifies the minimum number of wet areas (including toilets) that should be provided against the number of residents occupying the house. This can be a difficult standard to achieve given that it has always been hard to ascertain the number of people occupying a house at any given time. Such standards are usually underpinned by conventional assumptions that measure the carrying capacity of a house against the number of bedrooms it contains (Memmott et al. 2012). Furthermore, it is difficult to assign a permanent population to a house because of high levels of temporary mobility amongst Indigenous people (Habibis et al. 2011; Markham et al. 2013). In the case

of the Town Camps, it is the high visitor numbers that have the biggest impact on hardware, since the main tenants themselves are a relatively stable population.

The guidelines recommend installing a hand basin within the toilet area or in close proximity to the toilet for hand washing and hygiene. The survey showed that in the new houses, hand basins were provided in the toilets. Although the small hand basins appeared to be narrow, none of the residents complained about its utility or size. In the refurbished and rebuilt houses the hand basins were either within the toilet or close to it.

The quality of taps and fixtures in the new houses appeared to be good and suitable for supporting healthy living. However, the fixing was not robust enough, especially taps and spouts and hand basins. We found that taps and fittings in the rebuilds and refurbishments to be of a suitable quality to support healthy living practices.

The entry and access to toilets in the new houses was generally secure and discrete. An overwhelming 86% of the respondents across all house types reported that their toilets worked well for them. Only 14%, or 4 respondents said that their toilets did not work well. The problems cited with the toilets were predominantly maintenance issues and the details are given below.

In the Alliance new houses, there was only one complaint about the toilet, which was a broken toilet seat. In the first round of fieldwork, a couple of the residents of a particular type of duplex house had complained that they were discontent that the toilet was separated from the bathroom. However, this disgruntlement was not raised 12 months later, and thus likely no longer considered an issue for the user.

There were only two complaints against toilets in the Alliance rebuilds. The tap in the toilet hand basin was leaking in one toilet while the light was not functioning in the second. Both of these issues point to a maintenance problem rather than to a design problem.

There was only one complaint with a toilet in the Alliance refurb and no complaints about toilets in the Tangentyere rebuilds.

The survey process revealed that in some of the refurbished legacy dwellings, toilet paper holders had been broken and so had some toilet seats. Not all toilets were provided with a hand basin for hand washing. Recessing the toilet paper holders are likely to provide longevity to the fixture, however in all house types the fixtures were surface mounted and therefore more susceptible to damage. However, on the whole, the toilets have performed well.

While the design for toilets in the new houses appeared to account for wheelchair accessibility, this was clearly not the case with the refurbished legacy dwellings. The toilets and their doors were too narrow without the specified clearances.

In one of the houses in Larapinta Valley, a Healthabitat-designed prefabricated wet area module had been attached to the back of the house. Although the fittings and fixtures appeared to have withstood use, it was the unsealed wall junctions between

the old dwelling and the new module that appeared to be problematic because the gaps in the wall junction enabled pests and dust to enter the house. Rather than using preformed wall linings like corrugated sheets, it would be better to use flat surfaces that can be suitably sealed or engineered to ensure sealing since pests and dust pose health problems for residents.



Figure 19 Prefabricated modular ablution & laundry block

#### 5.2.5.4 Kitchens

Nine residents in Stage 2.2 identified kitchens as a part of the house that did not work for them. Of these, two-thirds identified a lack of storage as the source of dissatisfaction with the kitchen. Nearly half disliked the kitchen fit out and a third of them were unhappy with the kitchen size.

As specified in Section 13 of the guidelines (GHD 2008a pp. 53-55), all the kitchens in the new houses are naturally lit and ventilated, and they have been provided durable stainless steel work surfaces and secure steel pantry cupboards for the storage of food. Although space has been provided for fridges, it was doubtful that there was sufficient space for a freezer or plumbing for a dishwasher.

It was more difficult for the designers to comply with the guidelines for the rebuilt and refurbished houses, where they were required to work within an existing building envelope and layout. These limitations also had an impact on the functionality of the kitchens. As identified in the Stage 1 report (CAT 2012a), driven by the need to standardise kitchen benches, the amenity in some of the kitchens was lost to the adjustment of a modular bench in a limited space. The respondent who lamented

the loss of her pantry to a wider modular kitchen bench in the Stage 1 interviews remained disconsolate 12 months later.

Only one resident from a Tangentyere rebuild volunteered to work closely with the designer of the house to ensure that she got the kitchen layout that suited her needs (A Broffman 2012, pers.comm., 3 August). This method of design consultation is in contrast with the method adopted by Territory Alliance that relied on Housing Reference Groups (HRGs) and interaction on a community level to provide more general feedback on the house designs (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 24 July). Related criticism of HRGs and their functioning (Christie and Campbell 2013 p. 16) is discussed further under in Section 5.4 on tenancy management.

The lack of storage has been an issue from the first round of interviews (CAT 2012a p. 33). The complaints were generally with regard to storage in the house rather than to the kitchen alone. However, when asked what attempts the resident had made or will make to overcome this issue, only 6 people said that they would pledge expendable income towards fixing their storage problem and 7 people said that they felt that they had adequate storage. Tangentyere and Territory Alliance too have identified enhancing storage as an improvement they would make for future house designs (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 24 July; A Broffman 2012, pers.comm., 3 August).

In the Stage 1 report (CAT 2012a p. 33), in the new houses, we observed that the kitchen size was not proportionate with the size of the house. The residents of the Alliance rebuilds were most critical of the kitchen (9 of 16 respondents in this category) against only four (out of 11) complaints from the new houses. Apart from dissatisfaction with size and a lack of storage expressed by some, there were also complaints of defective fixtures and whitegoods and a dislike for the stainless steel benches. One of the complaints was that the under-bench cupboards were not large enough to hold pots and pans. The designers for the Tangentyere rebuilds felt that there was need to improve the design of the kitchen cupboards (A Broffman 2012, pers.comm., 3 August); only one resident of the seven Tangentyere rebuilds interviewed felt that the size of the cupboards was small, while another felt the need for more storage. As suggested in the earlier reports, there is a need to rethink how to design storage spaces such that it has empathy for how people use them rather than simply complying with a requirement expressed as a quantity.

To the question, 'What was working for you?', all respondents from Hidden Valley said that they were happy with the kitchen. The majority of the respondents from the other camps also listed their kitchens as something that worked for them. There was however, relatively higher level of dissatisfaction with kitchens in Larapinta and Trucking Yards. There is little data to explain why the two camps had a higher level of dissatisfaction with their kitchens, other than to say that storage issues and size were the main source of dissatisfaction.

At least two respondents said that they did not like stainless steel benches. Through the survey, it was found that the stainless steel benches and splashbacks to be durable and in good shape. They appeared to be easy to clean and were generally well maintained. This suggests that the choice of material for the benches meets the needs of the CHLP - improving nutrition through the ability to store, prepare and cook food. The benches play a critical role in the hygienic preparation of food. The integrated sinks too appeared to be in good shape and there were no direct complaints about the sink or the taps. A lack of water pressure in the tap or a clogged sink drain were the only drawbacks noted through the interview and the survey.

Although there were only three instances where people complained about stoves and ovens not working, the R&M data from CAAHC (2012) suggests that there is a reasonably high cost to Department of Housing or tenants associated with the repairs or the replacement of stoves. This was not reflected in the interviews or the survey where the stoves and ovens were found to be in mostly good condition. This reporting may be a reflection of the asset-orientated focus of housing management processes put in place by the Department of Housing for the Town Camp houses (Horne et al. 2013 p. 44). Stoves are an important and integral hardware component of the critical healthy living practices that enable people to prepare healthy food. In the context of cultural fit, there were no complaints recorded about the design-oriented restrictions to preparing traditional foods, or other obstacles such as understanding appliances, a potential problem noted in much earlier research (Reser 1979 p. 80-81).

The sinks and taps were also found to be in good condition, apart from two complaints about a blocked sink drain and a leaking drain pipe under the sink. In some instances, we found that the sink taps were fitted loosely to the sink. From the R&M data received from CAAHC, repairs to damaged or loose taps appeared to be significantly more prevalent than was evident during the interviews or surveys.

The storage of food was not generally identified as a problem separate from the general storage problems and in Stage 1, many responded positively to the installed kitchen cupboards or pantries. One householder had put a fridge and tins of food in the bedroom, in part due to lack of storage in the kitchen. The drawers in the kitchens were not very robust; in Stage 1, we found five instances where damage had occurred on the plastic drawer fronts, and two more were found to be damaged in at least 2 houses in Stage 2.2. The stainless steel drawer fronts, where provided, showed no signs of damage.



#### 5.2.5.5 Laundries

The SIHIP guidelines recommend that the laundry must be lockable so the householder can limit access to the facilities. The laundry should have sufficient space for an industrial size washing machine, with hot and cold water outlets and a separate drainage outlet, and tenants should be assisted to make an informed decision on the procurement of a suitable washing machine, depending on local conditions and energy efficiency. The original guidelines advised that a laundry trough must be provided in the laundry to enable tenants to wash bedding in hot and cold water; the revised guidelines say that there is no need for hot water supply to the trough, but only cold water. It also suggests the provision of adequate bench space to enable the folding of clothes and for storing a laundry basket. For storage, it recommends the provision of a solid lockable overhead cupboard for storing washing powder and cleaning chemicals, safe from children. It further advises additional shelving for storing other laundry accessories like a 'wire clothes storage basket'. A dust suppressed pathway from laundry to clothesline was also specified (p. 57).

The survey of the new houses indicated that most of the houses had to a large degree been designed to guidelines. Not only were the laundry sizes generous (when compared with most rebuilds and refurbs), they were equipped with a sturdy stainless steel trough, bench, splashback and a small high level shelf. The non-slip tiled floors are easy to maintain and a floor drain with a steel grate is provided for washing floors or to handle spills or a blocked trough drain. The new laundries are well ventilated and naturally lit; some designs also provided direct access from outside with a door that in some instances leads to the clothesline. However, the laundries in the new houses had some deficiencies too:

- » Inadequate storage space was provided for dirty clothes. The opportunity to provide some shelving below the bench was missed and clothes were often stacked in piles on the floor and on benches
- » The overhead shelving was inadequate for storing detergents and chemicals and too narrow for holding other laundry accessories
- » In some of the houses, the flimsy mesh and screen door proved to be a security hazard and was targeted by those seeking to break in as the easiest means of entry into the house
- » The fixed location of the laundry on the floor plan proved detrimental to accessing the clothesline or for orienting the houses to the street, ie the laundry in some instances appeared to be at the front or road facing entrance while the clothesline was located far away from the laundry, often to the back of the house.

There clearly needs to be some flexibility in the house design to enable it to be located contiguously with the drying yard. In some of the Tangentyere rebuilds, a generous laundry was added externally or plugged onto the house quite effectively.





Figure 20 Tangentyere laundry addition

In the Alliance refurb and rebuilds, the aim was to upgrade the existing laundries which were already too small to accommodate a bench or any storage. In some laundries, the washing machine could only be accessed by squeezing in between the washing machine and the trough (see Figure 21). There was generally inadequate storage, with tenants improvising if possible, if not particularly safely (see eg in Tangentyere rebuild image below).



Figure 21 laundry design

The space congestion in the existing laundry also meant that accessibility requirements for the disabled in the SIHIP guidelines could not always be met. As already discussed, this did not seem possible in many of the refurbs and rebuilds since the designers were restricted by the building envelope available to them and within which they needed work. In short, it did not appear that much work was done in these house types to accommodate the SIHIP or the Housing Guide recommendations other than to ensure that the existing hardware was functioning.

Although the original SIHIP guidelines recommended providing a hot water tap to the washing machine, the Housing Guide states that ‘...there is no evidence that washing clothes in hot water will achieve improved health outcomes.’ (NIHG p 89). It appears that the Guidelines, in line with this recommendation and earlier work in the Town Camps under Tangentyere Housing, were revised, and Territory Alliance had capped or disconnected hot water from the washing machines, thus providing only cold water for the washing machines in the new houses, and had disconnected any existing washing machine hot water outlets in the refurbs and rebuilds. In Stage 1 there were a few protests about this, however 12 months later nobody complained about the loss of hot water supply to washing machines.

No modifications were made in the Tangentyere rebuild laundries. In the laundry troughs the Tangentyere rebuilds provided separate wall mounted hot and cold water faucets while Territory Alliance provided bench fixed single lever spouts.

The laundries in some new houses are only enclosed by open security screens despite the Housing Guide’s observation that dusty environments reduce the life of the washing machine. In at least two houses, the laundries were located outside the house which makes the washing machine not only susceptible to damage on account of dust, but also theft or unsolicited use.

The interviews showed that nearly 75% of the respondents felt that the laundries worked well for them. The complaints from the remaining 25% about the laundries included repairs and maintenance issues, the size of the laundry, and other complaints related to security, location and storage. None of the respondents specifically spoke of improving their laundries. Only 3 tenants of the 11 new house households interviewed complained about the laundry, while there were 5 complaints from the 10 Alliance rebuild households. One resident of a new house identified the location of the laundry to be wrong (as discussed above), while another said that the poor security on account of screen doors was an issue (discussed above). Alliance rebuild residents had R&M issues related to a blocked drain and a broken shelf, while two respondents said that their laundry or access to the laundry was too small.

With regard to the drying yard, the Housing Guide states that the drying yard should be easily accessible from the house. It also suggests that the clothesline should be robust and not visible from the street and preferably in a private screened area, and recommends providing a paved area below the clothesline to prevent erosion

and improve access. Providing a path to the drying yard gives access to people in wheelchairs or walking frames. As discussed, the fixed clotheslines especially in some of the new houses were located far from the laundry, as they were at the rear of the house and away from public view. There was no pathway leading to the clotheslines or paving under them. Although the clothesline was mostly firmly secured in the ground, the lines were often broken. This points to some deficiency in the robustness of the materials used. Improving access to the clotheslines and replacing of the lines, however, would appear to be quite simple. Rather than use nylon clotheslines, as in the case of the Alliance structures, Tangentyere used steel wires. Although wire clotheslines are more robust, replacing them is much harder and more expensive when they do break.

### 5.2.6 Accessibility

The SIHIP guidelines demand that all new house and yard developments be designed and constructed to enable 'visitability' as defined by AS4299 for adaptable housing. The SIHIP design guidelines (GHD 2008a p. 30) define 'visitability' as: 'The essential feature of adaptability is that the elderly and people with disabilities can visit all community housing, ie they have accessible entry to the house and each house has provision for a 'visitable' toilet'.

This is in response to the disproportionately high levels of disability found amongst Indigenous adults in Australia. The guidelines have adopted a few select features from AS 4299 which, according to the guidelines, ought to manifest in wider door openings, and grab rails in toilets. The guidelines also recommend consultation with communities to better cater to member's specific needs.



Figure 22 accessibility issues

Despite this critical design guideline, our interviews and particularly the surveys showed insufficient attention has been paid to enable 'visitability', even in houses where it is known that disabled relatives visit regularly. In an Alliance rebuild house, where the main tenant is elderly and in a wheelchair, even the main door width

was not modified to enable her wheelchair to pass comfortably (Figure 22). The door widths do not comply with AS1428. In these houses, tenants are required to make adaptations as can be seen in Figure 22. In the absence of a shower bench and inadequate grab rails, a plastic chair functions as a shower bench and in a new house, a sheet of plywood performs the function of a ramp.

By contrast, we also came across an Alliance rebuild house where special effort had been made to create a safe and compliant external ramp for a wheelchair bound resident (see Figure 23). Even though adaptability features were not adapted throughout that house, there appears to have been recognition and acknowledgement of special physical needs of at least one resident. That this courtesy was not extended to the resident of another house in another camp suggests an inconsistency in the approach to accessibility.



Figure 23 Modifications for accessibility; before (left) after (right)

The lack of accessibility fixtures and consideration in the design of the rebuilds and refurbishments could partially be explained by the limitations of budget and the existing building fabric within which adaptations needed to be made. However, it was evident that although door widths and accessibility features were compliant in the new houses, the raised verandas and plinths to external doors did not meet the criteria for ‘vistability’.

Territory Alliance (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 24 July) said that they had consulted an occupational therapist to get a better understanding of disability requirements. Territory Alliance also advised that there was room to retrofit houses with ramps and handrails should the need arise; however, the cost of putting in accessibility features in the houses from the start precluded its inclusion in the contract. Moreover, TA said that they did not receive clear instructions from the Department of Housing on specific houses that needed accessibility features since the houses had not been allocated prior to commencement of work.

Under the new Draft Policy for Remote Housing (NTG-DoH 2013a p. 13), ‘Tenants residing in dwellings with pre-fitted disability modifications may be relocated to



another dwelling so the [DoH] may appropriately accommodate a priority applicant who is frail aged, has a disability, special need or requires a Carer.' Furthermore, it adds that '[DoH] and Community Housing Officers will work collaboratively and in a culturally appropriate manner to facilitate the relocation process.' This represents a lack of consideration for households trying to settle into public housing. It would be more sensible, economically, to make houses adaptable for disability from the start so tenants do not need to be relocated.

### **5.2.7 Safety and Security**

The notion of safety in some of the housing literature has been mainly associated with health (Ross 1987 pp. 130-131). With regard to the role of housing in alleviating security, Ross observes that in her study group in Falls Creek, dangers were perceived to be from environments rather than from the dwellings themselves. Reser (1979 pp. 82-83) highlights the heightened sense of trouble that is expected when different family groups converge. Some of the larger Town Camps such as Larapinta Valley and Hidden Valley have supported different family groups, insulated by wide open expanses of open land between family groups. Houses in these camps are arranged in discrete clusters and inhabited by family groups, and any disruption of this arrangement can lead to insecurity and anxiety. Reser further observed that physical closeness is an important aspect of perceived security which manifests in as many as 4 people sharing a bedroom in a 'European house'. This behaviour, he surmises, can and should influence the design of the house as well as bedroom size whilst designing for Aboriginal people.

Reser (1979 pp. 89-90) also drew attention to another aspect of security that housing can address. This relates to property control or the ability to exercise control over personal property. The capacity for residents to keep their belongings safe in the house has immediate implications on the provision of lockable storage. Among the principle purposes of a dwelling or even a traditional structure is to store. This problem is exacerbated by the demand sharing or where reciprocal obligations for sharing cannot be easily declined without some form of sanction or retribution (Sutton 2007 pp. 20-21).

The SIHIP guidelines (GHD 2008a pp. 20-21) draw attention to the role of the house in the provision of safety and security to residents by acting as a 'fortress' to which residents who feel threatened can retreat. It enables the residents to exercise some control on their physical environment which has a positive impact on their sense of wellbeing and consequently health. The lockable rooms offer safe refuge for women and children who may be at or perceive to be at risk of violence fuelled by alcohol, especially at night. The guidelines also allude to the stresses that arise from a loss of privacy and control of the physical space of the house induced by crowding. It emphasises the need to design Indigenous houses to perform the function of a safe and secure retreat since it has a direct bearing on the comfort and health of residents.

The Guidelines describes how designers have traditionally achieved this goal in their designs for houses. The 'fortress house' enables and maintains good surveillance as well as hardware and design that provides the residents with the capacity to withdraw from conflict. It is characterised by solid masonry walls, security screens to all openings, mesh screens in verandas, locks on all doors and windows. The Guide cautions that such an approach to design and living also has negative impacts on excess energy cost outgoings for lighting and air conditioning where houses tend to be dark and shuttered almost all the time. Furthermore it argues that such design can be detrimental to social interactions within the community. The guidelines (2008a p. 21) recognises that violence in communities is a reflection of social problems within the community and that , ' Housing [or housing design] alone is not a solution to these social problems.' Rather than building fortresses, it recommends innovative alternatives like improved community level area lighting which have limited impact on the internal design of houses or its functioning.

The Stronger Futures community consultation report (AG 2011b pp. 44-50) also highlights community perceptions of how communities could be made safer for community members. These include some of the suggestions made in the guidelines such as more streetlights, putting in road signs and speed breakers on roads, in addition to suggestions with regard to disruptive child and youth behaviour. Amongst the suggestions to tackle the social issues included strengthening culture, enhancing training, more safe houses, improved police responsiveness, more intensive night patrols and keeping some of the special measures introduced through the NTER in place.

The NT Government have also appointed Public Housing Safety Officers (PHSO) whose primary responsibility to assist the work of Territory Housing in reducing antisocial behaviour within and around public housing. The Public Housing Safety Officers have powers to direct individuals to stop antisocial behaviour, ask visitors to leave Territory Housing premises, ban people from entering TH premises for up to 12 months and confiscate alcohol. They derive their powers from the NT Housing Act. The PHSOs can be identified by their uniforms or the specially marked cars that they drive in or can be contacted through a phone hotline (FaHCSIA 2013; NTG-DoH 2013c).

A number of the respondents were pleased with the introduction of PHSOs in their camps and were of the opinion that they were better than the police or night patrols in managing antisocial behaviour in the Town Camps. In the second round of interviews, respondents were less positive towards PHSOs, claiming that they simply drove around without bothering to get out of their cars.





Figure 24 Public Housing Safety Officers. Source: PHSO factsheet Available: [http://www.housing.nt.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/137726/PHSO\\_factsheet\\_web.pdf](http://www.housing.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/137726/PHSO_factsheet_web.pdf)

When asked if they felt safe in their house, an overwhelming 90% of those interviewed affirmed that they felt safe while all the respondents said that they felt safe in their respective camps. The respondents attributed this sense of safety, whether in the house or camp, to being close to family. Most of the residents (71%) were concerned that the sense of security that derives from proximity to family could be compromised by Territory Housing's allocation processes that disregard family ties and the sense of security that comes from it.

Nearly 50% of respondents appreciated the Territory Housing rules that empowered the house bosses to ask long-staying visitors to leave, thus restoring their sense of control over their physical domain. A few of the respondents even recommended a reduction of the currently permissible 6 week limit for visitors to 2 weeks. Nearly a sixth of the respondents said that they liked the safety officers since they were helpful, particularly with regard to visitors. Another recent study of tenant experiences of housing reform in remote Indigenous communities also had similar findings with regard to visitor management (ACG 2013 pp. 33-34). The findings of this evaluation also suggest that residents of the new houses found it easier to manage visitors than those in the rebuilt or refurbished houses.

Other respondents identified the fencing, gates, locks, streetlights and dogs as sources of security.

In response to the SIHIP design guidelines, we observed that the new SIHIP houses had safety screens on all external doors and motion-sensor external lights (Figure 26). In the larger camps, street lighting and paved footpaths have been provided and practically all respondents were very happy with this change from the perspective of safety. The new and well-lit roads and footpaths were welcomed because they represent some institutional consideration for child safety. Most of the respondents indicated that they felt safe in their houses and camps on account of closeness to kin.

With regard to the security of belongings, we found in a couple of houses that rather than keeping fridges in the kitchen they were kept in bedrooms. The residents explained that this was done to prevent people who broke into their houses from stealing food since they could lock the bedroom doors. It is conceivable also that

what manifested as inadequate storage in bedrooms in our and others (Memmott et al. 2000 p. 102) perception, could well have been simply a means of keeping prized belongings safe behind locked doors. Based on reports of high costs associated with replacing damaged bedroom door locks, Territory Alliance specified snibbed door privacy locksets on the bedroom doors to overcome the problem of lost keys. While from within the bedroom a turned snib locks the door, from the outside the lock can be released by a screwdriver or a coin. The new locks compromised security on both levels for many respondents, and they expressed their displeasure about this especially in the early rounds of the fieldwork. Perhaps it is worth considering introducing digital combination locks that allow security codes to be regularly changed; however, it may give rise to other problems. Territory Alliance (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 24 July) deleted combination locks from their specifications because they found them to be ineffective and of poor quality. It does not appear that there are any easier answers to the problem of bedroom door locks.

The flimsy screen doors in the TA houses, with a relatively easy to unlock screen lock set in the externally oriented laundries, also served as a convenient access point into the house for people breaking in to houses. Although Territory Alliance attempted to overcome this problem by installing a wide Perspex lock plate that restricted access to the lock, it was clear that it was not preventing break-ins. The lightweight nylon screens are easy to perforate and we did not find 'Crimsafe' quality mesh on any house that we inspected. In one of the houses, the tenant had installed a bicycle cable lock to prevent potential break-ins in the future (Figure 25).



Figure 25 Flimsy insect screen doors



Figure 26 Flimsy external security motion-sensor lights

While the external lights enable and enhance the ability for surveillance, the lack of protection to the plastic light fitting and motion sensors seem to have defeated the purpose. In most of the houses, the external lights have been broken either because they are a hindrance to those wishing to break in or an inconvenience for the residents themselves who may feel that the automatic lights impinge on their privacy in their yards.

In some of the older houses that had been refurbished and rebuilt, several respondents complained that the poor condition or even the non-existence of the gates and fences compromised their sense of security. This experience is intensified by a preference for an externally oriented lifestyle. This was particularly felt by households that were primarily comprised of women and girls. The lack of control over who enters or trespasses on the yard also contributes to the lack of security and safety for the dwellers. The condition of front fences in the designated growth camps was found to be better after the completion of infrastructure works and the realignment of yards and roads. However, the fences on the sides and back of the houses remained untouched and in poor condition. Some tenants in Trucking Yards felt that the significantly increased yard size compromised their sense of physical control of the yard thus leading to frustration and anxiety for its upkeep. Further, the survey showed that particularly in the smaller camps that despite complaints, fences and gates had not been repaired, further undermining the sense of security.

### 5.2.8 Feeling and Housing Experience

The reaction to design aspects of the housing was varied and changed over the course of the evaluation. While residents expressed strong feelings about design aspects such as house layouts, choice of finishes and building materials during Stage 1, by the second and third rounds of fieldwork, the tenants appeared to be adapting. There was less disgruntlement being expressed about the nature of the work carried out, and not just because their attention was being taken up by their experience of housing

management. For example, even though the surveys suggested that the orientation of many of the new houses were not well suited to good thermal comfort in the arid climate, many of the residents by the second and third interviews had begun to adapt, feeling that the evaporative air conditioning and the bar heaters, carpets and so on they had introduced had made their homes more comfortable.

In Stage 1, many respondents had reacted adversely to the ceramic floor tiles, claiming that they were too slippery. However, by Stage 2.2, they were quite pleased with how easy the tiled floors were to maintain and clean. Similar reactions and changing opinions were noted with regard to stainless steel benches in kitchens and powder-coated steel pantry cupboards. Several tenants commented about the awkward location of the drying yards in relation to laundries in different house types, but were less vocal about this in Stages 2.1 and 2.2, choosing instead to adapt, such as by hanging laundry over the fence (Figure 27).



(Figure 27 Adaptation to poor clothesline location.

There were some elements of house design that the tenants reacted to consistently, particularly the yards and a sense of insecurity that was intensified by the neglect of fencing and gates. It was clear that the design and utility of yards is critical to the enjoyment of houses in Town Camps due to preference for an externally oriented lifestyle. The reaction to the absence of fences and gates or their poor condition pointed to yet another important function of the yard in town camp living, namely its function as a buffer zone that provides a sense of security and spatial control for residents.

#### **Yards:**

As noted, there was a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with the yards and the amenity that they offered both for tenants and visitors. Despite the guidelines highlighting the need for improving outdoor living conditions and amenity, insufficient



resources were devoted for this purpose as a part of the housing program. The poor condition of the gates and fences in some houses contributed to a lack of feeling of safety. Many respondents felt that the yard and covered outdoor spaces like verandas were an ideal place to accommodate visitors and thereby reduce the stress of overcrowding, their inability to improve amenity for visitors has become a source of stress.

The poor drainage in many yards, the presence of discarded white goods and cars and lack of tidiness contributed to many residents' compromised self-image. Many of the residents and their relatives who had well-kept yards felt pride in its condition.

Residents' desire to improve amenity in their yard was thwarted by structural constraints, primarily money as well as public housing rules, such as getting permission and approvals for improvements. The lack of control of the immediate environment has been identified as a source of stress for Indigenous people (Memmott et al. 2012; Reser 1979), and this was reflected in some of the respondents' comments. This did not mean that some adaptation was not occurring regardless; campfires were appearing in yards despite restrictions imposed by the housing managers.

### **Security:**

The sense of security experienced by the majority of tenants was primarily through the knowledge of close physical proximity of family and kin. Traditional settlement patterns in Town Camps that incorporated this predate all tenancy management models imposed on the Town Camps. This source of security is threatened by the public housing allocation process that has its own set of priorities based on needs that ignore traditional kin-based settlement preferences.

Other than comments about locks and yard fences and gates, insecurity arising from the physical fabric of the house did not emerge as a significant contributor, even though there were cases of loss, woefully described, due to poor locks or security. The ACG report (2013 p. 64) on the tenant's experience of property and tenancy management found that women felt 'much safer' living in the new houses on account of less crowding.

Although it is evident that there were some poor design decisions made in the security arrangements for the houses in terms of material selections as well as robustness of the solutions, it was clear that physical design of the house could only play a limited role in building a sense of security, with other factors affecting a feeling of security such as tenure and confusing property management. That Territory Housing had sought to address some of the more general social factors that lead to insecurity was also addressed through regulatory measures, such as limiting the stay of visitors and introducing safety officers who were empowered to enforce the rules.

What appeared to frustrate tenants more than broken locks and flimsy doors was the seemingly lackadaisical responses by Territory Housing in fixing the damage caused by break-ins by inebriated or vengeful visitors. From the responses to the interviews, it became obvious that residents approved also of structural measures

such as the regulations and tenancy management measures to control visitors and enhance the house boss' control over the house to enhance security.

The slow response to repairs of damage caused by break ins or 'pay back' inflicted on the house aggravated the perceived and actual loss of control experienced by the house boss over the security of the house. The added burden of reporting damages to the police and the risk of having to pay for damages so inflicted on the house, serve as deterrents for the tenant adding and prolonging insecurity for the household.

The role of tenancy management and asset management in the enhancing people's sense of security can therefore not be underplayed. More efforts need to be made to offer a comprehensive approach to and support for the security and safety of tenants.

### **Climate responsiveness:**

The residents showed a high level of ingenuity in adapting to the lack of responsiveness to the climate. Although in Stage 1 some residents said that the house designs were meant for Darwin and the Top End and therefore more suited to its tropical humid conditions, by the latter stages of the study, people spoke less frequently about the suitability of the house designs to the arid climate of Central Australia. They felt that the air conditioners had been very good in overcoming heat stress in a particularly hot summer recently passed. This only reinforces Horne et al's (2013) finding that mechanical systems for cooling has impacted the social practices of keeping cool. It remains to be seen how rising power costs in the Territory will impact their use in the future. Memmott et al (2013 p. 144) found that Aboriginal residents in their study were aware of the impending increase in energy costs and some had even modified their use of electrical appliances for this reason. Unlike the air conditioners, the heaters installed by Tangentyere received an ambivalent response from residents and many found them to be ineffective, preferring to buy bar heaters. The preference for sitting around an outdoor fire in line with surveillance behaviours, as already discussed, may also be a factor in the ambivalence towards the indoor heating options.

The problem of dust in the semi-open sleep outs and breezeways in the design of some of the new houses has been identified as a problem by some residents who complain that it is hard to keep both the dust and winter cold out and therefore impacts the useability of this space. Tangentyere overcame this problem in one of their rebuilds by providing heavy canvas blinds that not only offered privacy to the users of the sleep out but also kept the dust and cold out.

As residents become dependent on mechanical means of keeping cool or warm, it is expected that there will be higher wear on the building infrastructure. Systemic delays in repairs and maintenance approvals will need to be addressed more efficiently.

The choice of some finishes and building materials made by housing developers that were questioned at first, seem to have been largely accepted by tenants over time. However, the inappropriateness of those choices is experienced by the tenants through a property management regime that penalises 'wilful' or tenant-related



damage that is poorly defined. Furthermore, some of the tenants' expectations of material choice and design could have been better managed through a more inclusive design process.

In sum, tenants' perceptions of the design of their houses changed over time. Their feelings towards the physical form of their houses were transformed from the initial sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction into a more reconciliatory position that was precipitated partly by their ability to actively adapt to their physical environment. Critical to this ability to adapt, however, is the housing regulatory environment directed at public housing tenants that may cripple tenants from making active adjustments to enhance their housing experience. A punitive regulatory environment rather than an enabling one could be one factor, amongst others (like money), that determines whether the design is part of a good or a bad housing experience for town camp tenants.

### **5.3 Maintenance**

Maintenance of house assets has significant consequences for the sustainability of housing. One of the fundamental aspects of SIHIP was the link established between the lease of town camp land and the projected life of housing. That is, the whole of life costing that is built into the SIHIP design guidelines assumes a life of 30 years for a public housing asset which corresponds with the minimum long-term lease duration (Appendix - NPARIH Agreement in FaHCSIA 2013 p. 81) sought by the Commonwealth Government. This emphasis on whole-of-life cost is important given that the bulk of the houses in the Town Camps were either refurbished or rebuilt to match 'public housing standards'. The fact remains that most Indigenous legacy housing stock, whether remote or in Town Camps, from inception and through most of its life, has not been subject to the standards and practices that mainstream public housing units are governed by (FaHCSIA 2013 p. 33). This has flow-on effects, not only in tenant dissatisfaction, but on the cost of supporting effective and quality maintenance programs from an operations perspective: for example, CAAHC (J Berriman & M Davidson pers.comm., 07 August 2012) highlighted the discrepancy in the annualised payout for R&M between a mainstream public housing unit (\$1,200 + \$800/unit/yr) and Indigenous public housing unit (\$7,300/unit/yr). This highlights the issue about the quality of the Indigenous housing stock that has now been inducted into the public housing stock at a much higher maintenance cost than average.

The review of NPARIH 2008-2013 (FaHCSIA 2013 p. 64) identified the need for a resolution to future government policy to fund the future repairs, maintenance and rebuilding of ageing infrastructure in remote Indigenous communities.

The benchmarks for the whole of life cost as identified in the SIHIP Performance Guidelines (GHD 2008b p. 7) should take into account:

- » maintenance and servicing
- » removal and replacement
- » ease of access
- » durability and robustness of materials and construction.

The guidelines further state that, 'Designs are to be constructed for sustainability, life-cycle costs and maintainability. Designs, which opt for minimising capital cost at the expense of on-going maintenance costs, are unacceptable and will be rejected.' Many of these design issues have already been discussed in the preceding section on the design of houses. This section of the report is primarily concerned with comparing tenant's experiences of ongoing maintenance arrangements against what was promised under the lease agreements and SIHIP/NPARIH with the Town Camps. It will also demonstrate the importance of an effective house repairs and maintenance program in improving the overall housing experience of tenants.

The NPARIH promised a 'robust repairs and maintenance program...to support longer asset life'. It also required the Territory government to set up a 'comprehensive rolling program of repairs and maintenance for all community houses by 2010...' (FaHCSIA 2013 p. 33). As a part of the lease negotiations with Tangentyere Council, the Commonwealth Government offered up to \$200,000 to Tangentyere Council to establish the Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (CAAHC) (Macklin 2009) which would be contracted under a service level agreement with Territory Housing to provide both property and tenancy management services to the Town Camps for a period of three years, after which it would go to tender with a preference for Indigenous subcontractors. CAAHC took over property and tenancy (in a limited capacity, as discussed below) management functions in the Town Camps from Tangentyere Council in 2011 after complying with DoH's requirements of financial and administrative autonomy from Tangentyere Council. Late in 2012, tenders were called again for both property and tenancy management of the town camp houses. The property management functions since late 2012 have been contracted to Ingkerreke, an Indigenous subcontractor, while CAAHC have retained the limited tenancy management function contract.

Under contractual arrangements since 2009, all contractors who sign service level agreements with DoH for property management, including CAAHC and Ingkerreke, are required to inspect, assess and photograph R&M requests received from tenants. These reports are then forwarded to DoH for approval to execute (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers.comm., 07 August; S Harley 2012, pers.comm., 27 July). According to CAAHC, delays in repairs that a lot of tenants report is on account of the turnaround time that DoH takes to approve or disapprove a job.

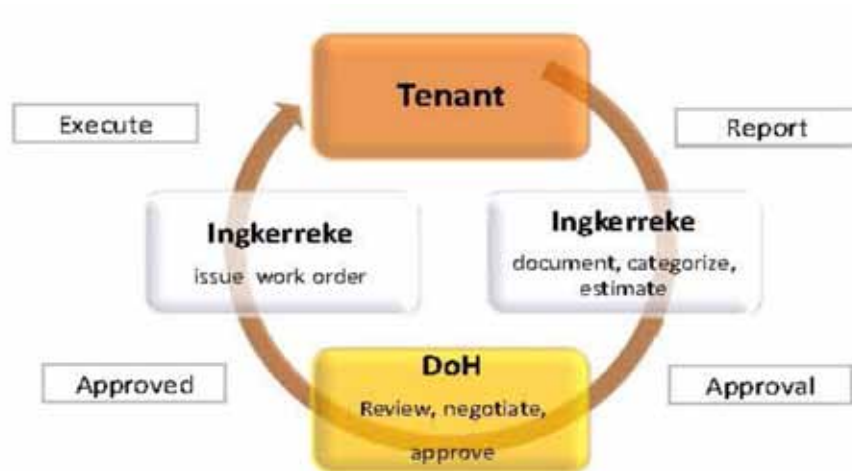


Figure 27 Property Management arrangements under the public housing model

In the Commonwealth Government's consultations on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (AG 2011b p. 65), the government reported that in response to the question on improving the way housing is provided and managed in remote locations, repairs and maintenance featured high on perceived priorities followed closely by more housing and overcrowding. The report said that the most frequent comments with regard to R&M were about delays in completing maintenance tasks, ensuring that the tasks were done to an acceptable standard using quality fixtures and better client service through direct contact or through customer hotlines. The consultations involved 100 communities and Town Camps across the Territory. Our findings in the Alice Springs Town Camps were a reinforcement of the same sorts of R&M issues that emerged in the Commonwealth Government report. The issue of timeliness of repairs under SIHIP has also been identified by the Commonwealth Ombudsman as a problem (CO 2012 pp. 34-38).

There are other issues related to the maintenance program that have been identified in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report. The current system relies on tenants reporting damages to property managers (CO 2012 pp. 34-38) and tends to therefore be reactive rather than preventive. The report also highlights the following weaknesses in the property management in SIHIP:

- » The quality of communication – complaints getting lost in the system, lack of clarity about how the system works or what recourse tenants have for inaction, poor feedback mechanism to keep tenants updated
- » •Timeliness and responsiveness to R&M requests – systemic problems around timeframes for repairs, monitoring of progress by DoH, classification (immediate, urgent or routine) of repair requests
- » Weaknesses in the systems and processes underpinning the new arrangements – lack of a centralised, coordinated and shared R&M database accessible to all levels of service providers, lack of transparency at the front end of the process.

CAAHC took the Housing for Health (HfH) approach to their maintenance contract, which is consistent with the SIHIP design guidelines and the Commonwealth Government's environmental health approach to the design of Indigenous settlements and houses implemented through the NIHG (Mansell and Sowerbutts 2011 p. 8). This approach has been labelled as the Maintaining Houses for Better Health (MHBH) and was the outcome of a research project funded by The Fred Hollows Foundation and in partnership with Healthabitat.

MHBH resulted in the development of an R&M database that is health-focussed and stresses the maintenance and sustenance of the critical healthy living practices identified in the Housing Guide. It also sought to build in a livelihoods component for creating sustainable employment opportunities, by building capacity for local Indigenous people to work in the housing sector by aligning the software interface with the user's workflow. The report (Mansell and Sowerbutts 2011 p. 8) claims that the health and safety focus of the program keeps it people-directed rather than asset-oriented. Although such an approach purports to locate people's health at the centre of its objectives, it still privileges assets, albeit health hardware, over the people's own requirements for and perceptions of health and wellbeing. The method uses a generalised, objective survey and audit process for collecting information on dysfunctional health hardware in houses derived from the Housing Guide. As a result, it underplays the individualised maintenance needs of long term and new tenants. This has a significant impact on how tenants in the Town Camps experience the R&M services.

The MHBH R&M approach therefore has its limitations in responding to the real and often unexpressed needs of town camp residents. Although the MHBH approach may have a reasonable fit with DoH's environmental health categorisation of complaints, where health hardware issues are accorded 'immediate' status, the tenants may have their own set of priorities which are not reconciled with the priorities allocated by CAAHC and DoH. There is an opportunity to develop an R&M approach that is more sympathetic to and aligned with town camp residents expressed housing repair priorities rather than a utilitarian approach that allows the operator's priorities to dominate the R&M discourse.

Regardless of who runs the R&M program, DoH, CAAHC or the Housing Association, if tenant satisfaction that leads to sustainable asset management is the objective of the R&M program, then tenants and their priorities must be the basis of the management program whether it is property or tenancy.

### **5.3.1 Tenant Experience**

Although the ACG report (2013 pp. 26-37) claims that it seeks to record and analyse tenants' experience of the NPARIH property and tenancy reforms, the method of enquiry mainly queries their understanding of their rights and responsibilities as public housing tenants. Based on a wider review of the literature, and based on

interviews with stakeholders and tenants, we found that in order for assets to be maintained, especially in the Indigenous context, it is necessary to use specific methods for collecting information on the ground.

These methods include having accessible people on the ground who tenants can approach to report repairs and maintenance issues to.

The NPARIH objective of ensuring that rental houses are well maintained and managed has identified a few performance indicators to measure outcomes (ANAO 2011 pp. 73-74):

- » Number of households covered by tenancy management arrangements overseen by state or territory government
- » Number of dwellings inspected through a standard property inspection regime
- » Number of dwelling repairs and maintenance works completed as programmed using property condition data
- » Average time taken to complete identified repairs and maintenance.

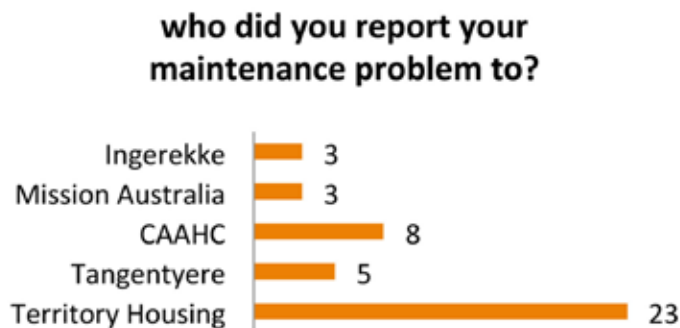
It appears that the number of dwellings and 'fixes' alone satisfy the program's objectives of protecting the asset. Such an asset-based approach that denies the tenant's experience of repairs and maintenance is also evident in the framing of the R&M process - 'robust and standardised tenancy management...that ensures rent collection, asset protection and governance arrangements consistent with public housing' and 'a program of ongoing maintenance and repairs that progressively increases the life-cycle of remote indigenous housing from seven years to a public housing-like lifecycle up to 30 years'. The performance indicators primarily concern themselves with asset management and maintenance using a quantitative approach that quantifies actions: they do not include any qualitative measures to assess tenant's experiences of how these changes have impacted their experience of housing.

This POE addressed this issue in part by asking questions such as: Who did tenants report problems to? What was the process? Was it effective? How did they think it can be made better? The focus was on the experiential as well as a practice-oriented approach. That is, the first surveys detailed defects or other problems, and the second surveys 12 months later reviewed the damage to see if they had been fixed. This provided critical insight into determining the 'average time taken to complete identified repairs and maintenance'. Our findings and analysis are presented in the following section.

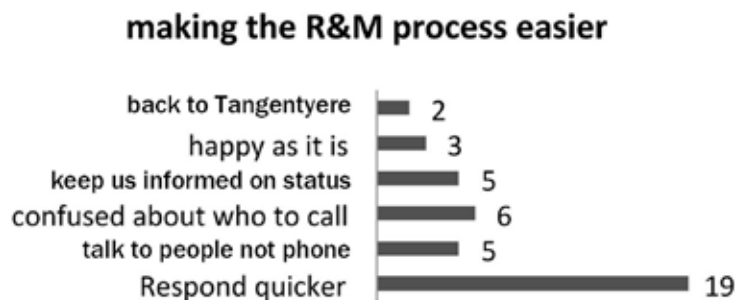
### 5.3.2 Interviews

In the March 2013 interviews, we found that nearly 86% of the respondents said that they had reported an R&M problem recently. Of these respondents, 14 said that they had reported the problem in 2012 and 8 said that they had lodged a report 1-4 months back. This clearly indicates and reconfirms the findings of other studies with regard to bottlenecks in the clearance of R&M jobs.

Delay in response to a reported R&M issue could partly be explained by the high level of confusion that tenants face with regard to who they should be reporting the problem to. In the Stage One interviews in March 2012, many tenants did not make distinction between ‘Tangentyere’, ‘Affordable Housing’ and ‘Territory Housing’ when it came to reporting R&M issues with their houses. When queried about this confusion about reporting, DoH in an interview stated that it did not matter to who it was reported to, either way things were fixed (S Harley 2012, pers.comm., 27 July). Many of the residents that we spoke to in March 2013 were unaware that the R&M contract had been handed over to Ingerrekke; eg, only three households had reported their issues to Ingerrekke and three reported them to Mission Australia (see Graph 5). Nearly 60% of the respondents reported their R&M problems to Territory Housing and 13 to Affordable Housing and Tangentyere, who are no longer involved with property management.



Graph 5 Reporting maintenance issues



Graph 6 Making the R&M process easier



When asked about what happened after reporting, 50% said that the problem was fixed but 75% of those who had problems needed to follow up on the problem to whomever they reported it to before it was fixed.

The lack of transparency and ineffective communication with tenants about repair works remained a problem. Sixty-eight percent of the tenants who reported a problem were unaware if the damage they were reporting was tenant-related damage (TRD) or not and whether they would therefore be required to pay for it. According to CAAHC, approximately 60% of problems are TRD, and therefore payable by the tenant under the NT Residential Tenancies Act. CAAHC's figures appear to contrast markedly with the results of Healthabitat surveys that assessed in broad surveys of Indigenous housing that 65% of items needing repair was due to poor maintenance, 25% to faulty installation, and only 10% to householder misuse (Lea & Pholeros 2010, p 192). Whatever the balance between responsibility for maintenance and TRD, and whether or not R&M can 'fix' flimsy installation, are not questions the property managers were able to resolve given a more limited set of options for accountability. Even so, tenants remained in the dark; only five respondents were aware of how much they were required to pay for repairing the damage.

Although nearly all tenants were aware that tenants pay for and are responsible for wilful damage inflicted on the property including damage caused by visitors, the lack of clarity around the classification of damage is a source of stress. Many respondents said that even though they had not paid for any visitor-related damage so far, it worried them, which then had an impact on their families. Berriman and Davidson (2012, pers.comm., 07 August) feel that the transition to making tenants responsible for their house represents a major 'mind shift' for people who have never had to be responsible for their house. This is also a finding of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (2012 p. 41) with regard to tenancy procedures introduced through remote housing reforms that have been in effect in the NT since 2008.

When a visitor damages the property, it is incumbent on the tenant to report the damage to the police. This could have several potential repercussions for the tenant. This requirement could therefore be detrimental to reporting damage when it occurs. At least one of the respondents noted that an angry visitor damaged the power box of the house. CAAHC has said that replacement of damaged power boxes is fairly common. It is worth noting, further, that one of the tenants commented that if visitors paid for damage, they also felt that they had an entitlement to stay longer than welcome, a situation that poses a conundrum for residents.

The residents were asked about how they thought that the repair process for their houses could be made easier; 19 of the respondents said that quicker response would be good, while six people said that they were confused about who to call. Talking physically to a person rather than on a phone as a preferred means for reporting and a better system for keeping tenants informed on the status of their complaint were also

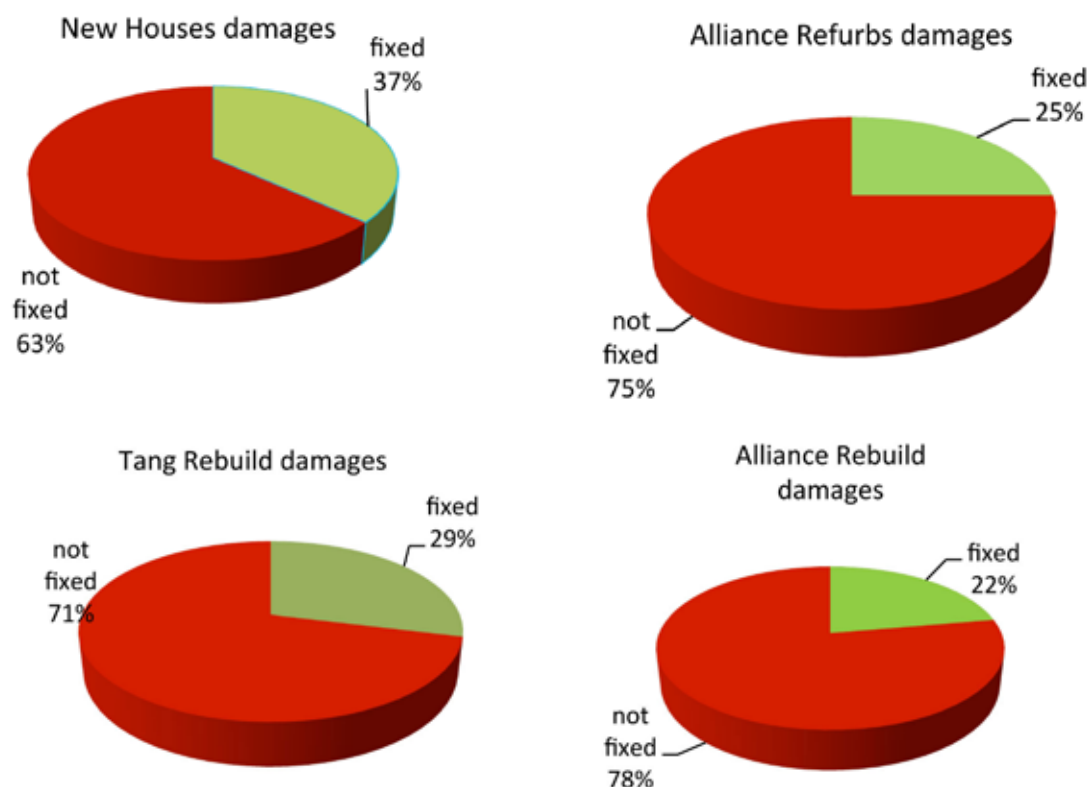
identified as improvements for the system. At least two people suggested a return to Tangentyere for managing R&M.

When asked if R&M was different under Tangentyere as compared to the current system and how, a very high number of respondents said it was different and most (60%) felt that Tangentyere was better for a number of reasons. A high proportion (25 out of 38) of the tenants felt that Tangentyere responded quicker than 'Territory Housing' and a few said that Tangentyere 'understand us and do it our way'.

Based on these responses, it seems that residents of Town Camps seek more direct and one-on-one engagement with R&M crews and prefer the decision making to occur locally rather than away from the camp, and preferably with an Indigenous organisation such as Tangentyere. It seems that in the process of trying to streamline the process of R&M, it may have made the whole process overly bureaucratic. Furthermore, the categorisation of R&M work as Immediate (4 hours), Urgent (2 days) and Routine (within 6 months) (CO 2012 p.34) is quite confusing for the residents who are not made aware of the category of their request. This does not appear to account either for the possibility that a problem that is Routine can become Urgent if left too long. It has been further highlighted in the report that there is a lack of transparency on account of the discretionary practices that tenancy officers employ in categorising the repair status. Although tenants are entitled to complaints about R&M inaction, when the process is murky, it creates doubt in the minds of tenants. As the Commonwealth Ombudsman (2012 pp. 34-38) stated, 'Residents require clear and accessible information about process for reporting repairs and maintenance matters and the associated timeframes... critical processes should be visible in the community, in the appropriate language...'. The Ombudsman further recommended a closer monitoring by the DoH of R&M works as well as keeping the tenant updated both on the status (category) as well as progress on the complaint. However, the Ombudsman and CAAHC also pointed out that in the absence of a centralised database for recording, monitoring and tracking R&M requests for a timely delivery of service, discretionary procedures in recording R&M requests and poor communications between tenants, contractors and DoH results in a poor housing experience for tenants.

### **5.3.3 Surveys**

One aspect of the surveys conducted in 38 households in March 2013 was tracking the complaints made by householders in the first round of fieldwork in March 2012. Our findings on what was or was not repaired are represented in the following graphs:



Graph 7 Maintenance requests fixed over 12 months.

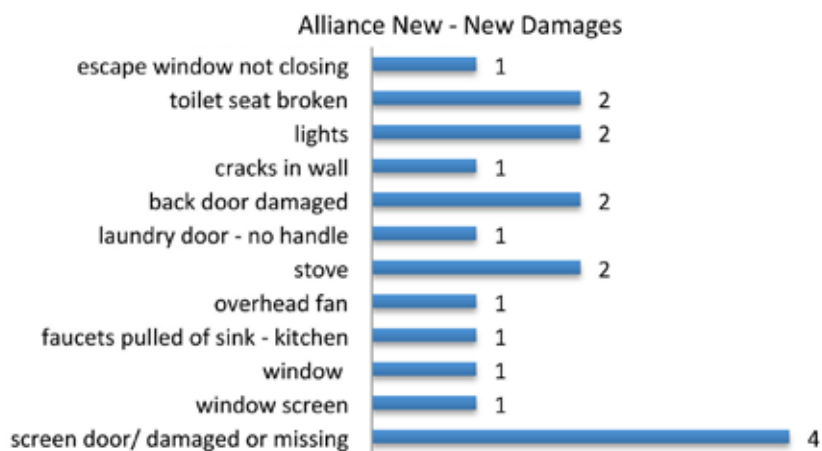
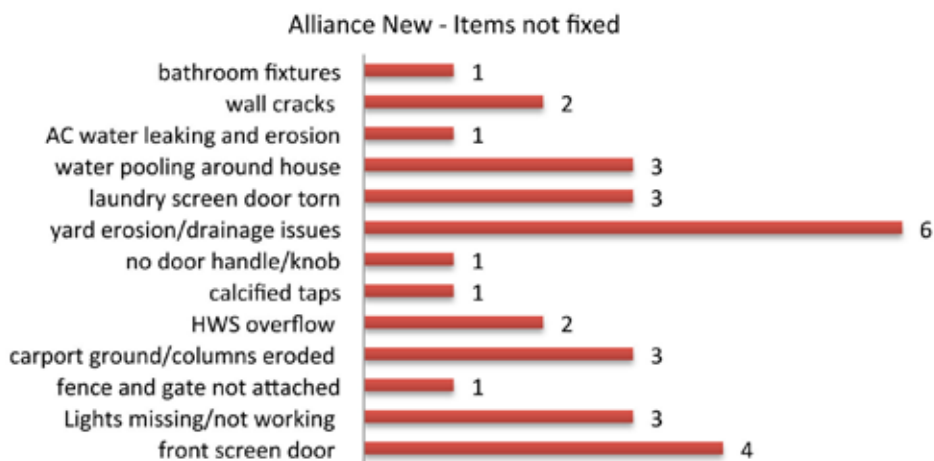
Over a period of 12 months averaged across the various house types, only about 28% of the reported R&M problems were fixed. Although from these graphs it would seem that repairs to the new houses were accorded R&M priority over the other house types, the new house repairs included the Ritek wall repairs, which were very widespread in almost all of the new houses.

In graphs 8, 9, 10 and 11, the numbers refer to individual repair items noted by the researchers conducted during the survey, across the different housing categories.

Each of the repair items noted in Stage 1, were revisited in Stage 2.2 to assess how many of the individual items across the house category had been fixed, remained the same or if there were incidents of new damage to be noted in Stage 2.2, eg, in graph 9, there was one incident of damaged gate having been fixed in Stage 2.2. There were three instances of where external walls had not been painted since Stage 1, and two instances of WC covers missing that had not been noted in Stage 1.

### 5.3.4 New Houses

During the Stage 1 survey, damages that required repair were recorded for each of the new houses. During the Stage 2.2 survey, those items were specifically looked at and recorded if they had been repaired or stayed the same. Thirty-seven percent of those listed items were fixed, mainly by contractors and in one instance by the tenants themselves. Those items fixed included the cracks in the walls, peeling of the paint and damaged cloth lines. Sixty percent of the items were not fixed, which was mainly the erosion, drainage and water pooling issues in the yards and erosions around the carports, damaged screen doors in the front entry and laundry doors, broken outdoor lights and light fittings.



Graph 8 Actual items fixed, not fixed, damages in new houses.

The graphs indicate the priorities that the property managers assign to each of the components of the house. The cracks in the Ritek walls were fixed at the supplier's expense and were identified by the contract administrators as a defect (G Barker 2012, pers.comm., 24 July). It is not clear why the clotheslines were repaired ahead of drainage issues in the yard, except of course that it is an easier repair in many cases. As pointed out in the earlier design section, the poor drainage in the yard poses serious health hazards for residents.

It is also evident, as already noted, that the yards were the most neglected aspect of the house in terms of R&M. The level of ground erosion, especially of the built-up ground embankments around the foundations of the houses, has not been stabilised. The problem is augmented by the absence of roof gutters. Although in the short term, this will have limited impact on the fabric of the house itself, over time and without stabilisation it could potentially whittle away the support substrate for the on-ground concrete slab, resulting in serious structural damage to the main house. This does not appear to be considered in the current approach collecting and categorising repairs, which are needed to preserve the asset for 30 years.

### **5.3.5 Alliance Refurbished Houses**

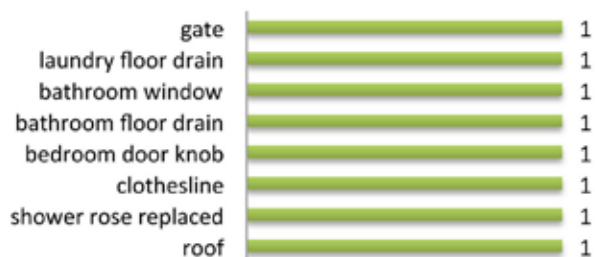
Overall, many of the items observed in poor condition and damages during the Stage 1 survey remained the same (75%) in Stage 2.2, with some getting worse and some new damage observed.

It is apparent from the graphs (on page 92) that the yards and external fabric elements (veranda floors, columns, drainage etc.) were given low-priority for repairs.

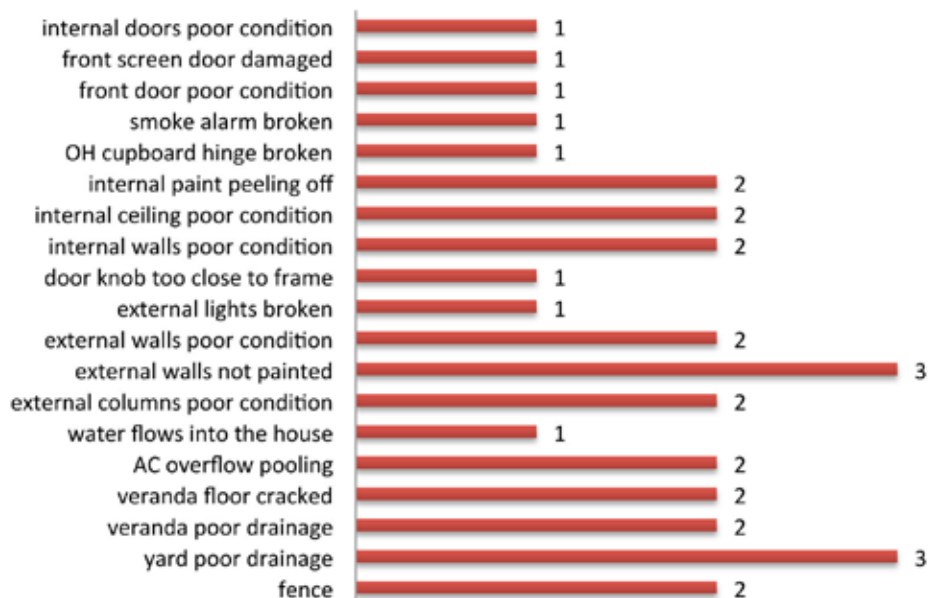
### **5.3.6 Alliance Rebuild**

In the Alliance rebuilds, 22% of the problems noted in Stage 1 were fixed, while 78% stayed the same or got worse. See graphs on pages 93-94.

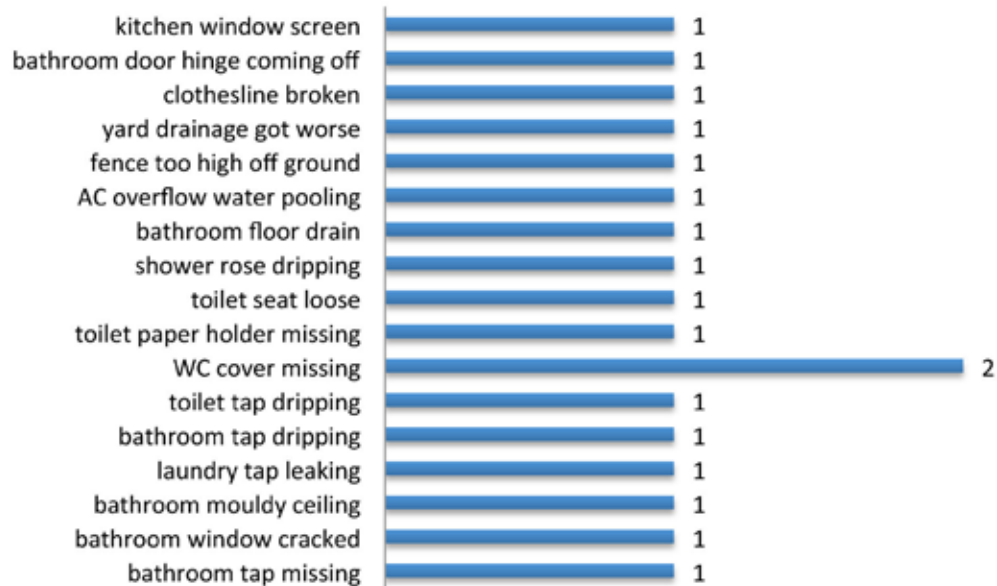
### Alliance Refurb -Fixed items



### Alliance Refurb - items not fixed



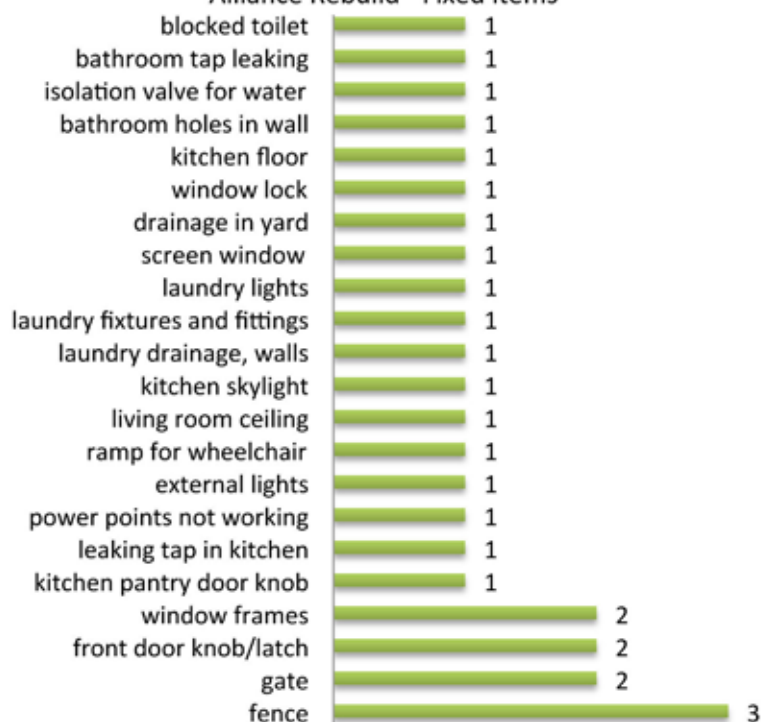
### Alliance Refurb - New Damages



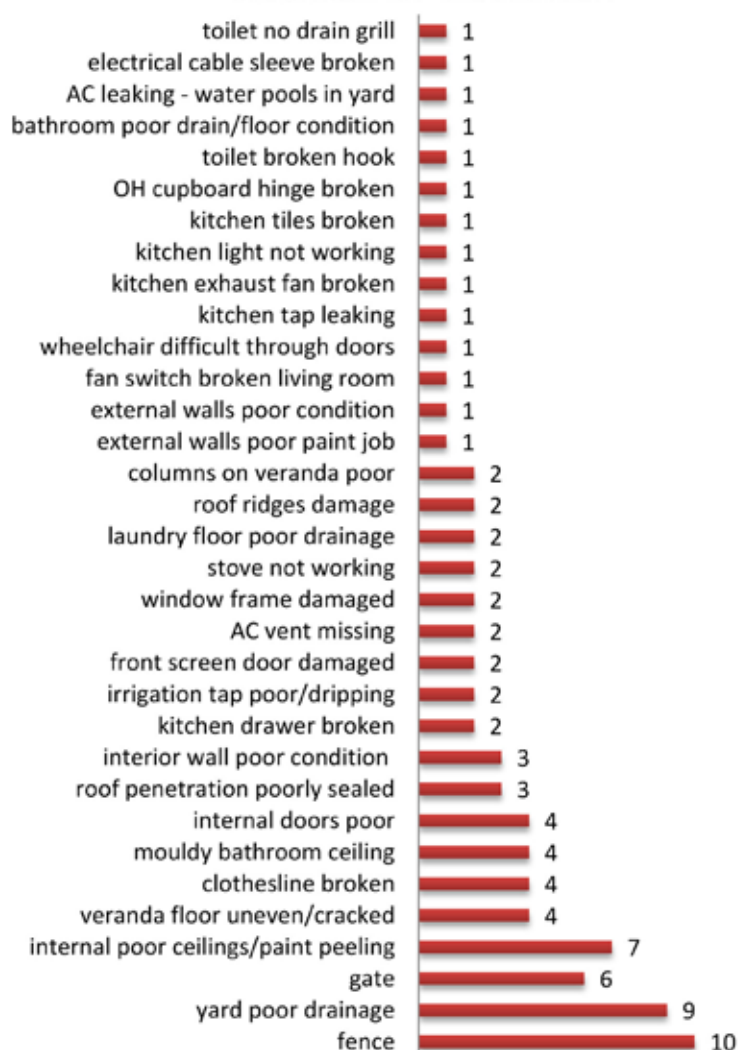
Graph 9 Items fixed, not fixed and new damages in TA refurb.

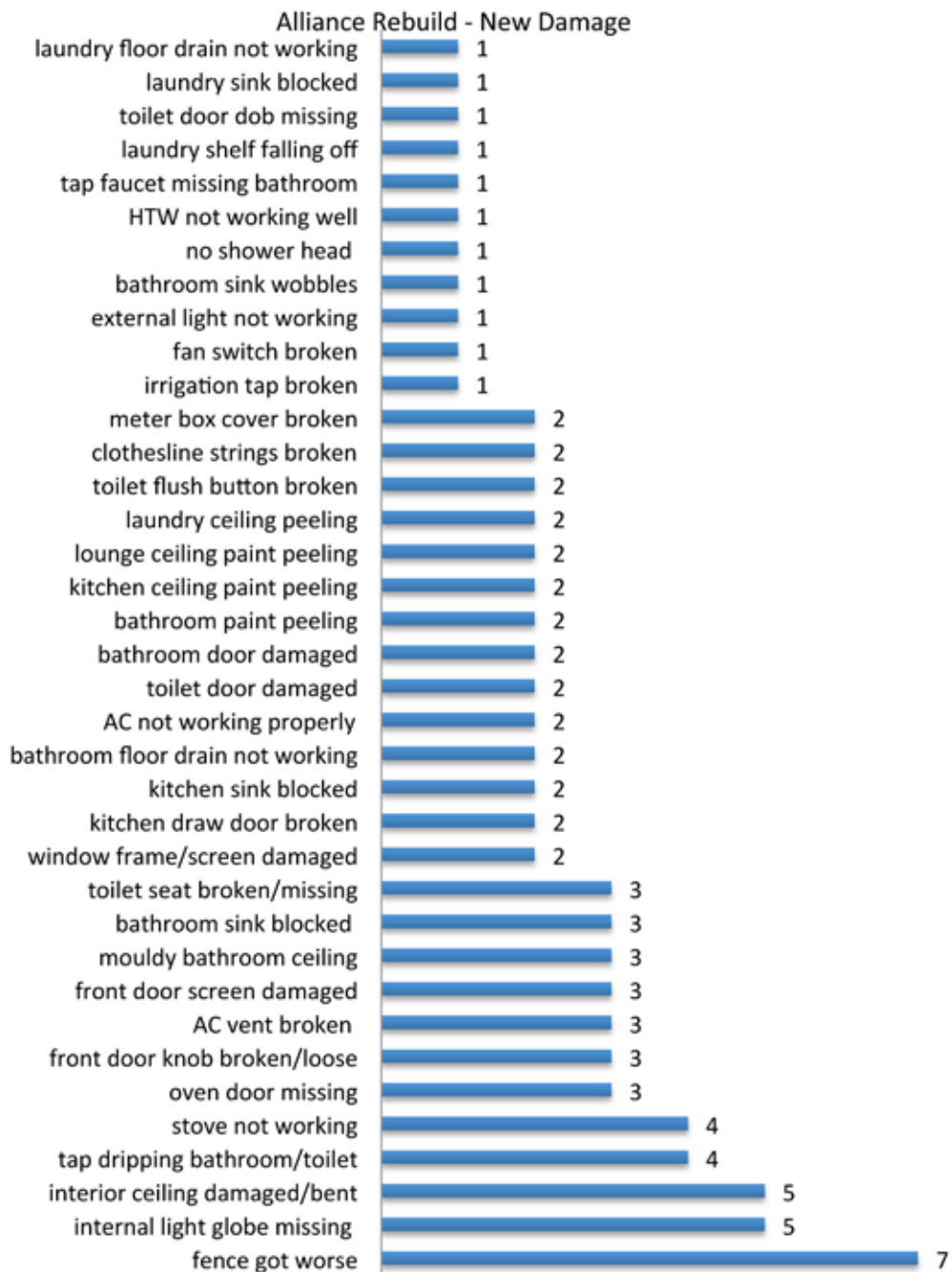


### Alliance Rebuild - Fixed items



### Alliance Rebuild - Items not fixed





Graph 10 Items fixed, not fixed and new damages for TA rebuild.

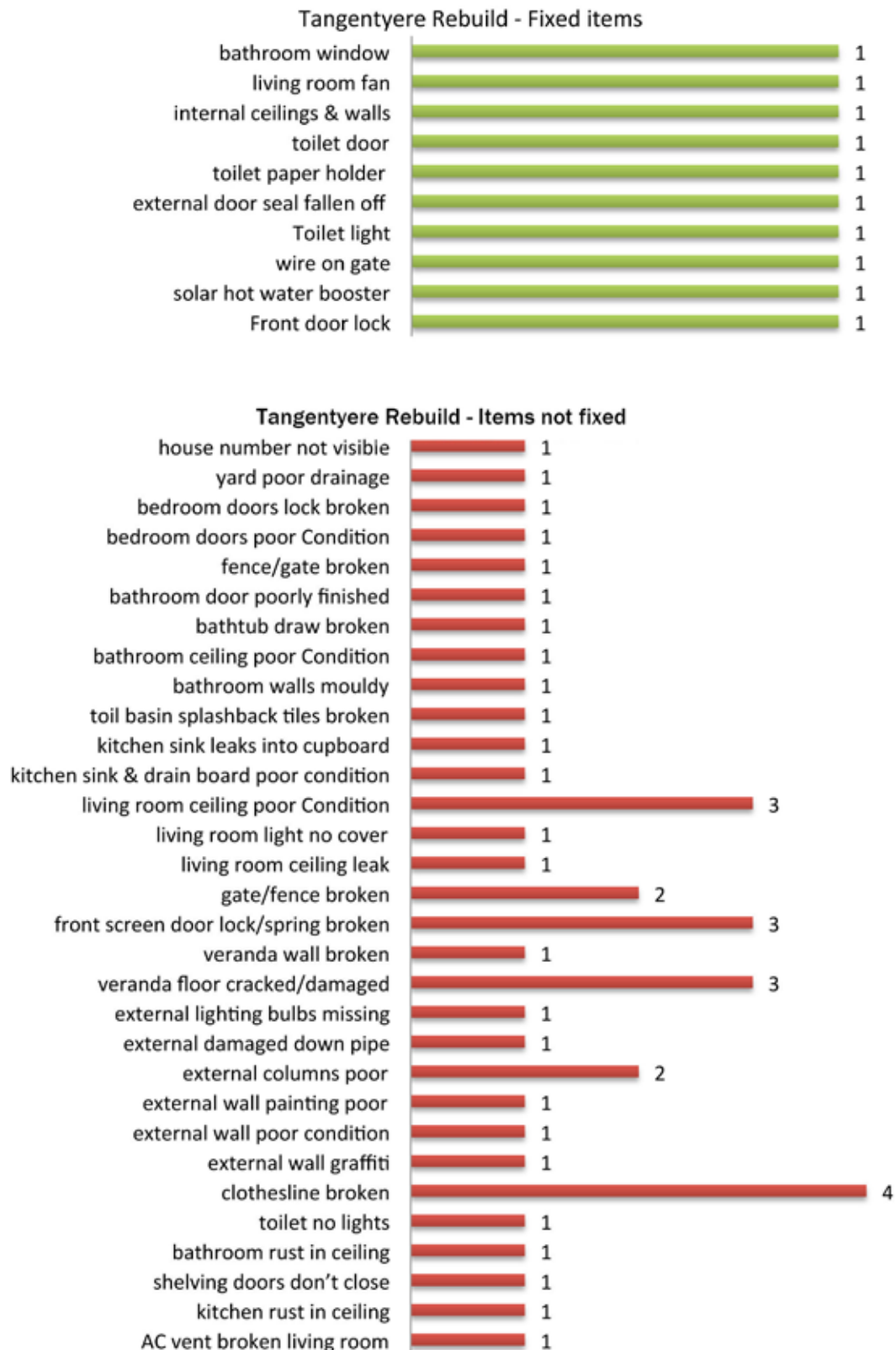
It is not clear why there is a greater diversity of unfixed items in this category of houses. Once again, the repairs to the external aspects of the houses seem to have been given a lower priority than the internal issues such as windows, door knobs etc. However, there appears to be inconsistency in the internal repairs. For instance, mouldy bathroom ceilings, which are a part of the rebuilt wet areas and an indicator of poor ventilation and a health hazard according to the NIHG, have not been repaired.

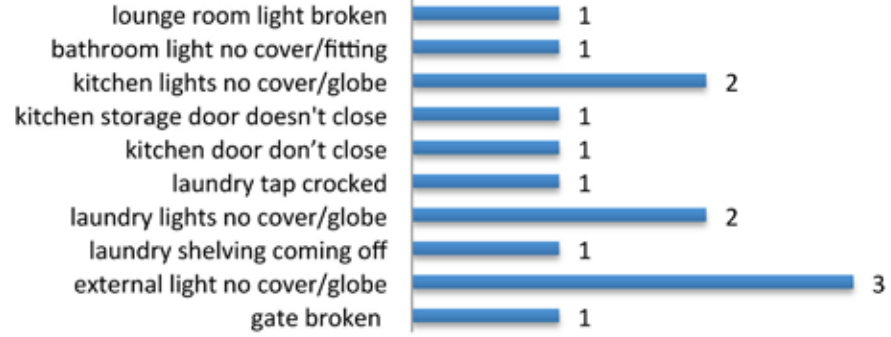
Although many fences and gates have been repaired, there remain a large number that have not. Gauging by the complaints, fences and gates are a critical means of providing security and safety for tenants, but may not be construed to be a health

hazard, and have therefore been accorded a low status.

### 5.3.7 Tangentyere Rebuilds

Of the Tangentyere rebuilds, 29% of problems observed in Stage 2.1 have been fixed, while 71% stayed the same or got worse.





Graph 11 Items fixed, items not fixed and new damages for Tangentyere Rebuilds.

### 5.3.8 Feeling & Housing Experience

Repairs and maintenance (R&M) is an integral and significant component of housing experience. When something is broken or does not work in a house, it limits the tenant's ability to enjoy the house for which she is paying rent. According to the SIHIP guidelines, when tenants have or feel that they have some control over the condition of their house, it enhances their sense of wellbeing. SIHIP, through the public housing model, promised a better property management experience for Town Camp tenants, but did not seem to adhere to its own guidelines.

The Town Camp tenant's experience of the public housing R&M programme was problematic. Tenants were unsure about whom to lodge their maintenance requests with, and once they had, what the status was of their request. They were required to follow up on their requests over the phone and could still not be certain when the request would be attended to. Through the interviews and surveys, we found that, on average, only about 28% of the requests had been addressed and resolved across the 4 house types in 12 months.

What stood out for the tenants was that their requests for repairs and maintenance were not attended to in a timely manner. They felt that the R&M service under the community housing model run by Tangentyere Council outperformed the R&M services provided under Territory Housing's public housing model. This they attributed to Tangentyere Council's better understanding of their 'ways'.

DoH's cryptic categorisation of repair works that is based on the performance of health hardware as well as the overly bureaucratic approval system for R&M contribute to the delays in responding to requests. The bureaucratic processes in place were inscrutable to most tenants, who have been habituated to more on-the-spot decision making by Tangentyere workers who understand the tenant's concerns, and individualised priorities through personal contact.

Under Division 3, Part 7 of Residential Tenancies Act 2009 (NT), to which DoH and tenants are signatories, tenants are within their rights to notify the landlord for the repairs to their rented house and the landlord is obliged to fix the reported problem within 7 business days or within 21 days of receiving notice for a need for repair. In any event, the landlord is advised to notify the tenant if s/he has made arrangements for the repair. As discussed, there appears to be ongoing neglect of these rules, eg tenants are not being notified on the proposed course of action that DOH intends to take on their request.

In doing so, socially disadvantaged tenants can feel a greater sense of alienation and exclusion when they are not informed about the status of their request or whether they are required to pay for the repairs in the first place. Through the interviews, we found that practically none of the tenants received any indication of the cost of repairs carried out or whether DoH was making direct deductions from their Centrelink payments for it. This is all the more concerning given the lack of clarity in



the definition of what constitutes ‘tenant-related damage’ chargeable to the tenant. ‘tenant-related damage’ or damage by visitors was clearly a source of stress for tenants.

Further, there was widespread misunderstanding of the purpose of bond money. Several tenants thought that repairs ought to be done using that money rather than making direct debits from their Centrelink payments. The lack of clarity around the purpose of bond money could lead to distrust between tenants and DoH thus contributing to the break down in the relationship.

Many of the residents reported that they are happy about the quarterly condition inspection regime by the DoH that is integral to the public housing model. They said that it is useful and ensures that the house is kept clean.

To summarise, the town camp tenants feel a loss of control with respect to the R&M processes currently in place and in contrast with a system that they have been used to. They expressed confusion about the changes to the R&M procedures that were being made and helpless to speed up repairs and maintenance requests. Under these circumstances, they feel that they are being denied the ability to enjoy the houses that they are paying a fair rent for, with these difficulties assuming too high a prominence in the housing experience of the town camps.

## **5.4 Tenancy Management**

In the introduction to this report we noted a perceptible shift in resident’s concerns from Stages 1 and 2.1, away from the design aspects of their house towards the wider aspects of housing and their experience of it. On the one hand, housing was experienced in a material sense as an object that fulfilled a physical need, a device that provided shelter from the elements, as walls that insulated residents from the social and physical challenges of town camp living and as an embodiment of aspiration. Property management or R&M dealt with the maintenance and upkeep of that physical entity of the house and what it represents to or is valued by its residents. This section of the report deals with tenancy management as defined by the Department of Housing through its draft Remote Public Housing Management Framework (RPHMF) (Porter 2009b p. 13) which is based on applying the RTA and built around a clearer definition of tenant’s and landlord’s roles and responsibilities as well as clarity about the ownership of the house (Rosenman and Clunies-Ross 2011 p. 12).

### 5.4.1 Tenancy Management Reform

The primary focus of the tenancy management reforms are (AG 2011a p. 22):

- » Ensuring that Indigenous tenants pay reasonable rent
- » Providing support to tenants to manage visitors
- » Ensuring that houses are fairly allocated
- » Ensuring that houses are regularly and consistently repaired and maintained.

Although tenancy management and property management are intertwined aspects of the housing experience, one deals with the property or the asset while the former deals with the inhabitants of the asset, the tenants. Tenancy management in this context deals with aspects such as rules and regulations, allocation of houses and managing the stay of visitors. All of these have to be done with the aim of moulding good tenants or sustainable tenants who pay regular rent, look after the property and observe the rules and regulations of tenancy (Porter 2009b p 14). This policy manifests in the form of signing tenancy agreements with DoH, assessing needs and eligibility for allocation of housing, collecting bond or security deposit and rent and managing antisocial behaviour (NTG-DoH 2013a). The provision of 'tenant support and living skills programs'<sup>4</sup> are key elements for achieving tenancy management reform in the Indigenous context which is lagging behind other reform implementation hindered by the poor literacy and numeracy skills of the tenants (FaHCSIA 2013 p. 65).

As referred to earlier, one the more significant aspects of NPARIH is to 'bring Indigenous housing in line with public housing standards' (AG 2010; ANAO 2011; CO 2012; Macklin 2013). In addition to increasing the longevity of the housing stock, the agreement aims to implement tenancy reform through the introduction of the NT Residential Tenancies Act 1999 and the remote rent framework (ANAO 2011 p. 123). The mainstreaming of tenancy management has also been referred to as 'standardised tenancy management' which includes tenancy support, rent collection, asset protection and governance arrangements (ACG 2013 p. 3). The key reforms to tenancy management also include community involvement in decision making, improved processes for repairs and maintenance (already discussed), housing allocation in consultation with the community, transparency in tenancy agreements, fair rent system and support for maintaining successful tenancies (ACG 2013 p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Tenant support and life skills programs were set up by DoH to assist Indigenous tenants to transition from community housing to the Remote Public Housing Management Framework. The programs are aimed at developing tenant capabilities to improving legal knowledge about house renting, financial management, knowledge of acceptable standards of hygiene and cleanliness, use and look after health hardware, maintain the house, managing noise and visitors. [Appendices in FaHCSIA 2013, National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH): Review of Progress (2008-2013) (pp. 179). Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Available online: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/indigenous/Final%20NPARIH%20Review%20May%2020132.pdf> [07/06/2013]

The remote rent framework under NPARIH has displaced poll tax arrangements where all tenants regardless of the house condition or type were required to pay a toll. The newly implemented Remote Rent Framework categorises housing in remote communities into improvised dwellings (humpies), legacy dwellings and NPARIH houses (new, rebuilt or refurbished). Each of these categories attracts a different rent and tenancy arrangement with tenants. For details, refer to ACG 2013, Tenants' experiences of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing in the Northern Territory: Report to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Melbourne: The Allen Consulting Group. February 2013. Available online: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/publications-articles/housing/national-indigenous-housing-guide/property-and-tenancy-management-report>

The primary focus of the tenancy management for SIHIP focuses on knowledge of the tenancy rules and duties and responsibilities of tenants for maintenance and upkeep of their houses. The associated tenancy support services have focussed their attention on aspects of homemaking and home management.

In light of the centrality of property and tenancy management reform as a key to achieving the long term objectives of the NPARIH, in the NT, \$465 million was earmarked for the implementation of the reforms within an established timeframe under SIHIP by the Department of Housing (ANAO 2011 p. 122). The NT government has implemented these reforms since 1 July 2010 as scheduled. The reforms are also seen as integral to achieving reduced whole-of-life costs of the Alliance houses. The Alice Springs Transformation Plan was tasked with the responsibility of implementing tenancy reforms as part of its social support services and allocated \$25 million for the task. The success of these reforms will be discussed in the section through the responses of tenants but also from the perspectives of Department of Housing, CAAHC and ASTP.

#### **5.4.2 Housing Reference Groups**

Housing Reference Groups are a significant element in the government's strategy to engage with local Indigenous communities for the implementation of the tenancy reforms started by the NTG and consolidated under SIHIP. HRG membership incorporates most of the members of the Housing Associations at the time of HRG formation for each camp. HRGs, as discussed previously, were instituted to involve the community in decision-making around issues of their housing (Christie and Campbell 2013 p. 4).

The purpose of this was to ensure that communities exercised some direct control over their living environments. However, this has not been the outcome, as noted by the Commonwealth Ombudsman (CO 2012 p. 30), and by Christie and Campbell (2013) in their consultations with Town Camp residents, among others. This is supported by evidence from the report on tenancy management reform by The Allen Consulting Group (ACG) conducted for FaHCSIA (2013 pp. 69-74), and . Drawing from the above research, it appears that the problems dogging HRGs relate mainly to the following:

- » poor communications between HRGs and the broader community leading to misunderstandings and disharmony in the communities
- » lack of transparency in the housing allocation process leading to lack of trust in the process
- » the advisory role of HRGs and the belief that the NTG has the final say in all the decision-making, which is made remotely in government head offices

- » lack of flexibility in decision making, with no room for decisions/contributions affecting the community to be made outside the HRGs
- » lack of accountability to the community since HRG members are not paid for their time.

### **5.4.3 Emergent Themes in Tenancy Management**

The themes and issues to emerge from the fieldwork regarding tenancy management included:

- » tenancy rules and regulations
- » housing allocation
- » lack of control perceived by tenants.

### **5.4.4 Findings**

In the final round of interviews, we asked four questions that directly related to tenancy management and included the themes listed above. However, data on tenancy management was also collected in previous rounds of fieldwork and the discussion that follows is influenced by our findings in all three rounds of fieldwork as well as discussions with other stakeholders directly and indirectly associated with the business and administration of tenancy management in the Alice Springs Town Camps.

#### **5.4.4.1 Tenancy Rules and Regulations**

When asked in Stage 2.2 if they knew Territory Housing rules, 18 respondents responded in the affirmative while an equal number responded that they knew only some of the rules. Only 2 respondents said that they did not know the rules. When queried further on the topic, 18 or 47% said that they liked the rules and 13 said that they did not.

The most popular tenancy rules included the visitor 6-week limit (29%), Inspections (16%), safety officers (16%) and permissions (11%). The least popular rules were 'Permission to lead our lifestyle' (13%), visitor stay restrictions (8%), house allocation (8%) and paying for damage (8%). On being asked about which rules the respondents would like to change, 37% wished to change the rules about permissions to modify the house (eg putting nails on the walls) to hang pictures or curtains, 21% wished to change the rules related to visitors stay and restrictions on number of pets respectively, 16% did not want to change any rules at all, 13% preferred to revise the inspection rules and 11% wanted to change the restrictions associated with lighting campfires around the house. At least one respondent stated that the rules were too soft and should be made stronger and conversely, another said that all rules should be changed.



Graph 12 Housing Rules - liked and disliked



Graph 13 Do Housing's allocation rules worry you?

In the earlier rounds of fieldwork, only the tenants in the Tangentyere rebuilds appeared stressed about the new tenancy rules, which may have been a reflection of a higher average age. Most of the tenants in all other house types were not worried about them. Some said that the TH rules are good because 'you got to look after your house well' and it also helps with the visitors (management). However, residents are stressed by house inspections as it was unclear to them what damage they would be required to pay.

The above responses make evident that the new tenancy rules associated with the public housing model and tenancy management reform cannot be simply and uniformly labelled as restrictive or autocratic. Clearly several if not the majority of the tenancy rules are liked and used by tenants to manage unwanted visitors and the house in general. This has also been the finding in the report on consultations published by the Commonwealth Government (AG 2011b p. 64). However, when a rule does not distinguish between wanted and unwanted visitors (Habibis et al. 2011;

Memmott et al. 2012) but applies uniformly to all visitors, it can be perceived as a restrictive rule. However, the latter view is the minority and tenants may have found a way around the restrictions on visitor stay. For instance, and as CAAHC's Berriman and Davidson (2012, pers.comm., 07 August) pointed out, visitors stay for 6 weeks, leave the house for a day and start the clock back again. It seemed that tenants were somewhat wary to talk about visitors in general, and this perception was also upheld by Tangentyere researchers. The reluctance to talk about visitors may be attributed to the sensitivity around the issue and its importance to the success of SIHIP for the housing administrators. Some respondents also supported the inspection system as useful both for managing visitors, but also a reason to tidy up the house and yard.

Temporary mobility directly impacts tenancy management (Habibis et al. 2011 p. 35). The impacts are both related to visitors and to long absences which could result in tenancy breaches and impact housing eligibility. Habibis et al (2011 pp. 144-145) recommend clear communications between tenants and housing services with regard to the consequences of having visitors (or prolonged absence) and the associated risks to tenancy stability. Our findings support this hypothesis; it is clear that most of the interviewed tenants are aware of the consequences of overstaying visitors and possibly extended absence from their allocated houses. We even found that this awareness led to tenants utilising the rules to manage their visitors.

Interestingly, the tenant-related damage rule where tenants are required to pay for damages was not cited as a disliked tenancy rule. The previous community housing model did not require tenants to pay for damages. However, it also became evident that tenants were unaware of paying for tenant-related damage since all deductions were made at the source and no receipts were being provided to tenants for any deductions from Centrelink payments. The lack of awareness and transparency may be attributed to the absence of clarity and definition within the Department of Housing of what constitutes tenant-related damage. The importance of this rule must not be overlooked in the management of public housing, since it could lead to accumulation of housing debt, eviction, poor housing history and ineligibility to future housing access (Habibis et al. 2011 p. 36).

Although it is assumed under the public housing system that a formal tenancy agreement between landlord and tenant leads to a better understanding of rights and responsibilities for both parties, in reality it has not been found to be the case. ACG (2013 p. 70) reports that '...entering into an agreement does not necessarily equate to understanding the agreement or having the skills to meet obligations under the agreement.' This is evident in the high number of respondents who reported that they were aware only of a few of the rules and at least 2 tenants said that they did not know the rules. While it is wholly understandable that tenants are not expected to know all the rules, it remains unclear if the tenants are aware of the impacts of breaching rules and its impact on their tenancy careers in the long term, especially under the new 'mainstream' public housing model. The Commonwealth Ombudsman (2012 pp.



25-28) has also noted that tenancy agreements are not entirely consistent with the Rental Tenancies Act, especially with regard to the limitations it places on Indigenous public housing tenants with the number of persons per bedroom. The Ombudsman has recommended, under recommendation 8 and 9, that DoH review its tenancy agreements to align with the Residential Tenancies Act.

Although the cultural aspects of tenancy management were not a factor discussed directly with respondents, the lack of cultural empathy for Aboriginal practices was indirectly raised by several respondents regarding visitors, outdoor living amenity and campfires. It has been suggested that Indigenous cultures require culturally specific management practices in social housing (Burke 2004) which is an argument that is linked closely with the cultural design paradigm for Indigenous housing. Most immediately the impacts of a culturally sympathetic housing tenancy management should introduce flexibility and tenant support for visitor management, temporary mobility, social disruptions (eg payback) or absence on account of ceremony (Habibis et al. 2011). There is a suggestion that what these special housing management practices may look like needs to be developed closely with communities themselves and building on local knowledge (ACG 2013; Burke 2004). The engagement of Tangentyere Council through CAAHC into a tenancy management role would be a good move to address this aspect.

The unpopularity of the rule regarding permissions for making additions or alterations to the house could be linked back to an experienced or even perceived lack of control that tenants feel in adapting their living environments to suit their needs and lifestyle. The Territory Housing Operational Policy Manual (THOPM) under Section 12.3 (NTG-DoH 2013f) states that, 'Territory Housing encourages tenants to regard their public housing dwelling as their home and therefore will approve most reasonable requests'. The THOPM then proceeds over 6 pages to list the conditions under which alterations maybe made. For example, the Manual under section 12.3.4 lays down the condition that a 'neutral colour' is used for painting and that a sample is provided and approved by Territory Housing. There seems to be a contradiction in the manual with regard to the benevolent intent in the first instance and the discouraging process for approval. Admittedly, the RTA applies this rule to all tenancies, Indigenous, mainstream, private or public. However, it was evident that many of the houses in the Town Camps, especially the rebuilt and refurbished houses, have been occupied by the same tenant for 10-30 years. This regulation needs to be revisited and reviewed in light of sustaining long-term tenancies in rental properties, which appears to be fairly common in the Alice Springs Town Camps.

#### 5.4.4.2 Housing Allocation

Through our interviews, we found that 71% of the respondents were worried about DoH deciding on housing allocations. The reason for this anxiety was attributed to a fear of outsiders and strangers by 20 respondents. Lack of consultation for allocation by the DoH was cited as another source of worry, while only 5 expressed faith in the Housing Reference Group and the existing allocation system.

The tenancy management reforms set out to revise the existing allocation process that was controlled by the Housing Association for each camp into a system that is based on need but also determined jointly by communities and government (ACG 2013 p. 3). The NTG set up the Housing Reference Group for each camp as a consultative body to advise the government on housing matters including housing allocation. The advisory role played by the HRGs was confirmed by the Department of Housing in their interview (S Harley 2012, pers.comm., 27 July). Christie and Campbell (2013 p. 1) have labelled the policy of 'advice only' for HRGs to be problematic at the community level, but also between DoH and HRGs (CO 2012 p. 27). They cite poor communications and miscommunication around new works, allocations and repairs as contributors to distress and acrimony. DoH (S Harley 2012, pers.comm., 27 July) reported that the manager representing DoH has discretionary powers to overrule HRG advice and these powers have been, according to anecdote, exercised by DoH on some occasions.

True to the tenets of the tenancy management reforms and public housing model, DoH has decided that housing allocation will be based on housing need. Under section 6.4 of the Territory Housing Operational Policy Manual (NTG-DoH 2013e), 'Public housing dwellings are generally allocated to the person at the top of the wait list as they become vacant; however there are many circumstances where this does not occur due to differing needs of the applicant.'

Housing allocation has been a contentious issue in the Town Camps for a number of reasons. It is perceived that by controlling the housing allocation process and by having the last word in allocations, DoH have wrested control of who gets to live on the camp, but also controls who will be neighbours. In a system where kinship is the primary means of personal and group identity, any dilution or undermining of power and control over the selection of town camp residents represents a challenge to traditional authority, especially in Town Camps, which have been argued to be a space relatively free of colonial control (Keenan 2013 p. 470). The Housing Associations that represented each camp therefore reflected that aspiration for autonomy to retain their distinctive social kinship structures. This autonomy was retained under the aegis of Tangentyere Council.

Although DoH made no reference to the acrimony between the Department and HRGs, interviews with two members of the HRG<sup>6</sup> confirmed this finding on a range of issues (discussed in the subsequent subsection) but particularly with regard to

<sup>6</sup> The identities of the HRG members have been deliberately concealed. The interview took place on 05/09/2012.

housing allocation. Despite being on the HRG of a larger camp, two members said, 'It's all need basis now. Camps were set up to provide housing for family groups. The family assessed the needs of its members.' One added further, 'Now people come in from anywhere. They have started to introduce new families into the camp. It's changing the camp ...'. The member said that the HRG was a divisive institution. The members said that there were 2 representatives from each part of the camp, '...nobody agrees on allocation and so the government steps in and takes a decision on our behalf... sometimes decisions are taken only with a few [selective] members present.'

We found that most respondents associated safety and wellbeing with proximity to family (50% of respondents) and a heightened awareness of who constituted their immediate neighbourhood. In the larger and spatially dispersed Town Camps like Hidden Valley and Larapinta, it was apparent that housing clusters were based on kinship and family ties. It was evident in some Town Camps, particularly the larger ones which are comprised of multiple family groups living in close proximity to each other, tensions were running high where one family group felt aggrieved about allocating a neighbouring house to members of a different language group and in another instance to a different family.

HRGs represent a useful opportunity to overcome such issues; however, they need to be managed better with greater transparency so that residents of the Town Camps can feel confident about the fairness of the allocation process. Moreover, the allocated house is sensitively located in the camp to ensure least conflict thus enhancing security for residents. This could be done by simply conducting HRG meetings and business within the town camp itself rather than elsewhere, as also suggested by CAAHC (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers. comm. 08 August).

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has under Recommendation 11 (CO 2012 p. 31) suggested improvements to the allocation process to make the tenancy application forms more accessible, to make the information on allocation and priority more accessible, to keep applicants updated on the status of their applications, and to bring greater transparency into the process of allocation.

#### **5.4.5 Control**

Consistent with the health and wellbeing imperative that underpins SIHIP, the Design Guidelines (p. 20) cite Reser's suggestion that 'individuals need a degree of 'felt control and security at the level of the built environment' to be able to successfully adapt to changes.' (Reser 1979). Reser had observed in that context that 'felt control of one's immediate life circumstances is a sine qua non for physical and mental wellbeing' (Reser 1979 p. 72).

Reporting on earlier studies on the links between housing, control and wellbeing, Helen Ross (1987 p. 165) surmised that where people have a level of control over decision making and have a role in the design, construction or management of their

housing, it results in greater individual and collective wellbeing. These sentiments were echoed in both the ACG report (2013) as well as the Horne and Martel report (2013). In many ways, it would appear to the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Alice Springs Town Camps that they have lost political ground in recent years, and indeed that little has changed since Coughlan's review in 1991, where it was noted that Aboriginal people through organisations like Tangentyere Council had begun '...to take the lead to determine not only their needs, but also how they wished to meet them.' (Coughlan 1991 p 64).

The FaHCSIA report on community consultation (AG 2011b p. 67) has indicated that there was some concern with regard to township leases and who controlled them and there was fear that the leases would lead to their losing their land. The perceived lack of security and loss of control leads to anxiety and distrust. As established in the introduction of this report and elsewhere, there is a strong link between land rights and self-determination especially in the context of the Alice Springs Town Camps. 'Aboriginal people were attracted to Town Camps because they provided a space almost free of colonial control' (Keenan 2013 p.470), to be shaped by their users to represent their own social organisation. Self-determination, in this context, represents a desire to exercise control over one's life and destiny. The compulsory acquisition of leased land of the Town Camps by the Commonwealth Government under the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 therefore represented a setback to that movement. It has been argued that even though the Government did not take up its right to exclusive possession, for example, it is using an indirect tool of governance (Keenan 2013 pp.464-65). 'Property's governmental power reaches beyond the subject, determining not only what belongs to who, but also who belongs where, and how spaces of belonging will be shaped in the future.' (Keenan 2013 pp. 492-493).

The vicissitudes of the loss and gain of control of the immediate living environment through changing housing policies is an often repeated theme in much of the Indigenous housing reports and political literature over the years (Barker 2003; Harris 2012; Neutze 2000). Further, the loss of control of one's life situation experienced as a consequence of housing tenure directly impacts emotional well-being and would therefore lead to higher levels of stress (Biddle 2011 p. 17).

Tenancy support services were reinforced as another measure by SIHIP to create sustainable tenancies in Indigenous communities (ANAO 2011). The idea behind this was to impart information to tenants with regard to their rights and responsibilities as public housing tenants, and it is currently the responsibility of DHLGRS.

This section of the report deals with aspects of tenancy management that have the potential to empower tenants and to have greater take control of their housing situation and their living conditions. Many of the government policies and approaches to supporting tenancies in public housing were designed with precisely that intent. However, as is often the case, the implementation of policies is less than optimal

in the experience of public housing tenants. The following section analyses some of the housing policy and its implementation in the field of tenancy management, to understand what works well and what needs improvement from a tenant's perspective.

#### **5.4.5.1 Tenancy Support Programs**

The SIHIP framework considered Tenancy Support Programs (TSPs) to be an integral part of building up sustainable tenancies in the Town Camps through encouraging a positive housing experience. The goals of the TSPs are to (ACG 2013 pp. 38-42):

- » discuss tenancy rules in detail
- » discuss and explain tenancy agreement in detail
- » discuss the responsibility of tenants and landlord
- » explain the working of the house and installed appliances including fire alarms (household induction manual)
- » maintain a safe, healthy and hygienic home – including inspections
- » manage visitors and crowding
- » manage money and resources.

The FaHCSIA review of the NPARIH's progress noted that TSPs are all the more important where English is not the first language and literacy and numeracy skills are low. (2013 pp. 35-36). It also recognised that TSPs need to be ongoing, delivered by local people, rather than a one-off exercise, to have a lasting impact on tenants (ANAO 2011 pp.123-124). Accordingly, the NTG has developed a Remote Housing Tenant Support Framework (Appendix 8 in ANAO 2011 pp.123-124; Appendix 8 in FaHCSIA 2013 pp. 157-166) that includes:

- » Intensive Tenant Support Program – a one-off program to transition tenants into public housing tenancy programs
- » Basic Tenant Support – available to all tenants on an ongoing basis
- » Remote Tenancy Sustainability - life skills training provided to identified households

Although not directly involved in the delivery of TSPs, Housing Reference Groups have an advisory role to the Department of Housing to enable better delivery of the programs. The language used to describe these programs could be construed as paternalistic as well as part of a larger scheme to mainstream housing. For example:

Many Indigenous people from remote communities live in overcrowded houses and have not had the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and/or skills required to maintain successful tenancies. Remote residents may have limited knowledge of the legal requirements of renting a house, financial management, knowledge of appropriate and acceptable standards of cleanliness and maintenance, poor health and hygiene, and may experience difficulty in managing noise and visitors. Consequently, there is a need to assist remote Indigenous residents to develop these capabilities through tenant support programs. (Appendix 8 in ANAO 2011 pp.123-124; Appendix 8 in FaHCSIA 2013 pp. 157-166).



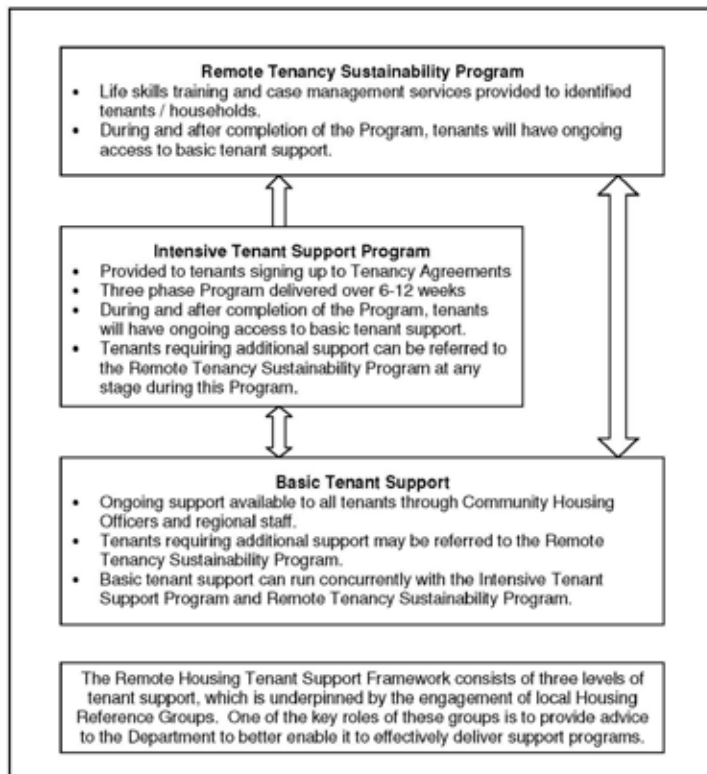


figure 8 Remote Housing Tenant Support Framework

#### 5.4.5.2 Tenancy Support Programs in the Town Camps

In the first round of fieldwork, 80% of the respondents said that they did not receive any 'tenancy support'. This response may have been complicated by a lack of clarity around what constitutes 'tenancy support'. That is, the respondents generally understood tenancy support to mean financial support from charitable organisations such as Anglicare or Mission Australia for the procurement of white goods. Clearly, DoH had not at the time adequately explained the tenancy support programs to the respondents. There were no references, by the respondents, to the explanatory DVDs in 15 languages or the plain English fact sheets explaining tenancy agreements that were produced by Territory Housing (ACG 2013 p 26).

The ACG report (2013) on tenancy management reforms reviewed the roll out of the tenancy support programs across the Territory. The report found that:

- » 66% of tenants had never received additional information since signing the tenancy agreement
- » 31% of select communities received some information in the form of brochures or a talk on the rules and responsibilities or on how to use some installed appliances
- » TSP service providers for the Intensive Tenancy Support program were uncertain of the effectiveness of the program



- » The service providers had reiterated the need of an ongoing program for reminding tenants of their rights and responsibilities as well as life skills training (managing finances, visitors and a clean healthy living environment)

The findings of the ACG support this evaluation of the Alice Spring Town Camps. The tenants were only aware of a few of their rights and responsibilities, and there appeared to be no evidence of an established ongoing tenancy support program, inasmuch as the TSP providers did not return to further explain things to the tenants.

#### **5.4.6 Rents**

While rents represent a financial burden on tenants in general, they also legitimise the occupancy of premises. The fact that a tenant pays rent also entitles him/her to demand the provision of services of an acceptable standard in return for the payment. The extent or the nature of services in the context of this project is explained through the tenancy agreement, the standardisation of which underpins the SIHIP program.

One of the stated purposes of the SIHIP program was to introduce and ensure that a fair rent was charged to the tenants. The chargeable rent system for SIHIP houses is based on total household income and the number of bedrooms, and cannot exceed the Maximum Dwelling Rent (MDR) limit. The MDR was set from 1 July 2010 as follows:

- » refurbished houses - \$120-200/week
- » rebuilt houses - \$150-250/week
- » new houses - \$150-250/week.

FaHCSIA (2013 p.37) observed that a rent setting system that relies on establishing rents based on the income of all those who have signed a tenancy agreement can not only be expensive to monitor, but also incomprehensible to most tenants. Given the high levels of mobility in the remote Indigenous communities in particular, there will be high administrative costs associated with frequent changes in household composition. The FaHCSIA report thus recommended simplifying the rent setting to be based on the asset, namely the number of bedrooms, rather than on the more fluid household composition.

In the Alice Springs Town Camps fieldwork, we found that over a period of 12 months, there was only a change of three house bosses and that 71% of the households remained unchanged. Nearly 90% of the household incomes remained unchanged. Despite the apparent stability of the composition of households interviewed in the Town Camps, there is still a need to simplify the method of rent setting, as Town Camps serve as base for people from remote locations for accessing employment and services. Although there are visitors in remote locations, there is generally a higher concentration and turnover of visitors in Town Camps and this was reflected in our findings, where 60% of the interviewed households confirmed that there were visitors.

Long-term visitors are unlikely to sign up to tenancy agreements, and existing tenants were wary about reporting changes in households.

The majority of tenants in all of the Territory Alliance housing types were not worried about paying rent. However, most tenants in Tangentyere rebuilds were worried about it. The demographics of the housing types indicate that the age of those interviewed in the Tangentyere rebuilds was considerably higher than those in the other housing types, ie 72% of the Tangentyere rebuild interviewees were over 40 years of age, in comparison with 40-42% being over 40 years of age in the TA housing types. It is possible that the worry expressed by the Tangentyere rebuild residents was a reflection of age and concern about changing rent rules as well as income, with twice as many of the Tangentyere residents being on disability pensions than the other categories.

At the time of writing, tenants did not receive any payment records from DoH. All tenants would like to have records of their payments.

In the Stage One interviews, respondents indicated that the higher chargeable rent that is directly proportional to the number of bedrooms encouraged head tenants to seek co-tenants to share the higher rent. This defeats the objective of reducing overcrowding in houses. In a few instances, tenants complained that they had been allocated houses that exceeded their bedroom demand but were forced to pay higher rents. The mismatch between need and allocation and resultant spare capacity also resulted in relatives demanding accommodation from head tenants in the spare bedrooms, leading to more overcrowding. This has happened despite the bedroom entitlement guidelines under subsection 3.1 in the Territory Housing Operational Policy Manual (NTG-DoH 2013d), where household configuration by size is clearly correlated to accommodation size.

Most respondents wanted to receive a statement that indicates their most up-to-date status on rent payments or other housing related arrears. It was not clear why this was not provided. The Ombudsman's Report and the Maintaining Houses for Better Health Report (2012; Mansell and Sowerbutts 2011) identify an inadequate IT system in use at DoH struggling to cope with the changes introduced or out of step with procedural practices. Multiple and uncoordinated computer systems, the Ombudsman's Report claims, make it both difficult and slow to issue rental statements. The report further states, '...procedural fairness plays a key role in people's trust of agencies and governments, and contributes to the willingness of people to cooperate with agencies and comply with rules.' (CO 2012).

As discussed earlier, many head tenants are reluctant to inform DoH about the change in the household size since payment of rent and accepting long-stay visitors also legitimises their claim to the dwelling. The Ombudsman also found that people were not aware of the requirement to provide the DoH with updated details of household occupancy, while others were unsure of how or to whom these changes

must be reported (CO 2012 pp. 17-23). It was also reported that DoH charged several tenants rent even while their houses were being renovated and they were unable to access the house (CAAHC, pers. comm. 2012, 7 August; Rosenman and Clunies-Ross 2011, p.13). Based on issues such as these, the Ombudsman recommended better communication with tenants on these matters.

According to the ACG report (2013 pp. 28-31), 80% of the respondents felt no stress about paying rents, which was similar to our own findings in the Town Camps. Although the report found that 70% of the respondents indicated that their rent was paid through direct deductions from their Centrelink payments, in our study all the respondents made this claim. They also all claimed that they did not receive any receipts or explanation for any additional deductions from their payments. The ACG report also highlights a lack of clarity amongst tenants in understanding how rent levels are calculated (AG 2011b p. 66). There were also issues around expectation, and some of the ACG respondents, especially those in refurbished and rebuilt houses, were dissatisfied with the amount of rent they paid for the houses they lived in.

We understood from CAAHC (pers. comm., 07 August 2012) that DoH was signing up 3-4 people per house, with 706 rental accounts for 270 properties on the Town Camps or an average was 2.7 rent accounts per house. Even though this system complies with the Residential Tenancies Act in the NT, it is not standard practice across other Australian jurisdictions. The Commonwealth Ombudsman also noted the need for review of how the Residential Tenancies Act was being applied (CO 2012 p.27).

#### **5.4.7 Inspections**

A performance indicator for improved tenancy management as identified by NPARIH was the introduction of a 'standard' property inspection regime (ANAO 2011, p.123). The rigorous inspection regimes are designed to ensure that tenants understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants but also play an active role in taking responsibility and caring for their homes and keeping them clean and tidy. It is simultaneously acknowledged by FAHCSIA that inspection regimes represent a big change from the previous requirements and expectations of tenants, who need to be supported in their transition into public tenancy through a sympathetic tenancy and life skills support system.

The tenant support system service provider's responsibilities include the following services related to inspections (FaHCSIA 2013 p. 155; NTG-DoH 2013a p. 22):

- » The process of inspections – when, why and how
- » Why the house needs to be kept clean and how
- » Demonstrate household cleaning products
- » Provide notice of when the inspection will take place
- » Walk and show the tenant what DoH's expectations are

- » Follow up on the tenants to ensure that they are sustaining a clean and healthy living environment.

The inspection regime includes an assessment of the condition and cleanliness of the following (ACG 2013 p. 47):

- » 'walls and doors;
- » cupboards and wardrobes;
- » ovens and stoves;
- » floors;
- » light fittings, power points, switches and controls;
- » taps;
- » bathrooms, toilets and laundry;
- » ceiling and exhaust fans;
- » windows;
- » external areas including veranda, paths, lawn and garden, garden sheds
- » fencing, gates and clothes line.'

Although not a part of the formal POE interview, some tenants reported that property inspections tended to be ad hoc in nature and not regular, let alone quarterly as promised (ANAO 2011 p. 123). Some residents, responding to the question of tenancy rules, related that inspections as a source of stress, knowing that they would be required to pay repairs if any damages were found to the house. Inspections were therefore seen by some tenants as a punitive instrument rather than a support mechanism for building sustainable tenancies. CAAHC informed the researchers that they were not aware of any clear policy within DHLGRS on what constitutes tenant-related damage (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers.comm., 07 August). This aspect of tenancy management, including inspections as support, clearly needs some further investigation to analyse its effectiveness.

The ACG report (2013 pp.46-49) has found through their research that over 50% claimed that their houses had been inspected. Most respondents said that the housing inspector stalked to them and made notes. Like our study, ACG found that there was confusion about the purpose and frequency of inspections.

#### **5.4.8 Feeling and Housing experience**

Under SIHIP, a new tenancy management system was designed to follow a public housing model which included standardising rents, property inspections and regulatory practices. This was structurally different from the community housing model run by the Indigenous Community Housing Associations regarding, among other things, the number of organisations involved, and has had a substantial effect on how tenants are feeling, and their housing experience.

As has been discussed previously, the broad intent of the tenancy reforms was well-intentioned. However, the roll out appears to have been problematic and poorly coordinated. Studies of tenancy management reforms, including this one, have found problems with communicating not just the reforms but also in conducting the tenancy support programs.

The rules and regulations have been well-received in many ways where people have been able to use the regulations to manage their visitors. Several respondents were also pleased with the inspection regime because it forced them to keep the house tidy and clean. While the inspections worried them, nobody condemned the practice outright. The rules did discourage tenants from making changes to their houses and yards, in addition to lacking money. The rules did not always prevent the tenants from making lifestyle choices. For example, despite the rules forbidding campfires near the house, many tenants made campfires anyway.

The allocation process itself was more complicated. A few respondents understood and even supported the rationale behind making housing allocation needs-based to accommodate the sick and the more economically and socially disadvantaged. However, they were mostly displeased with the lack of transparency in the decision making process. They consequently felt a loss of control over the locational aspect of their houses. Moreover, there was an expression of dissatisfaction with the lack of fit between a needs-based house allocation system and the preferred kinship system that underpins who lives where on Town Camps and indeed remote communities. There is a need for fine tuning the system to not only make it more transparent, but also to find a balance between the two systems. The Housing Reference Groups that represent each camp could play a more significant role in making this happen, if given real decision-making power.

The creation of Housing Reference Groups to make decisions on housing matters appears to acknowledge the importance of the Housing Association model. The importance of empowering the community to take decisions for itself cannot be overstated, in any context, and particularly in the current context of housing experience. Apart from injecting local knowledge and Aboriginal sensibility into the housing decision making process, HRGs need to take responsibility for their decisions. As long as HRGs serve only in advisory capacity to the government, they need not be responsible for any decision making and the community does not feel empowered to take control of its living environment. Most respondents in the larger Town Camps felt ambivalent about the HRGs and their performance. Broadly, the communities felt better represented by their Housing Associations rather than HRGs. Given that the HRG composition is primarily the same as the Housing Association, the difference possibly lies in the governance model associated with the operation of the two representative bodies. That HRG meetings, called by DoH, were held away from the Town Camps they represented may have contributed to the suspicion held

about its proceedings by the community members. CAAHC in their modified role as only tenancy managers (since early 2013) have proposed to hold HRG meetings within the community. Tangentyere could play an important role in finding ways to make HRGs more effective as a representative body, drawing on their experience of successfully managing collective decision making and advocating the best interests of the represented communities.

Paying rent did not appear to be much of an issue with the tenants. Nearly all the respondents felt that the charged rents were affordable and left them with enough money for other everyday activities. It was the absence of information flows or statements from the tenancy managers to the tenants listing rents, payments and direct deductions from Centrelink that was a contributing factor in making it harder for tenants to manage their finances better or differently.

The lack of trust in the Government, exacerbated by matters such as allocation and transparency is evident in responses and this was clearly having an impact on the overall experience of housing from a user perspective (CO 2012; Harris 2012). For example, many residents felt stressed about inspections and the financial impact it could have on them, as they weren't receiving rental statements or deduction receipts for damage taken directly from Centrelink payments. CAAHC too stressed that the reporting mechanism in place privileged the asset rather than the tenant, because it is more orientated towards identifying tenant-related damage or tenant obligations regarding maintenance rather than on tenant's rights or the landlord's duty to maintain the asset (J Berriman & M Davidson 2012, pers.comm., 07 August) (Mansell and Sowerbutts 2011).

Without effective tenancy management and support that includes good communications, consistency and predictability in events such as inspections, tenants are distracted and distressed by the regime. Given how positively tenants responded to many aspects to the new tenancy rules, there is a sound basis on which to improve this regime to reduce the imbalance it places on the overall housing experience.



## 6 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusions

The Alice Springs town camp residents exchanged, in all but Ilpeye Ilpeye's case, a 40-year lease of their land in return for \$100 million for housing and infrastructure upgrades. Before the housing works started, there were 199 houses listed in the Town Camps; 196 of these were rebuilt or refurbished by SIHIP and Tangentyere and 86 new houses built. New infrastructures, including roads, were also installed. The question driving the POE has been: What did the parties, the residents of the Town Camps and the Commonwealth Government, get out of this exchange? The POE has explored this question through interviews with residents, surveys of the houses, analysis of the policy and research environment, and interviews with institutional actors. The evaluation of the houses was the means for assessing the success of the building program in relation to the healthy living practices embodied in the SIHIP Guidelines and the National Indigenous Housing Guide, housing management arrangements and tenant expectations, and the quality of construction with its implications for health and sustainability. Issues of community consultation, design and appropriateness, community planning were considered as part of the process, as were procurement and construction issues.

Over 18 months, and three rounds of fieldwork, a rich picture of the evolution of the residents' relationship with their houses and the housing management regimes has emerged, as has a picture of the robustness of the housing fabric. Many residents and some of the organisations and agencies involved in the building program, such as Tangentyere Design, the Central Australian Housing Company, the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, members of the Territory Alliance and past staff of these organisations were generous with their time and information where possible to provide input into the study. Access to amended design guidelines and other procurement information was limited by confidentiality concerns on the part of the NT Government and Territory Alliance, which in turn limited the POE's 'value for money' considerations, in addition to contradicting the assumption of transparency that was part of the promise of the Alliance method. Nonetheless, sufficient information about the procurement process and the program's project management was available for analysis and incorporation in the recommendations.

The recommendations that flow from this evaluation are not only a list of 'What is to be done?'. They also suggest what each party involved in the Town Camp housing experience can do to contribute to implementing the recommendations.

As described in this report, the project's emphasis shifted from a primary focus on the house design and fabric to a consideration of the overall housing experience of town camp residents, as the initial relationship with the houses gave way to issues of property and tenancy management. It became clear that the evaluation of building and design in this particular public housing context had to be in the context of the management regimes crucial to the residents' experience. Perception of housing

performance by residents was inextricably linked to how it was managed, ie, it was less a matter that a door was off the hinge because it was flimsy than that it was not clear who should be doing and paying for the repair and when.

Generally speaking, the residents of all types of houses – new, rebuilt, and refurbished – were ‘happy’ with their houses, happy to have a new house or at least a fixed up house, and felt secure with their houses. There were exceptions where work had not been completed, such as in Ilpeye Ilpeye, and possibly Warlpiri, for reasons that remained unclear – different housing stock, or a 99 year lease meaning different priorities given to those houses, perhaps – but the numbers of such oddities were not significant enough to be able to draw any particular conclusion. The tenants adapted, if not in that case happily.

That most residents were happy did not of course mean that the housing design was without its problems. Orientation of the new houses affected their thermal properties and relationship to the street, neighbours, and clotheslines, with aspects of design reflecting the adaptation of new houses from the ‘Top End’ design used by Territory Alliance. Solutions to privacy and thermal efficiencies, such as the heavy canvas blinds installed in the Tangentyere rebuilds, had not been sufficiently considered for the SIHIP houses, but residents were adapting where possible. Conversely, many of the residents complained of being cold in the houses over winter, with the heating solutions having a mixed success rate, particularly with the Tangentyere refurb heaters. Although the designs developed by TA were the result of considerable knowledge, experience and consultation over years of housing design for Indigenous people, the target-oriented delivery process limited the extent of consultation in Alice Springs and further adaptation to local conditions, and building workmanship further compromised both resident enjoyment and longevity of the houses. Other decisions made to get the most out of the funding available, given the economies of scale and time involved, meant that the building program was efficient - residents received new houses and upgrades relatively fast – but it also meant that new materials such as the Ritek walls became and may continue to be problematic, and long- time residents were fitted out with new kitchens and laundry hardware that sometimes meant less workable spaces.

The inconsistent quality of construction was a surprise, given the access to trades and services in Alice Springs. Poor construction is endemic in remote Australia, the victim of remoteness and challenging quality assurance. The impact of mixed to poor construction in the Town Camps will be exacerbated by the limited 6 months defects liability period, in contrast to the usual 12 month period, which meant shoddy construction was more likely to go unnoticed and have a longer term impact on the housing life cycle. Choices of some materials such as plastic bathroom grates and flimsy screen doors appears short-sighted and at odds with the chosen robustness, if not aesthetic appeal, of elements such as the stainless steel benches and tile floors.

Similarly, there appeared to be inconsistency in the adherence to the few Critical Healthy Living Practices that were to be embedded in the process, resulting in poor ventilation, difficult access in some laundries and bathrooms and elements such as the

previously mentioned plastic grates. With the ongoing storage issues named by most residents, bathtubs were often being used as substitute storage units, as were kitchen benches, given the lack of useful cupboards. This offsets the positive aspects of the hardware choices, which for the most part proved durable over the period of the evaluation.

Storage remained a constant source of dissatisfaction throughout the interviews, and improved storage solutions would alleviate some other problems such as the small size of kitchens in relation to some of the larger houses. It is hard to know whether and how more consultation with individual households, rather than community groups, would have revealed residents' likely needs for storage and appropriately sized kitchens/bathrooms - there is clearly not enough, and in many cases less storage than there was in those houses where kitchen cupboards were removed and replaced with the open benches. The ongoing issue of storage solutions in the town camp houses revealed at least two major issues: first, it points to the impossibility in this case of fine tuning a mass housing program to accommodate legacy housing designs and individual need, begging the question of why bother with consultation in such a context unless the pact can be implemented, ie where householders are keen to be involved, that their input is reflected in the design. Second, the lack of adequate storage implies that the housing providers are not considering the tenants as consumers and users, as 'normal' householders, despite the drive to 'normalisation', but merely as occupants of a space designed for hygiene rather than comfort and 'normal' use. That at least one tenant felt they were living in a mortuary with all the stainless steel is indicative of the mixed relationship of residents with these aspects of design and the difficulty of designing for a group of people, some of whom have been tenants for 20 years, others for only two, and in almost all cases needing to cater for a fluctuating number of visitors.

It was assumed that mobility would have an impact on the ongoing appropriateness of the houses, given generally high mobility rates reported elsewhere (Foster et al. 2005; Prout 2008). In this study, there was less than 10% turnover in house bosses, a change to almost 1/3 of households regarding composition, and proximately 2/3 households reported visitors present in the last round of interviews. The major impact of mobility in the interviewed town camp population came about through the relationship of residents with their visitors; residents were often reluctant to name the number or tenure of visitors, particularly as for many it was unclear who might pay for what services and any damages. Many appreciated new tenancy rules that limited visitors, with tenancy management thus assisting visitor management. Visitors were not necessarily always perceived as unwelcome, but represented a housing cost. Some of the cost implications of visitors might be solved by changes to the yards and tenant capacity to make changes to their yards with assistance.

It was also clear throughout the POE that improving the yards and outdoor spaces remained a priority for householders. Not only did the lack of attention to the yards under the building programs have structural and health consequences, for example, poor drainage and pooling water, there was the aesthetic, cultural and security impact.

Yards were difficult to manage, and broken fences and gates added in some cases to safety fears. Some of the breakages in boundaries were repaired as part of the ongoing infrastructure works, but uncertainty remains about responsibility for fixing the boundaries, as well as the yards. Many householders had begun to make changes to their yards, including planting, and the majority of respondents in Stage 2.2, in response to the question about how they would spend \$1000, said that they would spend it on their yards, including verandas and trees. Further, householders had set up campfires again, despite being told they were forbidden under the new tenancy regime, though not apparently in the actual rules. These responses all re-confirmed the social, cultural and aesthetic importance of external spaces to housing that had already been well-documented by many observers and researchers. Ignoring these spaces may have affected town camp residents' health, relationship to their houses, and ability to work with or control their environment and visitors, effectively reducing the value of the new, refurbished or rebuilt housing.

Threaded throughout the householders' responses to questions about their relationship with their new or renovated houses were always and increasingly a matter of property and tenancy management. Most householders were not perturbed by the cost of renting, and found the new rules for visitors and inspections useful; rather, they were perturbed by an alienating allocation process and baffled by who was responsible for what, who to call when there was a problem, who would owe what money and what sort of changes they could make to their houses. The changes to the management regimes toward the end of 2012, with property and tenancy going to different providers, exacerbated the problem. The householders' relationship to their houses became dominated by their relationship with the external management regime that impinged and mediated their enjoyment of the house. Thus, although householders were mostly happy with their new and refurbished houses, if not their yards, they were stressed by how the houses were managed, making the housing experience an unsatisfactory one. Issues of appropriate design could not be separated in this case from issues of control, or a lack of it. The successful functioning of health hardware could not be wholly or successfully reconciled with the ways in which people lived and used their houses.

In short, the question of whether the town camp residents got value in return for their leases is ongoing; most of the houses are in better condition than they were and there are more of them, and householders adapted happily to many of the features such as the tiled floors, and began their own series of adaptations to address shortcomings in siting, landscaping and lack of individual consultation in the first instance. But the context, in which the houses are situated, the ways in which they are managed, is crucial and will continue to be crucial. That is, if the housing experience continues to be so negative, then how different is the situation for householders before or after the lease agreements? In any future large housing programs in the Alice Springs Town Camps, the housing *experience* – house, yards, management – needs to be considered to ensure the residents are getting proper value in the exchange.

## 6.2 Recommendations

The recommendations emerging from this evaluation address over 30 issues identified in the course of conducting interviews and surveys in the Alice Springs Town Camps in 2012-13. The recommendations range from general governance issues to very specific hardware issues. They are not only a list of ‘What is to be done?’ The following table of recommendations has been expanded to suggest what the major participants in the Town Camp housing experience might do to contribute to the implementation of the recommendations.

Recommendation	Government/ Housing developer	Tangentyere Council	Tenants/HRGs/ Housing Associations
<b>GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
<b>1 Review property and tenancy management regimes</b>  Focus of management regimes to enhance ‘housing experience’.	Review governance practices regularly, including feedback from tenants/HRGs to be more supportive, less punitive.	Advocate for tenants; provide feedback to the government/s on ‘housing experience’.	Voice issues and concerns to housing managers, HRGs, Housing Associations regarding housing and housing experience.
<b>2 Institute Indigenous tenancy support programs</b>  Tenants reported a preference for interacting with Indigenous organisations, like Tangentyere, who understood ‘their way’ of doing things.	Hire local Indigenous organisations such as Tangentyere to deliver service, schedule ongoing interactive programs rather than a single one-off engagement with new tenants.	Advise government on improving delivery of tenancy support services and programs.	Provide regular feedback, demand ongoing support from tenancy support provider.
<b>DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
<b>3 Outdoor amenity/yard improvements</b>  Yards and outdoor amenities appeared to be the most neglected aspects of the housing program.	Provide incentives to tenants to maintain and improve yards, fix up fences and gates through CDEP/RJCP, and create enabling regulatory environment.	Develop plant nurseries within town camps, make materials and expertise more accessible to tenants to improve outdoor amenity on their own.	Get actively involved in the design of yards and outdoor amenities for each house. Find ways to make own improvements. Seek out expertise. Look after plants and yard.
<b>4 Participatory Design</b>  In the SIHIP houses, tenants' participation in the design process was restricted. Involving long term tenants in particular will enhance tenant's sense of ownership.	Engage and encourage residents to get involved in the design or adaptation of houses, yards, verandas. Develop and improve SIHIP design guidelines as both community and professional resource.	Create design resource materials to enable productive engagement, build on and enhance SIHIP guidelines.	Participate in the design of houses and gardens.

5	<b>Yard drainage</b>  Poor drainage in yards impacts walls and foundations of houses but also has negative health impacts on residents by breeding mosquitoes etc.	Fix drainage problems in yards.	Advocate for fixing drainage problems in yards.	Report drainage issues as soon as possible to authority. Provide information to managers on where problems and water accumulation occurs.
6	<b>Locks – alternative keyless lock hardware for bedroom security</b>  Loss of keys results in damage to doors and locks.	Seek alternative locking arrangements, eg refer Healthabitat research on locks for remote housing.	Advise designers and administrators on how to overcome security issues.	Provide feedback on locks to Tangentyere and administrators.
7	<b>Healthy Living practices</b>  In DoH's environmental health categorisation of complaints, health hardware issues are accorded 'immediate' status. Tenants may have their own set of priorities which are not reconciled with the priorities allocated by CAAHC and DoH. Under current arrangements the service provider dominates the R&M discourse.	Use observational data on how health hardware is actually used along with using Healthy Living Practices principles in housing program development.	Through observation or research, document how tenants use health hardware, advise government and designers on how to make health hardware more effective in town camps.	Get involved in the design process, guide designers on how health hardware is actually used in the town camps and suggest how hardware can be improved to make it more useful for tenants.
8	<b>Bath tubs in refurb and rebuilds</b> Bath tubs are hard to maintain and keep clean, which can have a negative health impact.	Make bath tubs optional, install only if requested by a tenant.	Assist tenants with information about the advantages/disadvantages of bathtubs.	Ask for a bath tub if needed. Maintain and look after the bath tub
9	<b>Exhaust fans in bathrooms</b>  In several refurb and rebuilds bathrooms there was a presence of algae and mildew on the ceilings and walls.	Review specifications for house to include exhaust fans.	Include bathroom ventilation and related health issues in developing Tenancy Support Programs.	Report algae build-up in the bathroom to administrators, keep windows open to ventilate the bathroom after a shower.



<b>10 Solar hot water systems</b>  Tenants complained that the solar hot water systems did not have the capacity for large families and boosting wiped out any energy gains from solar.	Review the functioning of solar hot water systems in houses.	Conduct cost-benefit analysis on running solar hot water systems in houses.	Provide feedback and information on the functioning of the solar hot water system and expense for running to administrators and Tangentyere.
<b>11 Laundry space allocation</b>  The space allocation in the rebuilds and refurbis laundries was inadequate for effective and practical use.	Review current design practice for refurbis and rebuilds. Ensure that the design is practical.	See recommendations 4 and 7 above. Develop design resources.	Get involved in the design process. Demand extra space to be able to use laundry effectively if required.
<b>12 Floor waste gully grates</b> Steel floor waste gullies are more robust and easier to maintain.	Review specifications to deal with current ambiguity. Specify steel.	Advocate for replacement of grates and advise on process for replacement.	Ask for replacement of plastic floor waste gully grates.
<b>13 Kitchen sizes and storage</b>  Bigger houses need bigger kitchens to accommodate the larger number of users that the house can hold.	Review design of next tranche of new houses to ensure kitchen sizes are proportionate with size of the house, increase storage, relax regulatory environment to enable tenants to meet their storage needs.	Design better and more effective storage solutions with town camp residents.	Work out how to procure affordable and useful kitchen storage to meet needs.
<b>14 Toilet paper holders</b>  Recessed toilet paper holders are less prone to damage and therefore have positive health impact for tenants.	Review specifications for toilet paper holders.	Advocate for replacement of holders and advise on process for replacement.	Report broken toilet paper holders.
<b>15 Screen doors</b>  Aluminium framed screen doors in all but Tangentyere rebuilds too flimsy and subject to easy breakage.	Review design specifications for insect screen doors, ensure contractors supply and install as per specification.	Further review and performance of steel framed insect screens used in Tangentyere rebuilds.	Report damage to screen doors at the earliest. Request removal of the screen door if it is not needed.

<b>16 Accessibility for disabled visitability.</b>  Insufficient consideration given to disability needs.	Retrofit refurb and rebuilt houses for accessibility (door widths, grabrails, ramps etc). Enquire if disabled or elderly residents are likely to visit / live in the house.	Ensure tenants know what options may be available for households where disability is or might be a factor.	Clearly state need for accessibility if you have disabled or elderly visitors/tenants.
<b>17 External motion sensor lights.</b>  Many external lights too easily damaged, reducing security.	Review the quality of lights and sensors installed. Protect lights from damage. Provide an isolating switch to disable motion sensor light, if required.	Advocate for review of external lights and advise on process for replacement.	Request disabling of motion sensor lights, if not needed.
<b>TENANCY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
<b>18 Housing Reference Group (HRG) functioning</b> Tenant dissatisfaction with the operation of HRGs in advisory role to the government.	Review the role and functioning of HRGs. Strengthen HRG mandate for decision-making, not only advisory. Create transparency in processes.	Suitable design and funding of community meeting rooms for HRG deliberations within each town camp. Develop alternative Indigenous governance models to enable collective decision making outside HRGs.	Demand transparency in the HRG decision making process and housing allocation. Ensure that housing allocation in kin-based clusters is as per HRG recommendation.
<b>19 Tenancy rules and regulations</b>  Tenants felt stymied by some regulations and empowered with others. Tenancy rules need to be reviewed regularly from an Indigenous tenant's perspective to build sustainable tenancies.	Develop tenancy guidelines that support long-term tenancies. Encourage tenants to develop a sense of ownership of their houses. Develop tenancy guidelines that take cognisance of cultural factors and obligations. Strengthen tenancy regulations that help tenants to manage visitors.	Advise housing administrators on how suitable guidelines can be developed for long term tenancies, cultural needs and to better manage visitors.	Provide feedback to HRGs and Tangentyere on how rules and regulations are functioning or how to improve.

<b>20 Housing allocation</b> Maintaining kin group clustering is critical to safety perceptions of town camp dwellers.	Allocate housing on the basis of HRG advice.	Develop a guide for housing allocation that will provide a framework for HRG / Govt to make housing allocation decisions based on potential tenants preference and family groupings.	Indicate preference for location in the camp. Work with HRG or Indigenous organisation to make preference known to government.
<b>21 Occupying a house</b> House condition at the time of occupancy in some instances would be unacceptable.	Ensure that works on the house are complete at the time of occupancy.	Assist tenants in conducting a housing condition report. Develop resources to build tenant capacity.	Ensure that there are no outstanding works remaining on the house at the time of occupancy.
<b>22 Tenancy support programs</b> Improved communication and transparency with tenants. Utilise local knowledge to improve outcomes	See recommendation 2. Ensure one-on-one communication with tenants. Provide advice on tenancy issues regularly (not one off). Review tenancy support programs to ensure all tenants benefit from the program, not just head tenants.	Develop tenancy support guidelines that are specific to town camp housing contexts. Advise housing administrators on how to make programs more effective.	Demand ongoing tenancy support. Ensure that new tenants also receive tenancy support services.
<b>23 Residential Tenancies Act (RTA)</b> RTA is currently less sensitive to Indigenous tenancies and realities.	Read with recommendation 19, review RTA and introduce flexibility for long-term Indigenous tenants e.g. alterations to house, light fires near house, local cultural demands.	Advise government on how flexibility can be introduced in tenancy agreements to accommodate local Indigenous demands.	HRGs to advise government on how flexibility can be introduced in tenancy agreements to accommodate local Indigenous demands.
<b>24 Rents</b> DoH was not issuing any receipts to tenants at the time of the interviews.	Simplify the rent-setting system to be based on asset rather than household composition.	Advocate for proper documentation of rental process.	Demand a receipt and explanation of any deductions, payments for each rental cycle.

<p><b>25 Repairs and maintenance (R&amp;M)</b></p> <p>There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the R&amp;M processes and outcomes.</p>	<p>Improve the R&amp;M response times, simplify approval process that , expedites repairs. Improve communications with tenants, keep tenants updated on the status of their complaints, encourage one-on-one contact to record problems. Reduce / rationalise the number of agencies on the ground.</p>	<p>Advocate for and advise on improved process for improvement of R&amp;M.</p>	<p>Explain clearly to the TMO the risks involved to health and life if repairs are not carried out quickly, provide information on how it impacts families and health.</p>
<p><b>26 Preventive maintenance</b></p> <p>Carry out preventive maintenance that is not reliant on tenants reporting to enhance the life of the asset.</p>	<p>Take a proactive approach to R&amp;M, involve local community in the R&amp;M.</p>	<p>Develop training for tenancy officers and sensitise to Indigenous tenancy concerns with regards to R&amp;M or priorities.</p>	<p>Report damage/repair issue to authorities as soon as possible.</p>
<p><b>27 Transcending maintenance of 'health hardware'</b></p> <p>Functioning health hardware may not be the tenant's priority. Understand tenant's needs.</p>	<p>Listen to and act on tenant's priorities. Train tenancy officers to talk to and discuss housing issues. Use inspection procedures more effectively and attend to them swiftly.</p>	<p>Train tenancy officers to talk to tenants in town camps. Develop an R&amp;M approach that is more sympathetic to and aligned with town camp residents expressed housing repair priorities.</p>	<p>Talk to tenancy officers and explain your priorities when they come to inspect.</p>
<p><b>28 R&amp;M performance indicators</b></p> <p>The asset protection approach to R&amp;M does not take qualitative indicators account such as satisfaction with the process.</p>	<p>Review performance indicators of R&amp;M. Include qualitative factors to assess tenants' experience and satisfaction.</p>	<p>Compile data and evidence on the advantages and disadvantages of the community housing model of property management to inform government policy and practice.</p>	<p>Express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with R&amp;M activities.</p>

<p><b>29 Tenant related damage (TRD)</b></p> <p>Tenants are unclear about what tenant related damage is, how to report it and who to report it to.</p>	<p>Clearly define tenant-related damage. Inform tenants if they are liable for damage. Issue receipts to tenants if repairs costs are recovered from the tenant.</p>	<p>Conduct housing condition reports prior to occupying the house on behalf of tenants. Advocacy for tenants paying for poor construction and/or visitor-inflicted damage.</p>	<p>Follow guidelines for reporting damage caused by visitors. Ask if tenant will be required to pay for damage. Demand explanation why damage is categorised as TRD.</p>
<p><b>PROCUREMENT AND PROJECT DELIVERY RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>			
<p><b>30 Defects liability period</b></p> <p>SIHIP required only a 6-month defects liability period.</p>	<p>Follow standard building contract practices to provide 12 months of defect liability.</p>	<p>Review the housing construction contracts on behalf of HRGs.</p>	<p>HRGs to demand that Tangentyere review the housing contract on their behalf.</p>
<p><b>31 Infrastructure works and scheduling</b></p> <p>Housing works were completed first followed by infrastructure works causing health hazards for residents.</p>	<p>Review works scheduling to ensure infrastructure works are completed prior to building works, discuss scheduling with HRGs/tenants.</p>	<p>Review the housing construction schedules on behalf of HRGs.</p>	<p>Get involved in the works scheduling with administrators. Seek advice from Tangentyere for better outcomes.</p>

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## 8 APPENDICES

### 8.1 Appendix 1 –Interviews

#### 8.1.1 Stage 1 Interview

##### 8.1.1.1 New House Interview

### INTERVIEW

Project: Post Occupancy Evaluation of new Alice Springs Town Camp Housing 2008-2011

**Town Camp:**

**House No:**

**House Boss (+ gender):**

**Number of Rooms:**

#### 1. Where did you live before you moved into the new house?

Place:

☐ With Family (who/relationship)

☐ other

#### 2. How long have you been living in this new house?

☐ 3 months (since Christmas -summer)

☐ 6 months (carnival/show -winter)

☐ 1 year (after Christmas –summer)

☐ 1.5 years (Melbourne cup time – winter)

☐ 2 years (after Christmas - summer)

## DESIGN

### 3. Does the house look (design) the way you wanted it to look?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Did anyone talk to you and get your ideas about the design of your new house?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ How?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Is the size of the house (number of bedrooms/sleepouts) what you wanted it to be?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ why?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why not?

### 6. Is the house in the place where you wanted it to be (camp/close to family)?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ why?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why not?

**7. What do you LIKE/ DON'T LIKE in your NEW house?**

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

☐ Yes. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. We want to ask how well some rooms are working for you:**

**KITCHEN**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

☐ Yes. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**TOILET**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**BATHROOM**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

☐ Yes. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**LAUNDRY**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

YES NO Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Are you happy with where the clothesline is?

YES NO Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What do you LIKE / DON'T LIKE about your yard and the outside part of the house?**

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## **FEELING**

**10. Since moving into this house, how do you feel? (health)**

GOOD / ALRIGHT / BAD

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Do you and your family feel safe in your house or not safe?**

SAFE / NOT SAFE

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Has the house helped to make any of your everyday activities around the house easier or better to do?**

Yes / No

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_



## MAINTENANCE

13. Is your house easy to look after?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Why?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why?

14. Are you spending any money on improving your new house?

Yes (how much)

No

15. Is this house costing you more or less money to live in than the house you lived in before?

☐ More

☐ Power

☐ Rent

☐ Other

☐ Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Less

16. When something breaks down, who do you talk to, to fix it?

☐ Territory Housing

☐ Central Australian Affordable Housing (Tangentyere)

☐ Other

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## TENANCY

### 17. Did you sign any paperwork before moving into your house?

- ☐ Rules and regulations
- ☐ Condition report
- ☐ Rental/Tenancy agreement
- ☐ Other

If yes, was anything about the paperwork explained to you before you signed?

YES / NO

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

### 18. What tenancy support have you received since being in this house?

- ☐ Tangentyere Council
- ☐ Anglicare
- ☐ Mission Australia
- ☐ Other

☐ None \_\_\_\_\_

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## PEOPLE IN THE HOUSE

We want to ask some questions about yourself and others living in the house:

### 19. How old are you?

Adults:

Children:

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### 21. Where is the income in your household coming from?

- ☐ Carer's allowance
- ☐ Widows pension
- ☐ Single parent pension/partner pension
- ☐ Age Pension
- ☐ Disability Allowance
- ☐ Youth allowance
- ☐ Working (what work?)
- ☐ Other

### 22. After you pay rent, do you have enough money left over for food and other things?

YES / NO

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU**

## 8.1.1.2 refurb/rebuild Interview

### INTERVIEW

Project: Post Occupancy Evaluation of new Alice Springs Town Camp Housing 2008-2011

#### TYPE OF HOUSE

Town Camp:

House No:

House Boss (+ gender):

Number of Rooms:

#### 1. Is this a new house or an old house that's been fixed up?

- ☐ Alliance rebuild
- ☐ Alliance refurbished
- ☐ Tangentyere rebuild

#### 2. What work was done on your house?

- ☐ Kitchen \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Toilet \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Bathroom \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Laundry \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Bedrooms \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Yard \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Outdoor living \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Comment**\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Where did you live when the builders fixed up your old house?**

☐ Yipirinya Hostel

☐ Stuart Lodge

☐ Akantga Hostel

☐ Territory Housing

☐ Other

**4. Was that OK?**

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Why?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why not?

**5. How long have you been living in this house since it was fixed up/new?**

☐ 3 months (since Christmas -summer)

☐ 6 months (carnival/show -winter)

☐ 1 year (after Christmas –summer)

☐ 1.5 years (Melbourne cup time – winter)

☐ 2 years (after Christmas - summer)

## DESIGN

6. Are you happy with the way your house looks now?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

7. Did anyone talk to you and get your ideas before fixing up your house?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ How?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_

8. Is the size (number of bedrooms/sleepouts) of the house good for you now?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ why?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why not?

9. What do you LIKE/DON'T LIKE in your FIXED UP house?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_



**10. We want to ask how well some rooms are working for you:**

**KITCHEN**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

☐ Yes. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**TOILET**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

☐ Yes. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**BATHROOM**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

☐ Yes. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**LAUNDRY**

☐ Works well. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Not working. Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Is it in the right place for you?

YES NO Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Are you happy with where the clothesline is?

YES NO Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. What do you LIKE / DON'T LIKE about your yard and the outside part of the house?**

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## **FEELING**

**12. Since moving into this house, how do you feel? (health)**

GOOD / ALRIGHT / BAD

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Do you and your family feel safe in your house or not safe?**

SAFE / NOT SAFE

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Has the house helped to make any of your everyday activities around the house easier or better to do?**

Yes / No

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## MAINTENANCE

15. Is your house easy to look after?

☐ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Why?

☐ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why?

16. Are you spending any money on improving your fixed up house?

Yes (how much)

No

17. Is this house costing you more or less money to live in than before it was fixed?

☐ More

☐ Power

☐ Rent

☐ Other

☐ Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Less

18. When something breaks down, who do you talk to, to fix it?

☐ Territory Housing

☐ Central Australian Affordable Housing (Tangentyere)

☐ Other

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## TENANCY

**19. Did you sign any paperwork before moving into your house?**

- ☐ Rules and regulations
- ☐ Condition report
- ☐ Rental agreement
- ☐ Other

If yes, was anything about the paperwork explained to you before you signed?

YES / NO

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**20. What tenancy support have you received since being in this house?**

- ☐ Tangentyere Council
- ☐ Anglicare
- ☐ Mission Australia
- ☐ Other

☐ None \_\_\_\_\_

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## PEOPLE IN THE HOUSE

We want to ask some questions about yourself and others living in the house:

21. How old are you?

22. How many people live in the house?

Adults:

Children:

---

---

23. Where is the income in your household coming from?

- ☐ Carer's allowance
- ☐ Widows pension
- ☐ Single parent pension/partner pension
- ☐ Age Pension
- ☐ Disability Allowance
- ☐ Youth allowance
- ☐ Working (what work?)
- ☐ Other

24. After you pay rent, do you have enough money left over for food and other things?

THANK YOU



## 8.1.2 Stage 2.1 Interview

### Householder Interview

Town Camp: \_\_\_\_\_ House No: \_\_\_\_\_

House Boss:

☐ same

☐ other (reason?) Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. What are the changes in your household?

- **Family**

---

---

- **Visitor**

how many/how long are they allowed to stay

---

---

- **Income/employment**

---

---

- **Stress**

Number of visitors/ overcrowding/ supporting extra visitors or family

---

## DESIGN

### 2. Did you make Improvements to the house?

- **Lounge** (list improvements/changes made)

---

---

- **kitchen**  
Improved storage?

---

---

- **bedrooms**  
Improved wardrobe/storage?

---

---

- **toilet/bathroom/laundry**

---

---

- **other**

---

---

*Take photos of improvements*

**3. Did you make improvements to the yard/outdoor living?** (list improvements/changes made)

---

---

---

---

*Take photos of improvements*

**4. What are the improvements you would like to make?** (not what improvements you want others to make for you)

- **House** (list improvements/changes made)

---

---

---

- **Yard/outdoor living**

---

---

---

## FEELING

5. Do you feel more comfortable in the house now?

- Coping with winter/ getting used to house and yard/adapting to problems in the house/yard

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. How are you feeling about the major changes in the town camp?

- Roads/drains

---

---

- Letterboxes/street names

---

- **Streetlights**

---

---

**7. How close has the community bond been since the new houses/work was done? (sense of community and closeness)**

---

---

---

---

- **feeling safe**

---

---

## **Maintenance**

**8. Have repairs been done in the last 6 month?**

- ☐ yes  
☐ no

- **What was repaired?**

- Any new problems?

---

---

- Have you reported the problem, when and to whom?

---

---

- What was the response?

---

---

*Take photos of maintenance issues*

**9. Who pays for any damages?**

- Do you pay for it?

---

---



- **Visitors**

---

---

**10. Do you worry about paying for damages?**

---

---

- **How does that affect you and your family?**

---

---

## **TENANCY MANAGEMENT**

**11. What are the things that worry you about the house?**

- **Paying rent**

---

---

- **Territory Housing rules**

---

---

- Visitors (damaging things/understanding how to use the house)

---

---

- Other

---

---

**12. Do you or your visitors have problems operating things?**

- Air-conditioner \_\_\_\_\_

- Toilet flush \_\_\_\_\_

- Hot/cold water taps \_\_\_\_\_

- Stove/oven \_\_\_\_\_

- Tangentyere heating \_\_\_\_\_

- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Do you get any records of rent payments or other payments from Territory Housing?**

☐ Yes

What records? \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No

Do you want to know?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**THANK YOU**

### 8.1.3 Stage 2.2 Interview

#### HOUSEHOLDER

Town Camp: \_\_\_\_\_

House No: \_\_\_\_\_

House Boss:

☐ same

☐ other

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are the changes in your household?

- Family

---

---

- Visitor

---

---

- Income/employment

---

---

#### DESIGN

2. Are you happy with your house?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Why \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What is working/not working?**

	good	not good	comments
--	------	-------------	----------

Kitchen

Bathroom

Toilet

Laundry

Bedroom

Lounge

Yard

**4. Does the house suit you and your family?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Why \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Would you make any changes to your house and yard to deal with visitors?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

What \_\_\_\_\_

Why

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6. If you saved \$ 1,000 for improving your house and yard, what would you do?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Have you tried to improve your house and yard?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

What?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why not:

☐ No money

☐ Territory Housing rules

☐ Too busy

☐ No security

☐ No support (from \_\_\_\_\_)

☐ Too many kids



☐ No interest

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Have you tried to do something about the lack of storage (kitchen, laundry, bedroom, lounge)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## FEELING

8. Do you feel safe in your house?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you feel safe in your camp?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. How do you feel about the new Territory Housing rule which decides who gets a house in your camp?

☐ Good

☐ Worried

☐ Don't know

Why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## MAINTENANCE

### 11. Have you recently reported a maintenance problem?

☐ Yes    When? \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No    Do you know what to do if you have a problem?

☐ yes    Who? \_\_\_\_\_

☐ no

- What was the problem?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Who did you report to?

☐ CAAHC (Affordable Housing)

☐ Tangentyere

☐ Territory Housing

☐ Ingerrekke

☐ All of the above

☐ Other

☐ No one

- What happened?

☐ fixed

☐ asked me to contact

\_\_\_\_\_

☐ they said they will come and fix it

☐ fixed it ourselves

☐ nothing

☐ don't know

☐ other

\_\_\_\_\_

- Did you have to follow up on the problem?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**12. Do you know if you have to pay for repairing this problem?**

**(Or: Did you have to pay for repairs before?)**

☐ Yes

☐ No

- Did you know how much it was going to cost?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**13. Was it different when repair and maintenance was done by Tangentyere (Housing Association) then it is now?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

- What was different and why was it better or worse? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**14. How do you think the repair process now can be made easier for you?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## TENANCY MANAGEMENT

### 15. Do you know what the Territory Housing Rules are?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some rules

### 16. Do you like any of the Territory Housing Rules?

- ☐ Yes
- Which ones and why? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ No
- Which ones and why not? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 17. Which Territory Housing Rules would you like to change?

- ☐ Visitors      Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ 3 month inspection      Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Number of animals      Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Getting permissions      Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Rent charged/bedroom      Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Bond      Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Is there anything else that Territory Housing and others could do to help you manage your house and yard better?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**Who (and how)**

☐ Tangentyere

---

☐ Mission Australia

---

☐ Frontier Services

---

☐ Territory Housing

---

☐ Ingerrekke

---

☐ CAAHC (Affordable Housing)

---

☐ Other

---

**THANK YOU**



## 8.2 Appendix 2 – Surveys

### 8.2.1 Stage 1 – Sample Survey

<b>Project: Post Occupancy Evaluation of new Town Camp Housing in</b>				
TOWN CAMP				
House No.				
Type of House	SIHIP new	SIHIP rebuild	SIHIP refurbished	TANG rebuild
No. of bedrooms				
Surveyor/s				
Photos	yes	no		
Plan	yes	no		Plan No
Date & Time of survey:				

Overall condition
-------------------

A INTERNAL STRUCTURE & BUILDING					
This section of the survey covers all the spaces under the roof recorded on the day of survey.					
1	Living Room	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Floor				
	Walls				
	Ceiling				
	Windows				
	Windows - lock				
	Windows - location				
	Doors- condition				
	Doors - lock				
	Doors - location				
	Screens				
	Ceiling fans				
	Natural light				
	Wall power outlets				
	minimal use of power extensions				
	Working Curtains				
	Smoke alarms				
	Storage				
	Ventilation				
	Other				

	Comment:
--	----------



3	Kitchen	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Floor				
	Floor waste outlet				
	Walls				
	Ceiling				
	Windows				
	Window - locks				
	Window - location				
	Doors				
	Doors - lock				
	Doors - location				
	Stove				
	Light				
	Sink & drain board/s				
	Taps & spouts				
	Shelving				
	OH Cupboards				
	Pantry Cupbd				
	Drawers				
	Access to rubbish bin				
	Power outlet- location				
	Exhaust fan/hood				
	Natural ventilation				
	Ceiling fan				
	Fridge/freezer - location				
	Other				

	Comment:          
--	--





6	Bedroom 3	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Floor				
	Walls				
	Ceiling				
	Windows				
	Windows - lock				
	Windows - location				
	Doors				
	Doors - lock				
	Doors - location				
	Door/window Screens				
	Ceiling fans				
	Wall power outlets				
	Minimal use of power extensions				
	Curtains				
	Smoke/Fire alarms				
	Wardrobes				
	Natural Light				
	Natural ventilation				
	Other				

Comment:	
----------	--



7	Wet Area	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Toilet/Bathroom				
	Floor				
	Floor - non-slip				
	Step down to wet area				
	Floor drain				
	Walls				
	Ceiling				
	Windows				
	Windows - lock				
	Windows - location				
	Fixed/natural ventilation				
	Doors				
	Doors - lock				
	Doors - location				
	Window Screens -				
	Fittings & fixtures				
	Hand washing in WC				
	Vanity basin				
	Hooks				
	Power outlets				
	Power locations				
	Natural Light				
	Exhaust fan				
	Other				

	Comment:
--	----------

8	Laundry	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Floor				
	Floor - non slip				
	Step down to wet area				
	Floor drain				
	Walls				
	Ceiling				
	Windows				
	Windows - lock				
	Windows - location				
	Fixed ventilation				
	Doors				
	Doors - lock				
	Doors - location				
	Door/window Screens				
	Fiitings & fixtures				
	Whitegoods secure				
	Washing machine space - usable				
	Laundry trough & bench				
	Lighting				
	Storage				
	Link to drying yard				
	Ventilation				
	Other				
	Comment: <div></div>				

B		YARD			
This section of the survey covers aspects of the yard enclosed by the house fence.					
1	YARD	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Fence & gate				
	Height (to prevent easy straddling)				
	Visual privacy				
	Clothesline				
	Drying yard paving				
	Landscaping				
	Landscape - plants/trees				
	Landscape - lawn				
	Landscape - paths				
	Shade/amenity				
	Lighting				
	Dust reduction				
	Irrigation points				
	Drainage				
	Power outlets (weatherproof)				
	Other				
	Carport				
	Storage/garden shed				
	Letter box				
	Street/house number				
	Other				
Comment:					

2	<b>External Floor: veranda, car port</b>	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Floor heights to enable disabled accessibility				
	Flooring veranda				
	Level/grade veranda				
	Flooring carport				
	Level/grade carport				
	Connection details at old & new junctions				
	Drainage (if visible)				
	other				
	Comments:				
3	<b>External Walls/Columns</b>	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Walls				
	Paint/finish				
	Columns				
	other				
	comments:				
4	<b>External Ceiling/Eaves</b>	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Eaves				
	Sealed penetrations				
	Sealed door/window				
	Paint/finish				
	Roof overhang for shading				
	Other				
	comments:				

5	Roof & Roof plumbing	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Roof				
	Roof colour/paint				
	Gutter				
	Down pipe				
	Whirligig, ridge vent				
	Roofspace ventilation				
	Other				
	comments:				
6	Doors, Windows, equipment	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	Doors & windows				
	Ventilators				
	Sun protection to doors & windows				
	Seals to doors & windows				
	Solar HW				
	Evaporative Airconditioner				
	Eqpmt Security - protected from theft or damage				
	TV antennas/dish				
	Card meter - location				
	Switchboard security				
	Electrical cabling protected				
	Lights				
	Isolation valve for water				
	Irrigation taps				
	Accessibility to service eqpmt				
	Other				

	Comments:
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8	Outdoor Living	Good	OK	Poor	Comment
	<b>Areas</b>				
	Cooking area (incl bench & sink)				
	Eating area				
	Fumes extraction				
	Roof protection/Shade -				
	Wind protection				
	Floor				
	Floor - level				
	Eaves - protection from sun & rain				
	Roof - insulated				
	Roof - ventilated				
	Ceiling fan				
	Privacy				
	Storage				
	Other				

	Comments: <div style="height: 200px; border: 1px solid black; margin-top: 5px;"></div>
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## 8.2.2 Stage 2.2 Sample Survey

CAMP	TRUCKING YARDS		
House No	XX		
House Type	Tangentyere rebuild		
Date of Survey			
Surveyed By	YS/SP/RE		
Photos	yes/no		
House Boss			
Stage 1 Summary of House/Yard Issues			
laundry: lock in poor condition, no storage space, clothline access poor; yard: no tree, no landscaping, no shade, no dust reduction; verandah: floor rough.			
Stage 2.2 Status House/Yard Issues	Fixed	Same	Comment
Laundry: lock in poor condition			
verandah: rough floor			



<b>Stage 2.2 Adaptation/Use</b>				
<b>Yard</b>		<b>comment</b>		
poor access to clothline				
no landscaping, no shade				
no dust control				
<b>House</b>		<b>comment</b>		
no storage in laundry				
<b>Yard Survey</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Fence/Gate				
Clothesline				
Landscaping - plants/trees				
Paths/paving				
Lighting				
Car port				
Letterbox				
Drainage				
Verandah floor condition				
Wall condition				
Paint				
Roof (incl eaves)				
Doors/windows				
Irrigation tap condition				
HWS (Hot Water System)				
Evap AC				
Meter box				
Overall comment:				
<b>Critical Healthy Living Practices</b>				
<b>Laundry: P2 Washing cloth</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Floor				
walls				
Doors				

	Bench				
	Trough/Sink				
	drainage				
	shelving/storage				
	Clothesline				
<b>Bathroom/Toilet: P1 Washing people P3 Removing waste water</b>		<b>Good</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Comment</b>
	Floor				
	Walls				
	Fixtures/fittings				
	Drainage				
	Hot water				
	Light/vent				
	Windows				
	Doors				
<b>Kitchen</b>		<b>Good</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Comment</b>
	Floor				
	Walls				
	Bench				
	Sink				
	Stove				
	Storage				
	Light/vent				
	Windows				
	Doors				
	Exhaust fan				
<b>Lounge</b>		<b>Good</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Comment</b>
	Floor				
	Walls				
	Windows				
	Doors				
	Ceiling				
<b>Bedroom</b>		<b>Good</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Comment</b>
	Floor				
	Walls				
	Windows				
	Doors				

verandah



outside



kitchen



laundry



## 8.3 Appendix 3- Newsletters

### 8.3.1 Stage 1 Newsletter

As the Tangentyere researchers summed up:

"It's alright but not what they initially expect. Yards are too big to maintain for only a two bedroom unit. It's good to have a house of their own but we still have to cater for our extended families. Not enough storage in houses from kitchen to bedroom to laundry to lounge. Alliance houses are just a rough and ready house just as long as someone is living in it. Tangentyere houses worked with families to their likings and are happy with what they have."

#### What next

We are now starting Stage 2 of the research project. We will conduct further interviews with house bosses and do surveys in the houses that we visited in March. The information we collected then will be used to develop the new questions for September.

We will also talk with representatives of Housing Reference Groups in the selected town camps, Territory Alliance, Territory Housing, Central Australian Affordable Housing, Tangentyere Design, Tangentyere Construction and Alliance contractors for other information.

The researchers of Tangentyere research hub and the CAT teams look forward to meeting you again in September and hope you are happy to be interviewed and survey your house. The interviews and surveys will be shorter in this round. Our interest in September will include recording the house condition, your level of satisfaction with rent arrangements and your physical comfort in the house.

After completing Round 2, another report of our findings will be available to you.

#### Contact information

Please contact us if you would like more detail, a copy of the report for Round 1 or any other information about the project:

##### CAT

Sonja Peter on 89596153  
Yash Srivastava on 89596 171  
Ruth Elvin on 89596148

##### Tangentyere Research Hub

Denise Foster on 89514268  
Sian Owen-Jones, Manager of Social Services on 89514 244



www.icat.org.au



You may remember meeting us in March when we came around, interviewed you and walked around your house. Since we met, we have put together a report on what we found through the interview and survey of your house. We would like to share our findings with you through this newsletter.

#### What this project is about

Tangentyere Council asked CAT (Centre for Appropriate Technology) to look at and evaluate some of the new, rebuilt or refurbished houses that have been completed since 2008 in some of the town camps. Researchers of Tangentyere Research Hub and CAT are working together on this study.

The aim of this project is to understand and report your view on issues such as the design of your house; how it meets your needs; how your house helps you to live life in the way you want to; your satisfaction with the new rental and maintenance arrangements with Territory Housing and the cost of living in your house.



Tangentyere Researchers: Vanessa Davis, Audrey McCormack, Denise Foster



CAT researchers: Sonja Peter, Yash Srivastava, Ruth Elvin

CAT researchers also surveyed your house to report on the quality of construction of the house; what works well and what doesn't and what breaks down.

Your responses and what we see will help architects, builders and managers to make future houses in the town camps better to suit resident's needs. It will also help to better organise rent, repairs and maintenance arrangements for the houses.

This project consists of three rounds of interviews and surveys:

**Round 1** was to gather information through interviews with residents and surveys of the houses. This was done in March 2012. The information collected will help us to compare how your views on your house may change over time. It will also help to compare how your house condition may change over time.

**Round 2** will involve collecting more information from you about your satisfaction and concerns about your house 6 months after we first talked with you. This will happen in September 2012. We will note what things have or have not worked well in your house since the last meeting.

**In Round 3** is scheduled for March 2013 - 6 months after Round 2. Again we will ask about what things have changed since we met in September and hope you are happy to tell us more about your house and your life in it then.

The Tangentyere Executive Committee and the Ethics Committee in Central Australia have approved this research.

#### What we have done so far

From 6-23 March, Denise Foster, Vanessa Davis and Audrey McCormack from Tangentyere Research Hub and Sonja Peter, Yash Srivastava, and Ruth Elvin from CAT talked to selected residents of different house types (new, rebuilt and refurb) in six selected Town Camps.

The people we spoke with signed consent forms to confirm that they understood the project and that their identity was kept private. The interviews took about 30 minutes and included questions about how the house boss felt about the house and the new house and rent arrangements.

With the resident's permission, CAT researchers walked around the yard and inside the house to see how house was being used and how it was built by the contractors. This survey also took about 30 minutes.

#### What we learned

From the interviews we learned that residents of new houses were pleased, because the houses are new, functional and easy to clean. The houses provide a sense of their 'own place' to many residents.

The surveys showed that the new houses are in a reasonable condition, except for the walls, screen doors and external lights, all of which were also reported by residents in their interviews.

Residents of the rebuilt and refurbished houses were happy but like the residents in the new houses they mentioned a lack of enough storage in the kitchen, bedrooms and laundries.

In all surveyed house types, the condition of the yards made residents unhappy. The survey also found that poor condition of yards could affect the health and safety of residents. We also found that laundries are far away from clotheslines. In some houses, the main entry to the house is through the laundry. This shows that there needs to be more flexibility in the design of the house to allow different needs.

There were mixed responses to the way rent was paid. In many refurbished and rebuilt houses, the repair work was not visible to residents. There is confusion about who is responsible for repairs and maintenance.

Residents also complained about bedroom and bathroom locks.



## 8.3.2 Stage 2. 1 Newsletter



### Is your fixed up or new house working for you?

**Who are we?**  
We are a team of researchers, Yash and Sonja from CAT (Centre for Appropriate Technology) and Denise Foster from Tangentyere Research Hub. We have been employed by Tangentyere Council to do this research.

**What are we doing?**

- We are doing a check on how the new and repaired houses are working for you from the time you have lived in them since 2008.
- What we done so far?
- In March last year, we talked to 53 house bosses in 6 town camps and walked around the house and yard.
- In September we asked the same house what had changed.
- The reports can be requested from Tangentyere Council. These reports don't identify any tenants or house numbers.

**How will this help you?**

- By answering our questions and letting us look at your house and yard, the government and Housing will hear what you say about the houses or what can make them better.
- This will lead to better houses for town camps.
- Housing and Tangentyere can better look after houses and improve support and services for tenants.

**What we cannot do**

- We can't fix up your house if it has problems. You will have to report the problems to Housing or whoever looks after your houses currently.

**What's next?**

- To complete this important study, we are coming around to the same houses that we talked to last year for the last time.
- We now ask you different questions and have a look at your house in February and March 2013. We want to compare what has changed with you and your house since we last met.
- We hope you will make the time to talk to us and allow us to look at your house and yard.

**Thank You!**



CAT and Tangentyere Researchers



Walking around house and yards

**How to contact us:**  
**CAT**  
Sonja Peter on 8959 6153  
Yash Srivastava on 8959 6171

**Tangentyere Research Hub**  
Denise Foster on 89514286



Centre for Appropriate Technology



TANGENTYERE COUNCIL

### 8.3.3 Stage 2.2 Newsletter



#### The study

CAT (Centre for Appropriate Technology) carried out the study for Tangentyere Council.

We wanted to find out how the Alliance and Tangentyere Houses built since 2008 have worked for you in the Town Camps. We also wanted to know how to build better houses for Town Camps in the future.

Since March 2012, researchers from CAT and Tangentyere Research Hub have been interviewing residents who live in new, rebuilt or refurbished houses in Hidden Valley, Larapinta, Karnta, Ilpeye Ilpeye, Trucking Yards and Warlpiri Camps.

House bosses were asked how they felt about their houses and how the new rent collection and repair & maintenance process is working for them. CAT staff also looked at the houses and yards to find out how good the construction was.

#### Interviews and surveys

In March 2012 we talked to 53 house bosses and with their permission surveyed their house and yard. What we found was shown to residents in a newsletter, and we wrote the first report for Tangentyere Council.

We came back 6 months later in September 2012 to talk to the same house bosses. This time 39 of the original 53 house bosses were interviewed. We put together what we found in a newsletter to the residents and wrote a second report for Tangentyere Council.

In March 2013 we returned again to the original 53 houses and this time interviewed 38 house bosses. We also surveyed the houses and yards again to note the changes to the houses in the past 12 months. Before we did the interviews we had a BBQ run by Tangentyere Council in 5 Town Camps. We are now writing the final report for Tangentyere Council about what we found and how housing can be made better for Town Camps residents.



## What we found

We have listed here some of the things we found. More details are written up in the final report for Tangentyere Council.

### House

- Most tenants are happy with their new or fixed up house.
- People feel safe have family living close by.
- Most of the cracks and peeling paint in the new houses are fixed.
- Some tenants in reburbished and rebuilt houses were disappointed that not more was done to fix their houses better and that no one listened to them.
- Houses don't have enough storage in their kitchen, laundry and bedrooms.



### Yard

- Many yards were in poor condition, with some having drainage problems and water pooling.
- Most tenants would like to fix up their yards and plant trees.
- Some fences and gates still need to be fixed.



### New Infrastructure

- Tenants at Trucking Yards, Hidden Valley and Larapinta like and feel safe with their new roads, lights and speed breaks.
- Infrastructure work was done after the houses were completed, which made it hard and unsafe for tenants.





## Repairs and Maintenance

- Tenants are still not sure who to report to when something is broken.
- Tenants would like things to be fixed faster.
- Tenants don't know what damage is their responsibility.
- Tenants want to know when things are getting fixed and would like someone to keep them informed.
- A majority of the residents felt that Tangentyere Council's running of the repairs and maintenance program was better than the current system. Tenants said that Tangentyere responded much quicker and they also knew who to talk to about their issues.

## Tenancy Management

- Tenants like rules that help to manage visitors.
- The housing allocation process needs to be more open and supportive of family relations.
- All tenants would like to receive financial statements and receipts from Housing.



## Suggestions

We came up with over 30 suggestions which are in the final report for Tangentyere Council. Here are just some of the things we have suggested:

- Property and tenancy management to be more supportive of tenants and recognise and encourage long-term tenants in Town Camps.
- Reduce the time it takes for repair and maintenance to be done and keep tenants informed of what is happening with the request.
- Encourage local Aboriginal organisations like Tangentyere Council to assist with explaining how to be a good tenant, repairs and maintenance and ensuring Town Camps residents are involved in decision making.
- Improve yards including drainage, fences and planting trees while ensuring Town Camps residents are part of the process.
- Include Town Camps residents in any future changes to houses or new housing design.
- Improve storage in all houses, particularly in kitchens and laundries.
- Improve the quality of screen doors, toilet paper holders, floor waste grates.
- Make Housing Reference Groups more transparent and inclusive of Town Camps residents.
- Housing Reference Groups to have decision making powers, particularly in housing allocation.
- Provide better coordination and scheduling of infrastructure works.

## The research team



Tangentyere Researchers: Vanessa Davis, Audrey McCormack, Denise Foster, Elvena Hayes



CAT researchers: Yash Srivastava, Sonja Peter, Ruth Elvin

## Thank you for taking part in this study

Tangentyere Council has detailed reports of all the findings from the last 18 months. Please contact them if you want to have a look at the report.

## How to contact us:

### **Tangentyere Design**

Andrew Broffman on 8952 9110

### **CAT**

Sonja Peter on 8959 6153

Yash Srivastava on 8959 6171

### **Tangentyere Research Hub**

Denise Foster on 89514286

