

7 November 2019

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Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
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Dear Ms. Radcliffe,

**RE: Question on Notice: Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart and Related Payments and Alternative Mechanisms to Determine the Level of Income Support in Australia**

I write to you in my capacity as the CEO of Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation (TCAC) to provide additional information as requested by the Senate Community Affairs Committee.

This request was made at the Public Hearing held in Alice Springs on the 1<sup>st</sup> November as part of the Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart and Related Payments and Alternative Mechanisms to Determine the Level of Income Support in Australia.

TCAC identified to the Senate Committee in its written submission and through testimony at the Public Hearing that the rate of Newstart and income support more generally is too low and needs to be increased by \$75 per week (and more in regional and remote centers). TCAC identified that current rates contributed toward high levels of debt between public housing tenants and the Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development (DLGHCD). The Senate Committee requested that TCAC attempt to gather documentation to provide further detail and evidence of this observation.

TCAC subsequently wrote to DLGHCD on Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> November with the following queries:

Region	Location	Query
Alice Springs	Town Camp	What is the total number of Public Housing dwellings?
		What % of Public Housing dwellings are tenanted?
		What % of Public Housing Tenancies have a debt with the DLGHCD?
		What is the average \$ value of Public Housing Tenancy debt?
Alice Springs	Urban	What is the total number of Public Housing dwellings?
		What % of Public Housing dwellings are tenanted?
		What % of Public Housing Tenancies have a debt with the DLGHCD?
		What is the average \$ value of Public Housing Tenancy debt?
NT	Remote	What is the total number of Public Housing dwellings?
		What % of Public Housing dwellings are tenanted?
		What % of Public Housing Tenancies have a debt with the DLGHCD?
		What is the average \$ value of Public Housing Tenancy debt?
NT	Urban	What is the total number of Public Housing dwellings?
		What % of Public Housing dwellings are tenanted?
		What % of Public Housing Tenancies have a debt with the DLGHCD?
		What is the average \$ value of Public Housing Tenancy debt?

The DLGHCD responded yesterday (Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> November) to most of our query.

The following table outlines the number of houses, the rate of houses that are tenanted and the % of households with a rent related debt. This data is for Alice Springs (urban), its Town Camps, NT (urban) and NT (remote).



<b>Alice Springs as at 31 October 2019</b>	<b>Town Camp</b>	<b>Urban Public Housing</b>	<b>Total</b>
Public Housing dwellings	284	773	1057
Tenanted Public Housing dwellings	89%	92%	91%
Public Housing Tenancies with a Rent Debt	62%	34%	42%

  

<b>Northern Territory as at 31 October 2019</b>	<b>Remote Public Housing including Town Camps</b>	<b>Urban Public Housing</b>	<b>Total</b>
Public Housing dwellings	5209	4914	10123
Tenanted Public Housing dwellings	93%	96%	94%
Public Housing Tenancies with a Rent Debt	85%	25%	55%

The DLGHCD was not able to provide a monetary average value for these debts. TCAC understands that this reflects several interrelated challenges. The DLGHCD provided some additional information tracking changes in the % of households with debt as a function of time. It is notable that the one region showing some improvement as a function of time is the Alice Springs Town Camps. TCAC, its subsidiaries and related parties are working to address household debt through programs including the Tenancy Support Service (TCAC) and Tenancy Management (CAAHC). Historically TCAC was funded to employ a Financial Counsellor, this role is critical but was no longer funded because of the consolidation of funding for Financial Counselling Services with larger NGOs operating in larger regions. TCAC has been fortunate to retain its Financial Counsellor in the capacity of Coordinator of Tenancy Support. This outcome has strengthened this service and contributed to reductions in the frequency and severity of debt.

<b>Public Housing Tenancies with Rent Debt over a five year period</b>	<b>30/06/2015</b>	<b>30/06/2016</b>	<b>30/06/2017</b>	<b>30/06/2018</b>	<b>30/06/2019</b>	<b>31/10/2019</b>
<b>Alice Springs Town Camp</b>	74%	69%	65%	63%	62%	62%
<b>Alice Springs Urban Public Housing</b>	30%	26%	33%	31%	36%	34%
<b>Northern Territory Remote Public Housing including Town Camps</b>	78%	87%	85%	83%	84%	85%
<b>Northern Territory Urban Public Housing</b>	26%	19%	20%	21%	25%	25%

The Town Camps and Remote NT have greater levels of DLGHCD related debt when compared with urban (Alice Springs and NT). It is not possible to provide a detailed analysis at this time but TCAC can make the following observations as follows: (1) Town Camp and Remote Housing tenants on income support participate in the Community Development Program (CDP); (2) Urban Housing tenants participate in Job Active and not CDP; (3) CDP activity requirements are far higher than those of Job Active; (4) Breaching rates amongst CDP participants are far higher than that of Job Active participants; (5) CDP breaches of income support contribute to debts; (6) Town Camps and Remote Communities have poor access to postal and internet services; (7) poor postal services have impacted on the completion of rental rebate renewal forms; and (8) failure to complete rental rebate renewal forms increases the likelihood and severity of debt. TCAC

successfully demonstrated to the previous NT Government the impact of gaps in postal services. This changed the method of rental rebate renewal delivery. TCAC also had some success in its advocacy for the extension of postal services. This extension is not yet complete.

Overall the level of housing related debt and the lack of energy security detailed here, in our submission and at the Public Hearing support our recommendation that the rate of Newstart and income support more generally needs to be increased by \$75 per week universally. Individuals living in regional and remote require additional increases in addition to the universal \$75 per week that we have recommended.

Please contact Michael Klerck on 0438891722 at [tangentyere@tangentyere.org.au](mailto:tangentyere@tangentyere.org.au) should you have any queries.

Yours sincerely



Walter Shaw  
Chief Executive Officer

