

Northern Territory Government Initial Response to the Homelands Policy Review



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ONE ABOUT THE REVIEW

In October 2019, the NT Government commissioned an independent review (the Review) of the Homelands Policy and Programs, which guide the delivery of services for Northern Territory homelands.

The purpose of the Review was to provide a new direction for the delivery of services to homelands following handover from the Australian Government to the NT Government in 2015 of policy and financial responsibilities.

The Review addressed four priority policy and program areas:

1. **Homelands eligibility criteria** – to review the current guidelines which restrict funding to occupied homeland locations with viable housing and infrastructure, and to establish new or revised policy principles including a definition of a 'homeland' and criteria for funding.

2. **Grants programs** – to evaluate the current grants programs, including: Municipal and Essential Services; Housing Maintenance Services; Homelands Jobs Grants; Special Purpose Grants; and the Homelands Extra Allowance.

3. **Model of service delivery** – to assess and recommend changes to the way services are delivered by approximately 40 service providers.

4. **Homes in homelands** – to examine opportunities for better homes in homelands and to recommend pathways for the provision of new housing.

The Review assessed submissions from 18 homelands stakeholders and conducted over 30 face-to-face and telephone interviews.



TWO OUR COMMITMENT

The NT Government is determined to drive improved outcomes for all Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory and recognises homelands as being intimately connected to Aboriginal social, cultural and emotional wellbeing.

We acknowledge that the Review only addressed the current Homelands Policy and was therefore limited in scope. Given this, we commit to undertaking further engagement with Land Councils, the Australian Government, homelands residents and other relevant stakeholders to develop a sustainable and holistic Homelands Policy that provides clarity and empowers homelands residents.



THREE OUR RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Areas	Brief Summary of Recommendation	NT Government Response
Homelands Eligibility Criteria	Recommendation 1: Re-engage with the Australian Government and Land Councils to develop a sustainable policy.	Agree The NT Government commits to establishing a new body with Land Councils and the Australian Government to engage and co-design a long-term vision for homelands, including an holistic Homelands Policy framework. The development of a more collaborative and strategic Homelands Policy is required to support the aspirations of Aboriginal Territorians, to guide investment across a broader range of services and to support the implementation of relevant Closing the Gap commitments.
	Recommendation 2: Homelands be defined on the basis of population size and land tenure: as small discrete Aboriginal communities of less than 100 people living on Aboriginal communally-owned and controlled land.	Agree in principle The NT Government commits to working with Land Councils, the Australian Government and key stakeholders including homelands residents to develop sound evidence based definitions and criteria for homelands and homelands funding. This will be informed in part through the joint review into remote housing and leasing currently underway.



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	Recommendation 3: Homelands experiencing strong growth pressures with economic development potential can explore Local Decision Making opportunities.	Agree The NT Government commits to working with Land Councils, the Australian Government and key stakeholders including homelands residents, to consider Local Decision Making self-determination opportunities that encourage and support economic development on homelands.
	Recommendation 4: An eligible homeland must be the principal place of residence of the occupants.	Agree The NT Government commits to reviewing the existing eligibility criteria and to changing the definition of ‘unoccupied homeland’ from four to six months. The NT Government commits to working with Land Councils, the Australian Government and key stakeholders including homelands residents to develop sound evidence based definitions and criteria for homelands, and homelands funding, including further consideration of the principal place of residence criteria.



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	Recommendation 5: An eligible homeland must have an adequate potable water supply.	Agree The NT Government will continue developing a long-term, comprehensive sustainable water strategy to ensure all Territorians have access to water for drinking, for agriculture and for economic opportunities. The strategy will be informed by extensive community consultation including engagement and partnership with Land Councils and Aboriginal Territorians.
	Recommendation 6: An eligible homeland must have a serviceable electricity supply. Where the department makes an investment in updating power infrastructure it should secure the rights, through negotiation with the appropriate Land Council, to repurpose or move the asset should the homeland become unoccupied.	Agree The NT Government commits to working with Land Councils, the Australian Government and key stakeholders including homelands residents to develop sound evidence based definitions and criteria for homelands and homelands funding.
Grants Programs	Recommendation 7: Existing homelands grants to be combined into one single grant to allow maximum flexibility.	Agree The NT Government commits to implementing these recommendations, maintaining the commitment of overall funding, by 1 July 2021. By removing red tape and streamlining the funding program, homelands residents will have greater flexibility and increased decision-making to target the use of funds against identified works on their own homes.

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	Recommendation 8: Shift the focus of program monitoring from inputs to outputs, with the onus placed on providers to illustrate progress against targets.	Agree The NT Government commits to implementing these recommendations, maintaining the commitment of overall funding, by 1 July 2021. This will be supported by a shift to monitoring program outcomes and the development of a more holistic policy framework with Land Councils, the Australian Government and key stakeholders including homelands residents.
	Recommendation 9: Grants be allowed to rollover from year to year provided services have been delivered in accordance with the previous year's terms of agreement.	Agree in principle The NT Government will work with Land Councils, the Australian Government and service providers to ensure that housing and infrastructure funding for homelands is effectively utilised and targeted.
Model of Service Delivery	Recommendation 10: Public expressions of interest should be called for the delivery of homeland services. One service provider should be sought per region (not precluding the delivery of homelands services through sub-contracting, joint venture or partnership arrangements).	Agree The NT Government will complete a performance review of all existing service providers and work with relevant stakeholders to develop a new policy framework and way for the delivery of homeland services. Through Local Decision Making, the NT Government will work with residents and Land Councils to identify capable local service providers for support and capacity building.

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	<p>Recommendation 11:</p> <p>That a function of the Homelands Service Group to support the institutional capacity building of homelands' service providers be established and funded by the department.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>The NT Government will maintain existing capacity building activities and commits to examining new ways to build on regional networks to facilitate good practice, improved services and information sharing. The NT Government also commits to facilitating a bi-annual workshop/ conference to provide a platform for service providers, stakeholders and governments to come together to discuss matters relating to improved homeland service delivery, best practice models and new technologies to improve essential services.</p>
Homes in Homelands	<p>Recommendation 12:</p> <p>Where homelands residents have access to funds to contribute to co-funding new housing on homelands, this should be managed through Local Decision Making agreements, and include the relevant Land Council.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>The NT Government welcomes any additional investments that homelands residents may contribute or secure towards their homeland. The NT Government will work with homelands residents and service providers to ensure that homeland assets are maintained through appropriate grant programs. The NT Government acknowledges that additional investment into homelands may be auspiced through a relevant government department, service provider or Land Council.</p>

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	<p>Recommendation 13:</p> <p>To reduce reliance on the NT Government, guidelines should establish who has responsibility for upgrades and maintenance when new housing is constructed.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>The NT Government remains committed to improving the conditions on homelands across the Territory and is committed to exploring opportunities for co-investment into homelands, including new housing and service infrastructure. The NT Government commits to partnering with the Australian Government, Land Councils and Aboriginal peak organisations in the development and establishment of future housing and infrastructure guidelines. Future guidelines will need to be accessible, clear and easy to interpret.</p>

WHERE DO I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Further information on the Northern Territory Government’s Initial Response to the Independent Homelands Policy Review is available at www.dlghcd.nt.gov.au

