COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS

FACT SHEET

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ON REMOTE INDIGENOUS HOUSING

What is the content of the Agreement?

Improved housing outcomes for Indigenous peoples is critical to working towards the *Closing the Gap* targets of improved Indigenous health, life expectancy and educational attainment. The Agreement provides for a significant injection of an additional $1.94 billion over 10 years ($834.6 million over five years) to address these problems.
The reform package will improve the living standards of Indigenous Australians in remote areas by reducing overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages. Under this Agreement the Commonwealth Government will provide the funding for remote Indigenous housing. The State and Northern Territory (the States) governments will be responsible for delivering the reform package, including the provision of housing and associated tenancy management reforms.

The Agreement is a National Partnership (NP) between the Commonwealth and the States to bring about significant reform in the provision of housing for Indigenous people in remote communities.

A joint Implementation Plan will be agreed between the Commonwealth and the States.

What will the impact of the Agreement be?

Housing is an essential building block in Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Sub-standard and overcrowded housing has detrimental impacts on the health of tenants as well as their ability to participate in education and employment. In 2004-05, over 30 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over in remote areas, and over 60 per cent in very remote areas, lived in overcrowded housing.

This Agreement establishes a 10-year strategy to improve the current poor standard of housing in remote Australia. It affirms the joint commitment of the Commonwealth and the States to address the high levels of overcrowding and homelessness in remote Indigenous communities over the long term.

The immediate focus of the reform is on addressing urgent housing need in remote communities. In the first phase of the program existing houses will be brought to a safe and habitable standard and new houses will be built.

Over 10 years the Agreement will deliver:

- construction of up to 4,200 new houses to address severe overcrowding and homelessness;
- significant upgrades and repairs of around 4,800 houses in remote Indigenous communities across Australia which are currently in an appalling state of disrepair or are uninhabitable;

- improved tenancy management services to ensure that rental houses are well maintained, rent is collected and support services are in place;
- economic development opportunities through increased local training and employment opportunities in construction and housing management, providing up to 2,000 new jobs;
- upgrades to housing-related infrastructure in remote communities, including town camps;
- access to affordable accommodation options in regional centres to support employment, education, training opportunities and access to support services in regional areas of high employment; and
- the States and the Commonwealth will work towards clearer roles and responsibilities and funding with respect to municipal services and ongoing maintenance and infrastructure and essential services in remote areas.

What will change?

The Agreement addresses the current administrative complexity and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the States regarding remote Indigenous housing funding and delivery arrangements.

Under this Agreement, the States will have the main responsibility for housing delivery. This will mean that tenancies for Indigenous housing are properly managed, and that homes are upgraded and maintained. It will result in public housing like standards applying to rental housing in remote Indigenous communities.

What are the benefits that will flow from the Agreement?

The delivery of the reform package will have a significant impact on remote Indigenous communities through improving housing condition, reducing overcrowding and homelessness, improving tenancy management support and providing economic development opportunities through the provision of up to 2,000 new jobs.

The NP on Remote Indigenous Housing will set the platform to contribute towards key *Closing the Gap* targets in health, life expectancy and educational attainment can be achieved. Housing is an essential building block in closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

The Agreement provides for additional investment that will address significant overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing condition and severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities.

There will be flow on benefits to education, health and employment outcomes. Indigenous families in remote communities will benefit through improved living standards resulting from reduced overcrowding and homelessness. An increase in housing supply that is better managed and maintained will extend the life cycle of houses for families.

Many remote Indigenous communities will benefit from economic development opportunities through increased local training and employment opportunities in construction and housing management. Flexible accommodation options will support access to training, education, employment opportunities and support services in regional locations of high employment.

This reform will contribute to developing and maintaining sustainable communities in remote Australia.

When will the changes take effect?

The NP on Remote Indigenous Housing is expected to take effect from 1 January 2009.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Why does the package focus on remote housing?

While only one quarter of Indigenous people live in remote areas, it is this group which has the greatest level of housing need. In 2004-05, 30.8 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over in remote areas, and 60.4 per cent in very remote areas, lived in overcrowded houses. Using data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey 2006, the average occupancy per dwelling in remote areas is estimated to be 8.8 persons per dwelling. The national average occupancy rate is almost 2.6 persons.

The condition of houses in remote Indigenous communities is deteriorating. Between 2001 and 2006, the percentage of houses requiring major repairs in remote Australia increased from 19 per cent to 23 per cent. One in four houses needing major repairs is currently uninhabitable.

Current housing delivery arrangements in remote communities are complex and in some cases inefficient. Poor management of tenancies and housing stock has contributed to the currently unacceptable high levels of overcrowding and homelessness and poor housing condition in remote Indigenous communities.

2. What about funding for Indigenous people in urban and regional Australia?

The housing needs of Indigenous people in urban and regional areas will be targeted through the National Affordable Housing Agreement framework.

Housing is a fundamental contributor to improving living standards and life outcomes in urban, regional and remote Australia. The Remote Indigenous Housing Reform package is part of a broader suite of housing reform measures which will assist in addressing Indigenous housing disadvantage.

3. What happens to the existing remote Indigenous Community Housing Organisations?

Under the NP, the States will be responsible for the management of community housing to meet public housing standards. This will ensure that that Indigenous people receive the same level of housing and support in remote communities as other Australians. Indigenous Community Housing providers will need to provide robust tenancy management that meets these standards.

Transitional arrangements are still being determined. Indigenous Community Housing Organisations will be advised as soon as possible.

4. Will Indigenous people have input into the design and location of the housing?

The Indigenous housing reforms will include engagement with Indigenous people residing in remote communities. Indigenous communities will be involved in the design and delivery of programs locally and regionally. The housing reforms will also support innovation in design and construction and the sharing of knowledge and ideas.

5. Will it provide opportunities for Indigenous people to buy their own home?

Home ownership is an important economic indicator of wealth and saving and provides a secure asset base that can contribute to financial stability and against which people can borrow. Home ownership also provides security of tenure, which is not always available with rental housing. A home can be passed from one generation to another.

Under the NP the States have been asked to develop and implement land administration arrangements that will facilitate effective asset management, essential services and economic development opportunities including home ownership.